



# We Are Nothing

## Part I

**Title:** We Are Nothing

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**Summary:** Snape's Occlumency lessons have shattered the last defences of Harry's mind. Now, completely unprotected, his dreams have become home to a nightmare other than Voldemort. A nightmare that has taken on a life of its own.

**Author's Note:** Not entirely sure where the idea for this came from, perhaps it was a dream, but here it is!

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"We are nothing; less than nothing and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence, and a name."

- Charles Lamb, *Essays of Elia* , *Dream Children*

/oOo\

**Part I**

**Now I lay me down to sleep**

\oOo/

"Same time tomorrow, Potter."

The words, Snape's dismissal, were almost enough to make Harry cry.

Staggering out of the potions classroom, he didn't bother making any farewells. It wouldn't have mattered if he had, Snape would never deign to return them. Certainly not in a polite manner, though he may have taken the chance to further insult and belittle his supposed student.

The journey from the dungeons up to Gryffindor tower was a difficult one, mostly thanks to the excruciating migraine that was pounding through Harry's temples. Moments like this made him feel an almost nostalgic longing for the lesser pains that he had experienced in the past. Like the Cruciatus Curse.

Suffice to say, Harry's mental health was more than a little muddled.

Reaching the portrait of the fat lady, Harry mumbled and garbled the password so badly that the entryway refused to allow him entrance. His second attempt met a similar fate, as did the third. Finally, on his fourth try, he managed a somewhat coherent, "Requiem."

Pulling himself through the portal hole, he felt a small measure of relief to find that nobody had been waiting up for him. He really wasn't feeling up to listening Ron rant about Snape's greasiness, or Hermione's lectures on putting more effort into his Occlumency studies. On top of his detentions with Umbridge, her recent appointment as Hogwarts' headmistress (following Dumbledore's abrupt departure) and his nightly visions of Voldemort; Harry wanted nothing more than a single night of decent sleep. What truly made things even worse was the knowledge that he was unlikely to find that decent sleep.

His progress up the stairs to the fifth-year boys' dormitory was almost as difficult as the trip up from the dungeons. He had to stop twice to steady himself as the pain throbbing through his head became too much to bear. Pushing open the door, Harry was further relieved to find his roommates already asleep. Ron's rumbling chainsaw snores were almost a physical thing, especially considering the delicate condition of Harry's head.

Stripping off his school robes and kicking off his shoes, Harry lurched over to his bed and collapsed in a boneless heap. He tried to remove the rest of his clothes, or at least loosen them somewhat. He was in no condition to fully undress and then change into his pyjamas. Too tired to change, too tired to even get under the duvet, he crawled up the bed until his head was resting on his pillows. His position was an awkward one; only one leg on the bed and his right arm trapped under his body. He didn't care.

Not bothering to remove his glasses, which were horribly skewed across his face, Harry surrendered himself to unconsciousness.

-oOo-

It was that damned vision again. Or a dream. Whatever the hell it was called, it was the same imagery that had been plaguing Harry's sleep since before Christmas, night after night after night. He honestly didn't know whether to scream, laugh or cry. All three were tempting in their own ways.

The corridor stretched out before him. It was perfectly straight, he knew, yet it seemed to twist and skew as he looked down its length. It was like being on an unsteady ship in the midst of a typhoon. The lights mounted along the wall flickered and cast a surreal air over the scene. And there, at

the end of the corridor, was the focus of the vision; the door.

Oh, how he wished he knew the significance of it. He wanted to know. He *needed* to know. This door, and what lay beyond, was important to Voldemort. It was important to Dumbledore as well. Why else would he seek to guard it? Yet, as always, nobody bothered to tell him anything.

His ignorance caused a stab of anger to run through him.

That anger promptly changed to alarm as an unfamiliar voice spoke out.

**“Now this is one *boring* ass dream, kid.”**

Harry, who would much rather have been dreaming of Cho or some other pretty girl, could not bring himself to disagree. Instead, both curious and worried by this unexpected change, he looked back and forth. There was nobody between him and the door. There was nobody behind him. So who had spoken?

“Who’s there?” he called, his voice echoing strangely off the stone walls.

*“One, two...”*

Harry spun round at the soft whisper, yet found no-one. He frowned in confusion; the voice had been different. A young child. A girl? He turned around and stared at the door. Perhaps whoever had spoken was behind the door?

*“...he’s coming for you.”*

This time Harry turned so quickly that he lost his balance and his footing; falling on his arse. Yet, again, there was nobody to be seen. Just the same, unchanging corridor that stretched into the seemingly endless distance. Scrabbling to his feet, he looked about frantically, beginning to feel an up swell of panic as his searching still failed to reveal anything.

“Who are you? Where are you?” he yelled, clenching his fists tightly.

**“You want to know what’s on the other side of the door, dontcha?”**

This was the other voice, the one that had spoken first. A male. Deep and guttural with an unmistakable America accent. Not Voldemort. Harry licked his lips, trying to ignore the shivers that ran up his spine. That it was not the dark lord was a relief. On the other hand, the last thing he needed was *another* madman chasing after him. He really wished he had his wand with him, but despite being dressed in his uniform and robes, his wand was not to be found in any of his pockets.

**“Dontcha?”** the voice insisted.

“Yes,” Harry cautiously replied.

**“Then what are you waiting for?”** asked the voice. **“Open it.”**

“I can’t.”

**“You can. Open it.”**

“No!”

**“If you won’t...”** the voice mused, **“then I’ll have to do it for you!”**

With the words came action. The door swung open with unexpected violence, crashing against the corridor wall with a loud bang. Harry, startled and not about to let himself be dragged unwillingly into yet another life-or-death situation, spun on a heel and began to run. He had managed not a single step away from the now opened door before it became glaringly obvious that he was no longer in the corridor.

It was a Muggle factory of some sort. Everything, from the floor and walls to the ceiling was bare metal and concrete. There were pipes. Lots and lots of pipes. They ran back and forth in innumerable numbers. Side to side. Up and down. Harry could not even begin to guess what their purpose was. The air was stifling hot and thick with humidity amidst the glaring reds and oranges that illuminated the place. You could not find a place further removed from the magical world.

“Where the hell am I?” Harry asked in confusion.

*“Three, four, better lock your door.”*

The child’s voice whispered softly behind him and Harry turned just in time to see the open doorway slam shut, a loud clang echoing throughout the factory. But it was no longer the door he had grown familiar with. This was a large and heavy slab of cast and riveted steel, with an unwieldy looking wheel for a lock. Even as he watched, the wheel spun round in a blur and sealed the path behind him.

**“Ah, at long last... a visitor.”**

Harry twisted round in a full circle, looking for the source of the voice. As it had been for the entirety of this encounter, he found nothing.

“Where am I?” he demanded angrily.

**“Now, normally I prefer girls,”** the voice announced, ignoring him, **“but you’ll do just fine as an appetizer. The rest of your friends... they’ll be the main course!”**

“What?” asked Harry. He had a sudden feeling that the corridor had been much safer than his current locale.

SKRRRRRRREEEEEEEEE!!!!

Harry just about jumped out of his skin at the piercing screech that now echoed through the factory. It was like a demonic version of nails scraping against a blackboard. Somehow, he got the impression that he most emphatically did *not* want to encounter the source of the noise.

SKRRRRRRREEEEEEEEE!!!!

It was hard to tell, thanks to the echoing nature of the pipes, but damned if it wasn’t drawing closer.

**“Come on, kid... run,”** the voice urged. **“I really love a good chase.”**

That sounded like the best advice Harry had received since the end of the Triwizard Tournament.

SKRRRRRRREEEEEEEEE!!!!

A flicker of light caught Harry’s eye and he turned to stare at a nearby junction of pipe, where another corridor intersected the one he was in. More lights flashed. On and off. Off and on. With a sinking feeling in his stomach, he realized that he was seeing an approaching collection of sparks. Sparks caused by the source of that dreadful screeching noise; the sound of metal scraping against metal. Sharp metal.

Harry did as the voice suggested.

He began to run.

**“Come, Watson!”** the voice called in a purely awful attempt at an upper crust English accent. **“The game’s afoot! Ha ha! Ha ha ha hah!”**

Trying to ignore the insane laughter, Harry scampered down one corridor and then another. In the back of his mind he knew that he was hopelessly lost. Not only was he unfamiliar with his surroundings, but each pipe-lined passageway he turned into looked exactly the same as the last. His efforts to flee were not helped by the occasional burst of hot steam, which soon had his glasses completely fogged up. He was literally running blind.

SKRRRRRRREEEEEEEEE!!!!

And the madman chasing after him was gaining ground.

Rounding a bend, Harry cursed as his footing slipped, almost sending him crashing to the steel grate floor. He recovered quickly though, his years of experience at being chased by Dudley and his gang serving him well. However, even as he fumbled against one wall to retain his balance, one dark corner of his mind commented crossly that he was *always* running away. There were times when it seemed to be the only thing he could do.

Harry’s unhappy reminiscing came to an even unhappier ending as he discovered that the corridor he was currently running down was, in fact, a dead end. This was revealed to him as he reached said dead end and found that there was nowhere left to turn. Cursing floridly, he turned in the hopes of backtracking, but discovered that retracing his steps was not an option. His pursuer was blocking the way.

It was impossible to make out any details, especially with his foggy glasses. The man was standing backlit by ominous red and orange light, trails of steam wafting around him. With his body cast in darkness, only his profile provided any hint as to his appearance. His clothing seemed that of a Muggle, or at least he was not wearing any wizard robes. Perched on his head was a battered hat of some sort, maybe a fedora. And his right hand... extending from his fingers were gleaming steel blades.

**“Aw, over so soon?”** the shadowy figure asked mockingly.

Harry frantically searched for a way out as his tormentor began to approach. There was no escape. At least, no obvious escape. To his right, a hole formed out of many pipes that followed a common path. But it was small. Very small. Harry would have had no trouble crawling through such a space in his pre-Hogwarts years. Now, however, after four and a half-years being fattened up by regular meals in the Great Hall, not to mention Molly Weasley’s cooking, Harry doubted he would be able to make it. The screech of knife-like fingers against nearby pipes made the decision for him.

SKRRRRRRREEEEEEEEE!!!!

“Sod this,” muttered Harry.

Not wasting another second, he hurled himself into the tiny space. It was a tight fit, perhaps too tight. His shoulders protested as he folded them inwards as best he could, his arms desperately scrabbling for enough purchase to pull himself along. His legs, trailing behind him, kicked and pushed him further into the dark jungle of steaming pipes. The sharp clang of steel against steel spoke of his close escape. But he was not yet truly out of danger. He had managed to painfully wriggle his way through perhaps five metres of narrow conduit before the sound of scraping metal reached his ears from behind. The race was on.

Elation and relief filled him as the end suddenly appeared before him. Redoubling his efforts and ignoring the pain it caused him, Harry drove onward. He felt the cold scrape of bladed fingertips nibbling teasingly against the soles of his shoes. The maniac chasing him was close. Very

close. With a yell of both terror and exertion, he reached out with both hands to grasp the opening of the tunnel and hauled himself out into the open in a single fluid movement. He fell with a clatter to the floor of what appeared to be a suspended walkway of some sorts. He looked up and found himself kneeling before a massive Muggle furnace and boiler.

He turned back to stare into the black hole he had escaped from. In a blur of movement, a claw of steel exploded into view, reaching out for him. Harry flinched back as the razor-sharp blades nicked his shoulder, cutting the fabric of his already torn robes. Miraculously, though it cut through to the skin, it did not draw blood.

“Merlin!” he exclaimed, shocked by the close call.

Rolling to his feet, he took off down the catwalk, not bothering to risk looking back.

**“Run, run, as fast as you can,”** the man called after him. **“I’m still gonna catch you, little gingerbread man!”**

Now desperately trying to flee, Harry leaped down a flight of stairs, jumping them three at a time. He hit the floor below at a dead run, almost twisting his ankle when he landed badly. Reaching an intersection on the causeway, he turned randomly down one of the branches. He was so frantic by this point that he didn’t know if he had gone left or right.

As he rounded the corner, he looked over his shoulder. Nothing. Despite the apparent lack of pursuit, he did not slow. If anything, he picked up the pace and made a point of divesting himself of his ruined school robes, hoping to gain some extra speed without their encumbering weight. After several more turns, which lead him off the catwalk and back into the heavily piped corridors, Harry skidded to a halt alongside a steel ladder that was set into the wall. Glancing back once again and again seeing no-one behind him, he scaled the rungs of the ladder as quickly as he could.

**“Going up!”** the man’s voice announced, seemingly coming from all directions.

Cursing that his ploy to throw his hunter off track had failed, Harry climbed up to the next floor and resumed running. To his extreme relief, he saw an unwieldy metal door directly in front of him. It was identical to the one that had brought him to this place. He slammed into the closed door with enough force to bounce off and leave himself with several colourful new bruises. Grabbing hold of the wheel, he pulled and twisted with all the strength his arms could muster.

**“Ah, there you are.”**

Hearing that the madman chasing after him had finally caught up, Harry intensified his efforts. With a loud groan of protest, the wheel began to spin in his hands. After what seemed like a short eternity of frenzied twisting, the wheel could turn no more and he pulled the door open and squeezed his way through the available space even before it had fully opened. Spinning round, without bothering to identify the place he had entered, Harry braced one leg against the wall and pulled the door shut as quickly as possible. He gripped the locking wheel and spun it round and round until the doorway was firmly bolted shut.

Understanding that his pursuer could just as easily open the door from the other side, Harry backed away several steps and grabbed his wand. He never questioned why it was now present when earlier it had been missing from his apparel. He immediately pointed the wand at the door and began casting.

*“Colloportus!”* he screamed, casting the generic locking charm.

Feeling that he was at least somewhat safe, if only for the moment, Harry bent over and propped his hands on his knees. He had just managed several long, deep breaths, in the hope of calming his rapidly beating heart, when the locking wheel gave a sudden jerk.

“Aah!” he yelped, flinching back and falling on his arse. Despite the spell cast upon it, the wheel began to slowly unscrew and with it the bolts securing the door. With a speed born from sheer terror, Harry raised his wand and screamed, *“Colloportus! Colloportus!! COLLOPORTUS!!”*

The magic behind the repeated locking spells was enough to make the door shimmer, a faint blue glow surrounding it. The wheel was now frozen in place. Harry waited, wand held at the ready, hoping that this time it would be enough. The locking wheel remained perfectly still.

Taking a deep breath and releasing it in a massive sigh of relief, Harry began to take stock of his surroundings. He was quite surprised to find himself inside the Great Hall of Hogwarts. The door in front of him had replaced the wooden one that lead to the small antechamber just off the hall, where the Triwizard Champions had assembled the previous year.

Bolstered by being back on familiar ground, Harry turned towards the exit, intent on finding a way out. Or, at least, a way to someplace relatively safe. He had taken just a single step when a sharp sound reached his ears. It reminded him of the sound made when a can opener punctured a tin of food. The connotation of this was a frightening one, but there was little time for it to register in Harry’s mind. Another, now horribly familiar, sound picked up where the first had led off.

SKRRRRRRREEEEEEEEEE!!!!!!

“Oh, bollocks,” Harry spat, turning to face his fate. There would be no more running.

One of those monstrously sharp and strong steel knives had been jammed through the door’s face and, not unlike a can-opener, was tearing its way up the length of the steel frame. Reaching the top of the door, it withdrew, only to be immediately reinserted, this time to allow for horizontal movement. With the same rapidity, the blade cut along the top edge of the door.

Harry began to slowly back away. While he no longer intended to flee, he retained enough sense to know to keep his distance from an opponent that wielded blades. The extra room would give him, with his wand, an advantage over the much shorter ranged knife fingers.

SKRRRRRRREEEEEEEEEE!!!!!!

**“Timber!”**

In a manner not unlike a massive tree toppling over, the steel door collapsed inward, kicking up a small spray of dust as it crashed against the stone floor. Harry readied himself and peered into the black passageway. He absently wondered where the earlier light that had illuminated the boiler room had gone. Long seconds passed and nothing happened.

Then, a head emerged from the shadows and popped through the now open doorway.

**“Peekaboo!”**

It took all of Harry’s restraint, admittedly very little, not to immediately fire off the worst curse he could think of. His foe was truly hideous to finally behold. As the man calmly stepped through the door, his shabby figure was revealed. He was wearing a grimy and badly frayed sweater, coloured with horizontal stripes of red and green. A battered and stained fedora adorned his head and his right hand was adorned with a glove whose fingers trailed off into long and wickedly sharp knives.

But it was not his clothing that caught Harry’s attention. No, it was the man’s face. Or what was left of it. Not a single inch of skin was unmarred, but instead was a twisted and painful looking mass of scar tissue. He looked like a badly overcooked steak. Having more than a little experience in such matters, the Boy-Who-Lived recognised the disfiguring marks as being the result of burns. Whoever this was, he had clearly been burned alive at some point.

**“Well, it’s not Springwood, but - I - like - it!”** the horribly scarred man exclaimed, taking in the sight of the Great Hall.

Harry stared uncertainly at the man. This was hardly what he had been expected. Truth be told, he hadn’t known exactly what he had expected, but this ragged looking figure was definitely not it. Seeing that his pursuer was otherwise preoccupied, Harry slowly began to edge away, towards the doors leading to the Entrance Hall. He also made sure to keep his wand at the ready, tip never wavering away from the other man.

**“There’s potential here. Lots and lots of it,”** the man mused, absently trailing his clawed hand over the top of the teacher’s high table. He grinned wickedly, the grin of someone who enjoyed inflicting pain on others. Harry had seen a muted version of that grin on Dudley often enough. Pressing harder, the man’s steel claws dug deeply into the wooden table top. He looked up to Harry and purred, **“So many children to play with. So little time.”**

*“Five, six, grab your crucifix.”*

The unexpected whisper from behind caused Harry to jerk sideways, keeping his wand on the man as his eyes sought out the source. He almost dropped his wand at what he saw in the vicinity of the doors he had been retreating towards. There, wearing a pristine, frilly white dress was a little blonde girl. She was hopping over a skipping rope and singing too softly to properly hear her words. She was apparently unaware that she was not alone. Harry’s eyes flicked to the man and saw that he too had noticed the girl.

**“Ah, little Heather. I liked her,”** the man’s tongue snaked across his lips. **“Tasted just like chicken.”**

Whether the man was joking or not, Harry felt the bile rising up in his throat at the implication. He glanced back to the girl in question and was not too surprised to see that she had vanished. He promptly focused all of his attention on the only other person present. One that, unfortunately, had not vanished.

“Who the hell are you?” he demanded.

**“People call me a lot of things,”** the man admitted. **“Usually it’s ‘No! No! Please, I beg you! No! Arrrrgh!’ Or something like that.”**

Harry stared at his companion and concluded that his first impression had been the correct one; he was in the presence of a madman. Already leery, he took aim and fired off what had become his mainstay. *“Stupefy!”*

The man jerked his attention back to Harry, a look of surprise on his face. But it was too late. The bolt of glowing red magic caught the man dead centre of his chest and knocked him back and off his feet. He collapsed in a heap several steps back from where he had been standing. Sighing in relief at having gotten the drop on this latest complication in his life, Harry began to lower his wand.

**“Ho ho!”** the man exclaimed, cocking his head to look down the length of his body at Harry. He quickly pulled himself to his feet. **“So, the Boy-Who-Lived isn’t a complete wussy after all. Good. That’ll make this so much more fun.”**

Harry stared at the man in shock before pulling himself together and trying again. *“Stupefy!”*

This time the spell splashed across the man’s chest and barely staggered him. He smirked and wagged his bladed index finger. **“Uh uh, Harry, that’s not going to work twice. Fool me once and all that crap.”**

*“Petrificus Totalus!”*

The full body-bind seemed to work. The man’s arms and legs snapped to his sides and he began to totter unsteadily in place. But before he could topple over and land on his face, he inexplicably relaxed and resumed his loose stance.

**“Aw... did that not work either?”** he asked mockingly.

Harry snapped at the man began to slowly advance. He snapped up his wand again and tried something else. As the more benign spells were having no effect, he upped the ante with something a little more dangerous. With a brief horizontal slash, aimed across his adversary's throat, he cast a severing charm.

*"Diffindo!"*

**"Gak! Gurgle! Arrgh!"** the man gasped, clutching his throat with his unadorned hand. For a moment, Harry had some hope that the spell had worked, but this faded as the man continued to wheeze and fling himself about in an overly dramatic fashion. Perhaps sensing that his act had been divined, he ceased his playing and stood straight once more. **"This is my world, kid - I'm the only one allowed to slice and dice a person."**

Irritated by the use of the word 'kid' to address him, in a manner not unlike Vernon Dursley's preferred appellation of 'boy', Harry narrowed his eye and grit his teeth. The scarred man resumed his approach and walked straight into an anger-fuelled flame curse.

*"Inflamarae!"*

A fireball of bright yellow flame erupted from the tip of Harry's wand and raced to engulf the man. But, even as the fire covered his body from head to toe, the man reacted with terrifying calm. This time there was no showmanship. Instead, he took a big step forward and left the flames behind. With nothing to sustain it, the fire, quickly died out.

**"Look at my face you stupid little turd,"** the man commanded, for the first time without the black humour of his earlier tone. **"Do I look like that matchstick fire could scare me? You'll have to do better."**

*"Bombarda!"*

The blasting spell smashed into the man's face, causing his head to whip to one side. He recovered almost instantly, turning back to Harry with a sneer. **"Heh. Pathetic,"** he said. **"How d'you think you're gonna protect your friends if you can't even hurt me?"**

Clenching his jaw so hard his teeth hurt, Harry held his wand in a white-knuckled grip and tried another spell.

*"Everte Statum!"*

This worked better, but not much. The man was knocked him back a step, but nothing more. Harry knew, from his experience teaching the D.A. that the duelling spell would have flung an ordinary opponent through the air with little difficulty.

**"Better, but still not enough,"** the man assessed as he scratched his chin with a bladed finger. His grin was grew dark as he asked, **"You need to do better, Potter, or I'll be having me some good, ol' fashion fun with your friends."**

Frustrated by his inability to land a decisive hit, Harry snarled, "Shut up, you bastard!"

The insult, weak as it was, washed over the man to much the same affect as the spells. His dark grin shifted into a lecherous one. **"Maybe I'll start with the little chink bitch you're so fond of,"** he mused. He licked his lips in gross anticipation as he cupped his groin. **"Maybe I'll give her a real reason to cry... when I split her in two!"**

Despite the troubles plaguing his relationship with Cho Chang, Harry was under no illusions as to why his opponent would make such a suggestion. It was to hurt him, purely on an emotional level. It also, he mused, was intended to provoke him. To provoke a response. It succeeded.

Harry snarled and jerked his wand at the advancing figure. *"Crucio!"*

The curse was fuelled by his anger, his anger at everything that Harry perceived as being wrong in his life. And there was hatred there too. Hatred that he was unwilling to admit to having. His hatred of Umbridge and the torture sessions she disguised as detentions. His hatred of Snape and the torture sessions he disguised as Occlumency lessons. His hatred of Draco Malfoy for mocking and denigrating him as he endured both. His hatred of Dumbledore for allowing these things to be done to him without care or reprisal.

Suffice to say, it was an impressive Cruciatus Curse that erupted from Harry's wand.

**"AAAAHHH!! SON OF A BITCH!!"**

The man staggered under the curse and fell to his knees. While not writhing in unadulterated agony, his body was twitching uncontrollably. Harry took a step closer and twisted his wand, focusing more power into the curse. To his amazement and horror, however, the man refused to collapse. Instead, he actually fought off the curse's effect, slowly lifting up his clawed hand and pointing back to Harry.

**"ENOUGH!!"** he roared.

A wave of rippling air exploded out from him, moving in all directions. It slammed into Harry and knocked him down. He rolled with the blow and was quickly back on his feet, but it was too later. The burnt man was once again standing tall. But something was different. He was looking at Harry with a strange expression on his charred face.

**"I actually felt that!"** he muttered, as if surprised by this revelation.

"I should bloody well hope so!" exclaimed Harry, preparing to have a second go of it. He was understandably surprised when his opponent stepped back, as if disengaging from the chase.

**"What do you fear?"** he unexpectedly asked.

Harry blinked and considered. Deciding not to answer, lest he give his enemy a weapon to use against him, he settled for keeping a close eye on the man that was now pacing back and forth. Wavering slightly, he asked, "Why d'you want to know?"

**"Fear... that is my greatest strength... my gateway into the dreams of the children,"** the man explained, **"but you, Harry, you're not afraid."**

"Not of you, I'm not," Harry blustered.

**"No, you're not afraid,"** the burnt man concluded. **"You're angry."**

Knowing that this was true, Harry did not deny it.

**"So very, very angry."**

The man stopped his pacing and turned to face him. **"Not my cup of tea,"** he admitted, taking a slurp from a fine china teacup that had suddenly appeared in his unadorned hand. He smacked his lips in false appreciation and grinned, **"But I can work with it."**

*"Seven, eight, gonna stay up late."*

Swallowing, inexplicably nervous at the attention now focused on him, Harry had to ask, "Who the bloody hell are you?"

The reply came in a throaty chuckle, rich with a perverted amusement.

**"Me? I'm the stuff of nightmares!"**

**-oOo-**

"Harry? Harry, mate, are you all right?"

The boy in question stared dumbly up at his best friend, not entirely certain when he had made the transition from dream to reality. He drowsily looked about the room and noted that Neville and Dean were looking on with almost as much concern as Ron. Seamus, who had been somewhat on the outs with Harry, was trying to appear apathetic, though his sidelong glances spoke of his interest.

Pushing himself into a sitting position, Harry stared unhappily at Ron and asked, "You woke me up?"

"Well, yeah," Ron nodded.

"You woke me up."

"I had to - you were having another nightmare. Thrashing about and--"

Ron's explanation was cut off as Harry's fist smashed into his face, knocking him off his feet and to the dormitory floor. Harry glared down at him, waving his clenched hand threateningly. "You dumb bastard," he snarled, "What the hell did you do that for! Did I ask you to wake me up? No, I didn't! So why did you interrupt my perfectly good nightmare?!"

"Harry... you're yelling at Ron because he woke you up... from a nightmare?" asked Neville uncertainly.

"Yes!"

"Um, don't take this the wrong way, but why?"

"Because!" snapped Harry. "That was the most normal nightmare I've had in months - and he ruined it!"

"What was it about?" asked Dean, trying to steer them into a somewhat less inflammatory line of discussion.

Harry paused and frowned thoughtfully. The dream, or nightmare, had been amazingly vivid. Yet, now that he was awake, it was beginning to slip away from him, growing more and more disjointed. "I was - I was in a Muggle factory," he said. "It was hot, very hot, with lots of steam. And there was a man..."

Ron, having recovered somewhat, immediately asked, "It wasn't You-Know-Who, was it?"

"No," said Harry. "It wasn't Voldemort."

"Piss sake, Potter," yelled Seamus, "why can't you be like decent folk and not say his name all the time?"

"He had knives on his hand," Harry continued, ignoring the Irish boy, "like - like really long fingernails. He was scraping them against the pipes before he tried to cut me with them."

"And you're complaining because I woke you up?" asked Ron incredulously.

Harry, however, ignored Ron. His attention had moved to himself, or more specifically, his clothing. He had taken off his robes before going to



sleep, but not the rest of his clothes. While his memory of the previous night was a bit spotty, especially the time following Snape's lesson, he knew for a fact that he had not been wearing a sweater. He was also certain that he did not own any such sweater. It was worn and dirty and scratchy, with broad red and green horizontal stripes.

Exactly like his nightmare visitor had worn.

"Are you sure it wasn't You-Know-Who?" asked Ron cautiously.

"Pretty sure," Harry replied. He was fast growing sick of how everyone suspected Voldemort's involvement in everything. He flopped back on his bed, closing his eyes and wishing he were still asleep. Despite having slept through the night, he was still feeling horribly tired. The only good thing thus far was that his headache had faded away.

"I don't know - it might be a trick."

Harry opened his eyes and glared at Ron. "Unless Voldemort stuck his head in an oven and fried his face like a slice of bacon, then I rather doubt he had anything to do with it. I *can* have a nightmare that doesn't involve a homicidal dark lord, y'know."

Ron looked uncertain, but unwilling to risk another punch. "Well, if you're sure..."

Harry barely heard him, focused instead on the sweater he was now impossibly wearing. He fingered the rough woollen fabric as his mind played over the events in his nightmare. A mournful and sinister children's song repeated itself in his mind.

"Nine, ten," he whispered, "Freddy's back again..."

**TBC...**

**Author's Note:** Yes, Harry Potter is having nightmares, though not on Elm Street. Suffice to say; there's going to be quite the body count before this is over. I'm also going to be trying something new, a phenomena otherwise known as the "anyone can die" trope. Should be entertaining, no?



# We Are Nothing Part II

**Title:** We Are Nothing

**Author:** Ruskbyte

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**Summary:** Snape's Occlumency lessons have shattered the last defences of Harry's mind. Now, unprotected, his dreams have become home to a nightmare other than Voldemort. A nightmare that has taken on a life of its own.

"We are nothing; less than nothing and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence, and a name." - Charles Lamb, *Essays of Elia* , *Dream Children*

/oOo\

## Part II

### Perchance to dream

\oOo/

Harry had gone down to breakfast in a surprisingly chipper mood. While far from jubilant, this was the most relaxed he had been since the start of the school year. This was very odd, considering his sleep that night had consisted of a rather vivid and disturbing nightmare.

Devouring his breakfast with a bit more enthusiasm than he usually displayed, Harry mused that his somewhat bolstered spirits had to be a result of his night time encounter with the strange, yet undeniably ominous figure of Freddy. He had no idea how he knew the scarred man's name, but he just knew that it was Freddy. Not bothering to wonder about such inexplicable things, Harry turned his thoughts to the previous night's dream.

Despite the fact that he had been chased about, attacked, threatened and otherwise insulted, Harry found himself feeling strangely relaxed. If it weren't for the fact that the man was a hallucination conjured up by exhaustion, he would have shook Freddy's hand. Or perhaps not, he amended, thinking of the wicked knives on his right hand. Better safe than sorry, after all.

Sadly, however, it was not to last.

Harry's spirits began to dim almost immediately. At breakfast he was constantly besieged by the typical questions, mostly from Hermione. Are you sure you're all right? Did you practice your Occlumency properly? Are you sure it wasn't Voldemort? Then, of course, came the typical suggestions. Maybe you should go and see Madam Pomfrey. Maybe you should contact Sirius. Maybe you should ask Professor Snape for more lessons.

Harry's mood took a significant downturn at this last suggestion. It was only the fact that he knew Hermione was doing this out of concern for him that he refrained from telling her exactly what he thought about that idea.

Unfortunately, things only got worse from there on.

As was the trend for this year, his fifth at Hogwarts, things began with Dolores Umbridge, the school's new High Inquisitor. The tyrannical bitch spent most of the morning baiting him with her Ministry approved propaganda and other equally bigoted claptrap. It was all he could do to sit down, shut up and not respond to her relentless string of jabs. Harry liked to think that he was not a violent person, but right now he would have been more than happy to boil her in oil.

While hardly the most studious of people, Harry now found himself actually enjoying his other classes far more than he had in previous years - mostly because they were a brief escape from Umbridge's presence. The sole exception to this, of course, was potions, where Snape was proving to be just as much of a bastard as ever.

Speaking of which, Harry's day became as bad as it could get when he was forced to endure not only a double potions lesson, but occlumency immediately after dinner.

As he had come to expect, Snape started the lesson off with the usual barrage of insults, a distinct lack of actual instruction and then the three words that Harry had long since come to hate.

"Clear your mind."

As he clutched his temples, which throbbed in time to his heartbeat, Harry absently wondered if it were possible for anyone to hate Snape more than he did at that very moment. Somehow, he doubted it.

Gritting his teeth, jaw clenched painfully tight, he tried to bear the potion master's relentless and unforgiving assault.

Finally, after what seemed like a short eternity, Snape turned away and moved to sit at his desk. Pulling out a thick sheath of assignments, he

begin to mark them. Harry was totally ignored, save for his curt dismissal.

"Same time tomorrow, Potter."

Leaving the classroom, feeling as if his brains were oozing out of his ears, Harry began a slow and staggering return to Gryffindor Tower. He was only halfway there, just passing the trophy room, when he heard a hated voice call out.

"Well, well, well! Look who we have here."

Closing his eyes in frustration, knowing it would not end well, Harry turned to face one of the many people who had been vying for the position as "bane of Harry Potter's existence". At the moment Snape and Umbridge were definitely in the lead, closely followed by Voldemort, but Draco Malfoy was hardly out of the running.

The Slytherin boy smirked at him and folded his arms in a self-important manner. "Out after curfew, eh, Potty?"

"I was having potion lessons with Snape, Malfoy," said Harry, trying not to let his anger show in his voice.

"I don't think I believe you," Malfoy instantly countered. Not that it mattered whether he believed Harry's tale or not. His smirk grew broader, exposing a thin sliver of white teeth. "That'll be another detention with Professor Umbridge, I think. Tomorrow, after dinner."

Harry clenched his jaw so tight that his teeth groaned in protest.

"Well? Nothing to say?"

"It's a date," Harry managed to grind out, before turning on a heel and stalking off as best he could. He ignored the haughty taunts that followed him, the last few of which might have included the taking of some house points, but he was by this point too sore, too tired and too angry to really care.

His journey back to Gryffindor tower was somewhat easier than the previous night, mostly due to the burgeoning anger that was surging through his veins. He offered the fat lady a curt, "Requiem," and pushed his way through the portrait hole before she had a chance to speak. He did not care to hear her complaints. His entry into the common room, however, was halted when he found himself face-to-face with Hermione Granger. One look at her expression was enough to sour his mood even further. She was on a mission and he seemed to be the focus of it.

"Harry--"

"Not now, Hermione," he said, cutting her off.

"But Harry--"

"Damn it all, Hermione," he interrupted again. "I have a god-awful headache, I'm so tired I'm practically asleep on my feet and right now I really, *really*, want to punch something. Now, unless you want it to be you, let me go to bed."

Not bothering to see what she made of this demand, though he did note her startled expression, Harry stormed across to the stairways and up to the fifth-year boys' dormitory. He was not in the least surprised to find that his four roommates were already asleep. In fact, he heard Ron's rumbling snores before he even arrived. Taking off his robes and other clothes, he stripped down to his boxers and slipped under the covers of the bed. At least tonight he was not too tired to remove his glasses, which he set down atop of his bedside table before closing his eyes and lying back.

His last thoughts, before sleep quickly claimed him, were of how much he truly hated Draco Malfoy.

-oOo-

Draco was having a wonderful dream.

He was standing in the steaming waters of a Roman bath. As befitting the scene, he was in the nude, as were his companions. The voluptuous Daphne Greengrass was rubbing against him and all but smothering his face in her impressive bosom. She sighed prettily and groaned erotically as he lavished attention on her nipples. Even better was the rhythmic bobbing of Tracy Davis's head as she knelt in the thigh-high water and pleased him with her mouth.

"Oh yeah... oh yeah..." he groaned, threading one of his hands into her hair and forcing her to take him deeper.

Yes, life was good. Potter had been crushed underfoot, the mudbloods had been shown their place and these two beautiful witches were worshipping him as he deserved. Everything was perfect. As it should be.

As Davis made the most delightful choking noises round his length, Draco contemplated the difficult decision of whether to finish in her mouth or to reposition her for other pleasures. The sudden and unexpected press of a third nude female body against his back made the decision for him. After all, there were now enough girls to go around without having to repeat himself.

"Yes, bitch! Suck it! Suck it all the way!" he shouted, thrusting his hips violently.

"Yeah, that's it - tell her who's boss," the girl behind him whispered in his ear.

"Yeah!" Draco grunted in agreement, picking his pace up to a frenzied pounding. He wondered who his third treat for the night was. He could feel that she had truly massive breasts - even bigger than Daphne's. Where was Daphne for that matter? She was supposed to be rubbing her tits over his chest.

“Look at her,” urged the new girl, her hands stroking his arms, ribs and chest. “Look at her as she sucks your cock like **the whore she is!**”

“Yeah,” agreed Draco as he dutifully dropped his gaze to his groin and Davis.

It took a moment for him to realize that he was holding a decapitated head in his hands and was enthusiastically thrusting into its gaping mouth.

His erection died a sudden and violent death.

Draco almost died himself when, to his further horror, Davis’ eyes rolled in their sockets to look innocently up at him as she pouted, “Aw, but I wasn’t finished yet.”

“GAH!” he screamed, flinging the head away from him.

“**What’s wrong, Draco?**” asked the voice of the unknown girl, now rough and guttural. Her hands wrapped around his chest. She hugged him close, pressing her breasts tight against his back. “**I thought you liked getting a head!**”

Terrified by what was happening as his dream turning into a nightmare, Draco pulled away from her embrace and spun around to face her. The sudden movement caused a large splash of the water he was standing in - water that he now noticed as being stained red with blood. He blinked repeatedly to free his eyes of the splashed water that obscured his vision. Slowly his sight began to clear. If possible, he blanched even more than he already was when he finally got a look at... her?

It was definitely a woman’s body; her nudity left no doubt of that. And it was a gorgeous body. Long, lithe legs that reached up to full hips and a decadent bum. A narrow waist with a cute little belly button that was pierced with a Slytherin green emerald stud. The biggest breasts he had ever seen or imagined, far too large to be natural. And lastly a slender neck that led to a face that had to have come straight out of hell.

A male face.

“**Hello there,**” the terribly burned face greeted, eye dropping briefly to Draco’s crotch, “**little man.**”

“Fuck,” was all Draco could think to say.

The scarred man grinned toothily and moved his decidedly female body into a series of provocative poses. “**Shucks, you do have a way with words, little man, but on the first date? We’ve only just met - what kind of girl do you think I am?**”

“Fuck,” repeated Draco.

The man’s grin became predatory. “**Yeah, you pretty much are, little man.**”

Draco swallowed and finally managed a stammered, “W-wh-who?”

The man grinned again and spun tightly in place, kicking up another large spray of red stained water. When he stopped and the water had fallen back in place, his body was no longer that of a naked woman, but a fully clothed man. A very dirty and grimy looking man, some small part of Draco’s brain noted.

“**Call me Freddy,**” he said, extending his hand to shake.

Without really thinking, Draco reached out to accept.

It took a few seconds before he realized that something was wrong. Well, beside the obvious. He glanced down to see that his hand was now enveloped in a terrifying conglomeration of leather and metal. Sharp metal. It took another few seconds before he realized that the blood now dripping into the water was his own. Then the pain from the lacerations hit him.

Draco let out a scream that could have been heard from on side of Hogwarts to the other, provided they had been in the castle at the time.

“**Damn!**” Freddy exclaimed, sounding suitably impressed. “**What’d you scream so loud for?**”

“You - you cut me,” Draco stammered in disbelief, staring at the bloody mess that was his hand. “You cut me.”

“**That’s it? You screamed like that just ‘cause I gave you a fucking paper cut?**” asked Freddy in amazement. “**Guys don’t usually get that loud till I start castrating them.**” He grinned with anticipation. “**Let’s see if you can do better, huh?**”

Without preamble, Freddy’s knifehand flicked out and made a deft slash across Draco’s groin. A moment later there was a soft splash as the now detached portion of Draco’s anatomy fell into the water. The following spray of blood was impressive, but the water was already so stained with red that it made no difference.

This time Draco’s scream was much louder and continued to ring out even as the young wizard collapsed in agony.

“**Ah , I love the screams of eunuchs in the morning,**” commented Freddy with a grin.

Noticing that his victim was curled up into a tight ball of pain and misery, Freddy’s grin grew even broader. It became slightly less manic when the screams cut off and he realized that Draco had sunk beneath the water and was in danger of drowning. That would cut his fun short, which he wanted to avoid.

Reaching down, he grabbed Draco by the hair and pulled him to the surface. The air was promptly refilled with screams, moans and the odd bit of gibbered begging. Keeping firm hold on Draco, Freddy dragged him through the water and to the edge of the massive bath, singing as he went.

**“What will I do with a dickless faggot, what will I do with a dickless faggot, what will I do with a dickless faggot - earl-aye in the morning!”**

Tossing Draco out of the water and onto the hard marble floor, Freddy paused to consider what he should do next.

By now Draco’s shrieks of pain had left him and he had been reduced to begging in weak voice. The words “please” and “no more” were the most common. Those that knew him would have been morbidly amused to note that “my father” was not among them.

Stepping out of the blood filled water and revealing himself to be perfectly dry, Freddy moved to kneel down next to Draco. His close proximity reduced the boy to incoherent whimpers as he was overtaken by renewed terror. The whimpers rose back to screams as Freddy casually sliced open Draco’s cheek.

**“Ah,”** Freddy happily sighed, **“It’s been so long since I’ve had a chance to play like this. I’d almost forgotten how much fun it is.”**

He trailed a knife along Draco’s collar bone, slicing through the flesh with preternatural ease.

**“I hope you’re enjoying this as much as I am, little man.”**

As he spoke he quickly, but with a lazy motion, carved the words, “suck my dick” into Draco’s chest. He moved his knife hand down and scrawled, “oops, don’t have one” across his stomach. Draco continued to scream, only breaking off his howls when the need for air became an issue.

Pleased with his handiwork, Freddy once again grabbed Draco by the hair and dragged him across to a nearby Roman column. Propping the unresisting boy against the gleaming stone he sat down next to him.

**“Heh ,”** Freddy chuckled, slinging his left arm across Draco’s shoulders. **“Normally I’d drag this out, make you hurt real bad - but it’s been so long since I had a chance like this. So... see ya in hell, ferret-face. Tell ‘em Freddy sent ya!”**

With that, Freddy unceremoniously punched his right hand into his victim’s sternum, stabbing his knives deep into Draco’s chest and straight to his heart. It was a fatal blow, though not instantaneous. He rolled away and onto his feet as he withdrew the blades and watched with satisfaction as great gouts of blood shot from the wounds.

As his world faded to black, Draco had the stray thought that maybe it wasn’t such a wonderful dream.

**-oOo-**

Severus Snape did not appreciate being woken up in the dead of night. All things considered, he was very used to long and late nights. Lack of sleep was also something he was well used to. But he had been asleep not five minutes ago, before the frantic pounding on his door roused him from his slumber. He hated having his sleep interrupted, mostly because he rarely got enough of it.

“This had better not be a joke,” he muttered ominously as he and Blaise Zabini hurried to the Slytherin dormitories.

It was a measure of how badly shaken the young wizard was that he failed to reply.

“Tell me again what’s happened to Draco,” Snape commanded.

“I don’t know, sir,” answered Zabini helplessly. “He just started screaming in his sleep. When we woke up he was covered in blood and thrashing about in his bed. Greg and Vince were trying to hold him still when I left to fetch you.”

“Ascendancy,” announced Snape as they reached the entrance to the common room.

Passing through the revealed doorway, the potions master could instantly tell that this was not a joke and that his worst fears were confirmed. The common room was crowded with students. It appeared that every single Slytherin was up and about. That would not be the case unless something truly bad had happened.

Silence descended as the children noticed Snape’s arrival.

“Where’s Draco?” he asked.

“He’s... we left him in the dorm room, Professor,” said Theodore Nott.

“You left him alone? While badly injured?” demanded Snape unhappily. Slytherin nature was to look out for oneself first and foremost, but he was displeased to hear that they had abandoned a classmate, a friend so easily.

“There wasn’t any point, sir,” rumbled Goyle, his pyjamas liberally splattered with ominous red.

“Draco’s beyond help now,” agreed Crabbe sombrely. His nightclothes were in much the same condition.

This admission gave the professor pause. He knew what they were saying, but instinctively denied the possibility.

