

voice firm. “You gave him the best chance you could. Sometimes, even that isn’t enough.”

“He was sixteen,” Harry croaked, and McGonagall’s lips thinned.

“He was. But he died taking a curse for his younger brother, and I cannot imagine a nobler death.”

Harry’s eyes widened. “Dennis.” Their youngest fighter by far, a boy who never should have been on the battlefield to begin with. All of them had lost their arguments in convincing the kid to stay in the castle. Harry had hoped a house elf would grab him and put him safely in Hufflepuff, but clearly that was not the case. “Where is he?”

“Sleeping off a concussion, as far as I’m aware. A troll knocked him on the head.”

Harry winced. Straightening up, he turned back to the sheet-covered bodies, but McGonagall didn’t let him go. “Don’t torture yourself, Potter,” she urged. He shook her off.

“I need to know.” He needed to check that his family was not there, lying dead on the stone tiles.

McGonagall pursed her lips once more, but walked by his side all the same.

It seemed Colin was the first of many familiar faces. Padma Patil, Wayne Hopkins. Two seventh year Hufflepuffs. Professor Sinistra. Seamus Finnegan.

But for a battle mainly fought by students, most of the casualties seemed to be adults. Then again, Harry had been preparing his students for this far longer than any of the adults even realised.

Finally, he reached the end of the double row of bodies. Not nearly as many as he had feared. He hoped that meant they had done well for numbers, and not just that the Hospital Wing was overrun. He had to get up there, look for the rest of his family...

He looked up at McGonagall, seeing the deep furrows in her brow and around her mouth, her age made worse by her grief. She had probably taught every single one of those bodies, at some time or another. “Is there anything I can do?” he asked. McGonagall smiled sadly, her eyes softening more than Harry had ever seen from her.

“I quite think you’ve done enough, for now, don’t you?” she murmured. She squeezed his shoulders. “You should be proud of all you have done, Mr Potter. Not just today, but everything it took you to get here. Everything I missed right under my nose — like the reason Severus Snape is watching you like a mother duck with a wayward duckling,” she added, raising an eyebrow. Harry flushed. “I should very much like to hear how all this came to pass, one day. But not now. Now, you should get some rest. You’ve done your part, let us old hands do ours, hmm?”

There was a weariness in her gaze that made Harry wonder how many times she had done something like this; cleaned up the aftermath of death and destruction, looked at the dead bodies of her former or current students.