

Chapter 78

The sound of the front door slamming could be heard through half the house, and Harry jumped up from his bed, tossing his book aside. He knew Snape hadn't been at a Death Eater meeting, so he didn't feel like he was intruding to go and investigate; not like the nights when Snape came home and he and Remus went straight upstairs.

He bumped into Sirius and Charlie on the stairs, and then Remus; all four of them hurried down to greet Snape in the entrance hall. The Slytherin was cursing up a storm, pacing back and forth, and he only seemed to realise they were there when Remus stepped in to place hands on his shoulders. "Severus, what happened?"

"I'll tell you what bloody happened," the man growled. Looking closer, Harry could see the tight line of exhaustion in the corners of his eyes. "Albus fucking Dumbledore happened! The imbecile almost killed himself!"

Harry gaped. "He what?"

"He went out and found a ring that used to belong to the Dark Lord, and in his *ultimate wisdom* decided he had to put it on!" Snape explained, still furious. "It's a miracle I managed to stop the curse before it killed him, but even so his left arm will never be the same."

"Did he know it was cursed?" Charlie asked, wide eyed. Snape scoffed.

"Considering it was *dripping* with dark magic, I should sodding well hope so!" There was just the faintest hint of a northern accent creeping into his words, and Harry sucked in a sharp breath; Snape had to be *really* made to be letting that slip.

Remus clearly noticed it too, as he pressed his forehead to Snape's, running soothing hands over his shoulders. "It's alright, Severus," he assured. "You said you stopped the curse, right? Albus is okay?"

"For now," Snape affirmed. "He wouldn't tell me what was so special about the ring, but I could feel the magic on it. If I had to guess, I'd say it was a horcrux."

It was Harry's turn to curse. "Dumbledore's hunting them?" he asked, and Snape nodded. "Did you destroy it?"

"I believe so," Snape confirmed. "I had to use phoenix fire to get the ring off Albus' hand without cutting it off, and when Fawkes burned it, it screamed like it was dark magic dying. All that was left was the stone in the ring. Albus seemed quite insistent that the stone remain unharmed."

Harry's brow furrowed. "Why? What's so special about it?"

"I've no idea," Snape said, shaking his head. "He wouldn't tell me."