“Very well,” Snape ordered. “All of you are to remain here. Prefects, take a headcount. I want to know if anyone’s missing.”

With a fair amount of trepidation, which he was careful not to show, Snape made his way to the fifth year boys dormitory. He paused outside the door, taking note of the bloody handprints around the doorknob. Crabbe and Goyle had been in a hurry to leave. After checking to see that he was alone and that no students had followed him, Snape girded his loins for what he expected to find. Using his wand to open the door, rather than having to touch the bloodstained doorknob, he cautiously entered the dorm room.

He paused just across the threshold, frozen in place by the gruesome sight laid out before him.

It was impossible to miss.

Draco was splayed across his green and silver four-post bed, though the bed's colour was now had a large amount of red splattered about. The drapes and hangings had been ripped and torn from their mounts, a testament of the struggle Draco's dorm mates had made in their attempts to restrain him from further injury.

Draco himself lay in the middle of the bed, tortuously entangled in his bed sheets. His silk pyjamas were so soaked through with blood that they seemed more brown than emerald green. It was difficult to see exactly what had been done to him, but a stain of red across his face revealed a deep cut that had been sliced through his cheek and down to the bone.

Drawing close, Snape stared down at the boy he had once held high hopes for. Draco's eyes, frozen in death, stared blankly up at him in obvious terror.

-oOo-

Harry stood in the Great Hall of Hogwarts, trying to decide how he felt. At the moment he was having to choose between a sense of smug satisfaction and a stomach churning disgust.

He glared across at the hall's only other occupant; the man who had intruded into his dreams the previous night.

**“So, whaddaya think?”**

“What do I think? What do I *think* ?! “

**“Uh huh.”**

“What I think is you're a homicidal maniac! A raging lunatic!” concluded Harry.

**“Well, yeah, it's sweet of you to say that, but I was talking about the little show I put on,”** said Freddy.

Harry looked at the burnt man and could not repress a shudder of revulsion. “That was absolutely disgusting,” he answered. The more he thought about it, the more agitated he grew. “You cut him apart like he was a side of beef!”

**“Nah,”** Freddy dismissed the idea. **“He didn't have nearly enough meat for that.”**

“Who the hell are you?” demanded Harry. “*What* the hell are you?”

Freddy grinned wolfishly and said, **“You already know.”**

Harry clenched his fists at how wilfully obtuse his companion was being. “Freddy,” he said. “Your name's Freddy.”

**“The one and only!”** agreed Freddy with a bow. **“ Frederick Charles Krueger, at your service, kid.”**

“All right, now that we both know who you are; what are you doing in my head?!” exclaimed Harry impatiently. “I've got enough problems with Voldemort - I don't need another dark wizard running around in my dreams!”

**“A wizard? Hah! I'm no wizard. Never was, never will be.”**

This declaration gave Harry pause and left him staring uncertainly at this strange figment of his imagination. Or at least, he hoped it was a figment. The other option was even more disturbing than the thought of sharing his dreams with Voldemort. The dark lord was a monster, to be sure, but at least he was sane - or as sane as any would-be tyrant could be. Freddy, on the other hand, seemed to enjoy maiming and killing purely for the entertainment value it provided.

“If you're not a wizard, then what are you?” he asked.

**“I am master of all I survey!”** Freddy proclaimed, spreading his arms out wide. **“I am the king of dreams! The lord of nightmares! The son of a hundred maniacs! The Springwood Slasher! I – AM – FOREVER!!”**

“Great,” muttered Harry, “Maybe Fudge and the Prophet are right - I am delusional.”

**“Heh, don't kid yourself, kid,”** said Freddy dropping carelessly into the empty headmaster's chair. **“I'm my own man - not something you dreamed up.”**

“I don't see anyone else having nightmares about some burnt up freak,” Harry snapped.

Freddy changed positions so quickly that Harry never saw him move. One moment he was reclining languidly, the next he was standing behind him, pressed right up against him. His left arm was firmly wrapped round Harry's chest, preventing him from pulling away. His right hand was held up, the index finger's knife blade pressed lightly against his throat.

**"Careful, Harry,"** Freddy warned. **"I need you, yes, your anger is my door into your classmate's dreams, but it's not something I can't do without. This is just a vacation, you see. Something to kill time with until they remember - remember me."**

"Remember you?" repeated Harry, incredulous that anyone could forget such a face. Not without using some very strong memory charms.

Freddy gave him a lidded look. **"The Springwood Slasher, that's what they called me. I had so much fun back then, playing with the children."**

Harry tried not to shiver at the implications of that statement. He was acutely aware of the blade that remained pressed up against his throat.

**"But then the kids' parents got involved - mob justice is a terrible thing, Harry; especially when you're the one on the receiving end of it,"** reminisced Freddy. Much to Harry's relief, he lowered his bladed finger and stepped away, releasing the wizard from his grasp.

While perfectly willing to admit that he was not a genius like Hermione, Harry was still a fairly intelligent person when he put his mind to it. Thus, he quickly made the cognitive leap that lead him to the conclusion, "They killed you, didn't they?"

Freddy smiled unpleasantly. **"Sons of bitches burned me alive."**

"And then you came all the way to Hogwarts to haunt my dreams. Fantastic," grumbled Harry.

**"Something like that,"** agreed Freddy.

"So, this is it, huh? You're going to kill me now?" asked Harry, wondering if he would be getting out of this one. He had his doubts, having already attacked Freddy the previous night with some of the strongest spells he knew. The nightmarish maniac had barely been fazed.

In reply, Freddy threw back his head and laughed boisterously. **"Hahaha! You're an eager one, ain't ya, kid?"**

Harry considered that and cautiously asked, "So... you're not going to kill me?"

**"Oh, I'm gonna gut you like a Thanksgiving Turkey, Potter... just not yet."**

The casual way Freddy stated this disturbed Harry. There was an ease, behind his words, the kind of ease that came from long practice.

"Why not?"

Freddy smiled. It was an ugly sight, regardless of his already alarming features. **"Because you're the reason I'm here,"** he explained.

**"Whatever that big beaked chemistry teacher of yours did – it let me in to your dreams. And your dreams... your anger... is what lets me into the dreams of the others . So long as you're an angry little ball of teenage angst; I've got a practically free ticket to do whatever I want with them."**

Harry thought about this. It was true; he did hate Draco. Maybe not enough to actually kill the little ferret bastard, but certainly enough to take some measure of satisfaction in watching the other boy have his dreams turned into nightmares. Perhaps a week or two of having Freddy paying him nightly visits would cause Malfoy to start worrying less about his fellow students and more about the sleep he would no doubt be missing out on.

Then Harry's thoughts began to turn to everyone else he was angry at.

"Would you like a list?"

**-oOo-**

Harry was unhappily woken by Ron's hand shaking his shoulder. Rolling over, he stared at his red haired friend and briefly considered punching him again. He decided against it, mostly because he had not been enjoying the novelty of a somewhat different kind of nightmare. True, it had been somewhat cathartic seeing Draco get his comeuppance, however he could have lived without seeing the blonde boy's wet dream. For that matter, the manner of Draco's death had been more than a little disturbing.

"Wait, wait, wait," he said, holding up a hand to stop the stream of words escaping Ron's mouth.

The redhead obligingly shut up, but remained almost bouncing with excitement. Harry looked around the room. Dean and Seamus were not there, but Neville was sitting on his bed with a shocked expression on his face. Clearly, Harry's sleep had not been disturbed on a whim. Something must have happened.

"Now, from the beginning; what's so important that you had to wake me up at..." Harry checked the time and felt his eyebrows rise in surprise, "three in the morning?"

"Malfoy's dead!" blurted Ron.

Harry's growing displeasure was snuffed out in an instant. "What?"

Neville nodded in confirmation and explained, "Yeah, Professor McGonagall woke the house up. We're supposed to be assembling in the common



room for role call.”

“Draco’s dead?” asked Harry, dumbstruck.

“That’s what she told us,” nodded Ron.

“Holy shit. How?”

“Don’t know,” Ron shrugged. “Not like it really matters. Dead is dead.”

“Holy shit,” repeated Harry. A dark fear bloomed in his chest.

“Come on, we need to get downstairs with the others,” urged Neville getting up and leaving the dormitory. Harry grabbed a robe to throw over his pyjamas as he and Ron followed. As they walked, Harry held a hand up to his throat, where he could still feel the sharp edge of Freddy’s knife-finger pressing against his skin.

“One, two, Freddy’s coming for you,” he whispered.

**TBC...**



# We Are Nothing Part III

**Title:** We Are Nothing

**Author:** Ruskbyte

**Disclaimer:** This story is based on characters and situations created and owned by JK Rowling, various publishers including but not limited to Bloomsbury Books, Scholastic Books and Raincoast Books, and Warner Bros., Inc. No money is being made and no copyright or trademark infringement is intended.

**Summary:** Snape's Occlumency lessons have shattered the last defences of Harry's mind. Now, unprotected, his dreams have become home to a nightmare other than Voldemort. A nightmare that has taken on a life of its own.

"We are nothing; less than nothing and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence, and a name." - Charles Lamb, *Essays of Elia* , *Dream Children*

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## Part III

### Those little slices of Death

\oOo/

It had been several hours since the assembly in the Gryffindor common room and the revelation that Draco Malfoy had suffered an untimely demise. Nobody had been able to go back to sleep afterwards, no matter how tired they were. This was something of a blessing as far as Harry was concerned. He had little desire to find himself once again in Freddy's presence, especially now that the scarred man was revealed to be a murderer in fact, rather than just talk.

There was a chance that this was merely a coincidence. A chance that Draco had just so happened to die the very night that Harry had dreamed of such a thing occurring. A chance that Freddy Krueger was merely a figment of the Boy-Who-Lived's tortured imagination and not some sort of spectral killer who inhabited the realm of dreams.

Yes, there was a chance.

Unfortunately, Harry had stopped believing in coincidence some time during second year. Coincidence, he had found, was only something that happened when you were without the big picture and thus unable to connect all the dots. His dreams were a dot. Freddy Krueger was a dot. Draco being killed by Freddy in a dream was also one. Draco being found dead in reality shortly afterwards was another.

So what picture did you get by connecting them all?

Not a pleasant one, at least from Harry's perspective.

"Harry? Are you all right?"

"Just tired, Neville," he replied. "It was a long night."

Too true; the sun had finally risen above the horizon less than half an hour ago. Harry had spent most of that half hour in the showers, under a strong and steady spray of hot water. Almost scalding hot water. For some reason he felt dirty and in need of a thorough cleaning. Nearly boiling himself alive in the showers seemed like the only answer.

Now he stood by his bed, only half dressed and hopelessly distracted by what he had just heard. He could not, and likely never would, understand how gossip could spread so quickly and easily. This especially when each house was currently in lockdown and unable to interact with the others. Yet, somehow, details of what had happened in the Slytherin dormitories were making the rounds. Despite the gruesome nature of the incident nobody had said murder, just yet.

That was about to change however.

The latest little titbit, delivered by Seamus Finnegan, had hit Harry like a sucker punch to the gut.

"Harry?"

He looked up at Ron, who was frowning worriedly at him.

"Lavender said he was stabbed. Stabbed or cut?" he asked of Seamus, ignoring his friend for the moment.

"Yeah... Why?" confirmed the Irish boy.

"Do they know who did it?"

No,” answered Dean, having heard the question as he returned to the dormitory from the showers. He tossed aside the towel he had wrapped around his waist as he began to get dressed for the day. “Rumour has it he started screaming and yelling in his sleep while cuts and slashes just appeared on him out of nowhere. Whoever did it must have been invisible.”

“Invisible,” repeated Harry, sharing a significant look with Ron. He was, after all, the only person in the school with an invisibility cloak. He swallowed nervously, having the unpleasant thought that the label of ‘lead suspect’ was about to be added to his current title of ‘disturbed and deranged attention-seeker’.

“Well... shit.”

-oOo-

Not even the machinations of Dolores Umbridge, Hogwarts’ High Inquisitor, could keep news of the night’s events quiet. Not when it involved the son of her boss’s principal patron. By the time the students were released from their dormitories and allowed down for breakfast, the cold-blooded murder of Draco Malfoy was front page news in the Daily Prophet.

Harry’s only concern, really, was whether or not his name was mentioned anywhere. Fortunately that was not yet the case, but with the small army of Aurors that had shown up, that was likely to change.

“This is horrible,” muttered Hermione as they sat down to eat. “Can you believe it - Draco’s dead! Murdered!”

“I can believe it,” replied Ron, tucking in to some bacon and eggs.

“He wasn’t exactly making friends while on the Inquisitional Squad,” agreed Neville.

“But still! It’s awful!” Hermione insisted.

“What’s awful is that I can bet you a Galleon for a knut that the Ministry will try and put the blame on me,” grumbled Harry, who had already noticed a couple of glances being sent his way. He didn’t bother serving anything up onto his plate. He had no appetite; for a number of reasons.

“They wouldn’t,” Hermione tried to object, but her protest dies at the look her friends gave.

“Sure they would,” replied Ginny. “After all, they’re pretty much blaming him for everything else.”

“Please, Ginny, stop trying to cheer me up,” said Harry dryly.

“Look - look!”

The hushed command from Neville drew everyone’s attention to the main entrance to the Great Hall. Minister Fudge had arrived, and with him were Draco’s parents. Even at first glance it was obvious that the two adults were devastated. Lucius had a look of black despair frozen on his face and as a whole was looking a little unkempt. Narcissa was in tears and clung to her husband like a drowning woman. His arms, one around her waist and the other round her shoulders, seemed to be the only thing holding her upright. This all, more than all the accumulated rumour and gossip, brought home the fact that something truly awful had happened.

“Heh-Hem!”

It was only the direness of the situation that prevented eyes from rolling as Umbridge stepped forward to address the school.

“Due to last night’s unfortunate incident,” she began, ignoring a fresh wave of tears from Narcissa, “classes will be cancelled for the day. This is to allow the Ministry Aurors to conduct interviews.”

This set off an explosion of whispers and mutterings amongst the students.

“Interviews? They’re going to interview us?”

“What? Why?”

“Can they do that? Are they allowed to do that?”

“Does this mean they think one of us is the killer?”

This last question was soon the one on everyone’s lips as speculation ran wild. Harry resisted the urge to smack his head on the table. He just knew that he was the one that all the fingers would soon be pointing at.

“Heh-Hem!”

Reluctantly, discussion was hushed as all eyes turned back to Umbridge.

“Rest assured that the perpetrator of this heinous and cowardly attack will be found and dealt with in due course. The Ministry shall be dispensing justice both swiftly and surely,” Umbridge pompously announced. She let her gaze move across the Great Hall, no doubt in an attempt to mimic Dumbledore’s grandfatherly familiarity with each student. “At the same time, I urge anyone that knows anything about this tragedy to come forth. A

substantial reward will be offered for any information leading to the capture of the murderer.”

Her words were perhaps a little insensitive, as Narcissa burst into heaving sobs at the mention of “murder”. Lucius immediately gathered her even more tightly in his arms and quickly escorted her out of the Great Hall. This left Fudge gripping his lime-green bowler hat and looking embarrassed by his subordinate’s gaffe. He was quick to hurry after the departing Malfoys, but not before sending an unhappy glare in Umbridge’s direction.

“Ahem,” Umbridge cleared her throat, only now realising her mistake. “In the meanwhile, everyone is to remain in the Great Hall. When the Ministry Aurors are ready for you, they will call your name. Answer promptly and do not keep them waiting. Is that understood?”

There was some muttered agreement, which only served to aggravate the woman. “Is that understood?” she demanded in her usually sickly sweet tone, though the anger behind it was obvious to those that looked for it.

“Yes, Professor Umbridge,” the children chorused, many of them rolling their eyes.

“Good. Carry on,” she concluded before descending to speak to the Auror in charge.

“Ugh, why couldn’t they’ve killed *her* instead of Malfoy,” grouched Ron, turning back to his meal.

“Ron! Don’t say things like that!” chided Hermione, scandalized.

Ignoring his two best friends as they once again began to argue, Harry surreptitiously observed the Aurors. The only ones he recognised were Kingsley Shacklebolt and Tonks. There were one or two others that looked vaguely familiar, but that was it. He silently pleaded to have one of them be the one to question him, but doubted he would ever be that lucky.

-oOo-

“Sit down, Mr. Potter.”

As it turned out, Harry’s luck had taken a slight turn for the better. One of his interrogators was, as he had hoped, Kingsley. Unfortunately his luck had its limits and one of the school professors was expected to accompany him during the questioning. Naturally, Harry drew the short straw and had Snape of all people as his Hogwarts representative.

Taking the offered seat, Harry smiled tentatively at the waiting Auror. It was the wrong situation for a smile, he knew, but he was too relieved not to. Of course, having Snape looming forebodingly and stoically in the corner of the otherwise empty classroom put a dampener on his relief.

“How’re you holding up, Harry?” asked Kingsley.

“I’m fine,” Harry replied, using his pat answer for such a question. Seeing Kingsley’s sceptical look, he amended, “Just tired.”

“Tired?” repeated Kingsley.

“I’ve been having trouble sleeping - nightmares,” elaborated Harry.

“Doubtless due to your hopeless inability to practice proper occlumency,” commented Snape snidely.

Harry grit his teeth and bit out, “I’m pretty sure Voldemort has nothing to do with it.”

Snape took a long stride forward and glared furiously at him. “Do not say his name so frivolously!”

“It’s not frivolous!” argued Harry, pushing his chair back and rising to confront the man.

“Enough! Both of you!” thundered Kingsley, his deep bass tones cutting off the argument before it could properly start. “Snape, stop antagonising the boy. Harry, don’t let his words get to you like that.”

“Sorry, Kingsley,” muttered Harry as he sat back down. He wondered if anyone in the Order would ever completely side with him during his tiff with Snape. Everyone, other than Sirius, seemed happy to play peacekeeper and blame them both equally.

“Now then,” said Kingsley after they had settled, “Tell me about these nightmares. How can you be sure they’re not the word of You-Know-Who?”

Harry mulled over how to answer that. He decided to give only the broad strokes, while leaving out any mention of Freddy. Having to explain the crazy man’s presence in his dreams was not something he wanted. Doubtless the powers that be would only decide that more occlumency lessons with Snape were in order.

“I’m trapped in the Great Hall,” he explained. “All the doors are locked and there’s no way out.”

“Is there anyone else with you in the dreams?”

“Nobody I know in real life.”

“Oh? Who’s there? Can you describe them?”

“A little girl in a white dress, skipping with a jump rope,” said Harry with a shrug. “She’s singing some sort of children’s song.”

“I see,” murmured Kingsley. “That seems a bit odd.”

"It's better than Voldemort turning into a snake and sneaking into the Ministry," replied Harry dryly.

Kingsley shifted just a fraction, but otherwise hid his discomfort at Harry's subtle probe. "All right then, I suppose we should get started on the reason I'm here."

Harry leaned back and tried to relax. He had nothing to worry about; after all, he hadn't done anything.

"Tell me about everything that happened yesterday," Kingsley ordered.

"Everything?"

"Everything."

"Okay... well, Ron woke me up and I punched him in the mouth--"

"What? Why?" asked Kingsley, startled. Even Snape reacted, though only raising an eyebrow.

"I was having a good dream and he interrupted it," explained Harry flatly. He knew how the adults would interpret that.

Kingsley blinked. He nodded slowly and waved for him to continue.

Harry thought back and resumed recounting his experiences the previous day. He decided to keep things short. If Kingsley wanted any details, he could ask for them. "We had breakfast and then went to class. First was Transfiguration with Professor McGonagall, then Defence with Umbridge. Had lunch. Went back to class. Potions with Snape, then History with Professor Binns. Did a little homework, then had dinner. Went to detention with Snape--"

"That was an occlumency lesson, Potter, not a detention," interrupted the man in question.

Harry ignored him and carried right on. "After detention with Snape, I returned to Gryffindor Tower and straight to bed. I woke up with everyone else when Professor McGonagall called assembly in the common room."

"Have you noticed anything strange that's happened recently?"

Harry stared at the Auror for a long moment before answering, "Nothing that doesn't happen on a regular basis."

Kingsley gave a small grimace, but acknowledged the point. Strange and unusual were actually rather common occurrences in the magical world and at Hogwarts in particular. He asked his next question. "Can you think of anyone who would want to hurt the Malfoy boy? Did he have any enemies?"

Harry just could not help himself.

He burst into laughter.

Kingsley seemed startled by the outburst, but Snape was quickly turning red with anger. Neither man had a chance to speak, however, as Harry managed to chortle out, "Enemies? Hurt?"

"Yes?" said Kingsley slowly.

Having regained some measure of control, though still beset by the occasional giggle, Harry laid out his thoughts on the matter. "Kingsley, every non-Slytherin student in the school has had reason to want to *hurt* Malfoy," he explained. "Since the evil little git joined Umbridge's Inquisitional Squad, every Muggleborn and half-blood has had even more reason to *hurt* him. If you want a list of his enemies, get a roll call for Gryffindor, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw."

Snape had clenched his jaw so tightly that the creak of his grinding teeth was perfectly audible from where he remained standing.

The bluntness of Harry's answer seemed to have left Kingsley somewhat flummoxed. He blinked repeatedly before asking, "So you agree that it was a student that killed him?"

This time Harry fought down his laughter, though an unpleasant chuckle still escaped from him.

"The only students vicious enough to do something like this are the Slytherins," he began.

"And once again your egotistical superiority shines through," interrupted Snape, coming close enough to losing his temper that he stomped forward and loomed menacingly over Harry.

Harry ignored him and continued, "They're all mostly Voldemort's supporters, so nobody should really be surprised by that. It's the fact that they killed Malfoy and not an innocent Muggleborn that's caught everyone's attention. If *that* had happened, I'd guarantee the Ministry wouldn't have sent a single clerk to investigate, let alone an Auror."

Snape actually grabbed him by the shoulder and spun him round in his chair. "Now listen here, you arrogant little--"

"Snape! Let him go!" boomed Kingsley, rising to his feet.

The professor glared balefully at him. "He--"

"Let - him - go!" Kingsley repeated, leaving no room for argument. "Everyone's entitled to their own opinion. This is Harry's. If you don't like it, then maybe you should have tried a better way to change it over the years."

"As if a Potter would ever do that," Snape retorted, but he did release his hold on Harry and returned to his skulking in the corner.

"So, Harry, you think this might be some sort of power play in Slytherin?" asked Kingsley as he reclaimed his seat.

"No idea if it is," confessed Harry with a shrug. "Maybe one of the other snakes got tired of hearing him boast about how he was practically Voldemort's heir. Heaven knows the rest of us were."

"Well, it's certainly a reasonable hypothesis," Kingsley admitted, "but not the one Madam Umbridge or Minister Fudge were looking for."

Harry groaned and closed his eyes. "Let me guess; I'm their lead suspect."

Kingsley offered him a commiserating smile. "I'm afraid so."

"Typical bloody Malfoy," Harry grouched as he dropped his head into his hands. "Even after he's dead he's still causing me trouble."

"You're a disrespectful little bastard, Potter! How dare you speak that way about Draco?"

Harry glanced pointedly at the incensed potions master. He knew his next words would cost him, but his hatred of the man, after so many hours of tortuous "lessons", overrode his restraint. "Why shouldn't I?" he demanded in return. "After all, you and dear departed Draco do it to me all the time."

Snape went from red with anger to white with rage.

As satisfying as it was to have delivered such a successful verbal salvo, Harry was not looking forward to his next occlumency lesson.

"Thank you, Harry, I think that will be all," Kingsley quickly interjected.

"Can I go back to the Great Hall then?"

"Of course. Professor Snape will have to escort you there though."

"All right."

-oOo-

"You little bastard! You unbelievable, arrogant, spoiled little shit stain!"

"Fuck!"

Harry and Snape had made it less than halfway back to the Great Hall before the sallow faced man struck. Without warning, he turned on the young wizard, grabbed him by the front of his robes and slammed him into the nearest wall. The suddenness of the attack stunned Harry, but it was the crack of his head against the stone wall that stunned him to the point where he was unable to even think of retaliating, let alone defending himself.

"You really are your father reincarnate, Potter," sneered Snape, his breath hot against Harry's face.

"Let me go, you--"

"Shut up, Potter! Don't think for a moment that I'll let you talk your way out of this - Dumbledore is not here to protect you and McGonagall has been rendered powerless."

"What the hell is wrong with you?!" demanded Harry, trying to break loose of the man's grip.

Snape did not bother answering. Instead, he shoved himself away from Harry, managing to knock the younger wizard's head against the stone wall for a second time. Reaching into his robes, he withdrew his wand and levelled it at Harry.

"Clear your mind, *Potter*," commanded Snape, spitting Harry's name like it was a curse. "*Legilimens!*"

-oOo-

Harry spent the rest of the day in a daze, barely aware of anything that went on around him. He was actually a little surprised when he found himself standing aimlessly in the Gryffindor common room. He could not remember getting there. He could not remember being dismissed from the Great Hall either. He absently wondered what arrangements had been made for the Slytherins; he did not imagine that they would want to return to the dormitory where one of their number had been so brutally murdered.

"Harry, mate, are you sure you're all right?"

"I'm fine," replied Harry, not really hearing Ron's worried question. He hardly noticed as his friends exchanged worried glances, though he was aware of it. He was somewhat touched that they cared, but at the same time was somewhat annoyed by the attention.

"It's just..."

“You’ve been a little... off, since your interview,” elaborated Hermione.

“I’m fine,” he repeated.

The Sorting Hat was right; he should have been a Slytherin, for nobody in the other three houses would have been able to make such a bald-faced lie while keeping a straight face.

Harry, to put it plainly, felt like shit.

It really was not the most accurate way to describe his current state of being, but it was the most appropriate. He had nothing to compare it to, but he felt incredibly dirty now that he was beginning to come back to his senses. Then, as more and more memories came forth of what Snape had done, the feeling of violation grew almost painful.

Squeals of surprise drew his fractured attention to the fireplace, which was suddenly blazing like a miniature hell storm. Apparently he was so upset that his magic was lashing out, much as it had against Aunt Marge, and had thereby caused the fire to grow and burn in much the same way his growing fury was beginning to burn.

When next he saw Snape... he was going to kill the bastard.

A person could only take so much abuse, after all, before striking back. He knew that he would get into trouble, more than he was already in. He knew Dumbledore would be disappointed. He knew there was very little chance that he would succeed, let alone get away with it.

But, in the end, it boiled down to the fact that he simply did not care.

He was always in trouble of some sort, so what difference did a little more make? Dumbledore could scarcely be bothered to talk to him, so who cared what his opinion on the matter might be. As for doing the deed and getting away with it, well... that just meant Harry would have to be creative.

Oddly enough, most of his ideas involved cauldrons...

Settling in his chair, Ron and Hermione watching worriedly over him, Harry spent the rest of the evening immersed in one fantasy after another. He was sure that his friends were quite disturbed by the occasional giggle that escaped him whenever a particularly amusing way to kill Snape came to mind. In any case, he ignored their questions and lost himself in plots of death and murder.

When the time came to retire for the night, Harry climbed the stairs to the boys’ dormitory in a surprisingly chipper mood. He still felt as if he had been squashed by a giant and the dirty feeling had yet to fully fade away, but several hours of visualizing Snape’s gruesome demise had certainly elevated his spirits somewhat.

“You sure you’re--”

“For the sake of Merlin, Ron,” he interrupted as they changed for bed. “I’m fine.”

“Sorry,” Ron apologised. “It’s just... well...”

“I’m tired, that’s all – nothing a good night’s rest won’t cure,” asserted Harry.

“Well, if you’re sure...”

“I am. Now, go to bed, Ron.”

As the fifth-year Gryffindor boys settled down in their four poster beds, Harry could not help but wonder what tonight’s dreams would bring. His last nightmare had coincided with Draco’s murder. Was it only a coincident, something he doubted, or was there more to Freddy Krueger than just bad dreams?

Harry Potter was many things, but he was not patient. This was strange considering how much time he had spent, as a child in number four Privet Drive, locked in the cupboard beneath the stairs.

It took a very long time before sleep, and the accompanying dreams, came to him.

-oOo-

The Great Hall at Hogwarts was ominously dark. No candles were floating in the air. The wall torch sconces were empty. The ceiling’s enchantment was gone, leaving only blank stone. All in all, the room was giving off a foreboding air. Harry briefly wondered if this was a reflection of his mood, or perhaps that Freddy was somehow affecting the dreamscape to present a more sinister décor. If so it was working. These thoughts did not last long however, as the Boy-Who-Lived quickly spotted the reason he had trouble getting to sleep.

“Krueger! You son of a bitch!”

“**And a bastard as well,**” added Freddy, lounging in the headmaster’s chair.

“It was real! You killed him! It was really real! You killed Draco!”

Freddy rolled his eyes and snorted. “**Well, of course it was fucking real!**”



Harry stormed up opposite the scarred man and glared furiously at him. "Why did you do it? Why did you make it real?"

**"Because that's what you wanted. He pissed you off; you wanted revenge."**

"I didn't want him dead!" Harry all but screamed.

**"You wanted him to be punished; to pay for what he'd done,"** countered Freddy, waving aside the accusation.

"That doesn't mean you had to kill him!"

**"Of course it doesn't,"** Freddy concurred amiably.

Surprised by this ready agreement, Harry managed an intelligent, "Huh?"

Freddy smiled viciously, **"I killed him - because it was fun!"**

Harry stared at Freddy with a complete lack of understanding. The pure enjoyment the man received from his act, his butchering of Draco, was simply too alien for the young wizard to properly comprehend. Voldemort, the Death Eaters, Umbridge, Fudge, they did what they did because it served their purposes; it furthered their goals. This, however, did nothing for Freddy save give him some measure of sick pleasure.

Harry swallowed the rising bile and clenched his jaw.

"You're not going to do that again," he stated firmly.

**"Oh? And how do you plan to stop me?"** asked Freddy. **"After all, you're the one who's letting me out!"**

"I can stop you," Harry insisted.

**"Don't bet on it."**

"I can stop you!"

**"I'll believe it when I see it, kid,"** Freddy smirked. He turned away from Harry and began to retreat into the shadows. **"In the meantime, I have an appointment to keep. Seems like somebody's went to bed an angry little boy..."**

"No!"

**"Ha ha ha hah!"**

"Freddy, no!"

Fire burst into being, lining the Great Hall with scorching flames that reached almost as high as Harry was tall. Startled by this sudden change, and more than a little afraid by the implications, Harry retreated from the high table and took refuge in the centre of the room. Only once he was well away from the crackling fire did he begin to look for a way out.

*"You're afraid."*

Harry whirled in place and found himself face with a little girl, eight or nine years old at the most, dressed in a snow-white summer dress with lots of frills. Her hair was a deep red and seemed almost alive under the flickering light caused by the flames. She looked up at him with a solemn expression.

*"It's okay to be afraid. We were all afraid. Warn your friends. Warn everyone."*

"What--"

**"Gotcha."**

"Freddy!" Harry spun round to look for the source of Freddy's voice, but found nothing. When he turned back, he found the girl to be gone. Now extremely worried and, as she said, afraid, he began to frantically turn in place, desperately searching for some way to escape this latest nightmare.

**"FREDDY!!"**

**-oOo-**

Severus Snape was dreaming. He knew this by the fact that he was currently staring at the impossible. It was the park he had played in as a child. The park where he had first met Lily Evans, oh so long ago. It had been nearly two decades since he had last been here - yet nothing had changed.

This was not the first time the potions master had experienced lucid dreaming. It was actually quite a common phenomenon amongst practiced occlumens.

What puzzled him was the distinct lack of people.

Why am I here?" he asked of himself as he walked across the damp grass.

"You're here because I want to talk to you, Severus."

The hauntingly familiar voice caused Snape's heart to skip a beat even as he froze in place. It was her. He slowly turned around, almost afraid of what he might find, but unwilling to miss the opportunity to see her again.

"Lily," he breathed in awe as he caught sight of her.

"Hello, Severus," she politely greeted.

Snape swallowed, a painful lump in his throat. "It's good to see you again, Lily."

Lily smiled softly at him, the way she so often did before their falling out. She was wearing a simple blue summer dress, the colour of which contrasted wonderfully against her hair and eyes. The familiar pang of longing and guilt in Snape's chest became an almost palpable thing as he took in the sight of her.

"So, Severus," she said, "can we talk? There are some very important things we need to discuss."

"Of - of course," Snape stammered. He looked around for something. He pointed to the swings that stood nearby. He could remember spending many an hour sitting on them, talking with Lily.

"Actually, I was hoping for someplace a little more private," Lily demurred.

This time Snape looked around in confusion. They were in a park. Private was not likely to occur.

"Come on," she said, unexpectedly grabbing hold of his hand and leading him off. "Let's go to my house; we can talk there."

"What about Petunia?" asked Snape, somewhat dazed.

"Oh, she's out on a date with that Vernon boy," Lily answered. She smiled coyly. "We'll have the house all to ourselves."

Now wondering if this was one of 'those' dreams, Snape allowed himself to be led off by the woman he had once and still did love. He scarcely noticed their surroundings as they walked, his attention focused almost entirely upon her. He was vaguely aware of some young girls, wearing frilly white dresses, playing with a skip rope. They were singing as they jumped; some sort of banal little ditty. He ignored it, more intent on Lily than anything else.

"Here we are... home sweet home."

Snape looked away from his companion and saw that they were indeed standing outside the Evans household. Like the park they had just left, it did not seem to have changed since the last time he had been there. Of course, since this was only a dream, that was perfectly understandable.

Feeling strangely chivalrous, Snape moved to open the door and gestured for Lily to precede him into the house. Ladies first and all that.

Lily graced him with another smile as she slipped passed. Her shoulder and hip brushed provocatively against him as she did so.

"Thank you, kind sir," she declared as she disappeared into the house.

Struggling not to start smiling like an idiot, Snape followed her inside. He stopped two steps across the threshold.

This was not Lily's house.

A slam from behind caused him to spin around. The door had swung itself shut. Turning to ask Lily where they were and what was going on, he found that she had vanished.

**"Ah, the man I owe my return to,"** announced a rasping voice. **"I've been expecting you."**

"Who's there?" he called cautiously.

**"Speak of the devil and I shall appear,"** announced Freddy, stepping out of the shadows by the staircase.

Snape regarded the other man with a jaundiced eye. He swept his black gaze over the shabby trousers, the ragged green and red striped sweater. Special note was made of the wicked-looking knife glove worn on his right hand. Finally he settled on Freddy's disfigured face, crowned by the battered fedora. "Funny," he concluded dryly, giving no hint as to his true feelings, "but I always pictured the devil as being... taller."

**"Ooh, you cut me, sir!"**

"A kindness, I'm sure."

Freddy let loose a burst of coarse laughter, throwing his head back in amusement. Snape took the chance to grab for his wand, but found that it was missing. He was alone and unarmed in a situation that he was not liking. He began to slowly inch back to the house's front door.

**"Uh uh,"** Freddy shook his head chidingly. **"You and me need to have a little talk, Sevvie. I can't have you leaving here till it's over. Door's locked."**

“Who are you?” asked Snape, keeping his eyes on the other man but using his peripheral vision to search for an escape route.

Freddy sketched an overly elaborate bow, **“Freddy Krueger, at your service.”**

“And what do you want with me?” asked Snape.

The answering grin finalised Snape’s decision to flee. Concentrating on his occlumency, he forced his way out of the dream. He was unpleasantly surprised when his consciousness bounced off some sort of barrier. He blinked and found himself standing exactly where he had been a moment before; still in the dream and now possessing a bit of a headache.

**“Uh uh uh,”** said Freddy, wagging a bladed finger. **“Like I said; the door’s locked. You’re not going anywhere until I say so.”**

Surprised and alarmed that he was trapped; Snape repeated his question, hoping to stall for time to find a way out of the house, if not the dream.

“What do you want?”

**“Oh, a little of this, a little of that,”** replied Freddy easily.

“How did you get passed my occlumency shields?” demanded Snape, slowly edging his way to the nearest door. It led to what looked like the living room and he was hoping to perhaps escape from there by crashing through the large front windows. Hopefully putting some distance between himself and Freddy would free him to use his occlumency to wake up.

**“I didn’t,”** replied Freddy with a shark-like grin.

“Then how...” Snape trailed off.

**“Didn’t need ta,”** explained Freddy. **“Your fancy pants ‘shields’ don’t work on the inside, Sevvie. Your dreams let me in - and now we’re gonna have a little talk.”**

“About what?”

**“About poking that nose of yours into a place you really shouldn’t have.”**

“I’m quite sure I don’t know what you are talking about,” asserted Snape.

**“Of course you don’t,”** agreed Freddy. **“That’s what’s gonna make this so much fun.”**

“I see,” murmured Snape. His sense of self preservation was now screaming for him to flee this man’s presence. He became a little more blatant in his edging towards the living room.

**“Ah - ah - ah!”** tutted Freddy, wagging his bladed index finger again. **“Sorry, Sevvie, but you’re not allowed to leave until our little discussion is over.”**

A twitch of that same finger resulted in the door to the living room slamming shut. The bang was much too loud to be natural and resonated through the house like the tolling of a massive bell.

Snape paused, uncertain of what to do now that his most obvious escape route was cut off. His eyes drifted to the nearby staircase. The idea of fleeing upstairs occurred to him, but was quickly dismissed. He had never seen a Muggle horror movie, but his real life experiences as a Death Eater had taught him that such an act would not help him.

**“You’re a teacher, aintcha?”** asked Freddy suddenly.

“Yes, what of it?” replied Snape cautiously, a little confused by this seemingly irrelevant question.

**“Then you must understand the necessity of punishing troublemakers, yeah?”**

“Yes,” he confirmed, worry blossoming in his stomach as he deduced where this line of questioning was leading.

He shifted his stance in preparation for the attack that was coming. Without his wand he would have to rely on hand-to-hand, not something he had much experience with. Freddy’s knife-hand made that an even more unpleasant prospect. He tried to keep an eye on those blades, while at the same time watching for Freddy’s attack.

**“So tell me, Sevvie,”** asked Freddy, **“What would you do with a troublemaker that went looking where he shouldn’t have?”**

Somehow, Snape knew that he was the one being discussed. He tried to think of what he might have seen that had brought this maniac to him, but nothing sprang to mind. Almost all of his attention these days was divided between the Dark Lord and the Potter boy. There was no reason he could think of to explain this visit.

He was startled by a finger tapping him on the shoulder.

“Severus.”

That was Lily's voice speaking from behind him! He was halfway turned around when he realized what a stupid mistake he had just made. His dream Lily was obviously a decoy, used to lure him to this place where Freddy had been waiting. And now he had allowed that same decoy to distract him - to draw his eyes away from where they were needed. Doubtless the attack would come now, while his back was exposed to Freddy's attention.

The sight of Lily, standing there right in front of him, was almost enough to stall him. He ignored her, however, and began to turn back to Freddy. He was wondering why he had not yet struck, when a glint of steel caught his eye. The motion of Lily raising her arm caused him to pause.

The gleaming edge of the straight razor was the last thing he saw before his vision went black and pain erupted through his very being.

Snape staggered back, unable to hold back a cry of pain as he clutched his hand to his ruined eyes. He knew this was a dream, but the pain was all too real. The fact that it was Lily who had blinded him was almost as painful, despite the knowledge that she was merely a construct of Freddy's.

**"Ah, such lovely screams,"** declared Freddy as he sidled up behind Snape and held him in a firm grip.

"Wuh - why?" asked Snape, using his far too extensive experience with the Cruciatus to push his way through the pain. That and he kept reminding himself that this was only a dream. Everything would be fine, once he managed to wake up.

**"Because, Sevvie, you were looking in places you shouldn't have. You almost found me too. The only reason you didn't was because you weren't really looking for me,"** explained Freddy.

"I never..."

**"Oh, but you did... And now I need to make sure you don't go talking about what you *have* seen."**

Fingers playing over his lips were the only warning Snape had before his mouth was forced open. He tried to lock his jaws shut, but Freddy was too strong. His struggles grew frantic when grubby fingers latched onto his tongue. From what Freddy had said, he knew what was going to happen next.

The sharp pain of his lost eyes was almost lost in the biting agony of having his tongue cut out. Snape's screams were choked and half formed as blood immediately began to pool in his mouth.

**"Mm-mm,"** he heard Freddy hum, the madman releasing his hold on Snape and letting him fall to the floor. **"I love tongue. Especially on toast. Yes, toast. With an extra helping of ketchup."**

Snape was in too much pain to pay any really attention to Freddy's demented raving, but the thought of being slowly cut apart and consumed piece by piece brought new feelings of horror to him.

**"Aw shit – the brat's waking up,"** Freddy suddenly announced; his disappointment plain to hear.

Snape had no idea what the burned man was talking about, but fervently prayed that whatever it was would offer him some relief. He had already given up any hope of escaping this nightmare on his own. His only option was to ride it out on the chance he would emerge on the other side.

**"Well, see you tomorrow night, Sevvie,"** Freddy concluded as he faded away.

-oOo-

"Harry! Harry!"

"Huh? Wuzzah?"

"Wake up, Harry!"

"M'wake, m'wake," slurred Harry as he slowly regained coherence.

He stared blearily up at Ron and Neville, who were leaning over him. It was hard to make out their expressions without his glasses, but he got the impression that they were worried.

"What's wrong?" he asked, pushing himself up onto his elbows.

"You were talking in your sleep," answered Neville.

"Sounded like you were having another nightmare," elaborated Ron. Harry could easily hear the unasked question as to whether or not Voldemort was somehow involved.

"Sorry if I woke you up," he apologised.

"It's all right," said Neville. "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine, Nev. Thanks."

"Was it... you know... You-know-who?" asked Ron, unable to contain himself any longer.

Harry bit off a scathing reply and took a moment to compose an answer. He certainly couldn't tell them the truth. He already had the uncomfortable feeling the Freddy's encounter with Snape had been just as real as the one with Draco.

"No, it wasn't Voldemort," he finally said, taking a small measure of satisfaction in watching the redhead flinch at the name.

"Oh... That's good," said Ron, almost sounding disappointed.

"So, what was it?" asked Neville. He immediately realized the intimate nature of his query and quickly qualified it, "If you don't mind telling us."

"It's okay, Neville," answered Harry. He decided to mostly stick with the story he had told Shackbolt. "I was dreaming that Umbridge locked me in the Great Hall and I couldn't get out."

"Well, that's not so bad," said Ron.

"The whole place was on fire," concluded Harry dryly.

"Oh... well... that's..."

"Not so good?"

"Yeah."

"I don't soddin' care if it's bloody good or not - just shut th' hell up! Some of us're tryin' to sleep!"

The three boys were startled by the sudden outburst from Seamus's bed. Realising that he *did* have a point, they exchanged guilty looks and quietly apologised.

"Don't say you're sorry - say good night!" grumbled Seamus darkly.

With more muted apologies, Ron and Neville returned to their own beds. Harry remained in place, arms folded around his knees and propped up against his bed's headboard. He sat silently in the dark and listened as his friends slipped back to sleep. When Ron's snores once again reverberated through the dormitory, he let out a breath he did not know he had been holding.

"Good night my arse," he whispered.

He would remain unmoved and wide awake through the rest of the night. For the first time since he was a little boy, living in the Dursleys' cupboard, Harry was too afraid to go to sleep.

**TBC...**



# We Are Nothing Part IV

**Title:** We Are Nothing

**Author:** Ruskbyte

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**Summary:** Snape's Occlumency lessons have shattered the last defences of Harry's mind. Now, unprotected, his dreams have become home to a nightmare other than Voldemort. A nightmare that has taken on a life of its own.

