

“Often our idols will shatter the pedestals we put them on, in the end,” Salazar said wisely. “Your Albus Dumbledore, while I’m sure a very powerful and capable wizard in his time, was just a man. And men are far too easily corruptible.” He frowned down at his young heir. “You have hated this man for longer than you have loved him. You have spent months preparing to destroy his reputation so that he can rot in Azkaban. Now he is dead and gone and no longer has any sort of hold over your life. You should be happy.”

Harry snorted bitterly. He wasn’t sure what he felt right now, but happy certainly wasn’t it.

“Are you upset because he did not suffer?” Salazar asked, no judgement in his tone. “Because he will not live to see you destroy the world’s view of him? Because from the sounds of things, you had begun to do so long before today. He spent the last few months of his life in hiding because of you — he got to see the consequences of his actions, if only in part. And he got to see you succeed without him, see you loved and happy despite everything he tried to ruin. He suffered the loss of his dignity, the loss of his magic, the loss of his influence; all in a very public forum. Does that make you feel better?”

Part of Harry hated it, because damn it all, it *did*.

“I don’t know what I want,” he admitted. “I don’t know what I feel. I just... I didn’t expect it to go this way.” This didn’t feel like closure, or relief. He just felt... hollow.

“That’s normal,” Salazar told him, surprisingly gentle. “I daresay you have the right to be confused about it all. But I *also* think that the best thing for it is time, and comfort. From actual, living humans.” Harry gave him a look, and Salazar stared back, unrelenting. “Go back up to the castle, Harry. Find your family, and that young man of yours. Allow them to help you through this — you may find they have a similar mindset.”

Harry made to argue, then paused; Dumbledore had ruined more lives than just his. He’d cursed Remus with the spell to make his werewolf half hate him, to use him as an example of the kind of *beasts* that needed taming even if they meant well. He’d let Sirius languish in Azkaban for twelve years because he couldn’t bear to have someone around who cared more about Harry than the war. He’d forced Snape to do terrible, terrible things in the name of spying, and allowed the teenage Marauders to harass and almost murder him in the name of *friendly house rivalry*.

Maybe they would understand a little of what he was feeling.

“Fine, you win,” he muttered, glaring at the smug portrait. “I’m going.”

“Your life will be much easier once you learn to accept that I am always right,” Salazar replied. It was such a *Slytherin* thing to say it made Harry snort as he stepped through the wall, reappearing in the Great Hall exactly where he’d left it.

Immediately, Sirius jumped to his feet, bundling him in a hug. “Oh, thank fuck, there you are!” He pulled him close, kissing his crown. “Susan came and told us what happened. Harry... I’m so sorry you had to go through that, love, I truly am.”