

## Chapter 12

“Don’t do it!” Harry shouted.

The woman with dark, curly hair and violet eyes—who Hermione now recognized as Bellatrix Lestrange—turned to Harry with a glare and jammed the tip of her twisted wand into the small of his back.

“Crucio,” Bellatrix spat.

Harry collapsed to the ground, writhing in agony as he let out a torturous scream. The crowd behind Dumbledore, including Hermione, surged forward, but Dumbledore stopped them with raised arms.

“Stop!” he yelled firmly. “If you touch the wards, they’ll kill you.”

Mercifully, Bellatrix stopped the curse, leaving Harry trembling and groaning on the ground. Voldemort laughed cruelly and turned to Dumbledore with a triumphant look.

“You’ve lost, Dumbledore!” he crowed with a smirk. “I know the full prophecy now. Lower the wards, or I will kill your only hope of stopping me. Harry Potter!”

Dumbledore frowned and lowered his arms slowly; his brow creased as a troubled look crossed his vibrant blue eyes.

A low chuckle broke the silence, slowly gaining volume. Slowly climbing to his knees, Harry grinned and laughed. Bellatrix glared hatefully and raised her wand to curse him again but was stopped by a wordless gesture from Voldemort. He stared at Harry curiously and, Hermione noted, with a hint of caution. Her eyes met Harry’s, and she was struck by the reassuring smile he gave her and the complete lack of fear in his eyes.

Hope blossomed in her heart. Harry had a plan to get out of this.

“What are you laughing at, Potter?” Voldemort asked.

“You,” Harry said with a chuckle. “All these years, and you still don’t get it. The prophecy was never about me.”

“Harry, no! You can’t!” Heather shouted, her face pale and eyes glimmering with tears.

“It’s okay, Heather,” Harry said, flashing her a smile.

“Enough!” Voldemort yelled angrily. “I heard the prophecy myself. It can only apply to you.”

“Can it?” Harry asked, looking amused. “The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches. Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies. And the Dark Lord will them as his equal, but they will have power the Dark Lord knows not-”

“And either must die at the hand of the other, for neither can live while the other survives,” Voldemort finished. “You were born as the seventh month dies; your parents defied me thrice, and that scar marks you as my equal.”

“But there was another that fit the prophecy,” Harry smirked.

“Yes, Longbottom,” Voldemort hissed.

Everyone turned to look at Neville, who looked shocked.

“He fits part of it,” Harry conceded. “But you didn’t attack him.”

“Then it can be no one else,” Voldemort said.

“Really? Are you sure?” Harry asked. “My sister and I were born exactly one year apart, and she was in the room that night.”

“But you’re the one with the scar,” Voldemort pointed out.

“Did you really never go back to look at the memory of that night to see what went wrong?” Harry asked, climbing to his feet with a confident smirk. “I did. The prophecy said you would make them as an equal. It said nothing about a scar. Your curse might have been aimed at me, but I wasn’t the one who stopped your curse and destroyed your body. It was Heather. The prophecy is about her.”

Hermione turned to Heather, who stood staring down at her feet as tears fell from her eyes.

“Lies!” Voldemort spat angrily.

“Think back,” Harry said, staring at him defiantly. “Heather reflected your Killing Curse. It had nothing to do with the ritual my parents performed. It was all her. This scar is just from a piece of wood that hit me in the head when the roof was destroyed.”

Voldemort turned away, staring off into the distance. Hermione could practically see him replaying the scene in his mind. As the seconds passed, he frowned, his face growing more and more troubled until Harry once again laughed.

“All these years,” he chuckled. “All those times we fought, and I stopped you. You always thought it was because of the prophecy, but it wasn’t. I’m just a normal, ordinary student, and I still kicked your arse.”

Harry laughed while Voldemort scowled and turned back to him, his red eyes burning furiously.

“And I still am,” Harry laughed as he continued. “Two years of waiting and planning, and you captured the wrong Potter. You lose, Tom.”

Voldemort’s lips curled back in an enraged snarl. Hermione gasped when he suddenly whipped his wand up and aimed it at Harry.

“Avada Kedavra!” he screamed.