"We are nothing; less than nothing and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence, and a name." - Charles Lamb, *Essays of Elia* , *Dream Children*

/oOo\

## Part IV

### And God-appointed Berkeley

\oOo/

Harry felt absolutely terrible as he went down to breakfast. It must have been obvious that he had not had a good night's rest, as Hermione had been hovering over him from the moment he had descended the stairs into the common room.

Ordinarily he would have felt comforted by the attention, considering how bad he felt, but her repeated suggestions to skip breakfast, in leau of a visit to Madam Pomfrey, were fast beginning to get on his nerves.

"For the last time, Hermione," he asserted as their group entered the Great Hall, "I'm just a little tired due to lack of sleep. I don't need any potions or spells from Madam Pomfrey. A strong cup of tea and a proper breakfast will fix everything up."

Harry's skills at blatantly lying to his friends were increasing by leaps and bounds. The truth was that he doubted anything less than divine intervention would lift the bone weary lethargy that currently permeated his entire being.

"Well, if you're sure..."

"I am."

"Fine," she reluctantly relented, "but if you're not looking better by lunch then I'll drag you to the hospital wing myself."

"I'll be all right," Harry asserted with false confidence. "After all, today couldn't possible be half as bad as yesterday."

"Hey, have you heard? Someone attacked Snape last night! Gouged his eyes out!"

Harry turned to stare balefully at Colin Creevey, whose enthusiasm quickly died under the Boy-Who-Lived's glare.

"Um, sorry?"

Harry ground his teeth and turned his glare heavenward. "I just had to open my big mouth, didn't I?"

"Colin, are you sure?" asked Hermione.

"Yeah!" he confirmed, nodding his head rapidly. "Apparently the Aurors heard him screaming in his room and managed to save him."

"He's alive?" asked Harry, slightly surprised that Freddy had not finished the job.

"Uh-huh. Stephanie Miller saw them levitating him to the infirmary."

"Bloody hell," said Ron, summing up the situation.

Harry turned to Hermione as they settled into their usual seats at the Gryffindor table. "So... first Malfoy and now Snape."

Hermione nodded grimly, "Yes, this is getting serious. I wish Dumbledore were here."

"Not while the Ministry's still looking for him," Ron reminded her, filling his plate.

"But this is serious!" she repeated.

"The Ministry will handle it. More interviews, more Aurors at the school, less classes... more homework."

"But whoever it is that's doing this attacked a professor!"

"Well... better Snape than one of us," opined Ron.

"Ron!"

"I don't often say this, but he's right," said Ginny, who had been listening from her spot a couple of places down the table.

"Yeah," agreed Neville softly. "Besides, he was a horrible teacher."

"Maybe," Hermione reluctantly agreed, "but it's still a dreadful thing to say."

"Ah, fuck."

"Harry!"

"Look around us," Harry told them as he dropped his cutlery onto his plate.

His friends made a surreptitious sweep of the Great Hall and quickly spotted exactly what was bothering him. Apparently the much famed and much dreaded Hogwarts Rumour Mill was churning at maximum capacity. A great many eyes were making glances in Harry's direction and his name was being mentioned in hushed tones.

"This is really beginning to piss me the hell off," muttered Harry.

"Harry..." Hermione trailed off at his glare.

"I've been asleep and in my dormitory both goddamn times, Hermione," he snapped. "What do the bloody fools think - that I can kill them with just my mind from the other side of the sodding castle?"

"It... they... they're just scared, Harry," was all she could say in their defence.

Harry glowered unhappily at her. "So what gives them the right to take it out on me?"

Not having much of an answer, Hermione was left struggling until Ron came to her defence. "Just ignore it all, mate," he said, clapping a hand on Harry's shoulder. "This is just like second year and all that Heir of Slytherin nonsense. It'll blow over in a couple of months."

"If memory serves," snapped Harry, "I had to climb into the mouth of a hundred-foot long basilisk before it blew over last time."

"Uh..."

"I'm honestly beginning to hate this place," he grumbled, pushing his plate away.

His appetite was completely gone, as was Hermione's it seemed. Fortunately Ron ate enough for all three of them.

-oOo-

Their classes passed by and Harry's hold on his temper began to fray under the constant barrage of suspicious looks being sent his way. By the time they were done for the day, having just left a transfiguration class that he had hardly bother paying much attention to, Harry was feeling equal parts depressed, angry and resentful. The only bright point he could think of was that Snape was not the direct cause of his currently raging headache.

They had just settled down in the common room, having dropped off their book bags and hoping to relax for a bit before going down to dinner, when Harry was hit by an idea.

Knowledge, he realized, was power and just about everyone he had to deal with were doing their utmost to keep him in the dark and thus; powerless.

Of course, nobody other than himself was aware of the fact that Freddy had taken up residence in his dreams, but the fact remained - he needed more information about what was going on if he were to have any hope of settling things.

Naturally, he turned to the one person he knew would be able to help him discover what he needed to know.

"Hermione," he began thoughtfully, "you're good at researching things."

"Well, yes, I like to think so," she replied, pleased by the perceived compliment, even as she tried to be modest about it.

"What about your parents?" he asked.

Hermione blinked at the unexpected question. "I suppose they're rather good at it as well. Why do you ask?"

Harry gnawed on his bottom lip. "Do you think they'd mind looking up something in the Muggle world for me?"

"Of course they wouldn't mind," she replied without hesitation.



“Fantastic.”

“What do you want to know?” she asked.

“I want them to find out everything they can about a town called Springwood. It’s somewhere in America - I don’t know where exactly.”

“America?” repeated Hermione in surprise.

Harry nodded, ignoring her curious expression. Instead, he asked the last part of his request. “I also need to know about somebody who used to live there. A man called Freddy Krueger...”

**-oOo-**

Harry’s dinner was interrupted by a summons that left his already unpleasant day in complete ruins.

“Hello, Mr Potter. I’ve been expecting you.”

He decided against pointing out that it was obvious Umbridge was expecting him, as she had been the one to summon him to her office.

“Sit down; we have a lot to discuss this evening,” Umbridge commanding, indicating the chair set in front of her desk.

Reluctantly taking his place, Harry waited for what doubtless be another round of infuriatingly stupid and inflammatory discussion. Staring at the woman that currently held Hogwarts under her thumb, he wondered, not for the first time, if he could not somehow dispose of her in some way and maybe get away with it.

“You wanted to see me, Professor?” he asked, hoping that she would get to the point and thus conclude this meeting as quickly as possible.

“Here, Mr Potter, have a cup of tea,” she said, pushing the tea tray on her desk towards him.

Remembering the last time she had offered him a drink in her office, Harry shook his head and politely declined. Veritasserum was the last thing he needed, especially now that he had a murderous lunatic living in his dreams.

“No thank you, I’m not thirsty.”

“I insist.”

Understanding that this was a battle he would not win, Harry took the offered cup. Trying to act as natural as he could, he settled back into his chair.

“Excellent, Mr Potter,” said Umbridge, lifting up her own cup of tea. “Now, I would like to discuss the recent happenings in this school.”

“What about them?” asked Harry. He lifted his teacup to his lips. As he saw Umbridge lean forward in anticipation, he lowered it without having actually drunk anything.

Umbridge scowled for a second before reclaiming her usual mask of cheerful sweetness.

“As you are no doubt aware, Draco Malfoy has been murdered and now Professor Snape had been grievously attacked.”

“Yes,” agreed Harry grudgingly. “That seems to be about the only thing everyone’s been talking about.”

“Biscuit, Mr Potter?” suggested Umbridge, holding out a plate with an assortment of snacks.

“Yes please,” said Harry, taking a couple of the chocolate coated biscuits and placing them on his teacup’s saucer. He sat back and waited for Umbridge to resume speaking.

Scowling again at how Harry had yet to touch his tea, the woman took a noisy gulp from her own cup and proceeded to stare beadily at him. Her fake smile seemed to be growing a little more forced.

Just to tease her, Harry once more brought his cup up to his lips. This time he held it there for quite a while, using it to hide his smirk at Umbridge’s impatient expression. He raised his head a fraction and blew softly, as if to cool the steaming tea down.

“What do you think of this affair?” asked Umbridge with a small twitch.

Harry set his cup back down on the saucer resting on his lap. He picked up a biscuit and, reasonably sure it was not dosed with anything, popped it into his mouth. He chewed it noisily, making sure to crunch between his teeth as loudly as possible.

“Tragic,” he said, though his tone suggested his feelings on the matter were otherwise.

“Yes,” agreed Umbridge, obviously biting back something more scathing. “As you might imagine, the Minister is not happy with the situation.”

“Yes,” agreed Harry, once again raising his cup to hide a smile. “I imagine you and him are having some trouble over all this.”

“Yes,” she hissed, now openly glaring at him.

“Have the Aurors found any clues about who’s responsible?” asked Harry.

“They are following up on several leads,” she replied.

This was a blatant lie, Harry knew, as the actual perpetrator of both attacks was a madman that lived in the Boy-Who-Lived’s dreams. Not the kind of figure that could leave behind any clues, seeing as he had no physical body.

On the other hand, Harry had a feeling that Umbridge and Fudge would be perfectly happy to implicate him in the attacks, regardless of whatever evidence the Auror did or did not have.

“Well, I hope they catch whoever’s responsible soon,” said Harry. “Otherwise people might get the idea that Hogwarts isn’t safe.”

“Hogwarts is perfectly safe,” Umbridge automatically replied.

This time Harry couldn’t the smile. “Of course it is.”

“Are you enjoying your tea?” asked Umbridge through clenched teeth.

“It’s delicious, thank you,” replied Harry. He imagined he could almost hear her teeth grinding. He lifted the cup up to his lips once again, but again made not attempt to actually drink.

“Then maybe you should finish up and let me pour you another cup.”

“No thanks, I’ve had enough.”

Umbridge tried to maintain her faux smile, but it was impossible to miss the hatred in her eyes. Her smile split as she bared her teeth.

“I insist,” she commanded, repeating her earlier command.

Having had more than enough of this woman, Harry held up the tea and deliberated turned the cup over and poured its contents onto the office floor.

“Sorry, but I’m full,” he stated, never breaking her now furious gaze.

“Detention, Potter!” she snapped, leaping to her feet. Harry stood to match her. “Detention, with me, every single night from now until this is over!”

Harry smiled nastily at her, “That may be sooner than you think.”

“You dare think you can threaten me?” Umbridge all but screamed. Harry almost expected her to go for her wand.

Walking away from her desk, Harry paused at the office door and looked back at her. He gave her another nasty smile.

“Somebody killed Malfoy and almost killed Snape,” he told her. “What makes you think they’d like a bitch like you more than those bastards?”

-oOo-

Having finally escaped the clutches of Hogwarts’ High Inquisitor, with screams and threats and promises of things even worse than detention ringing in his ears, Harry returned to Gryffindor tower. He was feeling utterly exhausted and in dire need of a hot shower followed by a good night’s sleep, but unfortunately, had the suspicion that only one of those were likely to actually happen.

Giving the password to the Fat Lady, Harry stepped into the Gryffindor common room and found himself confronted by the sight of Seamus Finnegan apparently holding court about how Harry was the most likely suspect for the murders.

It was the most infuriating thing he had seen the entire day, which was really saying something considering he had just finished having ‘tea’ with Umbridge.

“What the hell is wrong with you, Finnegan,” he snapped angrily, announcing his presence.

Hermione, who had been trying to shoot down Seamus’ arguments, muttered a low and frustrated, “That’s something we’re all asking.”

Slightly surprised and embarrassed by the sudden arrival of the very person he had been speaking against, Seamus flushed red and retaliated, “I’m just saying out loud what everyone else is thinking, Potter - that you’re somehow behind all this.”

“Well, I’m certainly not thinking it,” declared Neville. There were several other voiced agreements, though a disheartening number of his fellow Gryffindors remained silent.

“You’re accusing *me* of killing them? Me?” Harry furiously demanded.

“Everyone knows how much you hated Malfoy and Snape,” Seamus stated.

“And naturally that means I killed them, of course,” scoffed Harry.

Seamus shrugged unconcernedly.

Seeing this, Harry spat on the floor. “Then you don’t know me at all.”

Now Seamus did speak up. "And how's that our fault, Potter?" he asked. "Weasley and Granger are your 'two best friends', after all. You hardly ever talk or spend time with the rest of us. The only time we do know what you're doing is when you're getting into trouble, losing points and racking up the detentions."

"That doesn't make me a murderer!"

"Maybe not, but it makes it very hard to give you the benefit of the bloody doubt!"

Harry paused and stared at the other boy. He had the sudden realization that he was in an argument that he simply could not win. Seamus would take whatever he said and twist it to suit his needs; namely vilifying him in a manner not unlike the more rabid stories in the Daily Prophet. What he really could not understand was why he was being like this. While there had been some friction between them at the start of the year, mainly caused by Seamus' mother's opinion of him, Harry had thought that they had managed to move passed that and start working together.

Realizing this, that nothing he said would make any difference, Harry threw up his hands and abandoned any pretence of trying to force some sense into his antagonist's thick skull.

"You really are a bloody idiot, aren't you?" asked Harry in pure exasperation.

Seamus bristled and began to retort, "Just because I--"

Harry cut him off, "If I really was the killer, Finnegan, aren't you worried that with your attitude... you might be next?"

The silence that fell over the common room was almost shocking in both its abruptness and its totality. Seamus was left gaping at Harry, eyes bulging and the colour slowly draining from his face. Just about everyone else was in a similar state and likewise staring at him in disbelief. Hermione and Ron in particular seemed especially flummoxed.

Harry offered all of them the very best smirk he could muster through his exhaustion.

"Now, if you'll excuse me," he said, beginning to ascend the stairs, "today's been another shitty day, so I'm going to bed."

The common room was unnaturally quiet as the rest of Gryffindor watched him leave.

-oOo-

Ordinarily the fact that Harry Potter was having a bad day would have caused Severus Snape some small measure of satisfaction. It was petty and mean, he knew, but his hatred of James Potter had long since overwhelmed reason where the younger wizard was involved.

Today, however, Snape was far too preoccupied with his own troubles to spare a thought for the distressed Boy-Who-Lived.

He had not been fully conscious at any point, but had gained enough lucidity to realize that his ordeal was over and he was safely ensconced in the school infirmary. He desperately wanted to talk to Dumbledore, or anyone else for that matter, to warn them of Freddy's existence. A difficult thing without his eyes and tongue, but he had to try.

Unfortunately the combined pain of his injuries and the numerous potions that had been poured down his throat kept him in a state of delirium where reality and dream seemed to blend together.

Eventually, however, everything caught up with him and he slipped into a fitful sleep.

Snape rested in the darkness that was now his existence, the only sound being his own steady breathing. He focused on his Occlumency and began to sort his thoughts and memories - it was a welcome diversion, which he needed to take his mind off things.

The sudden bang of a heavy wood door being slammed open jolted him to full alertness. In his surprise, he opened his eyes to see what was going on.

He blinked in further surprise as he found his eyes restored and his ability to see returned to him. He was so shocked by this that it took several seconds before he realized where he was and, more importantly, who was with him.

**"Listen up, maggots! There'll be no silly wand waving in my class!"**

Snape stared in mounting dread at the ominous figure of Freddy Krueger. The setting of this dream was the Hogwarts potions classroom. And Freddy was the teacher.

It was also obvious exactly who Freddy was role playing as. He was dressed in Snape's voluminous robes - which were billowing theatrically despite the fact that he was standing still. Topping it off, his burnt and scarred head was covered in a thick and greasy black wig, styled identically to his 'student'.

**"Now, you useless dunderheads, let's begin tonight's lesson..."** declared Freddy, clapping his hands together.

He rounded on Snape, looming over him. The real potions master tried to back away and flee, but found himself unable to leave his seat.

**"Sevvie,"** commanded Freddy, **"tell me; is it your unrequited love for dear, delicious, departed Lily that makes you such a bastard? Or is it just a case of really bad blue balls?"**

Realizing that he was trapped and unable to escape, Snape tried to remain calm. He looked at Freddy, who was waiting impatiently for an answer. Ignoring the question, he decided to do what he did best and gather as much information as he could on his captor.

"Who the hell are you?" he asked, only realizing as he spoke that he still had his tongue.

**"Wrong answer!"** exclaimed Freddy. He shook his head. **"Tut tut, it seems that being a bastard is not everything."**

Snape narrowed his eyes. Obviously Freddy had set up this entire dream as a bastardized reproduction of Snape's traditional introductory class to the first-years - particularly Harry Potter's first year.

"You're mocking me," he concluded.

Freddy smiled viciously. **"Tell me, Sevvie, does spying for both sides make you feel special? Do you get a hard-on from kissing the asses of both your masters? Do you get off on being their slave?"**

Snape's lips drew into a thin line even as he grit his teeth. "Since you seem to know so much about me," he demanded, "why don't you tell me the answer!"

**"Ah ah... I hate to do this, but two fingers from Slytherin for your disrespect !" declared Freddy.**

"Fingers," repeated Snape dully.

Freddy grinned back at him and lifted up his knife-hand, finger blades spread wide. **"Much better than points, dontcha think?"**

Snape came to the obvious conclusion, "You're mad."

**"Mad?"** repeated Freddy, cackling. **"Of course I'm mad. Mad for blood!"**

Before he could do anything, Freddy had reached over the desk and grabbed Snape by the arms. With strength that could not be resisted, he forced his hands down on the tabletop. As soon as he was released, Snape tried to pull back, but found that his hands were stuck in place, with their fingers splayed wide and thus easily accessible.

**"Now, two fingers, wasn't it?"** asked Freddy.

Snape didn't have a chance to do anything, not even scream, before Freddy's knives swung down. His horror at what was happening was momentarily delayed by the odd thought that the thunk of the blades cutting into the desk sounded very much like the sound of a butcher's knife embedding itself in a cutting board.

Shortly after that, however, pain lanced from his left hand and stabbed into his brain like a red-hot poker.

**"Ah, finally... an answer,"** crowed Freddy.

It took a while, but eventually Snape was able to push back the pain. He was gulping air in deep breathes and trying to focus on the blackboard at the front of this dream classroom. It took his all not to look down at his mutilated hand and confirm the loss of his pinky and ring fingers. So long as he did not look he could pretend otherwise, even if he already knew that his injuries in this dream would bleed over into the waking world.

Freddy was either kind or, more likely, cruel enough to wait for Snape to recover somewhat before he spoke up. His next words caused Snape's rapid and shallow breathing to catch in his throat.

**"Now, for another finger, I want you to answer this next impossible question..."**

And so it continued; with Freddy asking Snape one question after another and exacting his terrible punishment when the man failed to answer to his satisfaction. He seemed to take a perverse delight in making the questions as intimately embarrassing as possible.

Finally, after a question alluding that Snape had been sexually abused by his father, Freddy removed the last of the potions master's fingers. Snape was almost relieved, as this meant his punishment would soon be over.

**"Awwwww..."** moaned Freddy in disappointment. **"We seem to be all outta little piggies."**

Snape was in too much pain to bother wondering at why his fingers were being compared to pigs of all things. He had, to his extreme distress, glanced down at the fingerless stumps that were now his hands. His screams of horror were even louder than his earlier screams of pain.

He prayed that this really was just a nightmare. For the first time since he was a young boy, he prayed in true supplication instead of mere phrase. He prayed because he knew that even after the nightmare was over, his ordeal would continue.

There were instances of blind potion brewers. More than most people would believe, actually. There was not, however, any possibility of someone brewing potions without their eyes *and* hands.

His attention was so scattered, through physical and emotional pain, that he hardly heard what Freddy said next. When the words did finally seep through the pain and register in his mind, he wrenched his head upright and stared at his torturer in even greater horror.

"W-wuh-what?" he managed to choke out.

Freddy's answering smirk was vicious. **"I said; time for the last question for today's lesson."**

Snape's gaze involuntarily dropped to his ruined hands. At least, he thought morbidly, there were no more fingers he could lose.

Freddy's eyes followed his and the scarred man laughed darkly.

**"Of course, for this question. I'm gonna have move down to something else to take off if you get the answer wrong again."**

Snape stared blankly at the man for a long while, unable to understand what was being said. There was nothing left, was all that he could think again and again.

Seeing his confusion, Freddy leaned over the desk until he was almost nose to nose with Snape. He not so subtly glanced down. When this also failed to enlighten his prisoner, he resorted to pointing with his bloody finger knives.

Snape very nearly fainted as the realization dawned on him.

**"So, tell me, Sevvie,"** Freddy asked, **"How does it feel, knowing that it's almost entirely your fault I'm out and about? How does it feel to be responsible for all the little kiddies I'm gonna play with?"**

"I'm not!" Snape managed to protest, even as he made one desperate last attempt to escape.

**"Oh, but you are,"** gloated Freddy.

"I never saw you before!"

**"Maybe, but you helped let me out."**

"I didn't do anything!"

**"In a way that's true... Which I'm sure your student would agreed was half the problem."**

"I'm just a potions professor!" wailed Snape, his composure and fortitude long broken. "I never taught anything to do with you!"

**"Oh, I wouldn't be so sure about that, Sevvie,"** said Freddy, leaning in close. **"You taught one very important lesson... You taught him how to hate."**

Snape could only stare back, unable to understand how that had anything to do with what was happening to him.

Then Freddy leaned back a bit and held his knife hand at the ready. Snape began to thrash about, his movements violent in their desperation, but he remained unable to leave his seat.

**"Now, I strongly suggest you try and 'clear your mind'; that way this'll hurt more."**

The words struck right to the very core of Snape's being and he froze. He recognised them, of course, having repeated them on an almost nightly basis ever since the new year.

"Potter," he rasped in sudden understanding.

Freddy grinned in acknowledgement and slashed down with his blades, slicing into Snape's groin like a farmer's thresher. This time, the potions master's screams were particularly high pitched and of a much longer duration.

Laughing in delight at the broken man's agony, Freddy swivelled round and plopped himself down in the seat next to Snape. He waited for the hoarse screams to die down to moans and whimpers before draping his arm over Snape's shoulders in a deceptively friendly manner.

**"Well, I guess this is it"**

Snape continued to moan, unable to do anything else.

**"Can't have you talking, yeah?"** Freddy explained. **"If you did that, it might spoil my fun."**

With a deft slice to the side, the blade on his index finger split Snape's throat open with preternatural ease. The incision was elegantly made, but brutal in its execution, cutting through the man's flesh, larynx and oesophagus, reaching almost all the way back to the spine. The resulting spray of blood from the severed jugular stained the front of his robes an almost Gryffindor crimson.

Freddy grinned cheekily and waved goodbye.

**"Ta ta!"**

Snape's last thought, before he was claimed by oblivion, was that he had been right after all. It was all Potter's fault.

-oOo-

The Great Hall was exactly as Harry had come to expect it. Dark and foreboding. Of course, considering how he had been feeling lately, that was a

perfect reflection of his mood and thus quite appropriate.

At the same time, however, Harry was feeling particularly conflicted.

He turned from his place by the professor's table to face Freddy as the scarred man popped into being with a brief rain of confetti, balloons and a trumpeting fanfare.

"Freddy," he greeted, ignoring the melodramatic entrance.

**"Bit of a dick, wasn't he?"** Freddy asked.

"You get used to it," replied Harry blandly.

He would never admit it, but there had been something satisfying about seeing Snape on the receiving end of such a brutal assault. The final coup de grace was a bit much, but Harry simply could not bring himself to feel too much over the death of someone who had tormented him relentlessly for so many years. Especially after what the bastard had done to him the day before. He would have preferred to leave the potions master alive and unable to practice his art, but could just as easily accept his death.

"Why kill him?" asked Harry, more curious than anything else.

**"Like I said; we didn't want him to spoil our fun."**

Harry looked at Freddy pointedly and repeated, "We? Since when was there a 'we' in this?"

Freddy smirked knowingly and answered, **"Since you let me out to play."**

"How do you do it?" asked Harry. "How do you get into people's dreams?"

**"Dontcha know?"** countered Freddy in jest. **"Life is but a dream!"**

"You don't expect me to row a boat up a river, do you?" asked Harry dryly.

**"Ha ha! Now you're getting into the spirit of thing!"**

"Oh, happy days."

**"Oh, don't be such a stick in the mud, Harry. Learn to live a little and enjoy yourself,"** Freddy told him. **"Odds are you'll be dead when this is over, so try to have some fun before your time runs out."**

Ignoring what seemed like a fairly subtle threat, at least from Freddy, Harry tried to get the conversation back onto the subject of the madman's abilities.

"You said you weren't a wizard; weren't magical," Harry said, "So how do you do it?"

**"Jealous?"**

"A little, yes."

Freddy offered him a sly and salacious grin. **"I bet I know exactly what kind of dreams you want to visit."**

Harry tried not to blush at the insinuation, but could already feel the blood rushing to his cheeks.

"That's not what I meant and you know it!"

**"Oh? So you don't wanna see if Hermione has a wild side? You know what they say about the quiet ones."**

"I don't think about her like that!"

**"Sure you don't,"** taunted Freddy. **"But if you're in denial, why not visit little Gin-Gin's dreams? You can be her knight in shining armour... And get a reward for saving her from the giant snake. Or maybe you're in the mood for some Chinese takeout..."**

"Just answer the bloody question, dammit!" snapped Harry. "How are you doing all this without any magic?"

Freddy's smile took on a sharper, crueller edge. **"Why not?"** he decided. **"It comes down to belief."**

"Belief?" repeated Harry, unsure of whether Freddy has having him on or nor.

**"Belief,"** confirmed Freddy. **"So long as the children of Springwood believe in me - remember me - then I'll always be able to get into their dreams!"**

"This isn't Springwood," noted Harry.

**"Hahahaha!"** laughed Freddy. He gave a crazed smile and spread his arms wide, as if to encompass the entire castle surrounding them. **"Don't**

**be silly, kid - if there's one thing I've learned over the years - it's that every town has an Elm Street!"**

"Krueger, this isn't a town - it's a castle somewhere in Scotland," Harry pointed out. "That means there are no streets."

**"Pfft, like I'm gonna let some technicality stop me,"** scoffed Freddy.

"All right then, different question," declared Harry, deciding to try another approach. "Why Malfoy and Snape? Why go after them?"

Freddy laughed at him. **"Please, kid, you can't be this stupid. I've already told ya - it's 'cause you were angry with them. It's 'cause you hated them. Nothing more. Nothing less."**

Harry swallowed a lump that had formed in his throat.

"You mean you killed them because I wanted them to die?" he asked, a little worried by that thought.

**"You are an idiot. I killed them 'cause it was fun. All you did was point me in their direction,"** explained Freddy impatiently. **"Well, for the Malfoy kid, yeah. Snape was all that and the fact that his snooping around in your thick skull might've led to me being discovered. We can't have that now, can we?"**

He then abruptly turned away from Harry and strode down the hall's length.

**"Now, if you'll excuse me... I need to go reap the harvest of your anger."**

And with that, Freddy vanished back into the shadows.

Harry was left standing alone in the Great Hall yet again. This seemed to be how all his dreams went lately. More or less resigned to it, he moved over to the teacher's table and settled down in the headmaster's luxurious chair. If this dream held true to form, then he would soon be witnessing more of Freddy's fun and games.

Though he knew it was a horrible thing to wish, he hoped it would be Umbridge that fell to the badly burned man's blades.

**-oOo-**

Seamus Finnegan was parched. It was for this reason that he had saddled up his horse, left his cattle ranch and made his way into Daisy Town in search of something to quench his thirst. For some reason, a glass of well turned Irish Whiskey was the only thing he wanted.

Tying off his horse, a magnificent black stallion called Midnight, he turned to the nearby saloon. He hoped that Madam Lavender would be there - then he could maybe have a chance to quench a different kind of thirst. Crossing the town's main street with long strides, he smiled as the clink of his spurs reached his ears.

"Now hold on there, Pilgrim," a familiar voice called.

Surprised at been hailed, Seamus turned to find himself faced with the small gang of outlaws that had been stirring up trouble throughout Daisy Town for the last few years. They were an unruly and thuggish looking bunch; despite their frequent claims to being of quality breeding. Taking in their faces and the eager anticipation therein, he realized that this could be trouble.

There, to the left, was Calamity Crabbe - whose broad Stetson shaded his beady little eyes. A few paces away, on the right was his partner in all things; Gruesome Goyle, dressed in an almost identical manner, save for his gleaming Rattlesnake boots.

And there, standing in between them, his expression one of pure arrogance; Ferret-Face Malfoy.

Nobody ever called him that to his face, of course, as it was guaranteed to turn his disposition sour and likely get you killed for it.

Malfoy smirked across at Seamus and with a brush of his hand, parted his long coat to expose the pearl handle of his Army Colt. His other hand pulled playfully at the green neckerchief that was the only splash of colour in his otherwise pure black attire.

"We've been looking for you... sheriff," Malfoy drawled, fingering his gun.

A little surprised at being addressed this way, Seamus glanced down to see that, yes, he had a silver star pinned to his red and gold checked shirt. Realizing that as the town's lawman, he was the one tasked in dealing with these troublemakers, he moved his hands down to the twin six-shooters he wore at his hips.

"And what d'you want, Ferret-Face?" he asked, deliberately using the name that he knew would provoke Malfoy.

Malfoy sneered angrily at him and reply, "We were wantin' to string you up like the yellow-bellied Irish pig you are!"

Seamus breathed deeply, his nostrils flaring at the insult. "Nobody calls me a yellow-belly, Malfoy!"

"Then draw, Finegan!" Malfoy challenged, his two companions stepping in line with him and also showing off their guns.

His hands went for his guns and they cleared their holsters before the three outlaws even began to draw. They didn't call him Quick-Draw Finnegan for no good reason. He squeezed the triggers of both pistols in such perfect synchronisation that the resulting bang sounded like only a single gunshot. He smiled as two little red holes appeared in Crabbe and Goyle's foreheads. Seamus shifted his aim towards Malfoy even as his

companions' bodies began to fall to the ground.

By now Malfoy had managed get a grip on his gun's handle and was beginning to draw, but it was too late. With a loud crack, again sounding like a single shot, Seamus fired both guns and put a slug in each of his enemy's eyes.

Ferret-Face Malfoy joined Crabbe and Goyle in the dirt.

"NOOOOO!! DRACO!!"

Seamus whirled and almost fired again before he recognised the source of the cry. It was Miss Pansy, who owned the Snake's Pit bordello on the edge of town. She dashed frantically out of the saloon and rushed to where Draco had fallen.

"Draco! Draco!" she wailed, falling to her knees and cradling the dead man's body to her.

"I'm sorry, Miss Pansy," said Seamus, "but I had no choice."

**"There's always a choice, son,"** said a voice from behind him.

Seamus turned to see the town preacher approaching. He struggled not to wince; Father Freddy was horribly burned. There had apparently been an accident with a locomotive boiler that had exploded over in Springwood City. Whatever the cause, the results sure weren't pretty.

"I'm sorry, Father," he said, "but it was me or them."

**"Then you should have been a good Christian, Sheriff, and turned the other cheek,"** declared Father Freddy piously.

"I'm sorry, Father," Seamus repeated, this time with a frown, "but as the town sheriff, I couldn't do that."

"You murdering, bastard!" screamed Miss Pansy, her mournful wails giving way to furious grief.

"Yeah!" called Barrister Finch-Fletchley, standing in the doorway to his office. "You should have brought them in for a trial - not shot them down like that!"

"Must be illegal, what he just did," mused Madam Lavender from the where she was standing with everyone who had been in the saloon during the gunfight.

"They called me out!" protested Seamus unhappily. He really did not see what all this fuss was all about. He was the sheriff and it was his job to deal with outlaws and scum like Malfoy. He bitterly recalled that there had been no such protests a year ago, when he had hunted down and shot dead that dog Punxsutawney Potter. Heck, there had been celebrations in the streets when he had brought Potter's boy in for his bounty. That had been the same day the townsfolk had elected him as sheriff.

**"The path of the righteous man is beset on all sides by the iniquities of the selfish and the tyranny of evil men,"** quoted Father Freddy, holding his bible up over his head.

"Exactly!" exclaimed Seamus.

Father Freddy lowered the book and stared at him, **"I was talkin' about you, son. Get him."**

The townsfolk surged forward at the preacher's command. Seamus, panicking at being rushed by so many, drew his guns and fired a warning shot into the air. It did nothing to slow them and a second later he was flailing under the assault of a dozen people he once called friends.

"No! No - let me go!" he yelled, struggling.

**"Take him to the Judas tree!"** ordered Father Freddy. **"Hang 'im high!"**

"No!"

"Hang 'im high!" chorused the mob as they began pulling Seamus away.

"String him up by the neck!" yelled Dean Thomas, the town blacksmith.

"No! No! You can't do this!"

**"The wrath of God is slow but sure, Sheriff! It is His will,"** Father Freddy stated.

"What about a trial?" demanded Seamus, his struggles weakening as Neville Longbottom slugged him in the gut.

"The crime is murder!" proclaimed Finch-Fletchley, somehow having changed into a set of Judge's robes and the accompanying wig. "The verdict is guilty!"

"GUILTY!" chorused the rest of the crowd.

**"Thou shalt not kill,"** agreed Father Freddy.

"The sentence is death... by hanging," concluded Judge Finch-Fletchley.



“No!” protested Seamus as he was forcefully lifted up onto a horse. He dimly noticed that it was his own steed, Midnight, that he was being mounted upon.

“Shut up, you murdering dog,” spat Miss Pansy, hurling a fist-sized rock at him.

The rock struck him in the face, breaking his nose with a loud crack that sounded almost like a shot from his own guns. Blinking away tears and trying to stop Longbottom from properly tying the rope’s noose round his neck, Seamus absently noticed Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle getting up from where they had been lying in the dirt and walking off towards the saloon. Malfoy even paused at the doors and gave him a little wave.

“**Any last words?**” asked Father Freddy.

“You can’t do this,” protested Seamus desperately. “I’ve done nothing wrong!”

“**Very well,**” said Freddy, grinning dementedly. “**May God have mercy on your worthless soul!**”

With that, Freddy slapped Midnight hard on the horse’s flanks. Already upset by the press and noise of the crowd, Midnight whinnied loudly and bolted. Constrained as he was by the rope around his neck, Seamus was unable to remain in the saddle and, with a sharp jerk, he was pulled off.

“No!” cried Seamus as he fell. After that, the rope was too tight for him to make any attempt at protest.

-oOo-

Dean Thomas was the first of the fifth-year Gryffindors to wake up. This was not unusual, as he had been waking up first from practically the beginning. Occasionally Seamus or Neville would beat him, but it was normal for Dean to be the first to stir.

He spent a few minutes this morning just laying in bed and enjoying the peace and quiet. Those were rare commodities in any dormitory, but had been even harder to find this year.

Dean tried not to lay the blame at anyone’s feet, but between Harry’s nightmares and Seamus’ rather unnecessary antagonism, things had been more than a little unpleasant.

In truth, Dean could understand and sympathise with both boys, but he preferred not to take sides. He had other things to worry about this year. After all, the only thing worse than being a Muggleborn right now was being a black Muggleborn in a Hogwarts ruled over by Dolores Umbridge.

A loud snort, followed by a chainsaw rumbling from Ron’s bed, brought Dean out of his introspection.

Deciding to get up and enjoy the luxury of an uninterrupted shower, Dean gathered his toiletries and exited his curtained four-poster. As luck would have it, he stepped out on the side of his bed adjacent to Seamus’ bed. As such the very first thing he was presented with was the Irish wizard’s body.

This was so unexpected that Dean did not at first realize exactly what it was he was seeing. He stared blankly at the body, which had a slight sway to it, hanging from the frame of his four-poster bed with a makeshift rope made from his sheets wrapped tightly around his neck. His eyes took in the sight, but his brain failed to properly process it.

He blinked again and again as the stench of voided bladder and bowels began to permeate his consciousness.

Suddenly, Dean knew exactly what it was he was looking at.

His assorted toiletries fell from his limp hands and clattered to the dormitory floor. Nobody really noticed, as they were sleeping peacefully and blissfully unaware in their beds.

Their peace and bliss came to an end as Dean started screaming.

The other three boys woke abruptly to the sound of Dean’s frantic yells. Ron’s awakening was harder than Harry and Neville’s as he literally rolled off the bed and fell to the floor with a thump. His angry curses joined Dean’s screams, adding to the confusion.

“What’s wrong? What’s wrong?” asked Neville, tripping over his blankets as he tried to get out of his bed.

“Soddin’ hell, Dean, shut up!” yelled Ron from his place on the floor.

“What’s going on,” grumbled Harry, putting on his glasses and looking round to see what was causing Dean’s distress.

Once he could see clearly and had managed to move his drapes out of the way, Harry immediately saw what all the fuss was about.

He should not have been surprised, as Freddy had shown him everything that happened. Yet, now that he was seeing it with his own eyes, he could not help but fall on his rear in shock.

He was vaguely aware of Neville and Ron’s reactions as they too finally caught sight of Seamus. He was also aware that both boys sent significant glances in his direction, no doubt remembering his ill-chosen words the previous evening.

Harry stared at his roommate’s dangling corpse; terrible proof that his dream during the night had now become a very real nightmare.

In the end, there was only one thing he could think to say.

“Oh, you have to be fucking kidding.”

**TBC...**



# We Are Nothing Part V

**Title:** We Are Nothing

**Author:** Ruskbyte

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**Summary:** Snape's Occlumency lessons have shattered the last defences of Harry's mind. Now, unprotected, his dreams have become home to a nightmare other than Voldemort. A nightmare that has taken on a life of its own.

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"We are nothing; less than nothing and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence, and a name." - Charles Lamb, *Essays of Elia* , *Dream Children*

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/oOo\

## Part V

### In the Midnight Hour

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Not to anyone's surprise, it soon seemed as if every Auror in the British Isles had descended upon Hogwarts. It would almost have been impressive, were it not for the fact that two students and one professor were dead.

Snape's passing during the night caused very little stir amongst the population. In truth, while everyone was shocked and appalled by his brutal slaying, the details of which had somehow leaked, only the Slytherins were particularly saddened by his death. Much like Draco, the potions professor had done little to endear himself to the rest of the students.

Seamus' murder, however, lit the proverbial bonfire under everyone's collective rears. Unlike Snape and Malfoy, the Irish wizard had been reasonably well liked and his death seemed to herald the realization that anyone could be next.

Of course, considering his confrontation with Harry the previous night, witnessed by most of Gryffindor, it was also no surprise that the Boy-Who-Lived was now the prime suspect.

Naturally, Umbridge was delighted.

Harry, on the other hand, was an equal mixture of furious and resigned.

Most of his anger was direct at himself, for being so totally stupid as to have threatened Seamus the way he had. He was also angry at Freddy, for putting him in this situation by killing someone in Harry's own dorm room, thus depriving him of an alibi. He was also ashamed to admit to being angry with Seamus, whose inconvenient death had lead to this situation.

His feelings of resignation came from the fact that he was certain Azkaban would now play a prominent role in his future. He could not see any way around it, as he had no way to prove his innocence. Not while Freddy lived on in his dreams. His only hope now was that Fudge and Umbridge would hold some sort of trial, rather than simply tossing him into prison on what little evidence they had.

His ears picked up the faint sound of approaching footsteps.

Doubtless Umbridge and her Aurors were coming to arrest him. For a moment he contemplated the idea of trying to escape, but discarded the thought just as quickly as it formed.

His wand had been taken away from him earlier that morning, when he had been removed from Gryffindor tower and locked up in Professor McGonagall's office. Once trapped inside there was no way out. There was no floo connection in the room's fireplace and while the windows might have offered egress, the office was on the third floor. Without a broom, he would not be leaving that way.

The sound of the door unlocking seemed to echo throughout the room, as did the creak of the door being swung open.

Relief swept through him when the first person to enter the room was Professor McGonagall. For a moment he hoped that someone had realised the obvious; that he was not a murderer and thus arranged for him to be released.

His hopes were dashed when Umbridge followed on the deputy-headmistress's heels. Worse still, the dreadful woman was accompanied by a pair of Aurors. One of them, Harry did not recognised, but the other he knew to be Dawlish, who had been there when Fudge had tried to arrest Dumbledore.

“Professor--” Harry began, trying to plea his innocence the only other person in the room that he knew would listen to him. He was cut off, however, by Umbridge.

“Sit down, Mr Potter,” she ordered.

“But--”

A sign from Umbridge had Dawlish and his partner grabbing Harry by the shoulders and elbows and forcing him into one of the chairs in front of McGonagall's desk.

“There's no need to be so rough, Madam Umbridge,” McGonagall protested.

“On the contrary, Professor,” Umbridge countered snidely. “We are dealing with a deranged animal that's already killed three people and caused untold amounts of public unrest.”

“I didn't kill anyone!” yelled Harry, struggling to rise. Dawlish grabbed him by the shoulders and forced him back down. A quick wave of the second Auror's wand trapped him in place.

“Protest as much as you like, Mr Potter, but I know you're behind this,” asserted Umbridge, coming stand in front of him.

“I'm not! I haven't done anything!”

Umbridge smiled nastily at him and held up a small vial of clear liquid.

“Oh, I'm sure we'll be finding out everything you have done, Mr Potter. Every dirty little secret of yours, your friends and Dumbledore!”

Harry's eyes locked on the veritaserum in her grasp and a massive lump formed in his throat even as the bottom fell out of his stomach.

“How dare you?!” huffed McGonagall, stepping forward. “It's illegal to use veritaserum on a child!”

“This boy isn't a child - he's murderer!” countered Umbridge. She handed the vial to Dawlish and ordered, “Dose him.”

“No!” yelled McGonagall. She made to intervene, but the second Auror had already drawn his wand and now levelled it against.

“Open your mouth, Potter,” commanded Dawlish.

“No! Stop this at once!”

“Shut up, Minerva, or I'll have Fisher stun you,” threatened Umbridge.

Unwilling to wait any longer, Dawlish grabbed Harry's jaw and pried his mouth open. Knowing that he no actual choice in the matter, the young wizard offered no resistance and obediently held his mouth open in anticipation.

With morbid fascination, Harry watched as Dawlish uncorked the vial and tipped it forward over his waiting tongue. One, two, three drops Harry counted.

“Are you sure that's enough?” asked Umbridge.

“Yes ma'am,” replied Dawlish. “Three drops is all it takes.”

“And there's no chance he could resist it?”

“Not even divine intervention could help him lie to us now.”

“Perfect,” crowed Umbridge.

Harry was aware that she was rubbing her hands in anticipation, but the effect of the potion was making it difficult for him to pay much attention to what was going on around him. He would much rather sit back and enjoy the warm, fuzzy sensation that was now enveloping him. It was, he mused distractedly, rather like being under the Imperious Curse, only without the annoying voice telling him to do things.

“Now, let's get started, shall we?” asked Umbridge eagerly.

Since the question was not directed at him, Harry did not bother listening to it.

“Actually, ma'am,” interrupted Fisher, wand still trained on McGonagall, “there are a few control questions that need to be asked first; to confirm that the potion is working.”

“Fine, ask them then,” ordered Umbridge petulantly, unhappy at being kept waiting.

Dawlish left his spot behind Harry and moved to stand in front of him. “What's your full name?”

Still revelling in the wonderful warmth surrounding him, and a little amused that they did not already know who he was, Harry promptly answered.

Harry James Potter.”

“When were you born?”

“Midnight, July thirty-first, 1980,” answered Harry. He thought that his voice sounded funny. Sort of like flat Coke. But that really wasn’t important, so he gave it only a passing thought.

Dawlish turned to the impatiently waiting Umbridge and nodded, “The veritaserum is working. You can ask whatever you want.”

“No, you will not!” exclaimed McGonagall. She pushed forward, ignoring Fisher’s wand. She stomped in front of Umbridge. “Rest assured, Delores, people will be hearing of this and I’ll see to it you receive the proper punishment for this despicable breach of justice.”

