

And when Harry got down to the Chamber and was able to really put his back into duelling, he came alive.

Ever since the attack on Hogsmeade, he had pushed himself harder and harder. He had held his own, defended the village, and that was great — though he still saw the faces of those two students in his nightmares, sometimes — but he had also given away his skills. He had shown the Death Eaters that he wasn't just a silly little boy with an OWL-level defence education.

They knew he was good; that meant he had to be *better*.

Snape didn't seem thrilled with Harry's logic, but he also didn't argue with it. Especially not after the night he had shown up to their training session and told Harry that the loyal students within the school had been given the task of kidnapping him and bringing him to the Dark Lord.

Harry had already known that thanks to Anthony, but it was nice to have confirmation. He would be vigilant. He wasn't going to let anyone else get the better of him, especially not in this castle. Salazar's castle. *His* castle.

"I'm worried, Severus," Harry said one night as they healed their wounds and cleaned up their debris. Snape cocked an eyebrow. "I don't know if I can hold the war off until I turn seventeen. If there's another attack — if Voldemort decides to stick with the tradition of messing with me before the school year ends... I can't exactly tell him to bugger off and come back when I'm of age, can I?"

Snape's lips pursed. "Right now, the Dark Lord seems to be focused on finding Albus. He will not admit it, but he is intrigued by the idea that Albus believed so wholeheartedly in this *influence* he supposedly has over you. Especially now the connection he used to manipulate for his own gain is now no longer there."

"Do you think he suspects?" Harry asked, heart in his throat. But Snape nodded.

"I doubt it. He is not as erratic as I would suspect him to become should he start to fear for his horcruxes. He thinks the connection died when he began to purposefully block it. That is what I told him, after all." The tall man smirked. "He wants to see for himself if Albus has gone senile — to gloat, most likely. With that occupying his time, that should give you a grace period. Just don't get yourself kidnapped — *again*."

Harry gave a flicker as a smile, even as his worry remained. He didn't like the idea of Voldemort finding Dumbledore any more than he liked the idea of Voldemort coming for him.

Senile or no, if Dumbledore was now the Master of Death... either he would kill Voldemort before the final horcrux could be destroyed, or Voldemort would overpower him and kill him and perhaps gain the Hallows for himself.

Then they would truly be fucked.