A bright green, hissing curse left his wand and slammed into Harry’s chest. His body was thrown backward, twisting through the air as Death Eaters scrambled to get out of the way. He landed in their midst with a thud and lay completely still, his chest unmoving.

“NO!” Lily screamed.

She tried to run to him, but James wrapped an arm around her waist. Hermione stared in shock, her mind refusing to believe what she’d just seen. He couldn’t be gone. He just couldn’t.

Bellatrix cackled madly and twirled her wand.

“Crucio!” she shouted.

The curse hit Harry’s back, and for a moment, Hermione prayed she would hear his tortured scream just to know he was still alive. But there was nothing. Just the Death Eaters’ sick laughter as the demented woman continued to curse his lifeless body.

“Stop it! Stop!” Lily cried heartbrokenly as James and Sirius held her back.

“Bellatrix!” Voldemort barked, causing her to stop and the Death Eaters to fall silent as he turned to Dumbledore. “You have fifteen minutes to surrender.”

Turning around, he walked towards Harry and paused before looking back over his shoulder.

“If you refuse, this is what will happen to all that resist!” he yelled.

With a flick of his wand, he sent Harry’s body flying towards them. He hit the ground and rolled to a stop just short of the wards. Hot tears fell from Hermione’s eyes when she saw his face. His eyes were closed, and there was a small, smug smirk forever etched on his lips.

“We need to return to the castle,” Dumbledore said heavily as he watched Voldemort and his Death Eaters walk back toward the smoldering village.

“We can’t leave him there,” Lily said with tearful desperation. “Albus, please.”

Dumbledore turned to her and rested his hands on her shoulders.

“I’m sorry, Lily,” he said sadly. “There’s nothing you can do for him.”

Lily collapsed with only James’ arms holding her up.

“We need to get back to the castle,” he said softly. “Protecting the younger students must be our priority. It’s what Harry would want us to do.”

Lily nodded and allowed herself to be led back up to the castle, her arm wrapped tightly around Heather. Dumbledore and the other professors formed a wall behind them as if to protect them from themselves and stop them from turning back. Hermione felt a tug on her hand and numbly allowed herself to be pulled along. Glancing at Penny, Tonks, and Fleur, she could see the sadness on their tear-streaked faces. For some reason, that seemed to make the reality of the situation finally sink in.

Harry was gone.

“What do we do now?” she asked, her voice soft and weak even in her own ears.

“We fight,” Tonks replied angrily. “We make every single one of those bastards pay.”

“Oui,” Fleur nodded as they entered the castle.

The Great Hall was empty of younger students. Only older students, teachers, and the few Aurors that had arrived were walking around. Penny led Hermione over to the Gryffindor table and sat them down next to Lily and Heather. Lily reached over and took her hand while Heather cried into her shoulder.

“We need to alert the Ministry,” James said.

“I tried. The Floo is down,” McGonagall told him softly.

“Then send a Patronus,” James said.

“We have, but you know it will take an hour at least to reach London,” McGonagall replied.

“Then we must hold out,” Dumbledore said. “If Hogwarts falls, Voldemort will use the children to force the Ministry’s hand. They will have no choice but to give into his demands.”

“How long will the wards hold?” Sirius asked.

“Against Voldermot, not long enough, I’m afraid,” Dumbledore sighed. “It won’t take him long to overpower them.”

“Then we need to prepare to fight,” James said.

“The wards aren’t Howarts’ only defenses,” Dumbledore told him. “Minerva, take Sirius and the other Aurors and get started on a plan. James and I will be along in a moment.”

McGonagall nodded and left with Sirius while Dumbledore led James over to the Gryffindor table. Grabbing one of the benches from the Ravenclaw table, he pulled it closer and sat in front of Lily and Heather. Gently, he reached out and took one of Heather’s hands in hers.

“Heather, I know you’re in a lot of pain right now, but this is very important,” Dumbledore said. “Did you know the prophecy was about you?”

Looking down at her feet, Heather sniffled and nodded.

“It’s okay, sweetheart,” Lily whispered, rubbing her back soothingly.

“No, it’s not,” Heather said brokenly. “It’s all my fault.”