Umbridge peered up at the taller woman and smiled sweetly. “Oh, I’m sure people will be hearing of this. Just as I’m sure they won’t complain, but rather praise me for giving this little beast exactly what it deserves.”

She pushed passed the professor and leaned down over Harry.

“All right, Mr Potter,” she said. “It’s time for you to confess to killed Draco Malfoy and Professor Snape.”

Harry, in the meanwhile, was contemplating the rounded frame of his glasses.

“Well? Confess!”

It was difficult to see the frame properly whilst wearing the glasses, but he was too relaxed to bother taking them off.

Umbridge rounded on Dawlish. “It isn’t working,” she accused. “You didn’t use a large enough dose.”

Dawlish coughed into a hand, obviously embarrassed. “Actually ma’am,” he explained, “the boy’s not answering because you haven’t actually asked him a question yet.”

Umbridge flushed a deep red, which clashed horribly against her pink cardigan. She rounded on Harry again.

“Did you murder Draco Malfoy, Severus Snape and the other boy?” she demanded.

“Seamus Finnigan,” elaborated Fisher, still watching McGonagall.

“No.”

Umbridge and the Aurors stared at him in surprise. They failed to notice McGonagall’s small sigh of relief.

“Preposterous!” exclaimed Umbridge. “I know you killed them! You’re lying!”

Harry did not answer, as there had again been not question.

Dawlish cleared his throat, “Did you kill Draco Malfoy?”

“No.”

“Did you kill Severus Snape?”

“No, but I wish I had.”

“There, you see! He’s guilty!” proclaimed Umbridge.

“Hardly,” scoffed McGonagall. “There is a big difference between wanting to do something and actually doing it. If wanting to kill someone were a crime, then you’d have to arrest every student that isn’t in your Inquisitional Squad.”

Umbridge gave the other woman a scathing look. “Then he’s lying!”

“It’s impossible to lie under veritaserum,” McGonagall reminded her.

“But he is!” insisted Umbridge.

“Potter,” said Dawlish, trying to move things along. “Did you kill Seamus Finnigan last night?”

Harry would have smiled, had he not been too relaxed to bother. He was aware, on some level, that he had been exonerated on all the charges being levelled at him. Now, if only someone would ask about Voldemort...

“No.”

Dawlish and Fisher exchanged a nervous glance. The boy was clearly innocent, which meant that they had illegally dosed a child with truth serum entirely without cause. Umbridge might possibly protect them, but they had no doubt that McGonagall would do everything she could to bring this to the attention of people who would take action against them regardless of the Undersecretary’s supposed protection.

Have you ever killed anybody?" asked Fisher, hoping to maybe salvage something from what was fast becoming a disaster.

"No."

Harry was reasonably sure that he had not been responsible for Quirrell's death in his first year. Yes, he had badly burned the man, but Dumbledore had suggested it was Voldemort's abandonment of his body that had actually finished him off. And despite his feelings of guilt, he knew that Cedric's death had been completely out of his hands.

"Shit," concluded Fisher.

"I'm telling you now, I don't care what he says; he is guilty! Keep asking him!" demanded Umbridge.

"Did you have anything to do with any of the murders?" asked Dawlish.

"I hated Snape and Malfoy. I was angry with Seamus," answered Harry.

As Freddy had told him; it was his anger and hatred that let the real killer enter the dreams of his victims.

"Perhaps I should remind you that hating someone is also not against the law," said McGonagall.

Umbridge shoved her way passed Dawlish and actually grabbed hold of Harry. "You are lying! I know you're lying about it! Just like you've been lying about the dark lord, haven't you?"

"No, I'm not."

"You're not?" asked Fisher, looking worried.

"He is! The dark lord is not back!" she released Harry just long enough to slap him. "Tell them! You're lying about that to help Dumbledore undermine the Minister's position, aren't you?"

"No, I'm not," replied Harry, ignoring the sting of his cheek in favour of the bliss suffusing him.

"You're telling the truth? The dark lord really is back?" asked Fisher, praying that the answer would be no.

"Yes."

"Shit."

"HE IS NOT BACK!" Umbridge shrieked. "He is lying!"

"But the veritaserum..."

"Was obviously not enough," insisted Umbridge. She turned to Dawlish and snatched the potion vial out of his hand. "You incompetent buffoons obviously didn't give him enough!"

Before anyone could stop her, Umbridge uncorked the vial, forced open Harry's mouth and poured the contents down his throat.

"No!" cried McGonagall, pushing passed Fisher and pulling Umbridge off her student. Fisher did nothing to stop her as he was in fact moving with her.

"What have you done?" asked Fisher in horror as he pried the now empty vial from her fingers.

"I've done what you were supposed to do in the first place!" shouted Umbridge furiously. "I've given him enough to make him confess!"

"You idiot!" exploded Fisher.

"How dare you!"

"Three drops of veritaserum is all you ever need, damn it! Giving him more won't make him stop telling the truth!"

"It will, because he is *lying*!"

"Harry! Harry!"

All eyes turned to a frantic McGonagall. She was leaning over Harry, whose condition had deteriorated to a comatose state. The only sign of life was a spastic twitching in his restrained legs.

"Oh shit, he's going into convulsions!" exclaimed Fisher, releasing Umbridge and going to help the professor.

"Stop that at once and start asking questions," ordered Umbridge.

McGonagall temporarily abandoned her student to round on her supposed colleague and slap her across the face with enough force to send her crashing to the floor.

"You damnable woman," she yelled, taking the opportunity to kick her several times. After one last boot to the stomach, she returned her attention to Harry.

By now Fisher had released the Boy-Who-Lived from the chair and laid him out on the office floor. The spasms in his legs had spread to the rest of his limbs and were increasing in intensity.

"What's wrong with him?" she asked, kneeling down by his head.

"He's been overdosed on veritaserum," explained Fisher, trying to restrain Harry as his thrashings began to grow violent. "In large enough quantities it's actually a poison - that's why three drops is the limit."

"Do you have an antidote with you?"

"There isn't any - we need to flush the serum out of his body."

"I'll call Poppy," responded McGonagall, drawing her wand and sending off a quick patronus message to the Hogwarts matron.

"Fisher, stop helping the boy! Dawlish, arrest her for attacking me!"

Fisher ignored the recovering Umbridge, more concerned with trying to save Harry's life. Dawlish had no chance to follow the command given to him, as McGonagall turned to Umbridge and blasted her across the office with a fury powered Stunner. She then turned her attention to the Auror that was doing nothing but stand dumbly in place.

"I want Amelia Bones and Rufus Scrimgeour here at Hogwarts as soon as possible. I'll be laying charges of attempted murder against that foul little toad woman. Unless you want to be included, I suggest you hurry."

Dawlish fled the office at a run.

"Is there anything we can do?" she asked Fisher.

His response was curt and disheartening.

"Pray."

**-oOo-**

Thanks to the wonders and versatility of magic, the Hogwarts Hospital Wing was rarely a place of frantic and desperate action. At the moment, however, the realm of Poppy Pomfrey could have easily been mistaken for any of the world's most frenetic emergency rooms.

"I swear, he does things like this purely to vex me," muttered Pomfrey as she poured yet another potion down Harry's throat.

"Ack!" yelled Fisher, having just received an elbow to his sternum. "Can't we restrain him somehow?"

"We can't risk using too much magic on him right now - hold him down dammit!"

Unfortunately this was much easier said than done, as Harry was thrashing about in a manner that was making it very difficult for McGonagall and Fisher to keep a hold on him. Indeed, the professor already had a split lip while the Auror was developing an impressive black eye and several cracked ribs.

"Just hold him still for a few seconds," Pomfrey demanded, readying another potion.

"Grak! Gah!" Harry suddenly screamed incoherently as his convulsions, impossibly, grew even more violent.

"Look out!" exclaimed Fisher just as Harry bucked strongly enough to knock him to the infirmary floor/

"He's too strong!" gasped McGonagall, trying to hold him down by herself.

"What the devil's happening?" asked Fisher. "The veritaserum can't be causing *this*, can it?"

"And how many cases of veritaserum poisoning have you seen?" Pomfrey demanded to know. She tried to force her way through Harry's flailing arms to administer the next potion. She was having difficulty, as Professor McGonagall was only able to hold down the one.

"Nuhk! Nuhuh!"

"Poppy - he's choking!" McGonagall yelled, struggling to grab Harry's other arm.

"Fisher, grab his head and hold him still!" Pomfrey ordered. A glancing blow from Harry was enough to knock the potion vial she was holding out of her hand. Fortunately the glass had been spelled to be unbreakable, thus preventing it from shattering, though its contents sprayed out and were wasted on the floor.

"Noooooooo!" howled Harry, arching his back and throwing his head wildly from side to side.

"Merlin's flaming penis!" swore Fisher as he was once again knocked to the floor.



Dammit, Poppy, what *is* this?” asked McGonagall.

“I don’t know!” admitted Pomfrey, throwing herself over Harry’s chest.

“Nuhahaha-ha-ha-hah! Yes! Yes!”

Two burning blood-red eyes glared out at the world, even as Harry’s lips twisted into a grotesque mockery of a smile.

“Ha-ha-hah, I have you now, Potter,” exclaimed Voldemort, his overlaying Harry’s own. “There is no Dumbledore to save you this time! Your soul is mine!”

The dark lord’s mad cackling sent shivers down the spines of all that heard it. And as Harry twisted and contorted in the hospital bed, they could do nothing but watch helplessly.

-oOo-

Few things were more boring for Freddy Krueger than having to endure those quiet moments of wakefulness, when his victims were free from sleep’s embrace and went about their daily lives.

Thus, when something peculiar began to happen, deep in the shadows of Harry Potter’s mind, the Lord of Nightmares immediately noticed.

“**Well, this is different,**” he commented.

One thing that anyone who had ever met him would agree upon was that Freddy was not altruistic. He was incapable of helping people for any reason that did not further his own ends.

Which is why, when the black storm of Voldemort’s legilimency attack began to tear across the landscape of Harry’s mind, Freddy did nothing but stand back and watch.

Well, he did add some commentary, as if he were narrating a wildlife documentary.

“**Ooooh, that’s gonna leave a mark,**” he observed as Voldemort slammed into a patch of memories and began to brutally toss them aside.

The scarred man watched as Voldemort’s presence extended further and further from the connection that linked him to Harry. As he progressed he latched onto one memory after another, perusing them with vicious ease before discarding them and moving on.

Then, the light of Harry’s mindscape dimmed, as if the sun had gone behind a cloud. Freddy looked around in confusion.

“**What the hell is this?** ”

As he watched, a darkness that was not Voldemort’s intrusion began to engulf the world around him. Its presence was not limited, like the legilimency attack, but seemed to encompass the entirety of Harry’s mind all at once.

It finally began to dawn on Freddy that there was a very real chance that Harry was going to be injured to the point where he might actually end up dying. While Freddy could not have cared less for Harry’s welfare, the fact remained that he could only visit the dreams of Hogwarts while Harry remained alive. With Harry’s death, he would once again be relegated to the realm of waiting.

“**Oh, hell no!**” exclaimed Freddy. “**No! No! No! Ain’t nobody cutting me outta my happy fun time!**”

Determined not to be banished back to the abyss for no other reason than because his host was about to drop dead, Freddy leapt into action.

At first he considered simply severing the connection, but instead paused to consider it.

While he knew next to nothing about occlumency, legilimency or magic in general, Freddy did know that the link between Harry and Voldemort was by no means a one-way street.

This meant that if the dark lord could get to Harry, then conversely, Freddy could get to the dark lord.

And better still, from what he could make out; using the connection had put Voldemort in a state of near meditation. A state that some would describe as dreamlike.

Freddy owned dreamlike.

-oOo-

Voldemort blinked in surprise and looked around him. He was standing in what appeared to be a Muggle industrial complex of some sort. A smelter or perhaps a boiler room. It was a very strange thing for him to be standing in such a place, most especially when he knew he had been sitting in his private chambers only a moment before.

“**Ah, there you are.**”

Startled by the unexpected voice, the dark lord spun round to face whoever it was that had spoke. He promptly doubled over as a bladed fist buried itself in his stomach. Any thought that this was some bizarre sort of dream vanished as the dreadful sensation of four thin knives piercing into his

flesh registered. Then the pain struck him.

"Gagh," he coughed. He had endured worse during his lifetime and was able to prevent himself from actually screaming.

The hand and its bladed fingers withdrew, causing almost as much pain and injury in their exit as in their entry. Voldemort tried to suck in a breath, but found the wind driven from him a second time as the knives were slammed back into him. If anything this assault was even more painful.

**"So, you're the prick that's trying to kill the kid, huh? Damn, you're one ugly motherfucker!"**

Voldemort looked up from where he was hunched over the fist still embedded within his stomach. He found himself staring at the singularly most hideously disfigured face he had ever encountered. As if acknowledging that he had his attention, the man pulled back his hand and then quickly drove it back in again. This time the pain was enough that the dark lord could not help but cry out.

**"Ah, so you *can* sing,"** noted the man.

He stepped back, allowing Voldemort to collapse onto his hands and knees.

The dark lord wrapped both arms around his perforated middle, desperately wondering how he had come to be here. He had gone from ransacking the Potter boy's mind to being curled up in a ball of agony.

He considered the possibility that this was some kind of Occlumency defence being used against him, but discarded that idea almost immediately. Severus had reported before his death that Potter was a failure at the mind arts.

So what the hell was going on?

Struggling to push back the pain, Voldemort looked up to see that his attacker was standing back and watching him with an insufferably smug expression.

"You will pay for this," Voldemort gasped.

Freddy laughed and lashed out with his knife-hand. The blades sliced through Voldemort's cheek. **"I think you're confused as to who is going to pay who,"** he declared.

Voldemort clutched his ruined face with one hand and wrapped his other arm around his wounded stomach. The stench of blood and leaking offal almost made him gag, especially when combined with the pain that flared up inside of him as he forced himself to stand.

"I will revisit this attack upon you a thousand fold," he vowed, trying to gather his magic to heal himself.

**"Ooooh, I'm soooo scared,"** Freddy mocked.

Gritting his teeth as his flesh and innards slowly knit back together, Voldemort glared at his attacker. Surreptitiously reaching for the pocket that held his wand, he maintained close watch in case of another attack. Freddy seemed willing to leave him be for the moment; something the dark lord capitalized on the moment his fingers brushed over his wand's yew handle.

**"Avada Kedavra!"** he roared, snapping his wand out and aiming right at Freddy's heart. The sudden movement pulled on his injuries and caused a bad coughing fit that left him once again doubled over. He was still able to, just barely, watch as his spell struck its target.

**"Argh! No! I've been hit! Medic! Help! Somebody call me an ambulance!"** yelled Freddy dramatically, clutching both hands to his chest and making a production out of it. In truth, the Killing Curse had no discernable affect whatsoever.

"Impossible," sputtered Voldemort between wheezes.

**"So... was that your best shot? Huh?"** asked Freddy.

**"Avada Kedavra!"**

**"Oh, please - don't you have anything better?"**

Voldemort could only stare. The idea that someone could simply shrug off the Killing Curse so easily was almost beyond his comprehension.

Then Freddy spread the fingers of his knife-hand out wide and began to advance.

**"Avada Kedavra!"**

The curse was barely enough to make Freddy skip a stride.

**"Avada Kedavra!"**

This time, Freddy continued onward with flinching or even a pause. By now Voldemort was beginning to feel truly desperate and, even worse, he could feel the small bubblings of real fear.

**"Now, fucktard, it's time to teach you to a lesson about not interrupting someone else's fun,"** declared Freddy as he entered arm's reach.

And then there was nothing but the flash of knives.

-oOo-

A wail of pure agony, as if he were being tortured under the Cruciatus, was torn from Harry's throat. His body bucked and twisted and thrashed about wildly, his back arching almost to the breaking point. To the relief of those watching, the dual tone of his voice seemed to separate as the cry trailed off.

As if to confirm the end of the ordeal, Harry collapsed like a puppet with its strings suddenly cut.

Madam Pomfrey cautiously approached the now limp young wizard and began to check him with her wand.

"Is he dead?" asked Fisher anxiously.

"Unconscious," replied Pomfrey, continuing to cast one diagnostic spell after another. "I think whatever that was is over."

"Can you check his eyes," suggested McGonagall.

Cautiously and a bit reluctantly, Pomfrey lifted up one of Harry's eyelid. She releases a deep sigh of relief and reported, "Just as they're supposed to be. No red at all in the iris, though there is some corneal bleeding. Probably caused by the strain."

McGonagall bow her head and gave a brief prayer of thanks.

"So it's over?" asked Fisher. "He's all right?"

"All right?" repeated Pomfrey unhappily. "There's a lot of ways I can describe this boy at the moment and 'all right' is certainly not one of them!"

"How bad is it, Poppy?" asked McGonagall.

"This is the worst I've ever seen him," the nurse replied instantly.

"I see," nodded McGonagall. She had not expected anything less.

To her chagrin and shame, however, she had to admit that Harry's injuries were of minor import against what else had happened. If the dark lord had indeed done as she thought, and tried to possess her student, then she needed to inform Dumbledore.

"Do what you can, Poppy. Call in any help you need to," McGonagall ordered. "I'll be in Umbridge's office - there's a great many floo calls that need to be made."

"I'll let you know if anything else happens," said Pomfrey, already getting to work.

"Um, Professor?" asked Fisher, "What about me?"

McGonagall regarded the Auror for a long time. True, he had helped cause this mess, following Umbridge and her illicit questioning. But his quick actions earlier had more than likely saved Harry's life and that was not something that could be disregarded.

"Watch over them. Make sure nobody, especially Umbridge or Minister Fudge, causes a fuss," she told him before departing.

Feeling older than she had in many, many years, McGonagall exited the Hospital Wing. As she was closing the door behind her, she suddenly found herself accosted by a small army of students, all excitedly asking after their schoolmate.

"Quiet, please," she asked, holding up both hands.

The students quickly calmed down, though Hermione Granger was unable to refrain from asking one last question.

"Professor, is Harry all right?"

Deciding to be truthful, but without going into too much detail, McGonagall answered, "I'm afraid, children, that Mr Potter is gravely ill. Madam Pomfrey is doing her best to help him."

This prompted a flurry of further questions, asking for more details as to what was wrong with Harry. Again, McGonagall held up her hands for silence before answering.

"Mr Potter is suffering from veritaserum poisoning, caused by Madam Umbridge giving him an overdose of the potion while questioning him about the recent murders," she explained.

"That bloody bitch!" exclaimed Ron Weasley, his face rapidly achieving the same shade of red as his hair.

It was a measure of the severity of the situation that Hermione did not bother to chastise him for his language.

Things came within a bare inch of degenerating into violence, however, when Lavender Brown asked the inflammatory question, "So, does that mean he did it? Did he kill Seamus and the others?"

It was only the professor's timely intervention that prevented Ginny Weasley from attacking the older girl. As it was, murderous glares were all Ginny

was able to direct towards the object of her ire.

"Mr Potter has proven himself to be completely innocent of any wrongdoing, Ms Brown," McGonagall declared, raising her voice to ensure that nobody failed to hear her. She also made a point of giving Lavender a look that expressed her disappointment. "I would have hoped that you know him well enough to dismiss such blatant and idiotic rumour and gossip."

"Oh," muttered Lavender softly, ducking her head in embarrassment.

"But is Harry going to be okay?" asked Hermione insistently.

"As I said; Madam Pomfrey is doing her best," replied McGonagall, "but I fear Harry will have to endure a long recovery before he can be released."

"And what about Umbridge?" asked Neville Longbottom. "Is she going to get away with this as well?"

McGonagall drew her lips into a fine line as she turned her thoughts to the school's High Inquisitor. She had left the odious woman firmly trussed up in her office.

"Rest assured," she told her student, "I don't expect Madam Umbridge will be able to talk her way out of this mess. Not if I have anything to say about it."

-oOo-

Consciousness returned slowly to Harry. The first thing he became aware of was the dull, throbbing ache that seemed to originate in his bones and then worked its way out to the rest of his body. The second thing he noticed was that he was currently sprawled out on an uncomfortably hard floor.

He blinked open an eye and stared blearily at the floor his face was pressed against. For a moment he wondered who had stolen his carpet, but soon realized that he was not in his dormitory.

As the memories began to surface through the fuzz filling his mind, he instead wondered who had stolen Professor McGonagall's carpet.

Once more of his brain was working, Harry realized the ridiculousness of that thought and began to understand that he was no longer in the deputy headmistress's office.

The idea that he was in Azkaban occurred to him, as the floor was rather uncomfortable and he doubted that he would have been left on the floor anywhere else.

Struggling into a sitting position he took a look around at his surrounding.

"Ah, bollocks," he swore.

He was currently in the one place on earth that was even worse than Azkaban.

Number four Privet Drive.

"...I'm gonna go out on a limb and say this is hell," Harry said in a deadpan voice

**"Close, but not quite."**

"Freddy?" asked Harry, turning to see his dream companion descending the stairs.

**"Who else were you expecting? Your *loving* relatives?"** retorted Freddy.

"So this is a dream?" asked Harry, staggering unsteadily to his feet.

**"Of course it is."**

"But why are we here? Why not the Great Hall?"

Freddy rolled his eyes. **"How the hell should I know? It's your mind and your dream."**

"Great," grumbled Harry.

**"Stop being so emo, kid,"** said Freddy, clapping him hard on the shoulder. **"You're still alive, barely, so you ain't got nothing to complain about."**

"I suppose you're right."

**"Of course I am."**

"So, what happened?" asked Harry. "Everything's a bit fuzzy after they gave me the truth potion."

**"The ugly toad bitch nearly killed you with an overdose of that verification shit,"** explained Freddy.

Harry nodded slowly. "I sort of remember her trying to give me another dose."

**“Yeah, well that was just the start.”**

“What do you mean?”

**“Vol-de-mort,”** said Freddy succinctly.

“He actually came to Hogwarts?” asked Harry in alarm.

Freddy smacked him on the back of the head. **“Don’t be stupid, kid. He came here.”**

Harry was still a little muggy from everything and was thus understandably confused.

“Voldemort attacked the Dursleys?”

Freddy sighed and smacked Harry again. **“You’re an idiot. He came *here* . Here, as in *here* . This place. Your dreams.”**

“He was in my mind?” asked Harry, appalled. He could feel the blood draining from his face.

**“Yep,”** Freddy carelessly confirmed.

Harry began to pace back and forth. Freddy watched him with obvious amusement.

“What happened? I don’t know Occlumency -damn Snape- so I can’t keep him out...”

**“Don’t worry about it, kid. I took care of that ugly little shitstain,”** declared Freddy.

Harry stopped pacing and stared at him in disbelief.

“You what?”

**“Heh, I kicked his ass back to wherever he came from,”** explained Freddy.

“You beat him?” asked Harry incredulously.

**“It’s almost embarrassing how easy it was,”** Freddy boasted smugly.

Harry was at a loss as to how he should feel about this. On the one hand, it was disturbing to think that here, in the realm of dreams; Freddy was so powerful that Voldemort could be defeated so casually. On the other hand, it was rather pleasant to think that the dark lord had been so swiftly and decisively taken care of.

If only Dumbledore and the Order were half as effective.

In the end Harry merely said, “Uh, thank you... I guess.”

**“Meh,”** Freddy dismissed his thanks. **“If snakeface killed you I’d be cast back to Limbo. Ain’t no way I’m going back there until I’ve had my fun. And right now, the games are just beginning!”**

There wasn’t much Harry could think or say about that, save the disquieting feeling that a large number of people would do well to avoid falling asleep.

**-oOo-**

When true consciousness returned to Harry he was much more cognisant as to where he was. Considering the amount of time he had spent in the school infirmary, he could hardly mistake it for anywhere else.

“Well, this is an improvement,” he croaked. His throat was throbbing painfully, as if he had been drinking broken glass.

“Now that’s something I rarely hear. Especially from you, Mr Potter.”

“Madam Pomfrey,” greeted Harry with some relief. He had half been expecting to wake up in a Ministry holding cell, if not Azkaban.

“Drink this,” the matron commanded, holding up a vial filled with a deep violet potion.

Harry naturally looked at the potion with suspicion. Especially when his nose caught a whiff of mouldy cheese.

Seeing his expression, Pomfrey sighed. Potter was always a difficult patient.

“It’s a very weak pain relief potion for your throat,” she explained. “You screamed yourself hoarse and no doubt need it.”

“Yeah,” Harry acknowledged. He obediently opened his mouth and allowed her to feed him the potion.

“Now, how are you feeling?” she asked as she set the now empty vial aside. She held up a hand before he could answer. “And don’t think I’ll believe you if you say you’re fine.”

Laughing mirthlessly, and noting that his throat was already feeling better, Harry took stock of himself.

“All my muscles are sore,” he noted. He tentatively moved his limbs. “I feel like I just got off one of Oliver Wood’s more energetic training sessions.”

“Well, that’s better than I had hoped,” concluded Pomfrey.

“Oh?” queried Harry.

“You’re going to be spending a good couple of weeks in my care this time,” Pomfrey told him with a slight smirk.

“Wonderful.”

Pomfrey’s smirk grew, “Perhaps a prolonged convalescence will finally convince you to try and avoid getting into such situations in the first place.”

Harry directed a glare at the woman. “You seem to think I had a choice. Umbridge--”

“Is no longer at Hogwarts.”

Harry and Pomfrey turned to see that Professor McGonagall had entered the infirmary and was walking to join them at Harry’s bed.

“Ah, Minerva,” greeting Pomfrey. “I trust everything has been taken care of?”

McGonagall offered them a tight smile. “Madam Umbridge has been arrested for attempted murder. Aurors Dawlish and Fisher have been suspended pending an investigation.”

“Really?” asked Harry in disbelief.

“Madam Bones has taken a personal interest in the case,” explained McGonagall. “She will be personally dealing with both this and the murder investigation.”

“What about Fudge?” asked Harry.

He was well aware that the minister was not against doing whatever he felt like with impunity. The possibility that he would force the Aurors to release Umbridge was all too real. Harry’s trial had shown that very few people cared to stand up against his political machinations.

“Doubtless the Minister will be very upset once he learns what is happening,” agreed McGonagall.

“He’s going to force them to let her go, isn’t he?”

“He can try, but will find that Madam Bones cannot be dissuaded so easily.”

Harry sighed in relief and sank back into his pillows.

Then he remembered what Freddy had told him. While he had no memory at all of the attack, he had no reason to doubt his nightmarish companion’s claims.

“Voldemort!” he blurted out, jerking himself upright even as his muscles screamed in protest.

McGonagall managed to suppress most of her reaction to the dark lord’s name, but still gave a small twitch.

“So, you remember what happened?” she asked.

“A little,” Harry lied. “It’s all very fuzzy, but I think he was trying to break into my mind.”

“More than that, Mr Potter,” murmured McGonagall, vividly recalling just how disturbing those few short minutes had been.

“Minerva, Mr Potter’s friends have been knocking on the door every few minutes,” noted Pomfrey, looking for a less worrisome topic.

“Yes,” McGonagall confirmed. “I ran into some of them before I came in.”

“Can I see them?” asked Harry.

“I’m afraid not, Mr Potter, I sent them down to dinner,” apologised McGonagall.

“Well, maybe when they’re finished eating...”

“Not tonight,” interrupted Pomfrey.

“But--”

“You’ve had quite the day, Mr Potter, and are in no condition for prolonged visits.”

“But I--”

You're going to have a light soup and some bread for dinner and then you'll be turning in for the night. Understand?" commanded Pomfrey.

Knowing that this was yet another fight he would not win, Harry sighed and nodded. "Yes ma'am."

As Pomfrey left his bedside, doubtless to acquire yet another disgusting potion for him to drink, Harry turned his attention to McGonagall.

"Can you tell them I'm all right?" he asked.

"I'll let them know."

"Thanks Professor."

The deputy-headmistress stood and regarded him for a long moment before shaking her head.

"How do you keep getting into these situations, Mr Potter?" asked McGonagall.

"I'd like to know that as well," replied Harry.

-oOo-

"Is something wrong, Mr Potter?" asked Madam Pomfrey, taking his empty bowl of soup and setting it on the bedside table.

"Um, I've, uh, been having really bad nightmares the last couple of nights," Harry reluctantly explained. "I was, uh, wondering if I could... y'know, have some Dreamless Sleep potion tonight."

"Absolutely not," the matron promptly declared.

Trying to remain polite and not show how upset he felt at being denied, Harry asked, "Why not?"

Pomfrey patiently explained, "You're currently suffering from veritaserum poisoning, Mr Potter. I've given you several potion drafts to flush it out of your system - that's why you're sweating so much, but it will be several weeks before you can safely take anything more potent."

"Weeks," repeated Harry dismally.

"Probably closer to a month, just to be on the safe side," confirmed Pomfrey.

"But--"

"Mr Potter, you just came closer to death than you ever have during your time at Hogwarts," Pomfrey told him firmly. "One bad reaction to an even halfway potent potion could very well finish you off. I will not have that on my conscience."

Harry sighed and relented.

"In the meanwhile," Pomfrey continued, "I can give you one of the milder sleeping potions if you'd like."

"No, it's fine, thank you," Harry declined.

"Very well. Remember to call if you need anything."

Watching the school nurse leave the ward and slip into her office, Harry sourly thought that the one thing he really need was some Dreamless Sleep potion.

He really did not want to deal with Freddy so soon after their last meeting.

He especially had no desire to see if his dreams would take place in Privet Drive again or would revert to the much more comfortable Great Hall.

Trying to stay awake, however, was simply impossible. His entire body not only ached, but was almost dead from exhaustion. His small dinner had helped, but already he could feel his eyes beginning to droop. He tried his best not to succumb, but he was just too tired to hold it off any longer.

His last conscious thought before drifting to sleep was that he really hoped not to find himself dreaming of Privet Drive.

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**TBC...**





# We Are Nothing Part VI

**Title:** We Are Nothing

**Author:** Ruskbyte

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**Summary:** Snape's Occlumency lessons have shattered the last defences of Harry's mind. Now, unprotected, his dreams have become home to a nightmare other than Voldemort. A nightmare that has taken on a life of its own.

"We are nothing; less than nothing and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence, and a name." - Charles Lamb, *Essays of Elia* , *Dream Children*

/oOo\

## Part VI

### A night seems termless hell

\oOo/

Pansy had never felt so utterly helpless or so utterly terrified as she did right now.

She had no idea how she had come to be trapped in the school's astronomy tower. She did not even dare guess how she came to be wearing such an ostentatious evening gown and robes - something hardly appropriate for her circumstances.

All she did know was that she was stuck in the tower, all the entrances and exits were sealed and there was a crazy man dressed up as a black knight chasing after her. With a sword.

In hindsight, her apparel was appropriate for the proverbial damsel in distress.

**"Oh Pansy! Oh Pansy! Wherefore art thou, Pansy?"** called the black knight from the floor below.

Spurred on by his pursuit, Pansy resumed her flight up the stairs - she would rest later, rather than risk being caught.

In the back of her mind she was worried over what would happen when she eventually ran out of stairs; the astronomy tower was only so tall after all. Sooner, rather than later, she was going to reach the top floor and be left with nowhere else to run.

An ominous clanking sound drew her attention down. The black knight's metal boots were ringing against the stone floor. He was getting closer. To make matters worse, Pansy rounded the last bend in the staircase and found herself at its top. In front of her now was the closed door leading onto the roof where their astronomy classes and furtive romantic rendezvous took place. The heavy tread of the black knight continued to sound, drawing higher and closer with every passing second.

Pansy pushed open the door and rushed through.

She drew to an immediate halt, however, when she found herself faced with the impossible. She was not on the astronomy tower roof. Instead, she seemed to be at the bottom of another set of stairs. What really bothered her, however, was the fact that she recognised these stairs. They were the stairs she had just spent several frantically minutes running up. She was, somehow, back at the bottom of the tower and at the start of the stairs. She glanced back through the door behind her, to check if that staircase was still there.

**"Ello, poppet,"** the black knight greeted.

Pansy let out a startled scream upon finding her pursuer standing in the doorway right behind her. The black knighted lifted a gauntleted hand up to raise the visor to his all encompassing helmet. Pansy let loose another short scream at the sight revealed.

**"Peek-a-boo, I see-eth thou!"** declared Freddy Krueger, giving her a little wave.

Pansy renewed her flight up the stairs with a vigour spurred on by sheer terror. This time her ascent was haunted not by the black knight's echoing footsteps, but by his raucous and haughty laughter. Several times during her climb to the top of the tower Pansy tripped on the hem of her long dress and robes, but fear drove her on despite the accumulating bruises and small cuts. Reaching the top of the stairs for a second time, she paused to catch her breath.

The sudden absence of laughter worried her. Holding her breath, despite her need to gulp in as much air as possible, Pansy listened carefully. All was silent. It felt wrong for the stairwell to be so quiet. Then, just on the edges of her hearing, she detected the faint clink and clack of metal clad boots treading on stone floor. Realizing that she was still being chased, she turned to the door at the top of the stairs and once again flung it open. She was half expecting to find yet another copy of the Astronomy Tower's main staircase.

She was quite surprised, unpleasantly so, to find herself standing face-to-face with the black knight.

**“Hark, fair maiden, it be-eth time to ask-eth the most important-eth question,”** announced Freddy.

“What question?” asked Pansy, trying to edge away. Maybe now it was time to run *down* the stairs instead of up them.

Freddy’s answering smirk was filled with malicious enjoyment as he finally dropped his bad Olde English accent. **“Are you ‘too stupid to live’, or ‘too pathetic to kill’?”**

“No!”

**“No, you’re not too pathetic to kill? Perfect, just what I wanted to hear.”**

“No! Help! Somebody, anybody, help me!”

For the first in her life, Pansy wished that Harry Potter was there with her. He was the certified hero, after all. It was his job to stop things like this from happening. It was his job to ride in, a knight in Gryffindor colours, and save the damsel in distress.

Her wish would remain unfulfilled.

**-oOo-**

Poppy Pomfrey watched bleakly as two of her colleagues levitated the gurney carrying Pansy Parkinson’s body into the hospital wing.

“This way, Aurora,” she indicated.

Being a school infirmary there was no mortuary, so she was using the isolation section of the ward to hold what seemed like an ever growing number of bodies.

“Have you notified her parents, Headmistress?” she asked of McGonagall. With Umbridge out of the castle, most of the staff had elevated her to the position, at least until Dumbledore returned.

“No,” McGonagall shook her head, “The Aurors will be handling it.”

“Do they have any idea who’s doing this?”

“I’m afraid not.”

“Well, at least they can’t blame Mr Potter for it,” Pomfrey noted, glancing to where the boy in question was sleeping.

McGonagall also looked over to what was jokingly referred to as “his” hospital bed.

“Still asleep, is he?” she asked.

Pomfrey nodded and confirmed, “I slipped a specialized sleeping draft into his soup last night. It was difficult finding something to give him that wouldn’t have a bad reaction to the veritaserum.”

They followed Professor Sinistra into the makeshift morgue. Sheet covered bodies were already laid out on two of the beds. On one the white fabric was stained red in places.

“Here,” said Pomfrey, motioning to one of the empty beds. “You can place her next to Mr Finnigan.”

“Thank you, Poppy,” muttered Sinistra.

“Seamus’ mother should be coming today to collect the body,” said McGonagall.

“What about Severus?”

“I don’t know. He had no family and no close friends, other than Albus.”

Pomfrey moved to replace Sinistra by Pansy’s bed as the younger witch hastily departed. Placing a number of standard stasis charms, which she had once hoped to never use, to preserve the body, she briefly drew back the covering sheet to regard the dead girl’s face.

“So young,” she murmured.

“Do you still have some of that medicinal brandy in your office?” asked McGonagall tiredly.

“Of course,” replied Pomfrey, replacing the sheet. “I think we could both use a ‘wee dram’ right now.”

“Forget the ‘wee’ and make sure you use your biggest glasses,” McGonagall advised.

The two women retired to the nurse’s office, making sure to seal and lock the isolation ward on their way out. As promised, Pomfrey’s first stop was her desk, where she drew a bottle of aged brandy from the bottom drawer.

The large glasses are in that cabinet," she said, pushing aside various books and rolls of parchment to make space on her desktop.

"Right," acknowledged McGonagall. As she retrieved their drinking cups, she asked, "How is Mr. Potter? Other than sleeping quietly?"

"He should be all right. These sort of things seem to happen to him so often it's practically routine."

"So he will make a full recovery?"

"Barring any further idiocy from the Ministry," confirmed Pomfrey, filling their glasses.

"When will he be waking up?" asked McGonagall, starting with a large gulp of her brandy. "Madam Bones is going to want to speak with him."

Pomfrey shook her head. "She'll have to wait. The potion I gave him will keep him out for nearly a week."

McGonagall almost dropped her glass. "A whole week!"

"The veritaserum and You-Know-Who's possession have put a big strain on his body and his magic," Pomfrey explained. "At this point, a short and controlled healing coma is really the best thing for him."

"Well, if you're sure," agreed McGonagall as she sipped her brandy. "I'll be sure to tell Amelia."

"Silly boy should thank me," grumbled Pomfrey, enjoying her own drink.

"I'm afraid Harry's never enjoyed being in your care," observed McGonagall.

"Well he should," Pomfrey asserted. "What kind of teenage wizard wouldn't enjoy five days of uninterrupted sleep?"

-oOo-

Amelia Bones was in a decidedly unhappy mood. Truth be told, she had been in a bad mood ever since that debacle of a Triwizard Tournament had been announced. It had been going steadily down hill from there.

Not for the first time she cursed her lot in life. Nobody should have to deal with Cornelius Fudge on a regular basis. Especially since what few brains he possessed had apparently dribbled out his ears.

"Amelia, we've been waiting for you."

"Thank you, Minerva."

Falling into step beside the deputy-headmistress, for all intents and purposes the current headmistress of Hogwarts, Bones followed her to the staff room.

"Have there been any new developments?" she asked as they walked.

"Almost half the students have had to visit Madam Pomfrey for calming drafts," reported McGonagall. "There's a lot of tension in the air - particularly in Slytherin."

"That's only natural," replied Bones. "Three of the four victims were from that house."

"I'm worried it might escalate," McGonagall admitted. "There's been some talk that Mr Finnigan was killed in retaliation for Mr Malfoy and Severus."

"And now the Parkinson girl brings it back to Slytherin," concluded Bones.

"Aye."

"Any evidence to support this? Or just the usual friction between the two houses?"

"No evidence. But nothing to disprove it either. Three dead Slytherins is a rather compelling argument."

"And Finnigan was strangled whereas the other three were literally hacked to death."

"That's what some of my Lions are suggesting."

"Let's hope whoever's doing this doesn't decide to make things worse."

"From your lips to Merlin's ears," agreed McGonagall opening the staffroom door and entered.

Following her inside, Bones was confronted by most of the Hogwarts professors and staff. Subdued greetings and pleasantries were exchanged before all assembled took their seats.

"Thank you for meeting with me," Bones began. "Hopefully this won't take too long and you'll be able to get back to work soon."

"I'm afraid there's not much work that can be done," stated Professor Sprout. "Most of the children are in no fit state to attend classes."

Keeping them busy is more important than actually teaching them anything," explained Bones.

"That way they won't spend so much time dwelling on what's happening," agreed Flitwick with a nod.

"Exactly."

"So, what do you need from us, Madam Bones?" asked Professor Vector.

"I'm ashamed to admit it, but at this point we have absolutely nothing to work with," confessed Bones. "In fact, the only thing we *do* know is that Harry Potter has nothing to do with it."

"No suspects? At all?" asked Sprout.

Bones wearily shook her head. "As I said, we have nothing except four violent deaths under mysterious circumstances."

"Are there any similarities or links between them?" asked Professor Babbling.

"Three students and a professor," Vector mused. "Three Slytherins and a Gryffindor."

"Malfoy and Parkinson were both on Umbridge's Inquisitional Squad," noted Professor Burbage, her disapproval clear in her tone.

"Finnigan was in Potter's defence club, wasn't he?" added Vector.

"Severus wasn't killed straight away," noted Flitwick. "It may be that the killer was interrupted that time - forced to come back the next night."

"Snape is the only adult to be attacked so far, he might have been able to fight back," suggested Bones.

McGonagall immediately shook her head, "No, Severus was a very adept fighter. If he had duelled his attacker there would have been some sign of it in his room."

Bones reluctantly agreed, "My Aurors found no evidence of spell damage when they were checking his quarters."

"They didn't like Potter and he didn't like them."

The assembled professors turned to the source of this dark proclamation. Argus Filch stared balefully back at them.

"Argus, you can't be accusing Mr Potter," declared McGonagall in disbelief.

Filch scoffed at her. "Professor Snape, young Malfoy and the girl were his enemies. And Irish boy wasn't on good terms with him either."

"As I told you, Mr Potter is not involved," asserted Madam Bones firmly. "Despite the illegality of it, he *was* questioned under truth serum and proved his innocence in the process."

"The boy's a troublemaker," grumbled Filch. "He may not be the murderer, but you can bet he's involved. He always is."

"Thank you, Mr Filch," said McGonagall curtly. "I think you can return to your duties."

"But--"

"The pointless and baseless antagonism of certain members of staff towards Mr Potter may have been tolerated by Professor Dumbledore and Madam Umbridge," declared McGonagall sternly. "I, however, will *not* tolerate it. Good day, Mr Filch."

Realizing that he had overstepped his bounds, Filch slinked out of the staff room with his proverbial tail between his legs.

Seeing that Bones was looking at her with a raised brow, McGonagall explained her dismissal of the caretaker.

"If he can't be helpful to this discussion, or at the very least keep his biases to himself, then as far as I'm concerned - he can go back to mopping the floor!"

-oOo-

The school was quieter than normal that night. It was as if the entire castle had gone to sleep while holding its breath in anticipation. The tension was almost palpable, especially in the Gryffindor and Slytherin dormitories.

It thus came as one hell of a shock when the entirety of Hufflepuff was woken up in the dead of the night by screams of terror and agony.

The ensuing panic was hardly surprising, as the entire house had imagined themselves as being safe from any attack. For some reason they had thought the string of murders were going to remain constrained to the other houses. The resulting wake up call was nasty in more ways than one.

"Out of the way - out of the way!" yelled Professor Sprout, who had taken to sleeping in one of the spare rooms.

She had hoped not to be needed for such a situation, but was relieved that she was close enough to respond so quickly. Having fallen out of her bed at the sound of the first scream, she was only slightly slowed by her bruised hip.

Out of the way!" she ordered, pushing her way into the fifth-year boys' room.

"Professor Sprout!" shouted Ernie Macmillan, dashing to her.

Just one glance at the fifth-year boy was enough to convince Sprout that this was no joke in bad taste or a poorly thought out prank, as she had secretly hoped. Ernie, and his dorm-mate Justin Finch-Fletchley, were in an obvious panic. They were not fooling around. They were also liberally splattered with what could only be blood.

"Oh God, oh God, oh God, oh God, oh God," Justin was chanting, not even noticing her arrival.

For just a second the herbology professor almost asked what was wrong, but realized that such a question was rather stupid given the circumstances. She was about to rephrase her query to ask what was happening, but another horrific shriek drew her attention to the ceiling. Any thoughts of asking any questions were promptly derailed by the impossibility of what she saw hanging above her.

Zacharias Smith was being dragged across the dormitory ceiling, his pyjamas stained red with blood. A sudden swerve and change of direction send a small spray arcing through the air to splash across Sprout's face. A cry from Ernie indicated that he too had been hit, though with the copious amounts of blood already covering him it was a little hard to tell.

"OH GOD!" shouted Justin before resuming his chants of supplication with renewed vigour. "Oh God! Oh God! Oh God! Oh God!"

Sprout felt almost tempted to join him, but was too stunned to do anything more than stand and stare. She felt that if she tried to speak, especially so rapidly, her dinner would be making a re-appearance on the dormitory floor. It almost did when Zacharias was flung into the centre of the room, still pressed up against the ceiling without any visible support, and then began to spin round and round like some kind of demented top. The now almost constant spray of blood made the scene that much more terrible to witness.

Then, so unexpectedly that the other occupants of the room were badly startled, Zacharias came to an abrupt halt. To the further horror of those watching, he then arched his back almost to the breaking point as he let loose one final scream that surely must have been heard throughout the castle. With equal suddenness the buttons to his pyjama top gave way and his disembowelled guts fell to the floor. A moment later, Zacharias' body dropped after his insides and hit with blood and gore soaked floor with a meaty thud. Ernie and Justin followed shortly thereafter, though their collapse was an understandable case of unconsciousness.

Professor Sprout really wished she could join the pair in fainting.

-oOo-

The last time the Great Hall had been so sombre was at the end of the Triwizard Tournament the previous year and the death of Cedric Diggory.

The biggest difference now, however, was the ambient noise. After the tournament things had been subdued and uncomfortably quiet. Now, in the wake of five brutal murders, the Great Hall, while sombre, was alive with rampant discussion.

Students from all four houses were flitting back and forth, though they tended to stick together in small clusters. This was more for the illusion of safety than anything else, as the hall already had two whole squads of Aurors standing on guard.

Of course, while most of the students were quietly mingling, two houses were conspicuous in their avoidance of each other. Thankfully, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw were able to act as buffers between the two, or else the number of confrontations would have increased dramatically.

Unfortunately the unexpected murder of Zacharias Smith had caused great distress in Hufflepuff and thus they were no longer doing much to stay between Gryffindor and Slytherin other than offer a limited physical barrier.

"I'm telling you; there's going to be another murder tonight!"

All those in earshot turned their eyes to Michael Corner, who was currently having a loud and animated argument with Ernie Macmillan and Justin Finch-Fletchley.

"Don't be ridiculous," argued Ernie. He was looking extremely haggard, having been forced to watch one of his roommates killed in front of him.

"Someone's been killed every night for the last five nights," declared Michael. "Believe me, there'll be another tonight."

"Maybe not - the DMLE's posting a squad of Aurors in each house," countered Justin, his voice soft as he sat hunched over a strong cup of tea. He had no appetite for anything more.

"Yeah, and the Aurors patrolling the halls and corridors last night did such a good job in keeping Zacharias alive," Michael retorted.

While his statement was true enough, the bluntness of it, not to mention the lack of diplomacy, caused a ripple of indignation to sweep across the Hufflepuff table. He was talking about one of their own, after all. He seemed to realize the delicacy of the situation when several of the first- and second-years burst into tears again. The unpleasant looks from the older students also helped drive the point home.

"Don't be so pessimistic, Michael," chided Hannah Abbot quietly.

Nobody was so impolite as to mention the tear tracks streaking down her face. Most of the Hufflepuff girls were in a similar state, while the boys were almost universally ashen.

"I'm not being pessimistic," replied Michael, steadfast. "What I'm being is *realistic*. There's going to be another murder."

"Oh? And how's this madman going to get to us?" asked Ernie. "I can buy him somehow sneaking past the Aurors patrolling the corridors, but an entire squad in the common room? Impossible!"

"Not if he has an invisibility cloak like Potter's supposed to," suggested Terry Boot, joining the conversation.

"Oh, please don't suggest Harry's the one doing this," groaned Susan.

"I'm not," Terry quickly replied. "I'm just saying, Potter's supposed to have an invisibility cloak."

"And what? He's lending it out to the murderer?" asked Ernie angrily. "A Galleon an hour?"

"Three of the victims were people he didn't like," put in Michael, once again stirring the pot.

"Malfoy, Snape and Parkinson were hardly popular enough to make that unusual," said Susan.

"He was also on the outs with Seamus and had had a few arguments with Zach as well," continued Michael insistently.

"And he's not too fond of you either; is he, Corner?" asked Ernie bitinglly.

Michael's mouth hung open for a second before snapping shut with a loud click. He swallowed nervously and tried to retort. He was cut off by Justin before he could start.

"There's also the fact that you're a 'Claw," the stuffy boy noted. "That's the only house that hasn't lost anyone yet."

"Sounds like they're due for a nightly visit," added Ernie, twisting the knife.

"Or maybe the killer's one of us," suggested Terry. He received a large number of looks of wide-eyed disbelief. Seeing everyone's reactions, he shrugged, "Well, it's a possibility."

A moment of unease settled around the Hufflepuff table, with a large number of suspicious glances now being directed towards the Ravenclaws.

"You're all a bunch of idiots if you believe that," declared Theodore Nott, who had overheard the end of the conversation while on his way towards the Gryffindor table, where he had planned to bait Ron Weasley.

"Bugger off, Nott," snarled Ernie. "Nobody here asked for you opinion."

"Not that we'd trust it, even if we had," added Justin.

Nott sneered at them, staying to argue only because Crabbe and Goyle were accompanying him.

"You think we care?" he asked, "You Hufflepuffs are all nothing but Potter's lapdogs - of course you'd defend him, even as he starts killing you as well!"

"Shut your mouth, Nott," demanded Ernie, even as the other Hufflepuff members of the DA drew their wands. "Or we'll shut it for you!"

"Big words for a bunch of cowardly mudbloods and blood-traitors," retorted Nott, the Slytherins drawing their wands as well.

Michael and Terry demonstrated their Ravenclaw intelligence by backing out of the way. If there was going to be a fight, then they would prefer not to be involved.

The situation, however, quickly began to escalate as a contingent of Gryffindors arrived to support their nominal allies. It was a bit of a surprise that their chosen spokesman was not Hermione or Ron, but rather the unlikely figure of Neville Longbottom.

"You really should listen to Ernie, Nott," he told the Slytherin boy.

"Don't make me laugh," Nott sneered, bolstered by the arrival of several more of his house mates. While still outnumbered, the extra wands gave him a false sense of security.

Seeing the swelling number of Slytherins; Neville and the Gryffindors added fuel to the fire by also drawing their wands. By now the entire hall had gone quiet as all eyes turned to the mounting altercation. Even the on duty Aurors, supposedly standing guard and watching over them, seemed unable to do anything but watch things unfold.

Observing Neville with his wand out, Nott gave a contemptuous laugh. "Going to use your wand? Why bother, Longbottom? Everyone knows you couldn't hit a city, even if you were inside one."

"Then you have nothing to worry about, do you?" Neville quietly retorted.

The threat of violence was palpable in the air and every single wand was ready to cast the first spell of what could very easily turn into a full scale war.

"ENOUGH!"

The timely arrival of Professor McGonagall, accompanied by Madam Bones and even more Aurors, stalled any imminent explosion.

“PUT YOUR WANDS AWAY!” commanded McGonagall, sweeping her stern gaze over the mass of students. When nobody immediately complied, her eyes narrowed and her lips drew into a thin line. Her next command brooked no disobedience. “NOW!”

Slowly and grudgingly, wands were returned to their pockets and the confrontation began to disperse as the varied students returned to their own tables.

Open conflict between the houses had been averted, but everyone knew it was only temporary.

-oOo-

Michael's sleep was interrupted when he was shaken awake by a frantic Anthony Goldstein.

“Michael! Michael, wake up!” his friend pleaded urgently.

“Eh, wha? Woosat?” he eloquently mumbled as he slapped Anthony's hand away.

“There's been another murder!”

Now that helped wake him up properly.

“What?!”

“Yeah - and it was one of us! A Ravenclaw!” gushed Anthony.

“A Ravenclaw?” repeated Michael with horror. “No! Who was it? Not one of the girls, please?”

“Just hurry and get up,” Anthony urged impatiently. “You need to get down to the common room.”

“I'm up, I'm up,” Michael confirmed, throwing his sheets aside and almost jumping out of his bed.

Considering the urgent nature of the situation, Michael did not bother getting properly dressed. He settled for throwing on his dressing gown and slippers before following an oddly eager Anthony.

“Well?” he asked as they made their way to the common room. “Who's been killed? Mandy? Su?”

“You won't believe me when I tell you,” replied Anthony.

The first thing to bother Michael upon their arrival in the common room was the silence. When Draco had been murdered, the room had been alive with debate, speculation and gossip. Now, there was not a sound to be heard other than the soft tread of his feet.

The reason for the quiet setting became readily apparent when he looked around to find the commons empty; save for himself and his head of house, Professor Flitwick. He turned to ask Anthony where everyone else was, only to discover that his escort had unexpectedly vanished.

“Ah, there you are,” declared Flitwick in his usual piping tones. “I've been waiting for you, Michael.”

“Sir?” asked Michael. “Where is everyone?”

“Oh, they're all sleeping peacefully in their beds,” replied Flitwick.

“What? But why?” asked Michael, flabbergasted. “How can they be asleep when there's been another murder?”

Flitwick, who was for some reason wearing a rough wool sweater in a hideous combination of Gryffindor red and Slytherin green, shrugged his shoulders.

“I guess they just haven't heard the screams yet,” he ventured.

“Screams?” Michael repeated. “I don't hear any screams.”

Flitwick nodded, “Probably because you haven't started making them yet.”

A cold dread suddenly filled the pit of Michael's stomach, replacing the confusion he had felt since being woken.

That dread swiftly changed to terror as Flitwick grinned wickedly and held up his right hand, which was covered in a terrible conglomeration of leather glove and steel knives.

“Let's see about waking up the rest of the house.”

-oOo-

It caused Ernie and Justin no little distress that their suggestion of a Ravenclaw being next had been proved to be all together too accurate. That Michael himself was the victim caused something of a stir. Nobody was too surprised during breakfast when several loud arguments broke out between Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff. Ernie and Justin's words the previous day were now being interpreted as threats by the Ravenclaws, who were now blaming them for the killing.

Harry would have been relieved to find that, in at least the house of the supposedly intelligent; he was no longer the chief suspect.

Complicating matters was the fact that without those two houses running interference, the situation between Gryffindor and Slytherin began to deteriorate even faster. The professors were being kept very busy policing the students and even the Aurors were occasionally forced to step in. Any hope of uniting the houses against the Sorting Hat's warning was rapidly becoming a pipedream.

"The school's turning into a madhouse," grumbled Ron as he and Harry's closest friends entered the Hospital Wing for a visit.

"I honestly don't understand why Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw are fighting like this," Hermione muttered, leading the way to Harry's bed.

"Yeah," Neville quietly agreed. "It's obvious the killer doesn't care what house his - whoa!"

Neville's foot slipped on the tiled floor and shot out from under him. Luckily he was able to retain his balance and thus not topple over, though he did teeter unsteadily for a moment.

"Careful, Neville," cautioned Hermione.

"I slipped on something," he explained. He looked down to see the source of his near accident and paled. "Oh Merlin."

Looking to the infirmary floor, a smeared streak of deep red instantly caught everyone's eye.

"You appear to have stepped in some blood, Neville," noted Luna Lovegood, seeming to appear out of nowhere and startling the four Gryffindors.

"Bloody hell, Luna!" exclaimed Ron.

"Bloody indeed," Luna agreed, bending over to have a closer look at the blood. She moaned in disappointment when Hermione Vanished it before she could complete her examination.

"Madam Pomfrey must have missed it," Hermione concluded as she returned her wand to its pocket. She then noticed Ginny's pale face, as well as the shivers that were causing the young redhead's shoulder's to tremble. "Ginny..."

"That was Michael's blood," Ginny whispered.

The others grimaced, both at the reminder of their classmate's brutal murder and the fact that they had nearly forgotten that Ginny had been dating the boy. Even Ron, who had loudly disapproved of their relationship, could not bring himself to say something.

Hermione immediately crossed over and enveloped her in a tight hug.

"Oh, Ginny, I'm so sorry," she told her.

Trying to lose herself in the embrace, Ginny found herself staring over Hermione's shoulder and into Luna's smiling face. Ron and Neville were hovering uncomfortably in the background.

"How can you smile like that at a time like this?"

Luna continued to beam happily at her and replied, "I have to smile now, because tomorrow is going to be worse."

-oOo-

"This is a disaster, Amelia! A complete disaster!"

Amelia Bones thought she hardly needed Cornelius Fudge to tell her this rather obvious fact.

She watched as the Minister paced anxiously back and forth. There was something satisfying, despite the terrible cause, in seeing him like this.

"A disaster!"

"Yes, it is, Minister," she agreed. "But complaining about it won't solve the problem."

"Yes... yes, you're right," agreed Fudge, halting in his frantic pacing and turning to her. "We need to do something about this, Amelia - and quickly!"

"I already have six squads stationed in the school," she told him, ignoring the fact that those squads had done nothing to prevent the death of the latest victim. She went on, "I've ordered another six to join them - so we'll be doubling security there."

"Excellent. Excellent! That is exactly the kind of thing we need the public to see," praised Fudge, a smile finally breaking across his face.

He returned to his desk and settled down in his chair, relaxing for the first time since she had entered his office.

"It's a good thing you're on the job, Amelia," he continued. "I don't know what I'd do if you weren't here."

Probably blame Harry Potter for everything and have him arrested, mused Madam Bones darkly. She was careful not to let any sign of her thoughts on the matter show on her face. She adjusted her monocle.

"We're starting another round of questioning," she reported, "but I don't think we'll find anything amongst the students or staff."



“What about Harry Potter?” asked Fudge intently, his own thoughts no doubt turning in a similar direction to her earlier musings.

“He’s been unconscious under a healing coma in the school infirmary for the last three nights. That and his testimony under Umbridge’s truth serum make him the only person thus far that we can confirm as being entirely innocent in the matter.”

“I see,” Fudge muttered, obviously disappointed. “Is there any chance he might be lying?”

“None,” said Amelia with finality.

“Pity that.”

“As I said; I doubt we’ll find the killer in school’s staff or students.”

“You think it’s someone outside of Hogwarts doing this?” asked Fudge, as if the idea had not occurred to him. It probably had not.

“Yes,” confirmed Amelia. “If I were a betting witch, I’d place money on this being the work of the Dark Lord.”

Fudge almost fell out of his seat. “You-Know-Who is not back!” he immediately denied. “Honestly, Amelia, how can you possibly believe--”

Amelia cut him off. “Harry Potter has confirmed his return under truth serum.”

“That boy is lying!” yelled Fudge. “He’s delusional!”

“Veritaserum is the most powerful truth potion in the world,” Amelia asserted. “It does not allow lies, nor does it cater for delusions. Mr Potter is telling the truth.”

“But he--”

“The Dark Lord has returned.”

“He can’t be back, Amelia, he can’t,” insisted Fudge desperately. He was almost childish in his denial.

Amelia stared at him with a stony expression. It was the one she used to discomfort young Aurors that needed a firm hand. Fudge wilted under her gaze without much effort on her part.

“Whether you want to believe it or not, he *is* back,” she told him firmly. “Now while his return is troublesome and these murders are a grave problem, *you* have something else to worry about.”

“What’s that?” Fudge asked sulkily.

Amelia took great pleasure in the minister’s reaction as she explained the situation to him.

“The Dark Lord is back,” she said, “and sooner or later the public will find out about it.”

Mostly due to the fact that Amelia had met with the editor of the Daily Prophet and informed him about Potter’s testimony. She might also have mentioned that keeping quiet on the matter would result in him and his staff being arrested for ‘endangering the public’ by not alerting them to the threat.

Smiling thinly in anticipation, Amelia delivered the finishing blow. “And when they do - they are going to crucify you for lying about it.”

The sickly green shade of Fudge’s face was an unpleasant sight, but a strangely satisfying one.

**-oOo-**

Most people would assume that Vincent Crabbe and his constant companion Gregory Goyle were somewhat dull at the best, or near mindless thugs at the worst.

This was mostly due to the fact that they rarely bothered speaking in public and spent most of their time flanking Draco Malfoy like a pair of matching bookends.

These perceptions were, of course, perfectly true. In five years neither boy had said more than a dozen words to Harry Potter, despite having accompanied Draco in confrontations against him on a regular basis. The fact of the matter was they remained silent only because they saw no point in talking to someone who was not a friend or associate.

In truth, while they were hardly geniuses of the highest calibre, Crabbe and Goyle could be surprisingly erudite when they desired to be. It was well known in the Slytherin common room, if not the rest of the castle, that Crabbe was a rather good artist - easily on par with Dean Thomas. Goyle, on the other hand, while unable to draw even simple stick figures, was something of an aspiring poet; though his works tended to be a tad morbid and dreary, even by Slytherin standards.

Unfortunately for Crabbe, no measure of skill at drawing would help him at the moment.

**“I float like a butterfly and I sting like a bee! Get ready for a smack down from the one and only - Freddy!”**

Crabbe stared at the man who was bouncing lightly on his feet while making punching motions with his glove enclosed fists.

"You're the one who's been killing people, aren't you?" he finally asked.

Freddy grinned back at him and replied with a short jab to the face. As Crabbe staggered back, hands going to his bleeding nose, the Mohammed Ali wannabe cackled.

**"Ha! So you're not as dumb as you look!"**

Crabbe looked up at the man, momentarily giving up on staunching the blood. Freddy began to dance around him, his feet skipping across the springy floor of the boxing ring.

**"Come on, Vinny,"** he urged, **"Put up yer dukes and show me all that muscle you're so famous for!"**

"I don't know what game you're playing--" began Crabbe. He was cut off by another jab, this one glancing off the side of his head.

**"The game's boxing, Vinny!"**

Another jab followed, now to the other side of Crabbe's head.

**"The noble art of pugilism!"**

Two quick blows rained in, moving away from Crabbe's ringing noggin and centred on his ribs.

**"Come on, Vinny! Remember the Marquees of Queensb--"**

This time the punch was launched not by Freddy, but by a very aggravated Crabbe. His form was as sloppy as any untrained fighter could manage, but there was still enough force behind it to knock his opponent off his feet. Freddy was caught completely unprepared and took the right hook to the jaw without resistance.

"You're just like Draco," commented Crabbe, now standing over him. "Always talking."

**"Heh,"** grunted Freddy, a grin still on his face but growing darker as he centred on the wizard.

He rose back to his feet and somehow delivered a vicious uppercut in the same movement.

**"So're you,"** he observed wryly.

Cracking his neck to one side and then the other, he began to advance on the reeling Crabbe.

**"Still,"** he mused, slugging Crabbe in the stomach, **"I'm happy you're fighting back - that'll make this last longer."**

With the wind knocked out of him there was no way for Crabbe to reply, so he responded the only way he could. He also confirmed his placement in Slytherin by cheating.

His kick landed square between Freddy's legs.

**"Fuckin' hell!"** yelled Freddy, staggering back and clutching his privates.

"The Marquees of Queensbury can kiss my sodding arse," declared Crabbe.

He cracked his knuckles and began his own advance even as Freddy straightened up. He knew he was fighting a losing battle and was probably going to die in the process, but Crabbe was determined not to go out without a fight.

That this was the Gryffindor thing to do was his last rueful thought before he and Freddy met in the centre of the boxing ring and began to exchange blows.

**-oOo-**

Crabbe's demise, having been beaten to death during the night, did nothing to improve the situation in the castle. While the students were shattered at this grim confirmation that things were continuing to get worse, the Slytherins were all but destroyed.

This now made if four of their number killed, three students and their head of house. That they had suffered as many losses as the other houses combined was still a sore point, but this latest death was enough that the fight had gone completely out of them. Their antagonism towards Gryffindor had disappeared entirely. They were too busy fearing for their lives to bother starting fights.

That the morning copy of the Daily Prophet led with a headline proclaiming Lord Voldemort's return, did not help matters.

Those who had believed and supported Harry were a little smug and satisfied at being proven correct, but Crabbe's death made it a slightly hollow victory.

"Here comes another one," noted Ron, watching the doors to the Great Hall.

Glancing over, everyone caught sight of yet another pair of parents storming into the school. Both mother and father were pale, obviously anxious and eager to get their child and leave.

"I think that's one of the first-year Slytherin's parents," said Hermione, watching as the pair hurried up to the head table and began conversing in hushed tones with Professor McGonagall.

"That's what? Eight? Nine?" asked Neville.

"Eight families, eleven students," confirmed Ginny.

This last murder, coupled with the public admission that Voldemort was back, had caused a deluge of concerned parents to fall upon Hogwarts and begin withdrawing their children.

The Patil twins, Padma and Parvati, had been the first. Their father, Baves Patil, had stormed into the Great Hall and almost dragged the two girls out of the school. The Daily Prophet had not yet been delivered at that point, but followed a few minutes later, at the same time as the Greengrass and Brocklehurst parents. There had been a steady stream of worried adults every few minutes since then.

"I'm actually kind of surprised mum hasn't shown up yet," commented Ron.

"At the very least she should have sent a howler," agreed Ginny.

"Look; it's Madam Bones," announced Hermione, drawing their attention back to the entrance.

"Probably here to withdraw Susan," suggested Ron.

"I don't know," said Neville.

The quartet watched as the head of the DMLE strode up to meet with Professor McGonagall. She waited until her conversation with the latest set of parents was done before stepping in close for a whispered conversation.

"If this keeps up, the school'll be half empty by lunch," noted Ron.

"Well, they probably *are* safer away from Hogwarts," Neville reluctantly admitted.

"This wouldn't be happening if Dumbledore was still here," grumbled Ginny.

"Maybe they'll bring him back," suggested Ron.

"At this point I don't know how much of a difference he would make," opined Hermione unhappily.

"Maybe we should talk to the Order about getting Harry and us out of here and back to headquarters," Ginny quietly suggested.

"Wait - I think McGonagall's going to say something," said Neville.

"May I have your attention please," McGonagall called out, standing in front of the staff table with Madam Bones by her side.

It did not take long for the hall to grow quiet as the assembled students waited to hear whatever it was she would be announcing.

"In light of recent events," McGonagall began, "and after consulting with the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, the school's board of governors have decided... that Hogwarts is to be closed until further notice."

In most situations, such a proclamation would have caused an uproar. After so many horrific murders, however, the thought of closing down the school was met with muted acceptance.

"Bloody hell," gasped Ron.

"Looks like Luna was right; today is worse," muttered Hermione. "Who would have thought?"

Since the assembled students were remaining mostly calm and quiet, there was no need for the professors to call for quiet before the announcements could continue. Instead, McGonagall only waited long enough for the disclosed information to sink in before she resumed speaking.

"Any students that do not leave today will flock to Diagon Alley tomorrow morning after breakfast, once arrangements have been made to collect you," she finished.

"In the meanwhile, I ask that you all remain here in the Great Hall for the rest of the day, and please do *not* go anywhere alone," declared Madam Bones.

"The school's going to be emptied a lot sooner than lunch," Neville commented to Ron.

-oOo-

She ran as if the You-Know-Who himself were chasing after her. All things considered, she would probably have preferred that he was.

Completely lost and disoriented in the strange Muggle building she was trapped inside, Marietta stumbled blindly down one pipe filled passage and, upon reaching an intersection, turned to flee down another.

**“Boo!”**

Coming face to face with Freddy Krueger, however, caused her flight to come to an abrupt halt. She skidded to a stop, trying to avoid crashing into her tormentor, losing her balance in the process and falling on her arse.

“Aaaaaaahh!”

She also gave out a cry of terror, even as she began to desperately scabble backwards.

**“Sorry, girly - it’s been fun, chasing you and all, but the game’s over,”** Freddy told her as he began to advance.

Marietta rolled over onto her hand and knees, so that she could move faster, only to be confronted by a plain concrete wall that had somehow appeared to block her path.

A flick of Freddy’s hand left four thin trails of blood down her back as his knives cut through the back of her nightgown.

“Aaaaaaahh!”

**“Ah, I could listen to that sound all night,”** declared Freddy happily.

Pressing up against the wall, Marietta desperately searched for a way to escape. Her quest ended as another slash of Freddy’s blades shredded the right sleeve of her nightgown and caused similar injuries on her arm.

After another scream, Marietta’s legs collapsed under her as she curled into a tight ball.

“Stop, stop, stop, stop, stop...” she chanted frantically.

**“Don’t be ridiculous; it’s never going to stop!”** Freddy chastised her.

“Why?” wailed Marietta.

Freddy paused, as if to think. **“Hmm. ‘Cause it’s fun, of course!”** he finally answered. **“That, and since you and the others are the only ones I can play with, I might as well draw it out as long as I can.”**

“Others?” asked Marietta tremulously.

**“Yeah, you know - Draco, Sevvie and the rest.”**

“But - but - but Potter!” stammered Marietta.

Freddy smiled, **“Ah, yes, *little* Harry. Little *innocent* Harry. Little innocent Harry whose teachers *tortured* him to the point where he was able to summon me back into the realm of your dreams.”**

“So it is his fault,” Marietta breathed in both vindication and horror.

**“Well, actually, if it’s anyone’s fault - it’s yours,”** Freddy corrected.

“Me?! How dare you even suggest such a thing?!” she exclaimed, indignation momentarily overriding her fear.

**“Because I wouldn’t be here if you hadn’t betrayed him and his little friends - that made him angry. And when he’s angry at someone... well, that’s how I get to them.”**

“Please... please let me go!” Marietta began to beg. “I’ll - I’ll make it up to him! I’ll never doubt his word again!”

**“Y’know, that stupid brat would probably forgive you if you asked,”** mused Freddy.

“Yes! Yes, I’ll go apologise to him as soon as I can,” promised Marietta, nodding quickly.

Freddy paused, as if he were considering her offer. Then he began to look around the boiler room. **“Harry! Oh, Harry!”** he called. He waited for an answer. When none came, he turned back to Marietta and shrugged, **“Sorry, but he ain’t here to accept your apology.”**

“He’s in the Hospital Wing! I can’t apologise now,” Marietta exclaimed frantically.

**“Sorry,”** Freddy apologised insincerely.

“No, please--”

**“Apology time is over,”** declared Freddy.

With a spin, Freddy changed clothes. His grimy brown trousers became smooth, clean black, while his tattered green and red sweater became a pristine white chef's jacket. A chef's mushroom hat, replacing his battered fedora, completed the transformation.

He stood for a moment, allowing Marietta to see and appreciate his new outfit.

**"Tada!"**

Freddy then pulled a butcher's meat cleaver out from behind him - only this meat cleaver was unnaturally large; the blade being nearly a yard long and half that deep. The immaculately polished stainless steel gleamed brilliantly, if wickedly, in the subdued lighting of the boiler room.

**"It's time for some frog legs gumbo!"**

"I'm not a frog!" protested Marietta in a panic, pressing desperately back against the wall.

**"Fine, we can make a bird's nest soup instead,"** shrugged Freddy, alluding to her place in Ravenclaw.

He lifted the blade high, causing Marietta to shriek in terror, and then blurred into action. He attacked her with terrible fury, but also with great precision. His every slice shredded her already bloody nightgown and left a thin and shallow cut in the skin underneath.

Marietta's screams continued to rise, louder and longer, as Freddy continued to lash out at her a dozen times a second. It might have lasted less than a minute, from start to end, but by the time he stepped back, Marietta's clothes were little more than tattered strips of fabric that could no longer cover her blood soaked body.

**"Ugh,"** Freddy grimaced, taking in the girl's all but naked form. **"I hate it when the bird's nest is too big."**

By this point Marietta had long since stopped begging for mercy. She had even stopped her pleas to die, thus ending her torment. All she could now manage was a mindless wail of agony that only paused when she broke to gasp for breath.

Freddy surveyed his work and smile with satisfaction. He truly had outdone himself this time; the girl's spirit had been broken even more thoroughly than her body.

But, he reluctantly admitted to himself, all good things eventually had to end.

**"Now, normally I make a point of playing with my food,"** explained Freddy, even though it was doubtful Marietta could hear him over her screams. **"But I have another appointment soon, so..."**

He hefted the meat cleaver high over his head and then repeated his earlier attack, only this time making sure that each blow and each strike of the blade cut down to bone.

By the time he stopped, Marietta had been reduced to a pile of diced meat that was barely recognisable as having once been human.

Tossing aside his chef's hat and discarding the now blood stained white uniform, Freddy walked away from the rapidly cooling body. He absently scraped his knives against the exposed piping as he went.

**"Now then,"** he mused, stroking his chin. **"Who's next?"**

**TBC...**



# We Are Nothing

## Part VII

**Title:** We Are Nothing

**Author:** Ruskbyte

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**Summary:** Snape's Occlumency lessons have shattered the last defences of Harry's mind. Now, unprotected, his dreams have become home to a nightmare other than Voldemort. A nightmare that has taken on a life of its own.

"We are nothing; less than nothing and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence, and a name." - Charles Lamb, *Essays of Elia* , *Dream Children*

/oOo\

### Part VII

#### Days of danger, nights of waking

\oOo/

"One, two, I'm coming for you..."

Delores Umbridge had to wonder where she was and, more importantly, how she had been brought there. She grimaced unhappily as she surveyed the ankle deep water she was standing in. Whoever had gotten her into this situation would be finding themselves in a great deal of trouble. All the more so because this place was obviously one of those disgusting Muggle factories – dirty and messy and filthy... much like the water she was being forced to walk through. She had never imagined simple water could smell so pungent.

"Three, four, don't bother locking your door..."

Even worse; whoever had done this was trying to scare her with some bastardised version of an immature children's song. Never before had she been so insulted. As if some still words could frighten her. She almost gave voice to the thought that the Potter brat was responsible, but that seemed unlikely – not while he was bedridden and confined to the Hogwarts infirmary after her failed... interview.

"Five, six, throw away your crucifix..."

"Heh-hem," she cleared her throat and stood tall in defiance. As one of the most senior officials in the Ministry, she refused to put up with this. "I do not play games," she called, her voice echoing flatly along the bare concrete of the corridor. "I am the Senior Undersecretary for the Minister of Magic and I order you to stop this nonsense and show yourself!"

"Seven, eight, it's much **too late...** "

Sucking her teeth at being ignored, Umbridge huffed. "I will not repeat myself, you miserable little ingrates!" she snapped, convinced that if it was not Potter, then it had to be his delinquent friends. "Cease this foolishness at once and come out, or I'll see that you spend a long while in Azkaban!"

**"Nine, ten... I'm really gonna enjoy gutting you, bitch."**

Umbridge spun round, as this time the mocking voice had not come from all around her, but rather from directly behind. Seeing who it was that was now stood before her, Umbridge had a hard time deciding whether to recoil in disgust or to soil herself in terror.

"Who the – what the hell are you?" she demanded as she stumbled back, trying to put some distance between herself and this... man.

**"Who am I?"** repeated Freddy, as if offended by the fact that she did not already know. He held up his bladed knife-hand and pressed it against his chest. **"Aw... I'm hurt."**

"Listen, whoever you are, I don't care who you think--"

**"You should,"** Freddy cut her off. **"You see, Delores – can I call you Delores?"**

"No, you may not!"

**"Thanks, Delores, that's sweet of ya."**

"Stop that at once!" Umbridge shrieked furiously, stamping her foot and kicking up a spray of foul liquid.

**"You really don't have any idea who I am, do you Delores?"** asked Freddy with a sly smile.

A freak is who you are!" snapped Umbridge. "A burned up, ugly freak!"

**"Tut tut, Delores--"**

"Stop calling me that! I am the High Inquisitor of Hogwarts and Senior Undersecretary to the Minister of Magic!"

**"--I thought we were talking about me, not you,"** finished Freddy as though he had not been interrupted.

Umbridge glared spitefully at him. "I am not burned up. I am not ugly. And I am most certainly not a no-account, deviant freak like you!"

Freddy shook his head mournfully. **"Sorry, Delores, but I'm afraid you're all of those things."**

"I am not!"

Freddy held up his right hand and extended his index blade. **"One; you are ugly as shit."**

"Shut up!" yelled Umbridge, stomping her foot again and sending up another spray of water. Most of the pungent liquid landed on her clothes.

Smirking, Freddy extended another bladed finger, **"Two; you are completely worthless."**

Infuriated beyond reason, Umbridge began searching for her wand. She was going to show this pathetic abomination exactly who he was dealing with. Only, her wand was not in its usual place and the rest of her pockets were turning up empty.

**"Three; you are a freak,"** continued Freddy, extending a third blade.

"I am not a freak!" insisted Umbridge shrilly. "I am a pureblood and your superior!"

**"And last, but not least,"** declared Freddy, ignoring her protestations as he now held up his knife hand with all its blades at the ready, **"you're just as badly burned up as I am!"**

Umbridge stared at him in disbelief at this blatant fallacy. Her attempt to retort never had a chance to get going as Freddy swung his arm in a wide arc. He was too far away to strike her, but she was not his target. The blades of his knives hit one of the exposed steel pipes and caused an impressive shower of sparks to fly through the air.

The tiny motes of brilliant light seemed to fall in slow motion, drawing Umbridge's eyes to them. Her eyes promptly grew wide in terror when the sparks landed in the water. Only, it was not water. Too late to do anything but scream, Umbridge was quickly engulfed as the pool of gasoline she was standing in exploded into flames.

Her screams were remarkably loud, but quickly cut off as the flames were sucked through her open mouth and into her lungs. Her frantic and spastic capering lasted less than a minute before she finally collapsed, her gasoline soaked body continuing to burn merrily.

**"Aah,"** Freddy sighed with satisfaction. **"Nothing like a good night's work to get the blood flowing. And just in time for breakfast."**

**-oOo-**

Harry returned to the waking world slowly and with a muggy head that left him wondering where he was and what had happened to send him there.

"Welcome back, Mr Potter."

He recognised Madam Pomfrey's voice, but his mind immediately went back to his first visit to the Leaky Cauldron and the reaction of its patrons when they had learned his identity. Someone had said that to him then. He forgot who. He smiled groggily at the memory of better, innocent days.

The present and its harsh reality forcefully reasserted itself when a small potion vial was pressed to his lips.

"Drink this," Pomfrey commanded without preamble.

Reluctantly Harry did as he was ordered. For once the potion was not too foul tasting. He had barely finished swallowing before it took effect and the cobwebs in his head began to vanish.

"There you go, that should help clear things up," said Pomfrey with satisfaction.

"You slipped me a sleeping potion, didn't you?" asked Harry, recognising that his slumber had not been a natural one.

"You needed your rest," was all Pomfrey said. "Now, I have a lot of packing that needs doing. In the meantime, you can talk to your friends."

Blinking at the school matron's abrupt departure, Harry fumbled for his glasses and soon found himself facing his friends. They were clustered by the foot of his hospital bed and were clearly bothered by something if their pale and anxious faces were any indication.

As Harry had witnessed first-hand exactly how busy Freddy had been recently, he understood why they would this way.

"Hi guys," he greeted. "How long have I been out? Seemed like forever."

"The potion Madam Pomfrey gave you put you in a healing coma for five days."



"FIVE DAYS?" repeated Harry, incredulously. Now he knew how Freddy had managed to perform such a slaughter instead of the usual one or two murders a night - it hadn't been just a single night or two, but a string of them, one after the other.

"It really was for the best, Harry," Hermione told him.

"Ugh."

Settling back on his pillows, Harry looked at his friends. Clearly the last few days had not been a pleasant experience for them. He would have sympathised with them, but having had to endure his own unpleasant experiences, he had little sympathy left to offer. Despite having been asleep, his nights had not been restful.

"How's everyone?" he asked. Of course, he already knew; having been forced to watch Freddy's depredations for five nights in a row.

His friends exchanged nervous glances. Harry could not miss the sudden tension that sprang up, even if he did not already know in advance.

"What happened?"

More concerned looks were shared before Ginny decided to cut to the chase and answered him.

"There were more murders while you were asleep," she said.

Despite his foreknowledge, Harry winced. He already knew that, having been forced to watch it all happen on the dream Dursleys' television in Privet Drive.

"They're also closing the school," Hermione told him, her voice soft.

Now this truly surprised Harry. His startled reaction almost caused his glasses to fall off his face.

"What? When?"

"Today," confirmed Ron. "All the students are being sent home in the next couple of hours. We're all going to be staying in headquarters. Well, except for Nev."

"Yeah, I'll be staying with my Gran."

Harry lay back against his pillows. He knew that closing the school was the only reasonable thing to do. All the murders had happened to people in the castle. Or at least, all the murders that the Ministry cared about.

Reminded of that, he turned the conversation back to the deaths that had happened while he was asleep. He already knew the answer, but asked the question anyway, as a means to get the proverbial ball rolling.

"Who's been killed?"

More worried looks, but this time with honest fear behind them. No doubt the much larger number of deaths had drummed home the seriousness of the matter.

"There - there were a lot more this time," said Hermione, licking her lips.

"Parkinson was the first," listed Neville.

"M-M-Michael," stammered Ginny, composure cracking at the mention of her boyfriend. Hermione and Neville immediately moved to comfort her.

Harry grimaced. He had forgotten that she had been dating Michael, even if the relationship was not that serious. He resolved to never mention that it was his displeasure with Michael's attitude that had allowed Freddy a door into the boy's dreams.

"Zacharias Smith and Crabbe were also got to," muttered Ron.

"Marietta was killed this morning, a couple of hours ago," finished Hermione, hugging Ginny to her even as she herself shuddered at the memory.

"It happened in the middle of the Great Hall," elaborated Neville, his face losing more colour. "Everyone was sleeping there last night. Safety in numbers... supposedly. Like that time Sirius Black snuck into Hogwarts."

"Yeah, Madam Bones even had a dozen full squads of Aurors here - four of them in the hall with us," said Ron. "I almost felt safe."

"She just started groaning and then screaming," whispered Ginny.

"She was screaming so loudly... and the cuts, they appeared out of nowhere...", said Neville distantly. "It was the most horrible thing... There was so much blood..."

"The Aurors were useless," declared Ron hotly. "Their spells didn't hit anything and they couldn't stop her thrashing about."

Harry was not surprised. The only way to free someone from Freddy's grasp, he knew, was to wake them up. He doubted the Aurors had thought to try that, considering that the girl was already screaming and thrashing about.

And even if they had, he would not have put much faith in their chances of success. Freddy was very good of dragging his victims very deep into their dreams, making it very difficult for them to wake up.

"But how can this be happening?" asked Ginny, her voice rising despite Neville and Hermione's attempts to calm her down. "We were sleeping in a sealed room, full of people and with Auror guards! How did they get in? How do they do it?"

"That's the question on everyone's lips," agreed Hermione. "After all, everyone was just sleeping in their... sleeping... bags..."

Hermione trailed off, her eyes glazing over as she became lost in thought. Everyone watched expectantly, waiting to hear what it was she had worked out.

"Sleeping," she muttered. "Sleeping... and dreaming."

She turned expectantly towards Harry.

He stared blankly back at her, too sore and too tired to really care. He was a little pleased that she had finally worked it all out, but not enough to get excited about it.

"Whoever's doing this is killing them while they sleep," Hermione stated with certainty. "He's killing them in their dreams."

"Er, how d'you figure that?" asked Ron, having no idea what she was talking about.

"It makes perfect sense," Hermione continued. "That's why the Aurors can't stop him - he's not here, he's in their dreams!"

"But how can people be killed just because they're dreaming?" asked Neville, doubtless voicing the question on Ron and Ginny's minds.

"Psychosomatic injuries are not unheard of, though they're rarely this bad," explained Hermione.

"Psycho-whasit?" asked Ron, voicing the question on everyone's minds.

"Basically," Hermione clarified, "if you experience a real enough dream your body will mimic whatever injuries occurred there."

"So you're saying the killer is murdering us in our dreams and that causes it to actually happen in real life?" asked Ginny, breaking the explanation down into a simpler form.

"Essentially yes," confirmed Hermione.

Harry was not too surprised that she had worked it out. She was the smartest out of all of them. What he did wonder was whether anyone would make the connection between the murders taking place in the victim's dreams and Harry Potter being asleep the entire time.

He had the damndest feeling they'd immediately start blaming him for it all. Which was perfectly right, for once, as he was the one responsible for Freddy being on the loose.

He also wondered what Hermione, more specifically her parents, would manage to turn up about Freddy and his exploits in Springwood. While he wanted to ask her how that investigation was going, he stayed quiet in the presence of their friends. He resolved to ask her later, as soon as he had a chance.

"Well, at least Binns should be happy," he quipped. "Now everyone *has* to stay awake in his class."

His bad joke was met with no laughter.

-oOo-

"Good morning, Mr Potter."

Harry had been expecting a visit from the Aurors. He had not been expecting the head of the DMLE to be the one to pay him said visit.

"Hello, Madam Bones," he greeted politely.

"I gather you've heard about everything that happened last night?" Bones asked as she took a seat next to his hospital bed.

"Just what my friends told me."

Bones hummed thoughtfully and adjusted her monocle. "Then you have not yet heard of what happened to Madam Umbridge."

Harry looked at her in surprise and asked, "Umbridge? What happened?"

"She was burned to death in the early hours of this morning. It was shortly after Marietta Edgecombe was killed."

"She's dead?" asked Harry in surprise. He had not seen or heard anything on the dream television about this.

"By the time the on duty guards got into her cell it was too late to save her," confirmed Bones.

Harry had to fight not to smile. He was not entirely successful. He was helped by the thought that, as Freddy usually avoided killing adults; Umbridge

must have garnered his ire due to her poisoning of Harry with the veritaserum. The thought that he might actually have to thank Freddy for it dampened his spirits somewhat,

"Well," he said, lips twitching at the corners, "I hope you won't hold it against me when I say I'm not at all sorry to hear that."

He paused as a worrisome thought occurred to him. "You're not going to blame me for it, are you?"

Though her face remained expressionless and her voice betrayed no opinion in the matter, Harry got the distinct impression that Madam Bones was amused by his concern.

"Having spoken to my niece, Susan, about what's been going on at Hogwarts this year, I can safely say that I won't be looking too deeply into the fate of your late Defence professor. And as you were here in the Hospital Wing, asleep, the entire time... you have a cast iron alibi," explained Bones.

"Really?" asked Harry in surprise.

"Despite whatever the Minister might like to think, I don't believe you're capable of cold-blooded murder, Mr Potter," Bones asserted.

"Mind telling the Prophet that?"

Bones' lips gave only a single twitch, which Harry only saw because he was looking for it.

"I'll release a statement," she told him.

"Thanks."

As if by the flip of a switch, Madam Bones' expression and entire demeanour changed. Any hint of humour vanished and a sombre and serious air seemed to settle around her.

"Now, Mister Potter," she said, leaning forward intently, "Please tell me everything you know about Freddy Krueger and the town of Springwood."

"How do you know about that?" asked Harry, startled by her knowledge of something he had been sure only he knew. His stomach twisted into a knot at the thought that someone might know his darkest and most terrible secret.

"Miss Granger mentioned it to me. Apparently you thought it was important."

Harry silently cursed Hermione and her all too frequent readiness to trust those in authority. While he could understand, and even appreciate that she was only doing this to help, it was still left him feeling a little annoyed.

He resolved to give her a piece of his mind as soon as he had a chance. This was a little different from handing his Firebolt over to Professor McGonagall.

"Well?" prompted Bones.

Licking his lips, Harry stated, "You're not going to believe me."

"I've seen a lot of strange and disturbing things over the years, Mr Potter. Try me."

"Springwood is where he lived," began Harry.

"Freddy Krueger."

"Yeah."

"And why do you believe he has anything to do with what has happened?"

Gathering himself, Harry directed his eyes to Madam Bones' and tried not to flinch as he admitted, "Because I was watching when he killed them. All of them."

Bones arched her eyebrow enough that her monocle fell out of place.

"You saw them being killed?" she asked incredulously.

"Yes."

"I thought you were asleep on each occasion."

"I was."

"Does this have something to do with those 'visions' that the Prophet occasionally mentions?" asked Bones.

"Not really," replied Harry. "Freddy actually interrupted the last one. Beat Voldemort up before tossing him out of my mind. Might've even killed him again if we're lucky."