“I can assure you nothing that’s happened is your fault,” Dumbledore said softly. “When did you find out?”

“When I was seven,” Heather admitted quietly.

Lily, James, and Dumbledore shared a shocked look.

“Who told you about the prophecy?” Dumbledore asked.

“We didn’t know about that part,” Heather said, wiping her eyes but refusing to look up. “Harry had a nightmare about the night Voldemort came to our house, and he wanted to know what really happened. When Mum fell asleep on the couch, Harry took her wand, and we used the

Pensieve in Dad's office. When Voldemort tried to kill Harry, I made a bright, gold shield that stopped it. That's when we knew I was the Girl-Who-Lived."

Heather sobbed, and Lily hugged her tightly while James sat down on the other side of his daughter and wrapped an arm around both of them.

"I was scared," Heather cried. "Everyone thought Harry was the Boy Who Lived, and it was horrible. They always wanted pictures and autographs, and everyone always expected him to be good at everything. I-I didn't..."

"You didn't want that to be put on you," Dumbledore said softly.

Heather nodded and sniffled, "Harry said we should keep it a secret. I thought about telling you, but then first year happened, and I knew I couldn't fight him... not like Harry could. When you told us about the prophecy after the Tournament, I thought we should tell you, but Harry convinced me we shouldn't. He said we could use it. I-I didn't know... I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

"Shh," Lily hushed her, hugging Heather as she bawled. "It's not your fault. None of this is your fault."

"Thank you for sharing that with me," Dumbledore said, tears falling freely into his beard. And your mother is right. None of this is your fault. Harry was protecting you, as a brother should."

Hermione thought she saw a flicker of shame cross the headmaster's face as he got to his feet.

"I will do all I can to weaken Voldemort before you meet him, but it will be you that must defeat him," he said.

"But how?" Heather asked desperately.



"I'm afraid I don't know," Dumbledore replied sadly.

"We'll be right there with you, love," Lily assured her daughter. "You won't face him alone."

"I'll help, too," Hermione said.

Lily looked over and gave her a grateful smile.

"Me, too," Penny added.

"We all will," Tonks said determinedly while Fleur nodded next to her.

"Thank you," James said sincerely. "I should go help the other Aurors make a plan, and we need to make sure the younger students are in a safe place."

"I believe Professor Flitwick sent them to their dorms," Dumbledore said.

"We could hide them in the Room of Requirement," Hermione suggested.

Dumbledore, James, and Lily turned to look at her curiously.

"It's a room Harry found on the seventh floor across from the portrait of Barnabas the Barmy," she explained. "If you pace in front of the wall three times while thinking about the room you want, it will appear. It even has a Floo."

"Ah, excellent," Dumbledore said. "If we can hold off long enough for Minerva's Patronus to reach the Ministry, we can get them safely out of the castle."

Lily kissed the top of Heather's head and stood.

"I'll go tell the professors," she said, wiping her red, puffy eyes. "You two go and talk with the Aurors."

James nodded and gave his wife a brief kiss before they separated. Sliding closer to Heather, Hermione hugged her tightly, taking the place where Lily had just been. Tonks, Penny, and Fleur joined them a moment later as they collectively mourned the loss of the man they'd all loved in their own way.

Unfortunately, they didn't have time to mourn for long.

"Can I have everyone's attention!" James yelled, standing on one of the benches. "We have a plan. When the wards come down, the professors and the Aurors will meet the Death Eaters outside while the students remain in the Entrance Hall."

"But we want to fight!" Neville yelled.

The students behind him cheered their agreement.

"And you will," James nodded. "But we're severely outnumbered, so we need to fight smart. We're going to use the castle itself to help beat the Death Eaters. The suits of armor and statues in the castle will attack any invaders. We want you to wait down the hall, hit them as they come around the corner, and then fall back before they can regroup. You're going to make your way up to the seventh floor, taking out as many as you can. We already have two professors there waiting to tell you what to do next. Understood?"

The students cheered again, this time even louder.

"We should go help," Heather said softly.

“Are you sure?” Penny asked, rubbing her back.

Wiping her face, Heather nodded.

“Dumbledore was right. Harry would want us to help,” she said.