Madam Bones stared at him for a long time. Just when he was starting to feel uncomfortable under her gaze, she broke the silence with a single command.

"Explain."

"I asked Hermione about Springwood so that her parents could look it up for me. It's a Muggle town, somewhere in America," Harry began. "Freddy's told me a little, but I wanted to know more."

"And what is it 'Freddy' has told you?"

"He told me how he died."

"Died?" repeated Bones. "He's dead? Is he a ghost?"

"He's dead," confirmed Harry, "But whatever he is, it's no ordinary ghost."

"How is he killing people?" asked Bones, trying to get to the heart of the matter.

Harry smiled listlessly. "He's killing them in their dreams," he explained. "That's what he became after he died; some kind of dream ghost. He calls himself the Lord of Nightmares."

Bones sat back in her chair and thought about what Harry had just told her. While it was completely unbelievable, it was no more so than his tale of Voldemort's return. He had been proven to be telling the truth in that regard, so now...

"How is he killing them in their dreams?" she asked.

"With his knives, mostly," Harry told her. He held up his right hand, bending his fingers into claws. "He has a glove with knives for fingers - like really long and sharp nails. He uses that. Mostly."

"I meant how is he doing it?" Bones elaborated, more interested in the means of Freddy's murders, rather than the method. "Dreams don't usually kill people."

"Not usually," agreed Harry.

"Then how?"

Harry shrugged. "I don't know. He kills them in their dreams and that kills them in real life. I don't know how he does it," he confessed. "Hermione mentioned something about psychotraumatic injuries or something. She might be able to explain it."

"All right," nodded Bones, accepting his explanation for the time being. "Now, how is it you can see what he's doing? And why the devil haven't you told anyone before now?"

"Why didn't I tell anyone?" repeated Harry. He laughed; a hollow and humourless sound. "Have you not been reading the newspaper? I'm just a deranged, attention-seeking delinquent. Telling anyone would have only made things worse."

Bones grimaced. The boy was not wrong there. Up until a few days ago the Ministry and its propaganda machine the Daily Prophet would have used that information to further damage the Boy-Who-Lived's image. As it stood; the newspaper was now desperately scrabbling to reaffirm Harry's place as the saviour of them all, now that Voldemort's return was confirmed. She doubted that he would care about their abrupt turnaround.

"The truth would have come out," she told him. "Just like it came out that you were telling the truth about the Dark Lord's return."

Harry stared blankly at her. "And before that I was slandered, ridiculed, tortured and damn near killed on several occasions. Fuck that."

Managing not to wince at his blunt words or his crudity, Madam Bones could again say nothing to rebut his claims. Though the mention of torture was interesting and something she should probably look in to.

"You can't paint everyone with the same brush, Mr Potter," she told him gently. "There would have been people who would have believed and supported you."

"Yeah, but they're rather outnumbered by the mindless idiots the Ministry prefers to cater for," Harry retorted bitinglly.

This time Bones did not fully hide her grimace and even gave a sigh of agreement. "I wish I could easily argue the point," she admitted.

Shaking herself out of the rut Harry had so quickly dug for her, she turned back to the matter at hand.

"You still haven't explained why you are the one that can see him doing these things," she prompted.

"Snape," said Harry succinctly.

Bones blinked at the unexpected answer. "Professor Severus Snape?" she asked. "What does he have to do with it?"

"Bastard was supposed to be teaching me Occlumency - to help keep out Voldemort's visions," explained Harry.

"I take it something went wrong."

"Arsehole broke my shields wide open instead. Anyone can get inside my head now, without even trying."

"Including Mr Krueger."

"Yeah," Harry nodded.

"And how does this allow you to see what this maniac is doing?"

Harry shrugged again. "Freddy doesn't just enter your dreams and kill you - he can control them."

Madam Bones swallowed. The more she learned the worse it seemed to get.

"He can actually control a person's dreams?"

"I think so," confirmed Harry. "But he can only do it one at a time. I'm special because without shields he can enter my dreams without having to leave the dreams of whoever he's killing at the time."

"Is that why he only kills one person a night?" asked Bones, looking for anything she could use.

Harry frowned thoughtfully and considered that. "I don't think that's right. He could probably kill a dozen people a night - if he wanted to."

Bones frowned. That did not make sense. "Then why doesn't he?"

Now Harry smiled unpleasantly, "Because it wouldn't be as much *fun*."

"Fun?" repeated Bones, revolted at the implications.

"Freddy kills for fun," Harry verified. "If he killed them all at once; it would be over too soon. This way he can draw it out."

"And enjoy his 'fun' for so much longer," Bones concluded.

"Exactly," agreed Harry. "And that's why he hasn't killed me yet; he likes making me watch him 'play'. I think he enjoys having an audience."

Bones sighed again and commiserated, "You seem to have drawn the short straw, Mr Potter."

"Life isn't fair, Madam Bones," muttered Harry in reply. "Sometimes it seems it's never fair."

"And has it been unfair to you, Mister Potter?" she asked, already knowing the answer.

Harry looked at her flatly before rejoining, "You met Umbridge, didn't you?"

Madam Bones had to smile a little at that.

"Can you think of anything we can do to stop Krueger?"

Harry shook his head. "He's already dead, so you can't kill or arrest him and since he lives in people's dreams, you can't even get to him."

"There must be something we can do," insisted Bones, not willing simply give up.

"He lives in dreams," repeated Harry. "Closing the school isn't going to help. Eventually the children will go to sleep. And when they dream, he'll be able to find them. Being at Hogwarts or not won't make any difference. At this point, your only hope is to wait it out. Sooner or later he'll hopefully get bored and go back to Springwood."

"Hopefully," repeated Bones.

"It's all you have."

"I do not like the feeling of being so utterly helpless," she confessed.

"How do you think I feel?" asked Harry grimly. "I may be safe for the moment, but when he finally leaves I'm going to be his last playmate."

Bones nodded, growing progressively less happy. "There has to be something we can do," she repeated. "Maybe we can't stop him, but he has to have some sort of weakness we can exploit."

"Do you want some free advice, Madam Bones?" he offered. At her slight nod, he told her, "You and Susan should start drinking coffee. Lots and lots and lots of coffee. The stronger the better. You might want to take an ad in the Prophet, telling everyone else to do the same."

"Coffee?" asked Bones, obviously confused.

Harry wanted to roll his eyes. It was so obvious it was almost painful. Of course, most witches and wizards had a hard time using what most people would consider common sense. He decided to speak slowly as he explained.

"Freddy kills you in your dreams. As long as you stay awake - he can't get to you."

Relocating from Hogwarts to number 12 Grimmauld Place was complicated due to Harry's condition as something of an invalid.

Despite his protestations that he was fine and could walk perfectly well, Madam Pomfrey put her foot down and threatened him with another week long sleep. Alarmed, and secretly frightened by the idea of returning to Freddy's domain, Harry shut up and accepted his situation with as much dignity as he could muster.

Thankfully all the other remaining students had already left in the thestral-drawn carriages by the time Harry's bed was levitated through the corridors. Ron, Hermione and Ginny had gone with them, planning to floo from the Three Broomsticks in Hogsmeade to the Leaky Cauldron in London. There they were met by Arthur Weasley and Hestia Jones, who would escort them through to headquarters.

Harry, however, was forced to take an alternate route. Once out the castle he was transferred to a plain black Bentley, the back seat of which had been magically expanded to accommodate the both the bed and Harry's escort. Apparently the Ministry was trying to make amends for their earlier treatment of him. Harry was not particularly impressed.

"Hold onto your butts," proclaimed the car's driver, who proved to have learned how to drive at the same school as Ernie Prang, the driver of the Knight Bus.

Suffice to say; the ride from Hogwarts castle to Diagon Alley was a little nerve-wracking.

"Yes," Madam Pomfrey muttered to Harry as they disembarked, "perhaps you *were* well enough to take the floo."

Harry was wise enough not to say, 'I told you so'.

Getting from the Leaky Cauldron to Grimmauld Place was somewhat anticlimactic by comparison to the car ride, but Harry was too busy trying to pretend he did not exist to really care. The Notice-Me-Not charms on his bed did help, as fewer people actually saw his embarrassment, but he still found it horribly humiliating to be floated through the London streets in a hospital bed.

"Harry!" exclaimed Sirius loudly as soon as they had entered. Unfortunately his boisterous greeting set off the portrait of his mother.

"TRAITORS! MUDBLOODS AND BEASTS!"

"SHUT THE FUCK UP, YOU FUCKING BITCH!" roared Harry in return.

To everyone's surprise, the portrait did exactly as it was told. This was probably because of the sheer crudity of Harry's return shout, which shocked the woman into a temporary silence.

"Harry! Language!"

The bedridden wizard looked away from the quietly sputtering portrait to see Hermione and his other friends descending the stairs. They quickly crowded round his bed.

"That was brilliant!" cheered Ron.

"You actually got her to shut up," said Tonks in awe.

"I'm going to have to remember how he did that," agreed Sirius, beaming with pride.

"Yeah, wonderful," grumbled Harry. "Can I get out of this damn bed now?"

"Oh no you don't," declared Pomfrey, recovering from her own shock at hearing such vulgarity.

"Wonderful," repeated Harry, his tone indicating that the situation was anything but.

"Don't worry about it," said Sirius, trying to cheer him up as they resumed levitating his bed and directing it up the stairs. "You're getting one of the large bedrooms all to yourself."

"I don't want my own bedroom," declared Harry.

He had no intention of going to sleep any time soon, so a bedroom was currently superfluous.

"What I want is to get out of this bloody bed," he insisted.

"You'll be staying in that bed, Mr Potter, for the next ten days," Pomfrey sternly told him. "If you don't complain too much I might, *might* cut it down to nine."

"I was poisoned," said Harry. "It's not like a short *walk* is going to kill me."

"Actually, it just might," asserted Pomfrey.

"How?" asked Harry in pure frustration.

"Despite the flushing potions I gave you, there will still be traces of the veritaserum in your system for the next couple of weeks," explained Pomfrey

as they reached the second floor landing.

"Walking around with cause the potion to circulate more," elaborated Hermione. "If that happens it will take longer for your body to get rid of it."

"Fucking hell!"

It was unfortunate that Harry chose this moment to swear as he did, for it just so happened to coincide with the moment that Molly Weasley emerged from the room they had been preparing for him.

"Harry Potter! What do you think you're doing, talking like that?!"

"I just can't win."

-oOo-

In truth Harry's new bedroom was very nice; perhaps the nicest room in the whole house. He also had to admit that the idea of avoiding Ron's snoring was part of the appeal to having the room to himself.

His fear of falling asleep put a dampener to most of his enthusiasm, as did Madam Pomfrey's persistent hovering.

"Now, remember, Mr Potter," the matron lectured, "what your body needs now is rest. So stay in the bed and try to get some sleep."

"I don't really want to sleep right now," Harry told her.

"You don't have to sleep right away. Just try to relax and get some rest. The sleep will come on its own, soon enough."

"What d'you mean by that?" asked Harry suspiciously.

Pomfrey rolled her eyes and explained, "It's a small side effect of the healing coma you were in. Your mind and body will need time to get back into a regular sleeping rhythm."

Not really sure what she meant, Harry asked, "Huh?"

"You're going to fall asleep very soon," Pomfrey told him patiently. "Probably sometime in the afternoon - definitely before dinner."

"Can't I have some coffee or something to stay awake?" pleaded Harry.

"You need to rest, Mr Potter," Pomfrey repeated. "Your body and magic won't begin to heal properly until you do."

"You don't understand," he insisted, "I *really* don't want to sleep."

"I'm afraid, Mr Potter," replied Pomfrey as she left the room, "that you really don't have a choice."

"Bugger," Harry concluded as Sirius and his friends barged into the room now that Madam Pomfrey was gone.

"What's wrong?" asked Sirius, grabbing a chair, spinning it round and straddling it.

"Pomfrey says I need to sleep," explained Harry.

"Good idea," said Ron. "You look like you could use it."

Harry stared at him for a moment before replying, "Thanks, Ron, you're so considerate."

"Harry," Hermione gently chided.

"I don't want to sleep," he groaned. "I really, *really* don't want to sleep."

"You were poisoned by Umbridge, possessed by You-Know-Who and put in a coma by the school nurse," listed Sirius. He spread his hands wide, almost knocking Ron in the face. "Frankly, Harry, a good night's sleep is probably exactly what you need."

Harry chose not to remind them about Freddy and how he had a habit of killing people during their good night's sleep. Apparently Madam Bones had not yet released all the details of her discussion with him. He decided to let them learn it all with everyone else in the next edition of the Daily Prophet.

He sighed and moaned, "I just spent most of a week asleep--"

"A coma is very different from proper sleep, Harry," interrupted Hermione.

"I don't care," he pouted. "I just want to stay awake as long as possible." Realizing who he was speaking to, he tried a different approach. "I must have tonnes of homework to catch up. Not to mention studying for OWLs..."

For a moment she wavered, but was quick to spot what he was trying to do.

"Fine," she relented anyway, "but it won't make much of a difference."

“Poppy did say you were going to nod off,” agreed Sirius.

“But we’ll help you put it off as long as possible,” offered Ginny.

“Thanks,” Harry accepted, returning her wan smile with one of his own.

“So, how’re we going to do that?” asked Ron. “Chess?”

Ron was lucky that there was nothing available for Harry to throw at him. Ginny corrected this fault by smacking her brother across the back of the head.

Seeing that the youngest Weasley had her brother somewhat under control, Harry turned to Hermione. He had originally wanted to talk to her in private, but no longer saw any point to keeping quiet on the matter.

“So, Hermione,” he began, waiting for her to turn her attention away from the bickering siblings. “Have your parents found out anything about Freddy?”

Hermione looked startled that he was asking this while the others were present. Watching her closely, he saw as she realized he knew that she had told Madam Bones about his query.

“Well?” he prompted.

“Harry...”

“I understand why you told Bones,” he said, folding his arms and leaning back to stare sternly at her. “I don’t like it, but I understand.”

“I’m sorry, but I thought it was important,” she apologised, ducking her head to avoid the puzzled looks the others were giving her.

“I understand,” repeated Harry with a sigh.

“Harry--”

“Hermione,” he interrupted firm. “I understand. Just, please, next time can you at least ask me first?”

**-oOo-**

Number four Privet Drive, or rather its dream world equivalent, was deathly silent when Freddy Krueger finally arrived.

The reason for the unnatural silence was that Harry had been sitting in what would normally have been his Uncle Vernon’s favourite armchair, while staring blankly at the television which was tuned to show Freddy’s incursions into the dreams of his victims. He had been watching it intently during his five-day-long healing coma. Watching as Freddy slaughtered his way through Harry’s classmates.

Now, having returned for another night, he was silently waiting for Freddy to make his usual appearance before rushing off on his eternal killing spree.

**“Honey, I’m home!”** called Freddy as he strode through the front door.

Receiving no reply, not that he had expected one, Freddy moved further into the house. He found Harry where he had left him, sitting and staring at the inactive television.

**“Hey, kid, enjoy the shows?”** he asked.

He was a little surprised when Harry spun out of the chair to confront him.

“You bastard! You son of a bitch!”

“**Hmm,**” mused Freddy scratching his chin thoughtfully, **“I’m guessing you’re trying to suck up to me for something. ‘Cause you can’t be dumb enough to try insulting me.”**

Freddy was more than a little surprised when Harry hauled off and slammed a right hook into his jaw. Surprise quickly gave way to annoyance, especially when Harry started yelling at him.

“You bloody bastard! What the hell are you doing!?”

**“I’m doing what I’ve always done, kid,”** replied Freddy, stroking his jaw. **“Having fun.”**

“Having fun? Having *fun* ?” repeated Harry, his voice rising to a near shriek.

**“Yep... fun,”** confirmed Freddy languidly.

“But you’re killing them?!”

**“So? That’s what I do, Potter.”**



“But they’re not all like Malfoy and Snape!” protested Harry, grabbing Freddy by his jersey. “Some of them are good people you’re killing!”

Displeased at being manhandled like this, Freddy shoved Harry away with a short backhand that knocked the young wizard off him.

**“Listen, shit-stain,”** Freddy growled, poking a bladed forefinger against Harry’s chest. **“Snape was a freebie. I don’t like killing adults - it ain’t good enough for me; I don’t enjoy it as much. What I like is the children - the kiddies - the brats - it’s better than fucking sex!”**

Holding his throbbing jaw, Harry stared at Freddy in incomprehension. He was knocked further back by a follow-up punch, this one right in his face, which sent his glasses flying.

**“I dealt with that greasy haired bastard because he almost found out about me visiting your dreams,”** explained Freddy, advancing on Harry as he reeled back with a bloody nose. **“If he knew I was here, he might’ve done something to fix whatever he did that let me inside in the first place.”**

“But--”

Freddy’s next punch was a simple shot to the stomach, folding Harry in half as all breath was driven from his body. Several more blows, mostly centred on Harry’s head and shoulders, rained down on him. Freddy continued to speak as he beat his dream host.

**“Voldemort and Umbridge damn near killed you,”** he continued. **“Now, let’s be honest; I don’t give a rat’s ass if you live or die - and you’re gonna die, ‘cause I’m gonna kill you. But, if you die too soon then my fun time with the kiddies gets cut short – and that ain’t gonna happen until I say so!”**

By now Freddy’s hands had a light sprinkling of blood on them, caused not by stab wounds, but by the repeated pounding of his fists into Harry’s now very bloody face. His lips were split, his nose broken and one eye was beginning to swell shut.

**“I’m fucking killing the rest of those little brats because I enjoy it.”**

Another backhand sent Harry stumbling. When his back struck something hard, he glanced round to see that he had retreated out of the lounge, into the entry of the house and had just bumped into the front door. Through tear-filled eyes, he could see the green and red blur of Freddy advancing on him to continue the beating.

Fumbling for the doorknob, Harry fled out into a night time copy of Privet Drive.

Running as fast as his legs could manage, and not daring to look back, Harry looked around desperately for either some way to escape his nightmare or find a place to hide until it was open.

**“Now,”** said Freddy, not bothering to pursue, but rather watching from number four’s doorway, **“Time for one more lesson before the kid wakes up. Gonna have to be extra messy.”**

TBC...



# We Are Nothing

## Part VIII

**Title:** We Are Nothing

**Author:** Ruskbyte

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**Summary:** Snape's Occlumency lessons have shattered the last defences of Harry's mind. Now, unprotected, his dreams have become home to a nightmare other than Voldemort. A nightmare that has taken on a life of its own.

"We are nothing; less than nothing and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence, and a name." - Charles Lamb, *Essays of Elia* , *Dream Children*

/oOo\

### Part VIII

#### Bounded in a nutshell

\oOo/

The mannequins were just plain creepy.

Dudley Dursley had come to that conclusion after less than a minute. He looked around again, having absolutely no idea where he was, what he was doing there or how he had gotten there in the first place. The only thing he did know was that the army of shop window mannequins was beginning to freak him out.

He was, for some reason, sitting in what seemed to be a massive auditorium of some sort. He had been placed right in the middle; the centre seat of a row exactly half way from the stage.

And he was the only person present, with every other seat in the room occupied by a mannequin.

He had just decided to get up and leave; and maybe find something to snack on, when the auditorium lights dimmed. Something was about to happen.

A figure stepped onto the stage and walked purposefully to the podium set up there.

The man was wearing an expensive looking three piece suit, in a staid blue-grey. A glint of gold from his waistcoat suggested a chain for a timepiece.

Dudley did not notice any of that, his attention taken up entirely by the man's horrible burned face. His desire for a snack left him.

**"Thank you, thank you,"** said the man as he settled in behind the podium. **"As you all know, I've had to come all the way from the good ol' U.S. of A to give this lecture, so thank you again for your rousing welcome."**

Dudley simply stared, not quite sure what to make of this. What he did know is that neither of his parents would have approved of the speaker's appearance, despite his fancy suit.

**"To begin, I'll be discussing dreams. Dreams and nightmares."**

Dudley looked left and right, wondering if he could slip out without this strange person noticing him.

**"You know, it's funny, but ninety percent of people's bad dreams are just like this,"** the man said. He waved a hand to indicate the auditorium surrounding them. **"Nightmares about standing in front of an audience and having to say a speech."**

He stepped out from behind the podium and walked off the stage, slowly making his way into the seats.

Dudley was properly terrified by this simple act, for no reason he could voice, but was too scared to move. This was worse than how he had felt when those dementia things had tried to kill him and his cousin.

**"Boring as hell, these kind of nightmares,"** the man continued to speak. **"Yeah, sure sometimes they're naked - which is kinda good when it's a hot babe, but even then - boring shit."**

Finally, just as the man reached his row, Dudley managed to lever himself out of his chair and tried to flee. It was difficult, considering the closeness of the seats and the very inconvenient mannequin legs that kept trying to trip him.

**"How the hell can anyone be afraid of this?"** asked the man, continuing to follow after Dudley.

Dudley was too afraid to answer, though the question was clearly rhetorical. He was too busy trying to reach the aisle, whereupon he could hopefully flee at a run instead of a stumbling shuffle.

**“I mean, come on! If you’re gonna have a nightmare, at least have it be interesting.”**

With a final lunge, Dudley passed the last couple of chairs in the row and fell into the aisle.

He was about to get up and start running when he noticed a pair of shoes right in front of his nose.

Slowly he looked up. His eyes traced the shoes, the legs, hips and torso before reaching the terrible face of Freddy Krueger.

**“Now, I’m no expert... Well, actually I am,”** he continued talking, as though his audience had not just tried to flee for his life. **“But I always thought people would be more afraid of having a madman tying them up and taking their eyes out, or something. You know - like me.”**

Dudley tried to move, to get up and run, but found himself bound in thick rope from chest to ankles. He was wrapped up tight, but not so tight as to have difficulty breathing.

Freddy reached down and hauled Dudley up, tossing him over his shoulder like a sack of grain.

**“But don’t you worry, Duddikins,”** he said, **“I ain’t gonna pluck your eyes out.”**

“You mean this is a dream?” asked Dudley, only now remembering that his last memory before he appeared here was of going to bed in his Smeltings dormitory.

**“Oh no, Duddikins,”** said Freddy. **“This ain’t no dream - it’s a nightmare.”**

Dudley tried to break free, but the rope was too strong. His struggles accomplished nothing save to make him short of breathe. To his credit, he did not scream.

Noticing that they were no longer in the mannequin filled auditorium, Dudley began twisting about to see where they were.

He was surprised to discover that they had somehow been transported into a jungle.

“Where are we? What are you going to do?” he asked his captor.

Freddy snorted, **“I already told you; we’re in your nightmares. As for what I’m gonna do...”**

Spinning on a heel, Freddy dropped his burden on the jungle floor with a loud thump. A nudge of his foot caused Dudley to roll over and find himself confronted by what looked like a sizeable fire pit.

**“...Your cousin, Harry, always thought you looked like a pig in a wig,”** Freddy continued. **“So I thought we’d be having us a barbeque.”**

Dudley flopped onto his back and stared up at Freddy in horror. His horror grew when he saw that his captor had produced a long wooden spit and was pointing the sharp end in his direction.

“No, no, no,” he whimpered. “I’m sorry for what I did to Harry - I’m really sorry - please don’t...”

Freddy smiled amiably and told him, **“Don’t worry. I’m not gonna stick this through ya.”** Dudley had second of relief, which was promptly ruined as Freddy continued, **“That would kill you long before you had a chance to cook through.”**

“Wha-what?” asked Dudley fearfully as Freddy stooped over him.

With a few deft and practiced motions, Freddy slipped the sharpened spit between the ropes along Dudley’s back.

**“Yep, there’s nothing better than a spit pig over the fire,”** declared Freddy as he hoisted Dudley into the air with deceptive ease and positioned him over the fire pit.

“I’m not a pig! I’m not a pig!” screamed Dudley desperately. He thrashed wildly about, but was unable to do more than give himself a slight rocking motion back and forth.

Freddy squatted down in front of him, grabbing Dudley’s hair to turn his head enough to look him in the eyes. With his free hand he held up a pallet of matches, the kind you’d find in a hotel. Dudley absently recognised the brand as being Holiday Inn.

**“Come on, Dudders,”** Freddy urged, **“All the boys enjoy playing with fire.”**

“I don’t! I’m not a pig! I’m sorry! I won’t do it again! I’m not a pig!”

Ignoring Dudley’s increasingly frantic protestations, Freddy struck the matches with a flourish. Dudley’s thrashing grew even more frenzied as the now burning matches were casually tossed into the pit below him.

**“Yes! Me caveman! Me cook meat on fire!”** declared Freddy, beating a hand against his chest.

Aaaaaahh!" screamed Dudley as the pit below him burst into flames. He could already feel the heat from the growing fire.

**"Yes! Squeal for me,"** Freddy commanded, wearing a frilly pink apron that had the words 'Feed the cook' printed on it. He poked and prodded Dudley's stomach with his barbeque fork. **"Come on, fat ass, squeal like a piggy! Squeal!"**

And as the flames licked higher and closer, Dudley's high-pitched screams could almost have been mistaken for squeals.

-oOo-

Harry woke up to the feeling of a cold shiver sinking into his jaw. It was barely enough to mask the sharp throb of pain that seemed to be encircling his face.

"Easy there, Harry. Don't try to move too much."

It was with some alarm he realized that it was Madam Pomfrey speaking to him. What worried him was the obvious concern he could hear in her voice. She was clearly troubled, especially if she was using his first name like that.

Blinking his eyes open revealed another disturbing fact; namely that he could not see out of his right eye.

"Don't worrying - your eye is fine, Harry. You just can't open it because of the swelling," Pomfrey was quick to reassure him.

"Wuht--"

Harry croaked, trying to ask what had happened, even though he knew exactly what and who was responsible. Unfortunately, he was having trouble forming the words as his lips were entirely numb.

"Don't try to speak. Your mouth and jaw are also badly swollen. I've applied a mild pain relief charm."

Harry turned the one eye he could open in the direction of her voice, but couldn't see much without his glasses.

"I think he wants his glasses," said another familiar voice.

He looked at her as best he could, but the only thing he could see of Hermione at the moment was a black blur, topped by a very fuzzy brown blur. The two red topped blurs next to her were probably Ron and Ginny. There was another blur, slightly off to one side, that might have been Sirius.

Remembering what Hermione had said, and wondering not for the first time at how well she knew him, Harry nodded his agreement.

"Here you go then, Harry," said Pomfrey as she settled his glasses in place. "I'm going to get some topical bruise and swelling potion for you. Unfortunately I can't do more than that and a few charms, so it will be about an hour before everything's fixed up."

She turned to his friends and fixed them with a commanding glare. "Do not excite him and I'll let you stay until Molly brings up his breakfast. Upset him in the slightest and I'll toss you out of here on your ears, understand?"

Receiving nods of agreement, some more enthusiastic than others, the matron departed for her storeroom to collect Harry's salve.

Harry turned his attention back to his friends and godfather. He tried to smile, but could tell his face was not moving as he wanted to.

"Hi," he grunted.

"Oh Harry," murmured Hermione. She looked to be on the verge of tears.

"You look like you had the stuffing kicked out of you, mate," said Ron as tactfully as ever.

Harry stared at his friend, who had a habit of stating the obvious, and tried to express his displeasure with just a look - seeing as talking hurt too much.

"What happened, Harry?" asked Sirius. "According to Madam Pomfrey you just... you were fine yesterday afternoon when you went to sleep, but were all beaten up when she checked on you this morning."

"Bahd drehm," Harry offered as an explanation.

"A bad dream?" repeated Hermione.

"Was it You-Know-Who?" asked Ron.

Harry rolled his one good eye and wondered, not for the first time why he was friends with the redheaded wizard. Trying to work around his swollen mouth and numb lips, he said, "Yohr Lyk uh brohkim rehkordh, Rohn."

He wondered what was taking Madam Pomfrey so long to get that salve. He did not like talking as if he had a Bludger stuffed in his mouth.

"What?"

"He said you're like a broken record," said Hermione with a sigh. "I suppose the same could be said for all of us."

Harry nodded in agreement.

Hermione's eyes grew wide and she stared at Harry with surprise and worry in her eyes.

"You were attacked by that Freddy Krueger person, weren't you?" she asked. "He tried to kill you in your dreams, just like the others."

"Hmm," Harry hummed in confirmation.

He saw no reason to correct her assumption. Based on what she knew it was a good guess, but the truth was somewhat different. Freddy had been punishing him, not trying to kill him. That was the only reason why he had escaped with his life; Freddy had let him go.

"Bloody hell," whispered Ron, obviously shocked by this revelation.

"Dammit," cursed Sirius, slamming a fist into the nearby dresser. "We'd been hoping that maybe the wards here would keep the bastard out."

"Why should they?" asked Ginny quietly. "The wards at Hogwarts didn't stop him - and they're bigger and stronger than the ones here."

"Remus said the same thing," grumbled Sirius, unhappy at being proven wrong.

"You mean this guy really can kill you in your sleep?" asked Ron. He paled further. "Bloody hell."

"Oh, Harry, you should have told someone," declared Hermione.

Harry stared at in confusion. What did she think he had just done? The others seemed to share his puzzlement.

Seeing that he did not understand, she elaborated, "You should've told us before - when we were still at Hogwarts."

"But he wasn't attacked at Hogwarts," said Ron, pointing out the obvious.

"Not like this," Ginny qualified.

"I'm not talking about this," said Hermione, not taking her eyes off Harry. "I mean he should have told someone about Krueger sooner."

"Wuhy?" asked Harry.

"Yeah, why should he?" agreed Ron.

Hermione finally turned to Ron and declared, "Because maybe somebody could have done something before so many people were killed!"

A very uncomfortable silence filled the bedroom as everyone began to realize that Hermione was essentially blaming Harry for all the murders.

"Are you really blaming Harry for this?" asked Sirius softly, a dangerous growl behind his words.

"No, of course not!" Hermione shook her head in vigorous denial. She then shrugged and reluctantly continued, "But he knew! He knew about Krueger - about how he gets into people's dreams and kills them! If he had just told someone--"

"It would have changed nothing," spat Sirius.

"We don't know that," said Hermione.

"Really?" Sirius scoffed. "So the Aurors can go into people's dreams and stop their nightmares? They can catch a murderer who doesn't exist and's already dead? They can do all that?"

"But they could've warned people..."

"Warned them about what? That a lunatic was going to kill them in their sleep? They already knew that!"

"But--"

"Or were they going to warn them not to have any dreams? After all, everyone can stop themselves from dreaming whenever they want!"

"Knowledge is power," Hermione weakly said. "If people had known--"

"It still wouldn't have saved them," declared Sirius with absolute certainty.

"You don't know that," said Hermione, repeating her earlier statement.

Sirius laughed darkly and smiled nastily at her. Harry, Ron and Ginny continued to watch the growing argument in silence.

"One day, Hermione," he told her, "you'll find that some knowledge simply can't help you, no matter what you do."

"But--"

"You're a Muggleborn - you know about guns," said Sirius, trying a different approach.

Yes,” confirmed Hermione uncertainly. “But what does that--”

“If someone held a gun to you head and pushed the button,” he asked, “would all the knowledge in the world save you?”

Hermione stared blankly at him, unable to respond. She eventually turned to the others and found a less than friendly reception. Ron was openly glaring at her; clearly angry at her perceived accusation against Harry. Ginny might have been more sympathetic, her boyfriend having been one of those murdered, but was clearly conflicted about it. Harry was simply staring at her. It was a little unnerving how calm he was in the face of her finger pointing.

“You know, Hermione--”

Whatever Ron meant to say was lost when the bedroom door slammed open to admit the grizzled form of Alastor ‘Mad-Eye’ Moody.

“Black, Potter,” he greeted curtly.

“Hey, Moody,” replied Sirius. “Any good news?”

Moody shrugged. “News, yes, though whether it’s good or not I’ll leave up to you.”

“What’s happened?” asked Hermione, eager to steer the conversation to any other topic.

“Well, there’ve been no reported killings last night,” Moody reported. “Looks like Potter here was the only one to be attacked.”

“Noh.”

All eyes immediately focused on Harry, especially Moody’s magical eye. The old Auror stomped closer to the bed.

“Explain,” he commanded simply.

“Ahm noht th’ onlee wuhn,” said Harry.

“You’re not the only one he went after last night?” repeated Moody. At Harry’s nod he frowned. “There haven’t been any reported slayings. The Ministry would’ve heard by now if any more witches or wizards had been killed.”

Harry stared into Moody’s electric blue false eye.

“He’s moved onto the Muggles, hasn’t he?”

Harry nodded.

“Damn, that complicates thing.”

“In more ways than one,” agreed Sirius unhappily.

Even the four teenagers, young as they were, knew that this development would cause problems. Not least of which was that the Ministry, directed by the affluent purebloods, would likely conclude that Freddy killing Muggles instead of witches or wizards was probably a good thing.

“Any idea of where? Or who?” asked Moody.

Harry tried to ignore the looks of expectation that were now levelled at him. He sighed deeply and tried not to feel guilty about what had happened.

“Smuheltings skhool,” he began.

“A school again, huh?” mused Moody. “Makes sense; bastard likes killing children.”

Hermione, however, had latched onto the obvious question.

“How do you know which school he was at?”

Harry focused on her. Despite her earlier words of accusation, he was too tired and the situation too dire to ignore the question. He sighed again and tried to form his words as clearly as possible.

“He kihled Duhdley.”

“Dudley?” asked Ron, not immediately recognising the name.

“Shit,” swore Sirius and Moody in concert.

“Your cousin?” Moody clarified.

Harry nodded. He took some measure of satisfaction in seeing the blood drain from Hermione’s face. Of course, Ron and Ginny also grew pale at this revelation.

“Bloody hell, Harry,” muttered Ron, “He’s going after your relatives!”

"Are you all right, Harry?" asked Ginny, clearly worried that he would be affected by this latest killing.

Hermione, for once, was left with nothing to say.

"Reahly bahd drehm," he asserted.

**-oOo-**

Harry spent the rest of the morning alone. Sirius having gone to work with the rest of the Order in finding a way to stop the unstoppable. His friends were scattered through the house, thinking over Hermione's accusations and generally acting almost as moodily as Harry had earlier in the year.

Other than Madam Pomfrey's frequent checks and Molly's delivery of a sumptuous lunch, Harry was left to his own devices.

Forbidden from leaving his bed, other than to visit the loo, Harry was soon bored out of his mind. Which was a bad thing, as he found himself hearing Hermione's words repeating in his head. This in turn led to him considering her accusation and asking the terrible question of if she was right.

Was he really responsible for all those deaths?

Even the arrival of Hedwig, who had flown down from Hogwarts, did little to cheer him from this dark train of thought.

Relief came with the arrival of his old Defence Against the Dark Arts professor.

"Hey, Remus," Harry greeted, relieved that Madam Pomfrey's salves and charms had eventually healed his bruised face. At least now he could talk like a normal person, rather than a particularly bright troll. His eye and jaw were still a bit tender though.

"I see you're looking better than you were earlier this morning," said Remus.

"Thanks to Madam Pomfrey," agreed Harry.

"She knows her stuff," Remus agreed, taking a seat next to the bed. He was much more sedate about it than Sirius had been.

Looking at his old professor, Harry could tell that something was bothering the man.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

Remus hesitated for only a second before answering, "I've just gotten back from Smeltings," he said. "I'm afraid I am the bearer of bad news."

Harry sighed in acceptance and asked, "Dudley really is dead then?"

It was mostly for form that he asked. He already knew that his cousin was gone - he had seen it happen, after all, in his dream. Freddy had been so kind as to project the spit roasting across the clouds that had been hanging low over the dream Privet Drive. Harry doubted he would ever look at a roast pig the same way again.

"I'm afraid so," Remus confirmed. "He was burned to death in his bed; not unlike what happened to Umbridge."

"What are the Muggles saying? And the Ministry?"

"The Muggle police are calling it an accident. They found a stash of cigarettes in Dudley's things and think he was smoking in bed when the hot ash set his linen on fire."

"And the Ministry?" repeated Harry.

Remus shook his head. "They don't know yet."

"What?"

"Your relatives are Muggles, so the Ministry doesn't keep track of them much," explained Remus. "They probably know Dudley's dead, but until they're told otherwise, will believe the police report - that it was an accident."

"Is anyone going to tell them?" asked Harry, a little surprised that the Order was not coordinating better with the Ministry. With Voldemort's return now confirmed, there should not have been any reason for them not to work together.

"I think Kingsley is going to speak to Madam Bones later today," said Remus.

"They're not going to blame me for this, are they?" asked Harry, suddenly cautious. "Because Dudley's my cousin or a Muggle or something stupid?"

"No, the Ministry won't be blaming you for what happened."

Harry narrowed his eyes and regarded Remus closely. There was something about the way he had phrased that...

"So who is blaming me for it?" he asked.



Remus dithered.

"Who?"

Remus sighed in resignation and answered, "Your aunt and uncle."

Harry groaned and dropped his head back. "Bloody typical," he complained. "They always blamed me if something went wrong - glad to hear my not even being there hasn't changed that."

"It's a little more complicated than that, Harry," said Remus softly.

"Oh?" asked Harry.

"Your uncle got a little... belligerent. Tonks actually had to Stun him," Remus reported.

"Is she all right?"

"More worried about you than anything else," replied Remus. "Your uncle made a great many threats to throttle you if he ever saw you again."

Harry had been told that particular threat on a fairly regular basis ever since he was old enough to understand what 'throttled' meant. It was, he knew, one of Vernon's favourites.

"He also mentioned beating you bloody with his golf clubs," Remus added.

That made Harry wince. Vernon only ever used that threat when he was furious beyond all measure. The last time he had mentioned it was when he had blown up Aunt Marge.

"I'm not going to stay with them during the summer, am I?" he asked nervously.

Remus grimaced and shook his head, "I certainly wouldn't recommend it. Dumbledore might push for it, but I don't think he'll get very far."

"Where is Dumbledore anyway?" asked Harry with a frown. "I thought he'd been staying here after Fudge and Umbridge chased him out of Hogwarts."

"He has been," replied Remus. "But ever since Snape was killed, he's been going out each day."

"Doing what?"

"Nobody knows."

"What's he think about all this?"

"He's very concerned, of course," Remus answered. "There were a few moments when he was worried that You-Know-Who had some competition - that a new dark lord had risen up."

Harry chuckled mirthlessly, "Better not let Freddy hear that. He might get ideas."

-oOo-

Four days and nights without sleep did nothing to help Harry escape the tender mercies of Madam Pomfrey. Nor did it do anything for the sheer exhaustion and ill-health he was suffering from.

By this point, the only things keeping Harry awake was willpower and fear.

He was determined not to give Freddy any further chances to run amuck and the only way he knew how to do that was to stay awake and deny the madman access to Harry's dreams.

The fear that gripped him was less noble and more a matter of self-preservation. Despite the fact that Freddy was a homicidal maniac, Harry had not really been afraid of the man before. His beating at Freddy's hands changed that. Harry was afraid of Freddy now... and fear was something that made the Lord of Nightmares all that much stronger.

There was also the niggling little detail that Freddy had repeatedly stated his intention of killing Harry when he finally had no further use for him.

Harry had a feeling that time was fast approaching.

As such he stayed awake for fear that if he did go to sleep he might very well not wake up.

"Check."

Thankfully his friends were doing their best to help him, even as they too tried to stay awake as long as they could. Luckily they had the unwitting aid of Molly Weasley, who made sure to assign them a few chores each day, which kept them busy. Harry, still confined to his bed, was not so fortunate and was forced to endure several long hours each day where he could do nothing but sit in his bed and try not to close his eyes for too long.

Sirius, Remus and Tonks also made a point of visiting for a little while each day, as did the other adults, though not so frequently.

Replying to Ron's latest attack on his king, Harry considered his friends.

Both Weasleys were paler than usual, something that made their freckles more defined. Their pale complexions also highlighted the growing shadows under their eyes. While not nearly as sleep deprived as Harry, they were only sleeping a couple of hours at a time and it was beginning to show.

Ron was holding up the best of them all, mostly due to his talent at ignoring the problem in favour of such topics as Quidditch, chess and food. It was a point of aggravation to the others that his appetite was unaffected by everything that was happening.

Ginny was still a little distressed and bothered by the death of her boyfriend, Michael Corner. While not bursting into tears at the drop of a hat, like Cho Chang had been doing, the younger redhead was far more quiet and introspective than she had been all year.

In a way, it reminded Harry of when he had first met her. At least she was not squeaking unintelligibly and sticking her elbow in the butter.

Hermione was looking the worst of the three, but for different reasons. Her earlier admonishments that Harry's silence about Freddy made him culpable in the murders was now weighing heavily on her mind.

A thick letter from her parents, containing a few newspaper clippings and rumours about Springwood, had given her some idea as to just how helpless everyone was against Freddy's depredations. Harry was surprised by how much information the Grangers had managed to dig up. Freddy had suggested that his name and exploits were being deliberately hidden by the Muggle authorities. It was a testament to their research skills and an indication that their daughter's faculty in the regard was inherited rather than learned.

After reading some of the articles, Hermione had been very quiet for the first couple of days and had avoided meeting Harry's eyes. She had begun to recover and had issued something of an apology on the third day of Harry's sleeplessness.

Personally he was frequently beset by the dark and uncharitable thought that her contrition was only because of Dudley's death.

Still, he welcomed her company, just as he did the others. Staying awake when in the company of your friends was fairly easy, he had found. It was in those quiet and lonely hours during the night when his friends dared to slumber that he found difficulty in not wanting to join them.

That they were safest while he remained awake was one reason why he did his best not to drowse off whenever they were sleeping. He was not angry with them, not like he had been with Malfoy and the others, but he preferred not to risk it.

He had not said anything, but he had never really appreciated them as much as he did right now.

"Checkmate. That's another one to me."

Although, the seemingly endless number of chess matches with Ron had long since become tiresome.

"What's that make it?" asked Ginny, not really interested, but making an effort to keep their already limited conversation running.

"Twenty-seven to Ron. Nothing to Harry," answered Hermione.

"Ouch," Ginny observed.

"That's me; the magical world's favourite glutton for punishment," joked Harry, though without any real humour in his tone.

"Care for another go?" asked Ron, a little smug over his long string of victories.

"No," Harry answered bluntly.

"Ah well," Ron relented. He turned to the two witches, "What about you two? Are either of you up for a game?"

"No, thanks," declined Hermione.

Ginny snorted, "After seeing you demolish Harry like that? Sorry, but I'm *not* a glutton for punishment."

Harry morbidly wondered if that would make her a more appealing target for Freddy. He seemed to like a challenge.

Realizing just where his thoughts were leading, Harry tried to think of something less likely to lead to problems later on - he did not want to jinx himself, or worse; jinx someone else.

Trying to concentrate on lighter matters, Harry took some measure of satisfaction in having stayed awake for so long and denying Freddy any more victims.

It had been four days now since Dudley had been roasted like a pig on a spit. Since then there had been no further deaths, something that was causing cautious optimism in the Daily Prophet articles that followed the "dream killer's" rampage. There had even been talk in the latest edition that Hogwarts might reopen, now that Freddy had supposedly been driven off by the Ministry's Aurors under the near divine leadership of Minister Fudge.

Harry took even more satisfaction that despite Fudge's attempts to grab the credit, the Minister's days were obviously numbered. There had already been several articles speculating as to who would be replacing him.

Biting back a yawn, Harry's gaze slipped back to Hermione, who was now arguing with Ron over the suggestion that they work on their homework instead of playing more chess.

Hermione suddenly squirmed and shifted about uncomfortably in her seat.

"Hermione?" asked Ron, noticing her unease.

"I just... I just had this... this feeling..." she stammered.

"You mean the feeling that someone's tap-dancing on your grave?" asked Harry.