“Let go kick some arse,” Tonks said, helping her to her feet.

The next ten minutes passed far too quickly as Hermione, Penny, and Heather helped the students form teams and plan routes through the castle. Meanwhile, Tonks and Fleur told them what spells and techniques to use to cause the most damage with the least amount of risk. They were interrupted when a loud bang resounded through the Great Hall.

“We are out of time,” Dumbledore said heavily. “Everyone, get to your positions.”

The students rushed into the Entrance Hall, bounding with nervous energy, while the professors and Aurors moved slower but with purpose. Hermione, not wanting to be separated from Heather and her girlfriends, left the castle with them. Professor McGonagall gave her a look, although she didn’t say anything. Thankfully, neither did anyone else.

Hermione gasped when she looked down the hill toward the ruined village of Hogsmeade. Over a hundred Death Eaters, with their wands raised, were raining deadly hexes and curses on the wards. It almost looked like the air was filled with fireworks as they exploded in multi-colored bursts. But that wasn’t the worst of it. At the head of the crowd, Voldemort unleashed curses that hit the wards like a battering ram. They were so powerful that the air reverberated each time they struck the wards.

Hermione looked back at the castle and did a quick count in her head. There were maybe half as many defenders at Hogwarts as there were Death Eaters, most of them students. They were severely outnumbered.

Suddenly, one of Voldemort's curses hammered into the wards, and a resounding crack echoed over the ground like a gunshot. The Death Eaters cheered loudly as a massive crack formed in the wards protecting Hogwarts. With renewed vigor, they focused on the weakened spot, hitting it again and again. The crack widened, spreading out like a massive spider's web, growing larger with every hit until, finally, they could take no more. Shattering like glass, the wards collapsed. Flakes of the remaining magic fell from the sky, burning up well before they could hit the ground.

Voldemort led his celebrating Death Eaters up the road to the castle, stepping over Harry's body as he reached the front gate. Hermione prayed for a miracle. Hoped that he would spring back to life and curse the man in the back to end this nightmare. But he didn't. He lay still and unmoving as the Death Eaters stepped over his lifeless body on their march up to the castle.

"Remember, our focus is to delay them as long as possible," Dumbledore said.

Hermione took a deep, steadying breath and drew her wand as Voldemort and his army of Death Eaters stopped a short distance away. There wasn't a single part of her that felt ready for this, but she couldn't turn and run either. Too many defenseless students were relying on them.

"Surrender, Dumbledore," Voldemort said, stepping forward while his Death Eaters waited. "You have no hope of winning. Spare your students a long and painful death."

"I doubt they would listen even if I told them to," Dumbledore said, taking a few steps forward to meet him in the middle of the two crowds. "I'm afraid killing Harry accomplished nothing but hardening their resolve."

Dumbledore's hand flashed forward faster than Hermione thought possible and let loose a powerful spell that crackled as it flew toward Voldemort. His red eyes narrowed, and he conjured a silver shield in front of himself. The headmaster's spell bounced off with a loud *gong* and flew up into the air. With a swing of his wand, Voldemort turned his shield on its side and flung it at Dumbledore. Quickly flicking his wand, he slapped it aside, and the two began to exchange spells at a furious pace.

Out of the corner of her eye, Hermione noticed an odd movement and turned for a better look. The Hog statues on either side of the front gate came to life, shaking their heads as they sprouted wings. Leaping from their pedestals, they took to the air and circled over the dueling wizards. One of them suddenly dove down, heading straight for Voldemort's unprotected back. Hermione's hope that it would bring a swift end to the fight grew as it got closer and closer. That hope was shattered, along with the statue, when Voldemort hit it with a negligent flick of his wand, his glowing red eyes never leaving the headmaster.

Before the chunks of stone could hit the ground, Voldemort transfigured them into spears, which he hurled at Dumbledore. As the headmaster shielded himself, the Dark Lord took a moment to destroy the other hog without even looking in its direction. Using the debris to send more spears at Dumbledore, a vicious smirk stretched across his thin lips as he raised his wand. A sickly yellow stream of magic left the tip, sputtering and hissing like it was alive.

Dumbledore swept aside the spears and raised a bluish, silver shield. He grunted under the strain of stopping the curse, and Voldemort snarled as he thrust his arm forward, pouring more power into it. Dumbledore strained behind his shield, sweat dripping from his brow. In moments, he visibly began to tire, and in seconds, he dropped to one knee. Voldemort grinned cruelly and pushed even harder, forcing Dumbledore to lean on one of his hands for support. Hermione felt her stomach sink as his shield flickered twice and then failed completely.

The yellow curse struck Dumbledore in the chest. He screamed out in pain as he was thrown backward, rolling to a stop at James' feet. A grimace marred the headmaster's kind face while James knelt down to check on him. Movement caught Hermione's attention, and she watched helplessly as Dumbledore's wand sailed into Voldemort's hand. Laughing, he held up the wand triumphantly, drawing a thunderous cheer from the waiting Death Eaters.

"Get ready," Tonks whispered, her face set in a determined mask.

Hermione nodded and tightened her grip on her wand. Voldemort motioned for his Death Eaters to fall silent and stalked back toward Dumbledore with a smirk.

"It's over," he said loudly. "You have no hope. Surrender, and Lord Voldemort will show you mercy."

“Go to hell!” James yelled, climbing to his feet and squaring his shoulders defiantly.

Voldemort laughed and raised his wand.

“Then you will die,” he said with a malicious grin stretched across his face.

“VOLDEMORRRRT!”

Everyone froze. The shout had come from behind the Death Eaters, and Hermione allowed an impossible hope to build in her chest. The defenders and Death Eaters turned toward the sound as one.

The mass of black cloaks began to part, starting at the back. They stepped aside out of fear, shuffling and bumping into each other to get out of the way. Someone was walking towards them, someone with dark hair and bright green eyes.

“It’s him!” Penny gasped. “It’s Harry! He’s alive!”

Tears sprang to Hermione’s eyes, her feelings a jumbled mess. Her heart soared seeing him alive, but a ball of terror grew in her stomach as he marched straight towards the man who had killed him a short time ago.

She couldn’t bear to lose him again. She just couldn’t.

But she wasn’t the only one that was afraid. Voldemort took an unconscious step backward as Harry stepped into the clearing between the two groups, her red eyes wide.

“Impossible,” he hissed, the shocked look on his face quickly morphing into a hateful snarl. “Why won’t you die!?”

“You first,” Harry replied.

“I can’t die!” Voldemort shouted furiously. “I’m Lord Voldemort! I have defeated death!”

“The only thing you’ve defeated is yourself,” Harry scoffed. “All those rituals you used to try and make yourself immortal won’t save you this time. It was a fluke you survived that night you attacked my family. You should have died, but your soul was so fractured from all the things you’ve done to yourself that a piece stayed behind. It attached itself to me, hanging on like a parasite. It was kind of pathetic, really.”

“Lies!” Voldemort screamed.

“How do you think I survived?” Harry asked. “You didn’t kill me. You killed the only thing that kept you alive that night.”

Dumbledore let out a wheezing, coughing laugh as Professor McGonagall helped him sit up.

“It’s true,” he said, pausing to catch his breath. “You may have beaten me, Tom, but once again, you’ve overreached yourself.”

His smile was so relieved and peaceful that Hermione couldn’t help but believe him.

“And now, the prophecy does apply to me,” Harry said, lifting his bangs to show the red, bleeding scar on his forehead. “Neither can live while the other survives.”

“You can’t defeat me!” Voldemort screamed furiously, his eyes glimmering with madness and fear. “I’m Lord Voldemort! The most powerful wizard to ever live!”

“You’re Tom Marvovlo Riddle!” Harry shouted back. “The son of a Muggle and a Squib! You’re nothing but a bitter and twisted old man too arrogant to realize he’s lost!”

“Avada Kedavra!” Voldemort screamed as he thrust his wand at Harry.

Harry calmly raised his wand, and without a word, a red beam of magic shot from the tip. It connected with the Killing Curse and stopped it in its tracks. Golden threads were spat into the air from where the two spells met and formed a dome around Harry and Voldemort.