"Yes," Hermione nodded.

"Happens to me all the time. Don't go to sleep."

**-oOo-**

"That boy is going to kill himself out of sheer stubbornness at this rate," complained Madam Pomfrey.

"His desire to remain awake is perfectly understandable, given the circumstances," said Professor McGonagall.

The two witches were relaxing for a moment in the sitting room at Grimmauld Place.

"After all," McGonagall continued, "He was badly beaten by this Krueger madman and then, when he managed to escape, he had to watch his cousin being killed as well."

"I know that," admitted Pomfrey, "and I understand how it must have traumatised him."

"But?" prompted McGonagall, sensing that there was more to her friend's argument.

"It's been four days since then and nobody else has been murdered," Pomfrey noted.

"Not that we know of," cautioned McGonagall.

"Aside from Mr Potter's cousin, all of the victims have been magical," argued Pomfrey. "I'm certain if there had been a killing then we would have heard something."

"Maybe," McGonagall reluctantly relented.

"What does Albus think of all this?"

"I don't know - he's been too busy running around the countryside to voice his opinion."

"Molly certainly thinks it's over."

"Molly's hoping for the best, as usual. The rest of us are maintaining a healthy sense of paranoia."

Pomfrey snorted at that. "Alastor must be loving this. A crazy murderer that kills people in their sleep."

McGonagall nodded in agreement, "He has been ranting about constant vigilance more than usual."

"Well," Pomfrey clapped her hands against her knees and stood up, "If Mr Potter won't go to sleep on his own, then I'll have to see to it that he goes to sleep anyway."

"Is that really a good idea, Poppy?" asked McGonagall cautiously.

"Of course," declared Pomfrey, wilfully misinterpreting her friend's question. "The lad's made good progress on his recovery from the veritaserum poisoning. A small dose of a weak sleeping potion in his dinner will be perfectly safe for him. Just enough to give him a good night's rest. He'll be fine."

"I hope you're right, Poppy, I hope you're right," McGonagall murmured.

"Now, where's Molly?" asked Pomfrey as she left, heading to the kitchen. Harry Potter would be getting a good night's sleeps tonight; she would be seeing to that.

**-oOo-**

Harry was not only exhausted but also dead tired. He had almost nodded off several times over the last hour. He grudgingly decided that he would have to start cutting back on how much he ate, as his drowsiness was obviously a result of Molly Weasley's dinner. He loved the woman, truly, but she always seemed determined to stuff him to the proverbial gills with as much food as she could pile on his plate. It was even worse now that he was recovering from not just Umbridge's poisoning of him, but also his brutal beating at Freddy's hands.

"Ugh, I going to be as fat as Dudley at this rate," he muttered, climbing out of bed. He almost slipped as the fact that Dudley was now dead caught up to him. Of all the people Freddy had killed, his last victim seemed the most unreal of them all.

Continuing to grumble under his breath, Harry exited what his friends were now jokingly calling the “hospital bedroom”. He was in desperate need of a visit to the loo, to relieve himself of the large jug of pumpkin juice that had accompanied his dinner. He staggered unsteadily to the bathroom down the hall, silently cursing the fact that nobody in the Order had thought to maybe arrange something like an ensuite water closet to his room - he was supposedly under the weather after all.

“Bloody idiots never had an ounce of sense between them all,” he complained, pausing outside the bathroom door to catch his breath.

He had developed the habit of speaking out loud whenever he was alone, as an additional means of keeping himself awake. He had no idea whether it would help or not, but at this point he would have even accepted, without questions, one of Snape’s potions if he had been told it would stop him from falling asleep.

Quickly concluding his business, and grateful that his aim had improved enough that he was no longer causing a mess, Harry returned the way he had come. He paused periodically along the way; listening at the doors to his friends’ bedrooms. Hermione and Ginny’s room was quiet, as it usually was. Ron, naturally, was producing a steady rumbling grind of snores that were only slightly muted by the intervening door. Relieved that all was apparently well, Harry continued his trek back to bed.

Harry stepped into the hospital bedroom, without really bothering to look around, and closed the door behind him. Turn back to the room he was planning on heading straight back to the bed, when he noticed that there was something wrong with what his eyes were reporting.

“Oh, for fuck’s sake!”

Finding himself standing in his bedroom, the smallest bedroom of number four Privet Drive, Harry realized that he had somehow fallen asleep without realizing it. Worse, he was obviously dreaming as well. This was partly the cause of his outburst, but mostly his ire was directed at the Hogwarts matron; whom he suspected of being the cause of his current state of slumber. Molly was also at fault, as the potion had doubtless been delivered to him in his dinner.

With tired resignation, knowing that staying in his room was not an option, Harry made his way downstairs. Standing in the small entry foyer, not far from his former cupboard under the stairs, he wondered where Freddy was.

**“Hey there, lil’ boy... want a balloon?”**

Harry turned around to face the entrance to the kitchen. He was a little relieved that Freddy was here, which meant that he wasn’t out and about; killing Harry’s classmates. The speech he had been preparing for this moment died in his throat, however, as he caught sight of his murderous companion.

He was dressed in shiny white overalls, with bright blue and yellow frills surrounding his neck, wrists and ankles. Four big, bright orange pompoms were dotted down his chequered red and green shirt. Giant red shoes, polished to a mirror shine, encased his feet. His face was covered in white pancake makeup, which instead of hiding his disfigurement served only to highlight his scars. Finishing the ensemble was a bulbous and shiny red nose.

“What the hell are you wearing?” asked Harry incredulously.

**“I am disguised as a clown,”** explained Freddy, as if his reason for doing so was perfectly obvious.

“The disguise was not necessary.”

**“Ha ha, very funny. Now, why’d you take so damn long, huh? I have a little party planned and don’t wanna be late.”**

.

**TBC...**



# We Are Nothing

## Part IX

**Title:** We Are Nothing

**Author:** Ruskbyte

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**Summary:** Snape's Occlumency lessons have shattered the last defences of Harry's mind. Now, unprotected, his dreams have become home to a nightmare other than Voldemort. A nightmare that has taken on a life of its own.

"We are nothing; less than nothing and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence, and a name." - Charles Lamb, *Essays of Elia* , *Dream Children*

/oOo\

### Part IX

**All our best men are laughed at**

\oOo/

Harry and Freddy stood in the short entrance hallway of number four Privet Drive and glared balefully at each other. Well, Harry was doing all the glaring. Freddy was simply matching his gaze with a bemused smirk.

The standoff was broken when a tumbleweed blew between the two, accompanied by the twang of a spaghetti western theme.

**"Y'know, pardner,"** drawled Freddy, **"I reckon you're not here for a pow-wow."**

Freddy's impersonation of John Wayne was wasted on Harry, who had never had a chance to see many movies. Also, the crazed dream killer was still wearing a brightly coloured clown costume, which some distracted from it.

"Stop it," commanded Harry flatly.

**"Stop what?"** countered Freddy.

"This. That," said Harry, indicating Freddy and his overly colourful clothes.

**"What, don't you like clowns?"** Freddy asked, making as if his feelings were hurt.

"Stop it, Krueger, you're not fooling anyone," Harry repeated his command.

Freddy waved his hand and obliged, his clown suit melting into his usual attire. Surprisingly, he seemed to have nothing to say for once. Instead he stood in place and waited for Harry to continue.

"You're not going to kill anyone else."

Freddy raised a brow at this proclamation, but otherwise did not react.

"You're not getting into anyone else's dreams."

The beginnings of honest amusement sparked in Freddy's eyes, but tempered with annoyance. Like a grown up confronted with a toddler that saw fit to order him around.

"I won't let you."

**"Really,"** drawled Freddy.

"I won't," repeated Harry.

**"And how're you gonna do that?"**

Harry compressed his lips into a thin line at the casual dismissal. He reach behind and drew his wand front the back pocket of his trousers.

Freddy rolled his eyes and scoffed, **"Please! You're gonna wave your wand?"**

"I won't let you kill anyone else," asserted Harry.

**"Don't be ridiculous, kid,"** responded Freddy, moving closer to him. **"You can't stop me. No-one can, of course, but especially not you."**

Harry kept his wand focused on Freddy, even as his knees began to tremble. He could clearly remember his beating at the man's hands and doubted that having his wand out would be enough to stop a repeat.

But he had to try, his conscience would accept nothing less.

Freddy came in close, ignoring how the tip of Harry's wand was pressed against his chest.

**"You can't stop me, Harry,"** he explained, **"because you're the one that's letting me out - every - single - time."**

"Maybe I am letting you out," Harry agreed, "but that also means I can *stop* letting you out."

Freddy smirked knowingly and repeated his earlier question, **"And how're you gonna do that?"**

Harry replied with a weak smirk of his own and said, "By not getting angry anymore."

Freddy burst into raucous laughter.

**"Well, you're off to a terrible start, kid,"** he crowed, backing away from him.

A pit formed in his stomach as he asked, "What do you mean?"

His answer was another vicious smirk.

**"Seems you're feeling a little angry at the know-it-all,"** replied Freddy.

The pit in Harry's stomach turned to ice at the mention of one of his closest and dearest friends.

He swallowed the lump in his throat and denied, "I'm not angry with Hermione. Never."

**"Oh?"** asked Freddy knowingly, **"not even that time she gave your new broom to McGonagall?"**

"That was years ago!" snapped Harry, confident that he could disprove Freddy's claim. "I'm not angry about that anymore - I forgave her for it long ago!"

**"For that maybe,"** agreed Freddy readily. **"But what about something a bit more... recent."**

Harry narrowed his eyes and replied, "Hermione's been a good friend this year. She--"

**"Didn't write to you during summer vacation."**

"Dumbledore and the Order wouldn't let her."

**"She accepted everything the toad bitch did to ya. Said it was your own fault for letting her get to you."**

"What else could she do?"

**"She was made a prefect and you weren't."**

Harry openly scoffed at this last accusation. "You think she had control over that? The professors chose the prefects. Hermione had nothing to do with that."

**"Maybe,"** agreed Freddy. His eyes gleamed as he went in for the kill. **"What she did have something to do with was telling the cops about me and Springwood. You didn't like that."**

"She did what needed to be done," countered Harry, though he could not hide a grimace. "People needed to know and I was too afraid to tell them."

**"Well, how about how she practically blamed you for all those deaths, just 'cause you didn't tell anyone 'bout little ol' me... heh heh... that really pissed you off, didn't it?"**

The chill down Harry's spine returned. "I'm not angry about that," he said weakly.

Freddy bore a shark-like grin. **"Maybe. Maybe not. Either way... you're angry."**

"No, I'm not!" asserted Harry.

**"Of course you're not. You... wait..."** Freddy trailed off, staring into the distance.

"What?" asked Harry. "What is it?"

Slowly, a smile began to form on Freddy's face. **"She's fallen asleep,"** he muttered. **"Hah! She's finally fallen asleep! And - she's - dreaming!"**

"No!"

**"Yes... This is perfect."**

Harry lunged forward, forgetting his wand and grabbing Freddy by the shoulder. "Don't kill her! Don't even try!"

Freddy looked at him with good humour, even as he easily twisted free of Harry's grasp.

**"Kill her?"** he repeated, as if the idea were ludicrous. **"Oh, I'm not gonna kill her! Not right away - after all, I can't play with her all that much if she dies too quickly!"**

As Freddy pushed his way passed Harry and to the front door, the young wizard finally remembered his wand.

"Krueger! No!" he warned, taking aim at Freddy's back.

Seeing that he was being ignored, he fired the first curse that sprang to mind.

*"Reducto!"*

The curse slammed into Freddy's back with everything Harry could put behind it. He may as well have been using a Muggle water pistol for all the difference it made. That at least would have made his opponent wet.

"Krueger!"

Freddy opened the front door and glanced back at Harry, looking over his shoulder. His smirk was cruel, triumphant and vindictive all in one. He cheekily waved the bladed fingers of his knife-hand before stepping out.

**"Toodles!"**

Harry's Slicing Charm, usually used by magical butchers, cut deeply into the door as it closed behind him.

"Freddy, no!" yelled Harry, chasing after him.

He slammed into the front door and desperately pulled and twisted on the doorknob, but it was to no avail. Freddy had locked the door behind him, trapping Harry inside the house.

Harry beat desperately against the door with both hands, but the sealed exit held firm.

"Freddy!"

**-oOo-**

There was something about the Hogwarts library that resonated with Hermione Granger's soul. It was the one place in all the world where she truly felt comfortable. Not her bedroom at home. Not the Gryffindor common room. Not the Burrow. Definitely not Grimmauld Place. Here, in the school's library, she was where she belonged.

Looking round, she contemplated the rows and rows of bookshelves. This was perhaps the only problem she had with the library; it was so large that it was sometimes a little hard to decide where to start.

Now then, what to do, what to do?

"I think I'll read a book," she stated, though still undecided as to which book it might be.

**"Now there's a novel idea."**

Not really paying attention, focused on the library as she was, Hermione was only aware that someone was talking too loudly. Her response was perfectly predictable to anyone that knew her.

"Shh."

Freddy, who was standing behind her and dressed up as a stereotypical librarian, complete with glasses and tweed suit, was both surprised and insulted by her unwitting dismissal.

Taking a moment to mull over her reaction, he then sucked in a deep breath and bellowed, **"SILENCE IN THE LIBRARY!!!"**

The incredible volume of Freddy's yell was enough to rattle the rafters and cause the book stacks to groan and creak as they wobbled in place. Hermione, caught entirely unprepared, fell to the floor with a cry of pain and clamped both hands over her ringing ears.

Freddy moved closer and waited for her to regain her equilibrium. It did not take long before she rolled onto her back and stared up at him. The look of mounting horror on her face, as she realized who he was and what was happening, prompted him to grin and wave down at her.

**"Hello!"**



Hermione swallowed thickly, fully aware that she was now in mortal danger. She had faced such situations before, but this was the first time since that first Halloween that she would be facing one alone.

**“What’s the matter, Hermy?”** asked Freddy. **“Cat got your tongue?”**

“I don’t suppose I could talk you out of trying to kill me?” she finally managed to ask as she cautiously backed away.

Freddy watched as she retreated and nodded amiably, **“Of course you can.”**

Hermione paused in surprise and then caution. It could not be that easy. “I can?”

**“Sure,”** Freddy nodded. **“You can talk me out of *trying* to kill you.”**

The emphasis he placed on the word ‘trying’ seemed important. It did not take Hermione very long to realize that he meant he would kill her without any chance existing for her to escape. He would not try; he would simply do it. For some reason her mind skipped to Star Wars and repeated Yoda’s little mantra; there is no try, even as Freddy stopped simply watching her and began to walk in her direction.

Scrabbling back up onto her feet, Hermione turned and fled quickly into the stacks of the library. This was a place she knew even better than the back of her hand; hopefully she would be able to hide from Freddy amidst the many bookcases until she somehow managed to wake up.

**“This won’t save you, Hermy,”** called Freddy. **“Stay or hide; it makes no difference. In the end it’ll end the same way it always does... I never lose.”**

It did not bother him that he received no reply from the dusty book stacks. That only meant that she was too busy running or too busy hiding to reply. That was fine; he had ways of making people talk.

He followed Hermione deeper into the library.

-oOo-

“Dammit, Freddy, you bastard! I’m not angry with her anymore - d’you hear? I’m not angry with her, so stop! Stop!”

Harry gave the front door a solid kick that sent a bolt of sharp pain shooting up his leg. Unfortunately, the physical approach seemed to be the only hope he had. Magic had proved a complete failure in forcing the door open. Spells to unlock it or even blow it to smithereens had all washed over its dirty white surface to no effect. He had tried conjuring a large mallet to try and bash the door down, but for some reason all his efforts kept producing rubber squeaky mallets instead.

“Buggering hell!” he swore, stepping back and considering the door.

Gritting his teeth, he abandoned the front hall and ran to the kitchen. If he could not leave through the front, then he would escape out the back.

Reaching the back door at a run, Harry literally bounced off of it as it failed to open. Quickly recovering, he gripped the doorknob and pushed as hard as he could. The door held just as firm as the front door had.

“Shite!”

He stepped back and drew his wand. Maybe he would have better luck with magic here. He fired off the first unlocking spell and was greatly surprised when he heard the lock ratchet open.

He almost broke his nose when he again tried to push the door open and found it to be unyielding.

“Dammit! Come on!” he cried in frustration.

His anger changed to momentary confusion and embarrassment when he pulled on the handle and felt the door swing inward. This was odd, he thought. The back door to number four opened out, not in. Pushing this anomaly aside, Harry flung the door open and charged through. He had to get to Hermione before Freddy and had already wasted too much time. He was so preoccupied by thoughts how to accomplish this that he completely failed to check exactly what the back door had opened to.

This time he did break his nose, or at least bloodied it as he slammed face first into a very solid brick wall.

“Sonuvabitch!” he swore, spitting blood from his mouth as he staggered back.

He glared balefully at the bricks as he pressed both hands to his bleeding nose. It was like something out of those cartoons Dudley had so enjoyed watching when they were younger. He immediately knew who had done this.

“Damn you, Freddy, you bastard!” he yelled to the heavens, knowing that the scarred man could hear him regardless of where he was.

Abandoning the back door as a lost cause, he suspected magic would be as useless against the bricks as it had against the front door, Harry considered the option of forcing his way out through the windows. A second glance, however, proved this idea to be just as futile.

“Oh, come on!” he whined, taking in the sight of the newly installed wrought-iron burglar bars that now framed the windows. Freddy had been busy, he thought unhappily, knowing who it was that had been doing so much remodelling to number four.

Cursing, he returned to the entrance hall, kicking the door to his old cupboard under the stairs as he passed. He stood before the front door and stared unhappily at it.

A crackled of static from the living room caught his attention. He recognised that sound; it was the noise made by the Dursleys' telly when it switched on.

Harry immediately closed in upon the front door and began to hit, kick and otherwise pound on it with everything he had. Freddy was starting his show and that meant Hermione's time was already running out.

-oOo-

**"I really gotta thank you, Hermy."**

Freddy was walking slowly down one row, between the library's many book stacks. He was casually scraping his knife-hand along one of the shelves, the sharp blades cutting into the wood with preternatural ease and leaving a trail of wood shavings behind him.

**"Yep, I gotta say it again; thanks,"** Freddy called as he reached the end of the row and turned into the next one. **"If it weren't for you; I'd probably be stuck in another boring ass dream, with nobody to play with - 'cept for Harry, of course. And let me tell you; that idiot barely has anything worth calling an imagination."**

Continuing down the row, Freddy lifted his blades a little higher and started cutting into the spines of the books. He enjoyed how the paper was so easily shredded and made such a nice mess in his wake. It would have been better, he knew, if Hermione had been able to see him causing the destruction of so many books – she would have been wonderfully appalled by it. Unfortunately, their little game of hide-and-seek throughout the library prevented that.

**"Yeah, this is all thanks to you, Hermy,"** he continued. His lips twisted in a nasty grin as he elaborated, **"If you hadn't accused poor little Harry of helping me kill all those kids, he wouldn't have gotten mad atcha and let me out to play with ya."**

He paused to listen, but Hermione made no reply. Resuming his trek, Freddy turned down another row. This one, he noted was the very last, at the far end of the library and as far from the exit into the rest of the school as it was possible to go.

**"You know that's what's happening, right? That whenever somebody pisses Harry off, it opens a door for me to get into their dreams?"** he called, walking until he reached the middle of the stack, where he stopped. **"So, how's it feel – know that you're the one that caused this? That you pretty much sent me an engraved invitation to come visit?"**

He waited, but again received no reply to his taunting commentary. Growing bored, he picked a book of the shelf in front of him. He glanced at the cover and smirked. Shakespeare. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He wondered if it was Hermione or himself that had dreamed it up. After a moment's thought he decided that it was probably the girl, as he had never bothered to read the story - or much of anything else, really.

**"To read, or not to read,"** Freddy pondered theatrically as he leafed through the book's pages. **"That's the question."**

Again he paused for a moment, waiting to see if Hermione had a comment. She remained stubbornly silent, despite his best efforts to provoke a response. He hated it when they were quiet like that. With a thump he closed the book and returned it to its place on the shelf.

Briefly he contemplated the old mainstay of simply changing his position within the dream so that he would appear right behind her. That was always good for a surprised scream, mostly because they always hoped he wouldn't find them. What very few realized was that he *always* knew exactly where they were. It was impossible for him not to. They were the ones creating the dreams, after all. And as the dream's source, he could sense their location with consummate ease.

Hermione was currently at the other end of the library; directly opposite him. She was obviously planning to either wait him out or sneak around him and escape out the exit.

Freddy stared in her direction, ignoring the dozens of book stacks arrayed between them. He thought about maybe animating the books to attack and flush her into his waiting arms, but then he looked the massive bookcase in front of him up and down.

**"Y'know, I never was a big fan of reading,"** he mused, stroking one of the wooden shelves with his blades. **"I always preferred to play games... games like... dominoes..."**

Rearing back, Freddy kicked out with all he had. The book stack remained perfectly and solidly in place, not budging so much as an inch. Then, heralded by a small sprinkle of loosened dust, the stack began to slowly rock back and forth. At first it seemed little more than a tremor, but soon the massive wood structure was swaying nearly a foot either way.

Freddy took a step back, cupped his hands around his mouth and yelled, **"Timber!"**

With that final prompt, the stack toppled over. As expected, it hit the book stack next to it; sending that stack toppling over as well. The effect was very much like a string of dominoes, which was exactly as Freddy intended.

On the other side of the library, hidden behind the last of the stacks, Hermione became aware of a creaking, followed by a series of loud thumps and progressively louder crashes. She froze in place, listening careful and wondering what Freddy was now up to. As the repeated thumps and crashes grew louder and nearer, she glanced around and took stock of her position in case she would need to flee. She was in the middle of the row, with a good twenty feet of bookshelves in front and behind her. Licking her lips, she resumed carefully creeping forward.

A sudden, monstrous crash caused the bookshelf next to her to jerk violent, nearly giving her a heart attack from its suddenness. Even as she turned to look at it, hoping that Freddy had not found her, she realized that the massive wooden structure was moving. She tried to run, but lost precious time having to change her direction and shift her momentum away from the rapidly falling stack. Not really thinking about it and acting purely on instinct, she ducked under the nearby reading table that was positioned between the last book stack and the library wall. She could only hope that the sturdy wooden desk would hold up against the falling stack's weight long enough for her to crawl clear.

Sadly, the toppling book stack's fall was not slowed in the slightest.

"Aaaah!!"

Hermione's scream was just loud enough to be heard over the thunderous crash of the final book stack crushing the reading table into kindling and collapsing to the floor. The sound of her legs, hips and back being broken like twigs was entirely lost amidst the cacophony, further muffled by the noise of hundreds of books being dislodged from their places and also striking the library floor in a veritable rain of paper, parchment and leather.

At the far end of the library, where everything had been set in motion, Freddy balanced easily atop the first of the fallen stacks.

**"Ah – there you are,"** crowed Freddy, clapping his hand together in satisfaction as he spied Hermione's trapped form.

The pain shooting through Hermione was greater than anything she had experienced and left her too shocked to fully realize her position. The only thing she was properly aware of at the moment was that she was in agony. She tried to move, both to relieve the pain and free herself from being pinned under the massive wooden shelves. Unfortunately, she was held fast and the fallen stacks were far too heavy for her to have any hope of moving by herself, not even with magic.

**"This reminds me of the good ol' days!"** crackled Freddy happily. **"The chase, the catch... the slaughter. Good times, good times."**

Slowly, making sure to savour each moment, he began to climb over the fallen stacks, heading towards where Hermione lay trapped.

**"Watch closely, kid,"** he said, addressing the observing Harry, **"you won't wanna miss a second of this."**

-oOo-

Harry slammed his fists against the door. He could already feel that his hands were bruised and some of his fingers either dislocated or broken. He ignored the pain and continued to hammer against the unyielding wood.

**"Watch closely, kid, you won't wanna miss a second of this."**

Hearing Freddy addressing him through the television, Harry rushed into the lounge. The sight displayed on the screen, of Hermione trapped under a fallen bookcase, with Freddy slowly advancing on her, threw Harry into an even more desperate frenzy.

Sprinting back out to the small entrance hall, he shoulder charged the front door. The only sign that his effort accomplished more than dislocating his shoulder was the soft chime of breaking glass.

Harry ignored the pain in his now limp right arm and stared at the door. It seemed utterly impervious, save for a single crack in one of the panes of frosted glass. He was so hysterical at this point that Harry failed to remember that the door at number four had no glass panelling.

"Hermione!" he screamed, ramming into the door again and again, despite the agony it sent shooting through him.

So distracted by Hermione's cries through the telly, he nearly missed the soft crack of the glass fracturing a second time, this time enough that a sliver of glass fell loose. It was only chance that he fell to the floor and managed to slice open the palm of his left hand upon that tiny sliver.

This pain, totally separate from the agony of his shoulder, caused him to pause for a second.

Half collapsed in the entrance, he stared at his bleeding hand. It was a tiny and shallow injury, hardly worth bothering about. Harry's eyes were fixed upon the shard of glass jammed into his flesh. He reached up, as best he could with a dislocated shoulder, and pulled the glass out. He held it up to the light and stared at it in wonder.

Another scream from the television spurred him back into motion.

Staggering to his feet, Harry stumbled unsteadily into the living room. With a strange sense of calm, underlain with urgency, he bypassed the television and approached the large French windows that looked out on the night-time street. He stared at the glass windows for a moment before turning to pick up one of the ashtrays scattered about the room. He looked at it and hefted it in his hand. It was carved stone and quite heavy. He hurled it with all his might at the window in front of him and smiled as the glass shattered impressively.

A few minutes ago the solid burglar bars that continued to bar his path would have left him feeling despondent, but not now. His plan was no longer to escape the house and rescue Hermione.

Stepping up to the now broken window, he searched the floor for what he needed. It did not take long for him to find it. It was a large shard; as wide as his hand and nearly as long as his forearm. Dropping to his knees, Harry scooped it up, uncaring of how its sharp edges cut into his palm.

He licked his lips and glanced back to the television. On it he could see that Freddy was almost upon Hermione, only a few short steps from her trapped form.

"Okay, time to wake up," Harry whispered to himself.

He shifted the piece of broken glass and plunged its point into his right thigh.

“AAAAHH!! Fuck!”

Pulling his impromptu blade out of his leg, Harry ignored the blood and pain. He immediately stabbed the glass shard into his left thigh.

“Aaah! Wake up, dammit! Wake up!”

He pulled the shard back out, tightening his grip as the blood made his fingers slippery. He looked to the television again, seeing that Freddy was almost there.

His free hand scrabbled blindly about the floor until it found another largish shard of glass. Now able to cut with both hands at once, Harry began stabbing himself again and again in a desperate bid to force himself awake.

“Either wake up or die, Potter!” he yelled to himself, slashing at his arms, legs and torso, “Hurry up and stop dreaming! Wake up, damn you! Wake the hell up!”

**-oOo-**

Poppy Pomfrey had always been a cautious Healer. It paid to be a cautious Healer, especially when dealing with children.

It was solely due to her cautious nature that she had placed a wide array of Monitoring Charms around her current patient’s bed. She did not want a repeat of what had happened after arriving at Grimmauld Place. While she could do nothing to stop Harry’s dreams and even less to protect him in them, she could at least make sure that he would not go unwatched while sleeping.

The moment large, deep and messy lacerations started to appear out of nowhere, Pomfrey’s Monitoring Charms went off like a Weasley twins’ firework. Anyone in the house who had not already been awake was roused from their slumber by a blaring alarm that succeeded in waking up the neighbours as well, despite the surrounding Fidelius Charm.

The situation was not aided by the fact that Pomfrey had neglected to mention that she would be setting up her Monitoring Charms and their accompanying alarms. As such, a significant number of the house’s occupants reached the erroneous conclusion that they were under attack. More than a few curses and hexes were fired before anyone realized what was really going on.

“Mr Potter! Something’s happening to Mr Potter!” yelled Pomfrey as she dashed out of her room. She did not bother putting a dressing gown over her nightdress. “Quickly - get to Harry’s room!”

The hallways were chaotic at the moment, making it difficult to move quickly. A clear path between the nurse and her destination only appeared when Sirius Black moved in front of her and charged forward like a rampaging bull. He knocked Hestia Jones flying and literally ran over Ron Weasley.

“Out of the way!” commanded Pomfrey, pushing him aside as he paused in the doorway.

“Morgana’s sagging tits!” Sirius exclaimed, as he took in the sight of his godson.

“Shit,” Pomfrey muttered, echoing his sentiment.

“What’s going on? What’s wrong?” asked Molly Weasley, peaking into the room. She was pulled back by Arthur, who knew to let Pomfrey work without distraction.

“That Krueger bastard must have him,” said Sirius grimly as he sat on Harry’s bed, opposite from where Pomfrey was already frantically working.

“Dammit, the cuts are forming faster than I can heal them!”

“Isn’t there anything you can do?”

“I’m already doing it, Black, so shut up!”

“Is there anything / can do?”

“Yes - shut up!”

“Poppy, what’s going on?” asked McGonagall as she entered the room.

“Not now, Minerva!” she snapped.

“Dammit, how do we stop this?” demanded Sirius, clamping both hands over a large gash that suddenly appeared across Harry’s chest.

“He’s being attacked in his dream,” noted Pomfrey, tilting Harry’s head back and pouring a blood replenishing potion down his throat. It was risky, doing this while he was still suffering from the veritaserum poisoning, but he was losing too much blood for her not to.

“Then why don’t you just wake him up?”

The innocent question caused everyone to pause. They looked to the doorway, where Ron was standing and watching as they tried to save his best

friend's life.

"Wake him up?" repeated Sirius dully. The idea had just not occurred to him.

With a course of action now available to him, fire bloomed in Sirius' eyes as he drew his wand. Alongside him Professor McGonagall did the same, while Pomfrey concentrated instead on trying to close the multiplying wounds.

*"Enervate! Enervate!! ENERVATE!!!"*

-oOo-

"Help! Please, somebody help!"

Freddy smiled as he listened to Hermione's frantic cries for help. He was enjoying the sound of her fear so much that he slowed his approach so that he could take the time to savour it.

**"One, two, I'm coming for you..."** he sang, kicking a fallen book out of his way.

Hermione froze and stared up at him. He was now standing over her, having finally reached her position despite his slow approach from over the fallen stacks. As he had when she first saw him, Freddy smiled and offered her another little wave.

**"Hello,"** he greeted politely.

Following her encounter with the mountain troll in the bathroom during her first year, Hermione had sworn that she would never again act like the stereotypical damsel in distress that Hollywood had such a fascination for. She would not, she had resolved, devolve into a state of utter uselessness whilst screaming hysterically. Of course, all rules will have the odd exception and having a the terrifying form of Freddy Krueger looming over her proved to be just that.

She started screaming, not for help, but screams of pure hysteria.

Freddy was delighted.

**"Oh, Hermy,"** he moaned with pleasure, **"you do sing the sweetest tunes."**

Any attempt at rational thought completely fled Hermione at this point, even as Freddy stepped away and began to circle round her. He easily ignored her continued screams; they were something he was long since used to, and began to ponder the important question as to what he should do to his latest victim now that he had caught her. At this point he was, mostly due to their surroundings, contemplating doing something with the many, many books that lay scattered about. A bonfire seemed like the obvious solution, but he had already killed Umbridge and Dudley by similar methods and thus wanted to try something else. Preferably something that involved cutting.

He was busy considering the possibility of using the books to create a maelstrom of razor-sharp paper to cut Hermione into ribbons when a sudden drop in the light caught his attention. He paused to look around. There were several windows scattered about the library and through them he could see...nothing? Freddy blinked in confusion. He was supposed to be seeing the forest and mountains surrounding the school; as that was the setting Hermione had dreamed up.

Then the entire room seemed to tremble, though it was not a physical thing. Freddy cursed.

Harry was waking up.

**"Damn it, Potter! Why the hell can't you stay asleep like a good boy?"** Freddy yelled in frustration. He abruptly calmed down in sudden acceptance. **"Ah, well... no use crying over spilt blood. Better make this quick."**

No longer having the option of drawing out his kill, Freddy strode back to Hermione with a few quick steps.

Even as she continued her struggles to pull free, he fell on her like the figurative lion moving to maul his prey.

Her screams of pain and terror abruptly cut off.

-oOo-

His eyes popped wide open and he jerked upright with such force that he almost literally catapulted himself off the bed and onto the floor. Whether it was a result of the multiple Waking Charms or sheer desperation to escape his dreams, no-one could be sure.

Suffice to say, however, Harry Potter made the transition from sleep to wakefulness in a remarkably short amount of time.

It was sheer luck that he missed cracking skulls with Madam Pomfrey, who had been leaning over him. As it was, the matron immediately grabbed him by the shoulders and tried to force him to lie back down. "Harry! Calm down, Harry, calm down!" she yelled, trying to get his attention. "It's okay - you're awake! He can't hurt you anymore; you're awake!"

"Harry!" called Sirius, leaning his own weight to help force Harry back down.

**"HERMIONE!"**

Once he had regained breath, Harry loosed a cry that was heard throughout the house and almost sent Sirius and Pomfrey reeling back. They managed to ignore the ringing of their ears, however, and continued to try and force Harry to lie down.

"Harry! Calm down!" yelled Sirius. "It's all right! It's over! You're awake! You're awake!"

"Mr Potter, control yourself," added Professor McGonagall, a Petrifying Spell on her lips if Harry did not soon do as he was told. While she would not risk Stunning him, thereby sending him back into Freddy's clutches, she would do whatever was necessary to prevent him from aggravating his already serious injuries.

"HERMIONE!!" screamed Harry, his struggles against Sirius and Pomfrey growing more frantic.

"Hermione's fine, Harry! She's fine!" Sirius told him. "Just lie down and I'll go get her for you!"

"HE HAS HER!! HE HAS HER!!" Harry shrieked, not letting up for a second. He managed to pull his relatively uninjured left arm free of Madam Pomfrey's grasp and punctuated his cry with a short hook into Sirius' jaw.

"Gah!" exclaimed Sirius as he took a step back, surprised and shocked by the blow.

Harry immediately capitalised on this brief moment of unguarded freedom. He kicked out with his leg and managed to knock Pomfrey back as he rolled over and made a clumsy jump out of the bed. Professor McGonagall's Petrifying Spell missed by an inch, as his badly mauled legs proved unable to fully support him.

"Mr Potter! Harry!" shouted McGonagall.

"He has her, Professor, he has her - he has Hermione," repeated Harry, a little calmer now that he was moving but still desperate.

"Ms Granger?" repeated McGonagall, only now realizing why Harry was fighting them so stubbornly.

Forcing his legs to work, despite the deep stab wounds he had inflicted upon them, Harry pushed passed the shocked professor. He did not get far, however, as a recovered Sirius grabbed him by the shoulders. "Harry! Calm down! It was just a nightmare - Hermione's fine!" he insisted, trying to pull Harry back to the bed. "Just lie down and let Poppy do her stuff and I'll go fetch Hermione for you!"

"I'll get her now," offered Ron, who was standing in the doorway with his mother and father.

A high pitched scream, unmistakably female, rang out through the house. Everyone paused as they recognised the sound of Ginny screaming in what had to be terror. The only person not frozen into inaction was Harry, who tore free of Sirius' grasp and charged out of the bedroom. For the second time that night Ron found himself being literally run over, as Harry shouldered his way passed the small crowd that had gathered outside his room.

"Help! Somebody help! Hermione's been attacked!" screamed Ginny, running out of the girls' bedroom. Even in the badly lit hallway, it was obvious that her hands and the front of her nightdress were stained red with blood. "Help her, please! She's bleeding!"

Harry didn't hear a word she said, or if he did he ignored them entirely. It was unimportant; after all, as he already knew everything she was trying to tell them.

-oOo-

If the door to the girls' bedroom were not already open, Harry would have likely torn it off its hinges upon his arrival.

"Hermione!" he screamed frantically, charging into the room with a swirl of magic surrounding him.

Tonks and Hestia, who had been summoned by Ginny's screams and arrived seconds earlier, tried to prevent him from approaching the bloodied figure stretched out on the room's second bed. Harry's wild magic lifted the two Aurors into the air and flung them across the room like rag dolls.

"Hermione!" exclaimed Harry as he climbed onto the bed and settled next to her. He turned to the room's entrance and yelled, "Madam Pomfrey!"

The Hogwarts nurse, while not quite as fleet of foot as Harry, had still been chasing hard on his heels. She came charging into the bedroom even as Harry drew breath for a second shout.

"Shit," she declared, taking in the situation with a glance.

Hurrying to where Harry was sitting, Hermione cradled in his arms, she had her wand out and casting even as she shoved him out of the way and out of the bed, onto the floor.

The room was soon swarming with witches and wizards, though Professor McGonagall quickly cleared out those that could do nothing to help. In the end, only herself, Pomfrey, Hestia and Sirius remained. Tonks and Molly made frequent visits as Pomfrey sent them back and forth for the various potions she needed.

Everyone, save Sirius, seemed content to leave Harry sitting on the floor. Unspoken mutual agreement was that Hermione currently needed their attention more than he did.

"Harry," said Sirius, squatting down next to him.

Harry ignored him entirely, his own dazed attention focused solely on the frantic activity surrounding Hermione's bed.

"Harry," Sirius called a second time. He grabbed him by the shoulder and gave him a gently shake.

It took a slightly firmer shake before Harry properly noticed him. Looking away from Hermione for the first time, he stared blankly at his godfather.

"Are you all right?" asked Sirius worriedly.

Harry nodded dumbly and lied, "I'm fine."

The fact that Harry was covered in nearly as much blood as Hermione, almost all of it his own, told an entirely different story. It was the completely lost expression on his face that really drove the point home. Sirius cast an eye about and quickly latched onto Ron and Ginny, who were watching from the doorway. Molly was too busy helping Pomfrey, otherwise she would have shooed them off to the far side of the house.

"You two," he ordered, "Get in here - quickly."

The two redheads nervously entered the room, making sure to stay out of the way. Both tried to avoid looking at Hermione's bed and the frenetic activity surrounding it.

"Harry? Harry," Sirius called, gripping the boy by the shoulders and forcefully turning him away from Hermione and towards his other friends. He had a hard time ignoring the many injuries still dotted around his body.

Looking at Ron and Ginny, he motioned them to Harry as he stepped back and drew his wand. He was no certified Healer, but he knew enough spells to close up minor wounds. He would do what he could until Pomfrey was finished with Hermione and could turn her eye back to Harry.

Ron and Ginny approached the friend and knelt down on the floor next to him. Neither was able to hide their reaction to his current condition. They had both seen Harry battered and bruised before, especially after his last encounter with Freddy, but this was beyond anything they had witnessed.

"Harry..." began Ron.

"It's my fault," Harry cut him off.

"What? No, you didn't--"

"It's all my fault," repeated Harry, speaking mostly to himself. "I let him in, I got angry with her and that let him in... it's my fault..."

Sirius was too busy casting healing spells to say anything, but a low growl began to rumble in his throat. He did not like the sound of this.

"You can't believe that, Harry," whispered Ginny, her freckles standing out in stark contrast to her pale skin. "This isn't your fault."

"Yeah," agreed Ron. "There's nothing you could have done."

Harry stared at them, unable to speak as he began to cry. With his throat constricted and his breath coming in shorter and shorter bursts, all he could manage was to shake his head in denial. While he could not say the words out loud, his mind was more than willing to repeatedly state that this was all his fault.

Ignoring the pain of his many self-inflicted wounds was easy; his mind was currently so numb that he literally did not feel them - just as he could hardly feel Ron and Ginny's arms as they held him in their arms and tried to comfort him as he broke down.

**TBC...**





# We Are Nothing

## Part X

**Title:** We Are Nothing

**Author:** Ruskbyte

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**Summary:** Snape's Occlumency lessons have shattered the last defences of Harry's mind. Now, unprotected, his dreams have become home to a nightmare other than Voldemort. A nightmare that has taken on a life of its own.

"We are nothing; less than nothing and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence, and a name." - Charles Lamb, *Essays of Elia* , *Dream Children*

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### Part X

#### He who walks in two worlds

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Harry sat stoically in his bed, watching as Madam Pomfrey tended to her other patient. It was only the Calming Draft he had been given that kept him from bothering her.

The Healer finally finished with whatever she was doing and stepped away, allowing him to look upon Hermione's bandaged countenance without obstruction.

In the aftermath of Freddy's brutal attack, the badly injured witch had been moved into Harry's bedroom, which was now serving as a makeshift infirmary.

"How is she," he rasped, his voice still thick from his earlier tears.

Madam Pomfrey paused before answering.

Harry knew from this hesitation that it must be bad, but needed to know.

"Please," he pleaded.

"She has a lot of deep lacerations," Pomfrey slowly reported. "Mostly on the torso and a few on the arms. I've treated them well enough; so they will heal up in the next day or two. Thankfully there shouldn't be much scarring and what little there is will eventually fade away."

She moved to Harry's bedside and began to fuss over him instead. The severity of Hermione's injuries had required her to be the focus of Pomfrey's attention for the last few hours. Harry's wounds had been tended to by the various other adults that had been present; principally Sirius with a little help from Professor McGonagall.

Now that things had finally calmed down, Pomfrey was taking the opportunity to give him a proper check-up. Common healing charms and simple bandages were good enough for small things, but she knew her patient already had enough scars without needlessly having to add any more.

"What else?" asked Harry, knowing there was more there was more going on than some simple cuts, no matter how they had been inflicted.

Pomfrey pursed her lips, not really wanting to answer.

"Both her legs are broken," she finally explained. "Her hips are damaged, though those fractures are less severe. The biggest problem is her back..."

"Her back?" Harry repeated, not liking how she had trailed off. The broken bones, he knew, were from when Freddy had toppled the bookcases on her.

"I'm sorry, Harry, but her back has been broken as well," Pomfrey confessed.

Harry blanched. He swallowed repeatedly, forcing down the bile that threatened to rise.

"Is she... will she..."

Understanding his difficulty in asking the question, Pomfrey supplied an answer. She was professional enough not to let a grimace show on her

face. "There is possibly some injury to the spine, but," she held up a hand to stall his reaction, "*but* , at this point it's much too soon to tell how bad it really is."

Seeing how Harry was swaying unsteadily, Pomfrey gave him the only good news she could.

"There is a very good chance that the damage isn't that bad... and a good potions regime will probably fix things up as good as new."

This did little to comfort Harry, or to ease his guilt, but it did succeed in calming him down.

Harry had to shift slightly to look past Pomfrey, who was now blocking his view of Hermione. He was aware that the nurse had taken out her wand and was waving it about him. He ignored her, preferring to concentrate his attention solely on the small and incredibly vulnerable looking figure of his friend. A sudden surge of anger ran through him at the fact that the Healer was worrying about his seemingly minor by comparison injuries when she could still be focusing her attention and skills on Hermione.

Then the memory of exactly why Hermione was in such a state hit him and Harry ruthlessly clamped down on his anger and snuffed it out. He replaced that irrational resentment with a not much better, but definitely safer, sense of fear. Fearing for Hermione's life and future was much safer than getting angry at Madam Pomfrey for no good reason.

At least that way there was much less chance of Freddy going on a rampage and killing the school nurse.

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"Harry, my dear boy."

Harry opened his eyes and stared at his latest visitor. While it was much too dangerous to sleep, he found the darkness soothing. In its black embrace he could pretend, if only for a little while, that the reality of his situation was different. He could pretend that everyone was still alive and that he had played no part at all in their deaths. Most of all, he could pretend not to see Hermione lying motionless in the bed next to him.

His wishful thinking, however, had just been disturbed by a very familiar voice.

"Dumbledore," he said tonelessly, instantly recognising the man sitting by his bedside.