Slowly, gradually, Harry’s red spell pushed back Voldemort’s sickly green Killing Curse, creeping closer and closer to his wand.

“It’s over, Tom!” Harry yelled over the crackling of their spells.

“No!” Voldemort screamed fearfully as the center inched closer to his wand tip. “Stop! I’ll leave! You can have this blasted country!”

“It’s too late for that,” Harry said, meeting his terrified stare with a steady gaze. “This is the end.”

Harry’s spell connected with the tip of Voldemort’s wand with a bright flash, forcing everyone to cover their eyes for a moment. When they looked back, dozens of ghosts spewed from his wand and surrounded him. Grimacing, Voldemort struggled, and for a second, Hermione thought he was fighting back, but she soon realized that he was just trying to yank his wand free to escape. He looked desperate and terrified as he tugged fruitlessly at his wand. He looked weak.

“Goodbye, Tom,” Harry said, looking at the man with pity.

“No!” Voldemort screamed as his wand began to vibrate in his hand. “No!”



Suddenly, his wand exploded, and Harry's red spell hit him in the chest. With a look of terror etched on his face, Voldemort's breath froze. Harry released his spell, causing the dome to collapse. Voldemort teetered for a moment before he fell backward and landed on the ground, his eyes staring at the sky, dead and lifeless.

For a long moment, no one dared to move. They stared at Voldemort, but he didn't twitch, his chest didn't move up and down, and his eyes didn't blink.

It was over.

The cheer that came from the defenders was so sudden and loud that it caused Hermione to jump. Death Eaters began to Apparate away en masse, but she ignored them. Without thought, she sprinted towards Harry and hugged him as tightly as she could.

"I thought you were dead," she sniffled, burying her face in the crook of his neck.

"Sorry," Harry said, kissing the top of her head.

"Hermione! Look out!" Tonks shouted.

Harry and Hermione turned back to the Death Eaters and found Bellatrix staring at them with demented glee, her wand raised.

"Avada-"

*Bang!*

A bright blue spell slammed into Bellatrix's chest, sending her flying into the few other Death Eaters that had stayed and knocking them over like bowling pins. Hermione looked back and

saw Lily stalking forward with a look of pure fury on her face while the tip of her wand smoked. James, Heather, Penny, Tonks, and Fleur were right behind her, their wands raised.

“Don’t you dare touch my son,” Lily growled.

“Drop your wands!” James ordered.

The Death Eaters shared a look and Disapparated, taking Bellatrix with them.

“Damn it!” James growled.

Heather suddenly slammed into Harry and Hermione, nearly knocking them over. With a chuckle, Harry wrapped an arm around her and hugged her. Wiping her eyes, Hermione stepped back so Lily could take her place. She couldn’t help but smile as James patted him on the back proudly while his mother scolded him for scaring her. The moment Lily stepped aside, Penny and Tonks hugged him while Fleur walked right up and snogged him deeply.

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“Fred, George, they’re ready,” Angelina said, smoothing out the front of her blue dress robes.

“We’re on it,” Fred grinned.

Turning to his brother, they reached out and straightened each other’s bowties before stepping onto the stage that had been set up on the Hogwarts grounds.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” George said into the microphone, drawing the attention of the crowd.

“It’s our distinct pleasure to announce Mr. and Mrs.-“ Fred began.

“And Mrs.-” George added.

“And Mrs.-”

“And Mrs.-”

“POTTER!” they shouted in unison.

Hermione chuckled as Harry led her, Tonks, Penny, and Fleur out of the tent and onto the dance floor. Smiling the brightest smile of her life, she gazed around at the faces of her family and friends.

“Way ter go, Harry!” Hagrid boomed.

Dumbledore clapped and smiled from his wheelchair. The curse Voldemort had hit him with had weakened him greatly, but he was slowly recovering. From his shoulder, Fawkes took to the air with a thrill, sending feelings of pure joy through the crowd.

“It’ll be interesting to see who he dances with first,” Fred said, drawing laughter from the reception.

“We drew straws,” Tonks yelled back, prompting even more laughter.

As the music started to play, Harry took Hermione’s hand and pulled her to him for the first dance.