"It is good to see you again, Harry," said the old wizard.

Harry might once have felt something similar, but was currently too tired to care. All he could be bothered to do was observe a rather obvious fact. "You're back."

"Yes," agreed Dumbledore with a ghost of a smile. "Apparently the situation with this 'Dream Killer' is sufficiently dire that the Minister no longer considers me to be a threat to his position. Or at least, no longer the greatest threat. Of course, the efforts of Madam Bones have been a great help, as too was the revelation that Voldemort has indeed returned. I have already been granted a full pardon, provided I help, 'fix things'."

"Fucking hypocrite."

If the newly reinstated headmaster was offended by Harry's summation, he gave no indication of it. Instead he reached out to gently pat him on the shoulder. "You will find a great many people in perfect agreement with you," he said.

"They're hypocrites as well," asserted Harry acerbically.

The hand on his shoulder fell away as Dumbledore retreated with a solemn expression on his aged face. He sighed deeply before speaking. "I wish I could disagree with your assessment, but I cannot," he said. "Unfortunately, as you are well aware, public opinion is a fickle thing."

"Fucking idiots," Harry summed up with a grumble.

"You seem to have developed a bit of a blue streak," observed Dumbledore, though there was no rebuke in his voice. Again, he offered the faintest of smiles. "You best be careful around Molly Weasley, lest she wash your mouth out with some soap."

"Blame it on my 'house guest'," sniped Harry.

"Ah yes, Mr. Krueger," mused Dumbledore thoughtfully.

"It's all your fault, you know," Harry declared, some life entering his voice and posture.

"I beg your pardon?" Dumbledore asked. He blinked in astonishment at the accusation. Over the years he had become accustomed to being blamed for a great many things. He failed, however, to see how he could be blamed for events that had transpired after he had been driven from Hogwarts and had been nowhere near the castle at the time.

Harry fixed him with a flat, but accusing stare that sent a shiver down his spine.

"Snape," he said simply.

"Professor Snape, Harry," corrected the old wizard, with just a hint of rebuke. One should always pay the proper respect for the dead, after all. At the same time, Dumbledore had to wonder why one of Freddy Krueger's only two adult victims, thus far, had any bearing on circumstances.

Professor Fucking-Asshole-That-I'm-Actually-Glad-Is-Dead," rejoined Harry with a vicious snap.

Dumbledore was appalled. "How could you say such a thing?"

Harry glared at him. "Easily," he asserted. "Your, oh so dear friend Snivellous didn't bother teaching me Occlumency. Not when he had the chance to humiliate and hurt me instead."

"I'm sorry?" asked Dumbledore, a horrible knot beginning to form in his stomach.

"Bastard destroyed all my shields. All of them. Opened up my mind for Freddy to get in my dreams," explained Harry bitterly. He fixed the headmaster with a look of pure loathing. "You're the fool that let him do it - that makes it all - your - fucking - fault!"

Dumbledore closed his eyes and cursed his stupidity. Most especially he cursed his sometimes naïve faith in people. He had known full well how acrimonious Harry and Severus' relationship was. Hardly the proper foundation for what was needed to properly teach and learn the mind arts. Yet, as always, he had hoped his fellow wizards would rise above their differences and work against their common enemy. It was for the greater good, after all.

Instead... this had happened.

"Ah," was all he could manage.

Harry was quite correct. He had indeed played a part in causing all this.

"Yeah," agreed Harry acerbically as he repeated, "Ah."

-oOo-

The bulk of Grimmauld Place's permanent residents were gathered in the sitting room, talking softly about anything they could think of that would take their minds off the dreadful events of the previous night. Things had been bad enough in the dark, but the harsh light of day had thus far proven to be no better.

Muted conversation drew to a halt as Dumbledore returned from his visit with Harry. It did not take much skill to see that his already sombre mood had grown more pensive. Clearly his talk with the Boy-Who-Lived had not gone as well as he had hoped.

"Albus?" called Professor McGonagall.

Dumbledore visibly shook himself free of his thoughts and turned to his deputy. "Ah, Minerva."

"Are you all right?" she asked.

"As well as can be expected, given the circumstances," he replied. "Unfortunately, it seems there is little I can do here to help."

"How's Harry?" asked Sirius expectantly.

"And Hermione," added Remus.

"Poppy has done her usual excellent work. Both children are well on the way to recovering from their injuries," Dumbledore reported. "Now, if you will excuse me, I am needed at the Ministry - the Unspeakables are planning an exorcising ritual in the hopes either destroying or banishing the 'Dream Killer'. I have been asked to assist."

"When will you be back?" asked Molly.

"Late this evening - certainly after dinner."

"I'll keep something left over for you then."

Giving his thanks and saying his farewells, the old headmaster departed through the floo. There was a long moment of awkward silence as everyone present stood and stared at each other. Most of their thoughts were centred on Dumbledore's last statement and the hope that the Unspeakables would succeed. Eventually the various conversations that had paused now resumed, though they remained hushed and subdued.

It was a short time later, as he was looking to see if Tonks had finished with her late breakfast, that Remus noticed a pale face peaking cautiously round the sitting room doorframe. The messy mop of black hair was instantly recognisable.

He nudged Sirius, drawing his friend's attention to where Harry was hiding.

Sirius was about to rise and start berating his godson for being out of bed and not resting, when Harry motioned for the two older wizards to join him. His posture suggested that he did not want anyone else to know he was there.

The two Marauders exchanged a glance and quickly made their excuses.

"Hey, kiddo," greeted Sirius quietly. "You all right?"

Harry stared at him.

Sirius winced and nodded in understanding. "Yeah, you're right; stupid question."

"I need to talk to you," said Harry, leading them back up the stairs.

The three crept surreptitiously along the hallway, stopping only briefly to collect a very quiet Ron from his room. The now four strong group slipped into the infirmary bedroom. Feeling the strain of his exertions, Harry returned to his bed and sat down.

"What's this all about, Harry?" asked Remus. "If you wanted to speak with us, you only had to tell Poppy to call us up here."

Harry stared at the three of them. "I don't want anyone else to know what I'm planning."

"Planning?" repeated Ron.

"To kill Krueger," Harry elaborated.

"You don't have to do anything, Harry," announced Sirius. "Dumbledore and the Unspeakables--"

"Are wasting their time," Harry interrupted. "He told me what they're going to do. It won't work."

"You don't know that, Harry," replied Remus. "The Department of Mysteries has a lot of experience with the sort of thing. I'm sure they'll be able to get rid of this madman. You won't have to do anything."

Harry glared hotly at him. "I think I know a little more about what Freddy's capable of than a bunch of Ministry bureaucrats that never leave their department!"

There was an uncomfortable silence in the wake of Harry's sharp retort. While the two adults tried to find the words to refute Harry's claims, it was Ron that first spoke up.

"This plan of yours is going to scare the hell out of me isn't it?"

"You'd have a better time going to dinner with Aragog," replied Harry honestly.

"Oh, joy."

Ignoring his friend's pessimism, Harry rose for his bed and crossed the room to his trunk. It had barely been opened during their time at Grimmauld Place.

"I want to show you something," he told them as he unlocked the trunk and opened it.

"What?" asked Sirius, his curiosity momentarily overriding his displeasure at Harry's earlier words.

Instead of answering, Harry began to sift through the contents of the trunk. Moving piles of folded clothes and some textbooks, he dug his way down to the bottom of the trunk.

"Harry?" prompted Sirius.

Finally finding what he was looking for, what he had hidden away one morning weeks earlier, Harry closed his trunk and turned back to face his three companions. In his hands he held a dirty and worn red and green banded sweater, which he obligingly held up for their inspection.

"A sweater?" asked Remus.

"A dirty sweater," observed Sirius. "I think my old prison robes were cleaner than this thing."

Harry glared at them both. "Shut and up be serious, will you." He immediately held up a hand to halt Sirius' expected reply. "Actually... just shut up."

Sirius closed his mouth with a click.

"Why are you showing us your dirty laundry?" asked Ron.

"This isn't mine," replied Harry, throwing the sweater across to the redhead.

"It's not? Then who's is it?" asked Ron, turning the sweater over in his hands.

Harry gave him a look and asked, "Who do you think?"

"That's the Dream Killer's sweater?" asked Remus, moving across to pluck the item out of Ron's hands.

"Yes," confirmed Harry.

"But I thought he lived in people's dreams?" asked Sirius, also moving to examine the article of clothing.

"He does."

"Then how...?"

Harry reclaimed the sweater and sat back down on his bed. Standing and moving around so much was tiring him out.

"I don't know how it works," he explained, "but this sweater proves it; you can bring things from Freddy's dream world into the real world."

"Interesting," murmured Remus.

"And important," said Harry.

"Why?" asked Ron and Sirius.

"Because if I can bring his sweater into the real world," Harry suggested, "then I might be able to bring *him* here as well."

Silence greeted that pronouncement. Then, slowly, the idea began to percolate.

"Are you out of you mind?!" demanded Ron and Sirius in chorus.

By this point Harry was not sure enough of his sleep deprived sanity to indicate a negative.

"Harry, why would you want to do that?" asked Remus, trying to remain calm.

"Freddy lives in dreams," explained Harry.

"Yes; and I think it's a good idea for him to stay there!" exclaimed Sirius.

Harry shook his head. "He's too strong there. He can shrug off Killing Curses like they were raindrops!"

"Then we sure as hell don't want him out and about in the real world!"

"But he'll be weaker here!"

"What d'you mean?" asked Ron.

Harry struggled to explained, "He's so strong in the dreams because he can control them - he can make it so nothing can hurt him... but only in the dream!"

"So you think he would be vulnerable here, in the real world, where he can't make himself immune to our spells," concluded Remus, realizing what Harry was trying to say.

"Exactly."

Sirius and Remus sat back in their chairs, mulling over this little nugget. Ron, who had been left without a chair to sit in, nervously paced back and forth.

"It just might work," mused Sirius thoughtfully.

"Damn risky though," cautioned Remus.

"Which is why I want you three to keep an eye on me," explained Harry.

"Oh, hell no!"

"Shut up and listen to me!"

Sirius reluctantly sat down, though the thunderous look on his face betrayed his displeasure. He crossed his arms expectantly and declared, "Fine. I'm listening. Nothing more."

Harry sighed. He knew he was going to face a lot of opposition to his plan. Having spent more than a decade in Azkaban, Sirius was not exactly right in the head and was insanely overprotective of his godson. Normally Harry would have appreciated such devotion, but at the moment it was his greatest hurdle, followed by Remus' calm and logical arguments.

"The Unspeakables won't be able to do anything to Krueger because he doesn't just live in dreams," explained Harry softly. "He's living in *my* dreams. With everyone else, he's only visiting their dreams. In the end, he always comes back to mine."

"Because Snape damaged your mind's natural occlumency barriers," concluded Remus, following Harry's reasoning.

"I'd kill the bastard myself if he wasn't already dead," grumbled Sirius.

Nobody knew that it was Harry's anger that allowed Freddy to enter the dreams others. So far as everyone else was concerned, his choice of victims thus far was entirely random. Unfortunately, Harry had a feeling this secret would soon be revealed, which was the only reason he mentioned as much as he had to orchestrate his plan.

"The only way to get to Krueger is to go into my dreams," Harry doggedly continued. "And the only way to kill him is to bring him out of my dreams."

"So, what?" asked Ron. "We wait for you to fall asleep and then? You grab this lunatic and then what?"

"And then you're going to force a dose of Waking Potion down my throat when I give the signal," stated Harry with more calm than he was feeling.

"And how're you going to do that?" demanded Ron. "Last night you had to hack yourself half to death before Sirius there could wake you up - do you really think Krueger is going to let you do that again and just stand there waiting for it?"

"You're also forgetting that you're still suffering the after-effects of veritaserum poisoning," Remus pointed out. "Taking a Waking Potion will probably make your condition worse."

"That's a risk I'm willing to take, Professor," replied Harry. He turned to address Ron's concerns. "I won't have to cut myself - at least not so much." He held up the pocketknife Sirius had given him for Christmas. "When I've got hold of Krueger I'll stab myself with this. That'll be the signal for you to feed me the potion."

Ron stared at him. "Maybe we should wait for Hermione to wake up," he finally said. "Her plans are a lot better than yours."

Harry offered him a weak smile and agreed, "Yeah, they are. And if you have a better idea..."

"Damn right we have a better idea!" exploded Sirius, leaping to his feet.

"What?" asked Harry.

"Teach you occlumency properly, for one," Sirius insisted. "With the proper shields, Krueger won't be able to get in your dreams like he does."

"None of the others had broken shields," countered Harry. "He got into their dreams easily enough - he just couldn't stay."

"Which sounds like a bloody fine idea to me!"

"And because he couldn't stay long; he killed them all," Harry concluded.

Sirius stared at him. Slowly he seemed to deflate and collapsed bonelessly back into his chair.

"Bugger."

"There's also the slight problem that learning occlumency will take time," Harry continued. "Rebuilding my natural shields and adding new ones on top of that would take weeks - months."

"During which Krueger will be killing his way through all the children in Britain," finished Remus.

"Yeah," confirmed Harry. "Like it or not, my plan is the only one we have."

"Bugger."

Harry looked closely at his godfather. While Sirius had seemingly given up arguing, it was obvious that he was not pleased with the situation.

"Well?"

Sirius sighed and ran a hand over his face. "Fine," he growled. "We'll try it."

Remus looked incredulously at his old friend, "Sirius?"

"Like it or not, Moony, he's right," Sirius admitted unhappily. "The only thing we can do now is help him before he does something even stupider - like trying this insane plan of his on his own!"

Dropping his head into his hands, this time it was Remus that swore. "Bugger."

"You aren't honestly be thinking of going along with this, are you?" demanded Ron in disbelief.

"Like Harry said; do you have a better idea?" retorted Sirius tiredly.

Ron's face flushed such a deep shade of red that Harry was almost worried that the redhead might suffer an aneurysm or something similar. But in the end, even Ron had to admit that Harry's plan did seem like their best chance of putting an end to Freddy's rampage. Like Sirius, he was very unhappy to admit as much and spent most of the next half-hour letting the other three know it. Had his mother been present or managed to overhear him, his choice of words would have resulted in a thorough scrubbing out of his mouth with some soap.

Finally, the impromptu planning session broke up. Ron, Sirius and Remus slipped out of the infirmary to attend lunch in the kitchen, so as to prevent anyone from coming looking for them once things got started. It would undoubtedly be a right balls up if they were interrupted in the middle of something precarious. Once lunch was over, the four would set things in motion.

"I don't like this, Harry, I really don't like it," Ron declared as he left the room, not waiting for a reply.

"Yeah," Harry admitted, speaking out to the nearly empty room, "I don't either."

Trying to ignore the cold pit of anxiety in his stomach, Harry turned his attention back to Hermione. He resumed his silent vigil.

As had been agreed during their short planning session, the group reassembled in the infirmary bedroom a little after lunch. This was a suggestion by Remus, based on the idea that doing this during daylight hours would weaken Freddy further. It also had the added bonus of limiting the number of potential victims if things should go awry, being that most people were awake during the day. Harry had chided himself for not coming up with that idea himself. While he would have still been at Freddy's nonexistent mercy, at least everyone else would have been safe.

"Wotcher, Harry. What's this I hear about you going crazy and trying to kill yourself?"

Harry stared at Tonks for a second before turning an accusing eye to Sirius and Remus.

"Complain if you like, Harry, but four wands are better than three. Even you can't argue about that," said Sirius.

"And the part about me committing suicide?" asked Harry unhappily.

"Oh, don't blame these three for that," announced Tonks with a grin. She drew her wand and twirled it like a baton, her pink hair shifting through several colours before settling on an iridescent violet. "I came up with that all myself after hearing about this crazy plan of yours."

"Well, when everything else fails the only options left are usually the crazy ones," Harry defended. "In fact, you'd be surprised how often it actually works."

"Oh, you're preaching to the choir here, luv," said Tonks.

"I still think we should wait for Dumbledore," said Remus.

Harry vigorously shook his head. "No. He'd never let us do this."

"And that might not be a bad thing," interjected Ron. "This entire plan of yours is insane!"

Harry ignored his friend's outburst and instead asked of Remus, "Do you have the Sleeping Potion?"

Remus nodded and held up a small bottle filled with a smoky blue potion. "Mother's Rest," he announced. "It's actually for nursing mothers who need to rest, but not too deeply in case their baby needs something. It's also fairly weak, so hopefully won't put too much on your system."

"Thanks, Remus," said Harry, accepting the potion as it was handed to him.

"So, how's this going to work?" asked Sirius.

"As soon as I find Krueger I'll give the signal," Harry explained. "Hopefully he'll be too distracted to notice."

"Harry, this is insane," repeated Ron insistently.

"It's better than sitting around doing nothing."

"Have you forgotten what Krueger can do to you? Have you forgotten what Pomfrey said?" demanded Ron. "If Krueger doesn't kill you; these potions just might finish the job!"

Harry rounded on his friend and hissed, "Well, I'd rather die this way than be killed by the Ministry!"

"What?"

Heaving a deep and tired sigh, Harry explained, "Freddy is living in *my* dreams, Ron. Not anyone else's - *mine*."

"So?" asked Ron, not seeing Harry's point.

"So, sooner or later someone is going to realize that the easiest way to get rid of him; is to get rid of *me*."

Ron spent a second thinking that through. He did not like the conclusion he quickly reached.

"Aw crap."

"Yeah."

It was Sirius who spoke up next; trying to keep them focused and not too morbid. "All right," he declared with a clap of his hands, "Let's get started."

Harry nodded and, much to Tonks' surprise, started to remove his clothes.

"Um?" she glanced at Remus, seeking an answer.

"He's going to strip down to his boxers," Remus explained. "That way we'll be able to see when he cuts himself and not risk missing it because of his clothes."

"That's a relief," she muttered.

Ignoring the brief explanation and trying not to blush as Tonks looked him up and down, Harry continued to strip. Having removed his shirt and trousers, he sat down on his bed. He almost threw back the covers and climbed in, but remembered that he wanted the observers to have an unfettered view of his body for when he gave the signal.

“Harry...”

He looked to Ron, who was holding the vial of Waking Potion.

“Ron?”

“This fight with Krueger,” he asked, “How bad is it going to be?”

“I don’t know,” Harry replied. “I’ve got a few ideas that I can try.”

Sensing that his friend was dodging the question, Ron pressed, “And what are the chances these ideas will actually work?”

Despite wanting to lie, Harry replied honestly, “Pretty low, unless I can distract him and then take him by surprise.”

He almost fell out of the bed when Ron lurched forward and embraced him. “You better be damn careful,” he whispered, his voice cracking. “I don’t want to be the one to tell Hermione all about how you got yourself killed doing this.”

“I’ll be careful,” promised Harry.

Ron released the hug and stepped back, a suspicious shimmer to his eyes. “Dammit, Harry...”

Harry sighed and nodded in understanding. He did not say anything else, but instead held up the bottle of Sleeping Potion and considered it. Once he drank its contents there would be no turning back.

“Uh, just one quick question?” asked Tonks.

“Yeah?”

“I get why you have the pocketknife, even if it does weird me out,” she said, “but what’s with the quill?”

Harry looked down at the simple quill he was clutching. He smiled as best he could and replied, “I’m going to teach Freddy a little lesson about how the pen is just as mighty as the sword.”

As his watchers exchanged puzzled looks, Harry uncorked the bottle and downed the Sleeping Potion in a single gulp. Surprisingly, the taste was not that bad; rather like sour apples with a bit of burnt toast for seasoning.

Closing his eyes, Harry lay back against his pillows and surrendered to sleep.

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The first thing Harry did, upon finding himself asleep and dreaming, was to check that he was dressed in something more than just his boxers. He was very relieved to find that he was wearing his faded jeans, one of his better shirts and his Hogwarts school robes. A quick pat down of his pockets revealed that the pocketknife and quill were still with him. Even better, his wand was safely (though Moody might disagree) tucked away in his back pocket.

Reassured that he would not be fighting Freddy in his underwear, Harry next took in his surroundings. Looking around, he immediately knew that the situation was a lot worse than he had thought. This was despite having prepared himself for the worst.

He had been expecting to face Freddy in a dream version of Privet Drive, as he had before.

Wherever he was; this was not Privet Drive.

“Wonderful,” he grumbled.

Harry licked his lips, suddenly aware that he was now with any possible home field advantage. Freddy could be anywhere in this house and Harry had no knowledge of its layout.

He removed the quill from where it was tucked in his belt. A quick wave of his wand with a good piece of transfiguration and Harry was holding a reasonable facsimile of the sword of Gryffindor. After testing its weight and balance, which seemed to much his memories of three years ago, he returned his wand to its place in his back pocket and transferred the sword to his right hand.

Looking around, Harry studied his new surroundings. It was obviously a house and for what he could see from his spot in the entrance hall, not much larger or smaller than Privet Drive. Of course, size and space were not always constant in dreams, so it was likely there was more to this place than he could see.

Running his free hand over the broken banister lining the stair, Harry grimaced at the amount of dirt and grime that came away. That was certainly another difference between this place and Privet Drive; it was filthy. Aunt Petunia would have had a fit if her quaint little house had been in such a state.



Actually, peering through the gloom, Harry had the disquieting thought that fire might have been involved in creating this mess. He wondered if that was deliberate on Freddy's part or not.

A loud creak caught his attention.

Freddy had appeared and was descending from the floor above. His every step on the staircase was met with the groan of straining wood.

Harry cautiously backed away, not wanting to get too close to Freddy in an enclosed space.

**"Welcome to fourteen twenty-eight Elm Street - my old stompin' grounds,"** announced Freddy in greeting.

Grimacing at the acknowledgement that he was now on Freddy's home ground, Harry licked his lips again and tried to decide on a course of action. Most of his plans up until now had involved meeting Freddy in either number four or Hogwarts, where Harry could use the layout of either building to his limited advantage. That was no longer possible.

Freddy reached the bottom of the stairs and turned to face him. He shook his head as if in disappointment. **"You've been a naughty boy, Harry,"** he said. **"You interrupted Uncle Freddy's play time with the know-it-all. Uncle Freddy didn't like that."**

"You shouldn't have gone after Hermione," Harry told him, desperately gathering as much of his Gryffindor courage as he could. "I was annoyed with her; not angry - not enough for that."

Freddy rolled his eyes, **"You really are an idiot. Angry, annoyed, pissed off... they're all the same thing - it's just a matter of degrees."**

Not having much of an answer, not that he wanted to debate the point; Harry held his tongue and instead focused on the task at hand. He had not come here to fight a battle of words and wit.

Gripping his pocketknife in one hand and the sword of Gryffindor in the other, Harry charged.

-oOo-

Ron sat nervously next to Harry's bed, watching as his best friend risked life, limb and sanity in what had to be the craziest plan ever concocted. He could not stop the thought that this would not work and would accomplish nothing more than putting Harry even closer to death's door than usual.

He glanced to where Hermione was laying, hoping that she might miraculously awaken and somehow provide a solution, as she so often had in the past.

But it was not to be. The normally bushy-haired witch remained perfectly still, her hair lying limp and lifeless round her face. The bandages on her chest and arms were slightly stained with blood and would need to be changed later in the day. Hopefully that would be the end of it and Madam Pomfrey's healing magic would have closed the wounds fully by then. With any luck, Hermione would wake up soon afterwards.

A soft rustling drew his attention back to Harry.

His friend was twitching in his sleep.

It was subtle at first and barely noticeable if you were not looking for it. But even as he watched, Ron could tell that the short spasms in Harry's body were getting progressively more intense.

Shifting his chair closer to the bed, he reached for the dose of Waking Potion.

-oOo-

Harry swung the sword of Gryffindor with every ounce of strength his arm could put behind it. He was only using the one hand, as the other held the pocketknife he planned to use to escape. He hoped that the quickness of his attack would make up for the lack of force that a single-handed grip cost him. Besides which, his plan was not to hurt Freddy, though he would not complain if he were able to wound his dream nemesis. His attack was solely for the purpose of distracting Freddy and getting close enough to hopefully drag him back into the waking world.

The sword blade cleaved a downward arc towards Freddy's face. The strike was a blur of motion. With languid ease, Freddy blocked with his knife-hand and stopped the attack with a loud clang of metal against metal. A reverberating shudder from the sudden stop shot down Harry's arm, nearly causing him to lose his grip on the sword's hilt.

**"Who the fuck do you think you are, kid? King Fucking Arthur?"** asked Freddy, examining the sword as he held it back with his bladed right hand. He shoved casually against the blade and knocked Harry back half a dozen steps.

"Shut up, Krueger," replied Harry, jumping forward and attempting another swing, this time aimed at the burned man's torso. "This is *my* dream and I'll do whatever the hell I want in it."

Again Freddy casually blocked the attack, though this time there was a small spray of sparks as his knives scraped against the sword's blade. Before Harry could pull the sword back and make a third swing, Freddy reached out with his unadorned left hand and grasped the sword's edge with his bare palm. Harry stared in a mixture of disbelief and horror as Freddy held the sword in an iron grip and prevented him from pulling away.

Freddy smirked. **"It might be *your* dream, Harry, but it's *my* rules!"**

That said, Freddy demonstrated exactly how dirty his rules were. He kicked Harry in the balls.

-oOo-

“Gahk!”

Ron, Sirius, Remus and Tonks had been watching Harry closely as he slept. Considering how little they had been doing, they were experiencing a considerable amount of stress. This came to a head when Harry suddenly and unexpectedly gave a wracking cough, twisted onto his side and curled into a tight ball.

“Shit!” exclaimed Sirius, levelling his wand in Harry’s direction. Remus and Tonks moved to stand back to back and did their best to cover the rest of the bedroom.

“I told him this was a stupid plan!” Ron declared, both vindicated and worried. He nervously fingered the vial of Waking Potion.

Sirius moved closer, standing right next to Ron, and examined his godson closely. “He’s not bleeding anywhere,” he observed, “but I’ve had enough of this - let’s wake him up.”

Ron nodded in agreement and stood up. “Help me straighten him out and then I’ll feed him the potion.”

Together the pair worked to stretch Harry out on the bed, checking him for any sign of injury as they did so.

“Someone’s coming,” observed Tonks, standing nearest the door.

“Quickly, Ron - the potion!” commanded Remus.

“Just a second,” replied Ron, turning to grab the potion vial from where he had left it on the bedside table. The three adults stepped back and continued to observe the room, just in case Harry was successful in dragging Freddy back into the waking world with him.

It was unto this scene that Madam Pomfrey stumbled. Still feeling somewhat guilty about Harry’s condition, due to her having slipped him a sleeping potion, she was coming to give her patients another check up. She was not expecting to find Ron Weasley preparing to shove a potion down his friend’s throat while three adults stood back and watched.

“What the bloody hell do you lot think you’re doing?”

-oOo-

Harry knelt on the dirty floor of 1428 Elm Street, cupping both hands between his legs. Freddy stood nearby watching him rock back and forth with bemusement. For some reason, probably to draw out the fun of fight, he was not pressing the advantage while Harry was incapacitated.

“Fuck!” spat Harry, pushing through the pain.

**“A couple more hits like that, Harry, and you never will,”** observed Freddy.

Not wanting to even contemplate suffering another such blow to his bits, Harry glared up at Freddy with loathing. The scarred man continued to smirk smugly at him. Harry looked around and was disheartened to see that his transfiguration had failed. The sword of Gryffindor had returned to its original form and was lying uselessly on the floor between the two combatants.

**“Heh heh,”** Freddy chuckled, **“I guess the pen ain’t quite as mighty as the sword, is it?”**

Seeing that his primary weapon was no longer available, Harry searched for the second. Removing his hands from his throbbing groin, he scabbled about the floor for a moment before he finding what he was looking for. Gripping firmly in hand, he staggered to his feet and stared across at the waiting Freddy.

**“Ooooooh, you also have a little knife,”** Freddy noted, seeing the pocketknife in Harry’s hand. He held his knife-hand up, fingers and blades spread wide and exclaimed, **“I got more – and they’re bigger too!”**

Grimacing in anticipation of the pain, Harry tightened his grasp on the pocketknife and then stabbed it into his right hip. He hoped that by avoiding the bigger muscles he would not limit his ability to move. He had a feeling he was going to be doing a lot of running away in the very near future. Unfortunately the spot he had just stabbed would be covered by his boxers. Hopefully someone would notice the bleeding before too long and Ron would dose him with the Waking Potion. If not, then were going to get very messy very quickly.

-oOo-

Ron was trying to keep Madam Pomfrey from tearing the Waking Potion out of his hand. It was not as easy as he would have thought, for the school nurse was proving to be a lot stronger than she looked. That she was yelling and spewing increasingly vehement vitriol at him was almost as surprising.

“Poppy! Let him go!” shouted Sirius, grabbing Pomfrey by the wrists and trying to pry her hands off the potion vial.

“No! Dammit, Black, do you have any idea what giving him that potion might do to him?!” demanded Pomfrey.

“If we don’t give it to him; he’s going to *die* !” screamed Sirius, spittle flying from his mouth and splattering her face.

What?"

Pomfrey paused at Sirius' pronouncement, relaxing her grip just long enough for him and Ron to pull free. Sirius immediately grabbed her by the waist and literally picked her up, carrying her away from Harry's bed.

"Quickly!" he commanded of Ron, "Dose him!"

"What do you mean, die?" asked Pomfrey, beginning to struggle against Sirius' hold on her.

"He's dreaming, you idiot!"

"Then wake him up!"

"What d'you think we're doing?" asked Sirius incredulously.

"Dosing him with a potentially lethal potion when a simply Waking Charm would work just as well," replied Pomfrey heatedly.

"Because that's how Harry wants it," countered Remus calmly, though his worried expression gave lie to his level tone. It had taken Sirius and Professor McGonagall working together; casting several different Waking Charms multiple times before Harry had woken up the night before. Harry had not wanted to risk such a delay and had been betting that the potion would wake him up a lot faster. Pomfrey's interference had thrown a very large monkey-wrench into that idea.

Further debate became unnecessary, however, as Ron finished pouring the Waking Potion down Harry's throat. He had noticed the small patch of blood on Harry's right hip and realized that the signal had been given.

"You bloody fool!" shrieked Pomfrey in horror.

Ron ignored her, more intent on seeing what the result would be. He silently prayed that he had not just killed his best friend.

-oOo-

Freddy was beginning to get aggravated with his channel. The boy was stubbornly resisting him, and thus keeping him occupied, instead of letting him go about his business. It was so annoying that Freddy was seriously contemplating the possibility that he would have to end him.

He would have preferred not to; there were still so many young witches and wizards whose dreams he had yet to visit. But sometimes, he knew, you had to cut your losses.

Deciding against killing Harry right then, he began to increase the punishment he was handing out. With any luck, he would beat any sense of opposition out of him. If not, well, the boy had served his purpose for long enough.

He looked at the boy, who was standing uncertainly in front of him, favouring his one leg. Why the idiot had stabbed himself like that, Freddy, was unsure. If it was another attempt to wake up, it was hardly enough to do the job.

Faster than the eye could follow, Freddy moved forward and grabbed Harry by the throat. He lifted him up high in the air, his feet dangling nearly a foot off the floor, and shook him about in much the same way a dog would worry at a bone.

**"You're pissing me off, Potter,"** he growled.

Harry was unable to reply, his throat caught in Freddy's unbreakable grasp. He was trying frantically to break free, but even with both hands he was unable to bend one of Freddy's fingers back. In one of those strange moments of mental detachment, he wondered if it was possible to black out from lack of air while dreaming.

Freddy sneered at him and tossed him back, sending him crashing into the far wall. As he slid down to the floor, Freddy was upon him again, picking him up and throwing him across the room into the opposite wall. Again, as Harry collapsed down, Freddy was there to hoist him back up and launch him through the air.

**"I don't like having to interrupt my play time to deal with a dumbass little shit like you, kid,"** Freddy lectured.

He sent Harry flying again, this time directing him to crash through a wooden door and into what looked like a dining room. Harry was vaguely aware that it was far too ostentatious for such a modestly sized house. He tried to climb to his feet, but found that Freddy was standing in front of him.

**"I know what you were thinking, Harry,"** said Freddy. Harry looked up at the burned man just in time to catch a boot to his chin. **"You were thinking you could get rid of me - rid of me !"**

Harry rolled onto his side, his ears ringing and his jaw feeling as if it had been shattered. He doubted that had actually happened, but the pain was enough that he could almost believe it. "I... hurk..." he coughed, "I *am* going to get rid of you, Krueger."

Freddy scoffed and kicked him again, sending Harry skidding across the floor, scattering several of the chairs that surrounded the dining table.

**"Stupid brat! Do you really think you can play this game and win? Against me? Me ?"**

Grabbing the dining table with one hand, Freddy tossed it out of his way as he stomped over to Harry. He resisted weakly as his was once again

lifted up and hurled, this time with considerable force, across the room. He smashed into a chair, which splintered into pieces under the impact.

**“Here in your dreams I am FOREVER!”** Freddy roared as he kicked Harry in the ribs, **“And no matter what you think - you aren’t!”**

“Yeah, I’m not,” agreed Harry, spitting out a large glob of blood even as he suddenly felt something beginning to shift behind his belly. It felt rather like the initial pull of a portkey. He hoped it was the potion-induced kind. “Pity for you; neither are my dreams.”

Freddy paused and stared at him. **“What?”**

Harry smiled up at him. “Time to wake up, arsehole.”

He reached out and grabbed Freddy by the ankle.

**-oOo-**

“Gurhk!”

Harry woke with a cough, almost choking on the blood filling his mouth. He rolled over in his bed, coming perilously close to falling out, and ignored the question of whether or not his plan had worked as he tried not to vomit.

“He’s awake – keep your eyes open for Krueger,” announced Remus.

“Dammit, I don’t see him,” said Sirius, releasing his hold on Madam Pomfrey in favour of scanning the room.

“Nothing here either,” Tonks reported.

“You mean it didn’t work?” asked Ron. He honestly did not know whether to be disappointed or relieved at the failure.

“Dammit,” repeated Sirius.

“He’s here,” Harry choked out. He was having trouble breathing and had wrapped both arms round his stomach. He shuddered and swallowed, desperately trying to stop the rising bile. “He’s here,” he repeated, “I know he is.”

“There’s nobody else in this room but us, Mr Potter,” declared Pomfrey, shoving her way passed Sirius and Ron. She moved around the bed to get a bit more room to work with as she began to play her wand over Harry’s figure. Her already displeased frown grew deeper as she worked.

Harry gasped as a shuddering convulsion swept through him. He had been feeling progressively hotter, as if with a fever, and now sweating enough that the bedcovers beneath him were already damp. Of course, that was secondary to the spasms wracking his stomach. Coupled with the feeling that his insides were doing their best to crawl up his throat and see what it was like on the outside, he was now fully aware of just how stupid it had been to ignore the nurse’s warnings.

“Bloody idiots,” grumbled Pomfrey, shaking her head.

She moved away from the bed for a moment, making a quick search of the small cabinet that had been install in the room to hold the various potions she might need. Noting the missing Waking Potion, which Ron had fed to Harry, she shook her head again. Considering the collection of potions, she selected a handful of the smaller vials - too large a dose of anything at this point would only make Harry’s situation worse.

Returning to the bed, she handed the first of the potions to Harry. Fortunately he was still stable enough to handle them himself.

“Drink this, Harry,” she instructed gently, as if speaking to a small child. She would berate him properly later.

Harry shakily uncorked the vial and, holding his breath, swallowed the grass-green liquid within. He tried not to gag at the taste, but as the potion burned and then chilled it way down into his stomach, he was amazed to find that he was already feeling marginally better.

**“Oh, please tell me you’re giving him the good drugs!”**

Madam Pomfrey had no time to brace herself for the blow, which caught her completely by surprise. All she could do was blink once and stare blankly at the dark form that had suddenly leapt up from its hiding place beneath Harry’s bed. She took a moment to note, with professional detachment, the badly burned and scarred features before she looked down to see that a bladed hand had been driven into her stomach. This too was observed with professional detachment, even as the knives were withdrawn and she collapsed to the floor, starting to cough as the shock of the attack wore off and the pain began to register in her mind.

“Shit!” exclaimed Sirius, before he fired of a cutting hex, *“Lacertus !”*

Freddy spun round to face him just as the spell hit, slicing a deep incision into his shoulder. **“Ah, fuck!”** he exclaimed, dodging left and right as Ron, Remus and Tonks cast a few curses of their own. They paused, however, as he ducked down and hauled Madam Pomfrey up in front of him, using her as a shield.

“Stop cursing!” yelled Remus upon seeing the badly wounded Healer. Unfortunately, by the time they had registered her presence, she had already been hit by a bone-breaker curse from Sirius, a bludgeoning curse from Tonks and another cutting hex from Ron.

**“Ah, nothing quite like putting someone else in the firing line,”** noted Freddy.

Let her go, you miserable bastard," snarled Sirius.

**"What? Does piss poor Paddy-foot not like this game?"** asked Freddy mockingly. **"Then maybe you shouldn't have started playing it!"**

*"Reducto!"*

Sirius fired the blasting curse over Freddy's shoulder; not close enough to risk hitting Madam Pomfrey, but still close enough to get his meaning across.

"Let her go," he repeated.

Freddy considered his position for a moment and then grinned. **"You want her?"** he asked. **"Fine - here she is!"**

Before anyone could do anything, he jammed his knife-hand back into Pomfrey's stomach, forcing a weak cry of agony from the injured witch. Grabbing her by the scruff of her neck with his other hand, he hoisted her up above him. He stood there for a second, daring them to curse him and risk having Pomfrey fall.

"Oh shit," muttered Remus.

**"Catch!"**

With a heave of his shoulders, Freddy tossed Pomfrey at Sirius. As soon as he regained his balance he took a quick step forward and kicked the frame of Harry's bed, sending it skidding across the room to crash into Remus and Tonks. The impact was loud and accompanied by several painful cracks of breaking bones, even as Harry himself was jolted over the side and onto the floor.

"Remus! Tonk!" yelled Sirius, struggling to pull himself out from beneath a now very limp Pomfrey.

"My legs! Shit, he broke my legs!" cried Tonks, pinned between the bed and the bedroom wall. Remus was likewise trapped, but had slipped while trying to dodge the moving bed and had been pinned down across his chest.

Freddy watched them struggle and laughed at the success of his ploy. **"Gotcha,"** he crowed, before taking a look around. **"Now, where the hell did that little shit bring me?"**

His eyes glanced over Harry, who was now lying on the bedroom and retching violently. Apparently his fall from the bed had finally broken the tenuous control he had been able to hold over his queasy stomach. Next Freddy observed Ron, who had managed to avoid the careening bed and was kneeling protectively over his bed. He was the only one in the room to still have a grip on his wand and was still keeping a close eye on Freddy.

He observed as Sirius managed to pull himself out from under Pomfrey and moved closer to deliver a kick to the man's jaw before he could stand. He was about to follow up and begin using his knives, when something in the corner of his eye caught his attention. For just a moment he looked away from Sirius and glanced behind him.

**"Ah! Look who we have here,"** exclaimed Freddy, noticing the other bed in the room and its occupant. **"It's Hermie! Oh, Harry, you do bring me the best presents."**

"Stay away from Hermione!" yelled Ron, jumping up from where he had been crouched next to Harry.

Freddy grinned spitefully and, with two long strides, crossed over to Hermione's bed and slammed his bladed fingers into her stomach.

"NOOOOO!!"

Ron's rage filled scream was utterly incoherent and not entirely human as he leapt at Freddy, forgoing the use of his wand in preference for attacking the man with his bare hands. He charged straight at him, not caring about anything else but getting his hands around the other man's neck and wringing his head off. He ran right into Freddy's backhand.

**"Ah, sweet love - it makes an idiot out of every man,"** noted Freddy.

He quickly grabbed Ron before he could recover from the blow and quickly moved him round into the same position he had held Pomfrey. He was just in time, as another slicing curse from Sirius cut a deep gash across Ron's chest.

"Aah!" screamed Ron before Freddy tightened his grip around his throat, cutting him off.

**"Missed me again, Paddy!"** Freddy crowed.

"You son of a bitch!" roared Sirius, almost stumbling over Pomfrey's body as he moved.

**"Heh? What's the matter? Don't like losing?"** Freddy shifted so that Ron would provide more cover. He also moved his right hand up, letting his knives hover close to the young wizard's throat. **"Better be careful with your mumbo-jumbo,"** he warned, **"or Ronny boy here's going get one helluva smile - ear to ear."**

Freddy had been so busy concentrating on Sirius, and to a lesser degree Remus and Tonks, that he had completely missed the fact that Harry had moved from his spot on the floor. The Boy-Who-Lived had crawled to his bedside table, which had toppled over when Freddy had kicked the bed across the room, and reclaimed his wand. From his current angle, he had a perfect shot from the side if the burned man. Focusing all his anger, all his rage, he cast the one spell he knew had affected Freddy even in the dreams, if only for a little while.

“*Crucio!*”

“**AAAAHHH!!**”

A spray of red blood fountained across the bedroom as Freddy convulsively slid his knives across Ron’s throat as his body began to spasm wildly. Luckily the four cuts that slashed across his neck were not as deep as they might have been, but it was a terrible injury and caught Harry completely by surprise. He had been hoping to free Ron, not cause his throat to be slit. Cursing himself for making yet another mistake, and possibly killing his best friend, he focused on his hatred for Freddy and poured it into the Cruciatus.

“**AAAAHHH!!**”

Freddy’s scream of pain rose up in pitch to a shriek of agony as he thrashed wildly about, somehow, impossibly, managing to stay on his feet.

“Harry! Harry, stop!” shouted Sirius.

Heeding his godfather’s words, mostly because he had something else in mind, Harry released his hold on the curse. Freddy immediately ceased his crazed lurching about and relaxed, drawing in deep and shuddering breathes. His hands were clutching spastically, the knives of his right hand skritchng against each other. After taking a second to compose himself, ignoring Sirius and his wand, Freddy stood straight and ready.

“**You little sonuvabitch!**” roared Freddy, spinning to face him. “**That’s it! I’m gonna gut you for that!**”

“Fuck you too, Freddy,” replied Harry. His wand had not shifted in its aim. “*Avada Kedavra!*”

The look of absolute surprise on Freddy’s face was almost worth the pain of this last beating. Harry smiled as the green bolt of magic caught Freddy high on the chest and knocked the Lord of Nightmares flying through the air. Freddy’s graceless flight came to an abrupt end as his body slammed into the wall with enough force to crack the plaster.

Harry kept his wand trained on Freddy, still slightly worried that the madman would be able shrug off even this attack. He watched closely, wary that this was merely another game or feint to lure them close enough for Freddy to strike.

Slowly, Freddy faded away as his body slid down the wall to the floor.

Still, Harry kept a vigil on the spot where the body had disappeared. The fact that the man had disappeared from view did not mean anything. Freddy was a creature of dreams - a real body was entirely superfluous.

He was dimly aware of noise intruding into the room, as well as blurred shapes darting about the edge of his fading vision. Vaguely aware that the rest of the Order had arrived, he finally slipped into unconsciousness.

**TBC...**

**Author’s Note:** This was the last chapter, leaving only the epilogue/aftermath still to come.

Quite a few people have commented on how Madam Pomfrey kept knocking Harry out with Sleeping Potions, despite however much common sense would seem to dictate that this was a BAD idea. Allow me to retort. Go watch any of the Nightmare on Elm Street movies. Regardless of how many kids Freddy has killed - just about every single adult to make an appearance seems to also suffer from this flaw. On several occasions you’ll find the kids being *sedated* for no apparent good reason other than they’re children and adults supposedly know better.

As such, in order to keep to the established formula, I had Pomfrey take leave of her senses on several occasions. Take it or leave it.