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Harry Potter

Deep in the water, a hot, pulsing shard of power shone like a lantern in the night, drawing nearer by the second. Harry knew that magic all too well. *His phoenix feather.* Next came the cold hum of her magic, churning with unease. He shifted from the lotus position, straightening his legs, and a moment later a slender silhouette blurred through the murk and crashed into him.

Before he could even utter a greeting, her pale face plunged through the bubble, and a set of cold lips sealed his mouth, and her tongue slipped through his teeth, aggressive like never before. Her arms coiled around him, squeezing so tight as if she wanted their bodies to merge.

Harry wanted to push her away but dismissed the idea when he saw the sheer relief on her face. Beside the heat in her eyes, a fading trace of fear remained.

'Did she think I was in danger?'

A minute passed, but she showed no sign of stopping, even as Harry's lungs screamed for air. He moved the hand still pouring magic into Gabrielle, patted his fiancée's back, then gently peeled her away.

Juno began wheezing and hacking, and only when her face withdrew from the bubble did she take deep, ragged breaths, her chest heaving up and down. That only stopped her for a moment. Her hands and eyes kept roaming across his robes, checking every inch, and only when she found nothing did she calm down.

In turn, Harry looked closer at his fiancée. She wore a single piece of inky-black fabric that clung tightly to her body and covered her from heel to neck, revealing a lean, well-trained frame and a full chest that made it hard to look away. Juno most certainly didn't mind, but it was ungentlemanly.

"Gillyweed?" he asked, eyeing the pulsing slits at her throat's sides. But neither her hands nor legs were webbed.

Juno opened her mouth, but only a mouthful of bubbles escaped.

"Transfiguration, then."

Once her breathing had calmed, she took a slow, deep inhale, then tapped her neck with her wand; the gills faded until only smooth skin remained. With a flick of her wand, she covered her head with a bubble. Her gaze flicked to the stone statue where Hermione and Gabrielle were still tied to the tail, both in deep slumber.

When she spoke, her voice sounded as if coming from behind a wall. "How could they ever take you?" she rasped out, her gaze growing dangerous.

"I let them," Harry said, leaning in. "Better me than my cousins or Diana. After all, there's no danger to me here, and even the Deep Slumber Charm couldn't keep me down. And I distinctly remember someone saying they didn't want even a hint, otherwise I'd have told you long ago."

"I regretted it a hundred times today." Juno's lips thinned. "Let's go."

Harry shook his head. With a kick, he returned to Gabby's side, then placed a hand on her back and poured a tickle of magic back into her. "Not yet."

Juno swam to his side, eyes darting to the little veela. "Is something wrong?"

"Yes," he murmured. "The slumber made her too weak, and I could feel her life and magic gutter in the cold water. I fear that if I leave now, she might not hold out until Fleur arrives."

Even now, Gabby's complexion looked pallid, not as ghostly as when he first awoke, but not as rosy as when he first started pouring in heat and magic into her.

Juno studied the girl for a long moment, then nodded. "Then let's take her with us." Her lips curled like crescents. "Perhaps Fleur will have to even thank me for it."

The merpeople had cautiously gathered around them, though never quite approaching.

The moment Juno pointed her wand, their leader swam forward, trident pointing at her. "You take your own hostage. Leave the others."

"I wasn't asking." Wand raised and glowing eerie purple, Juno flared her magic, and malice churned through the water.

The merpeople recoiled in an instant.

For once, Harry didn't begrudge her aggressiveness. With her mind transcended, Juno could control her emotions enough to use Dark Magic with little to no backlash—even now, the malice didn't spread indiscriminately; it avoided Harry and the other hostages and instead coalesced in front of the merfolk like a shield line in the water. His thoughts turned to something else. It was an odd thing. Were the merpeople part of the observers and judges?

If so, why did they threaten to intervene? Outside intervention risked a backlash from the Goblet of Fire, and neither Dumbledore nor Voldemort had dared to risk it, keeping themselves within the tournament's rules, even if loosely.

If the merpeople were part of the task, why didn't they try to stop any of the champions? In his previous life, they had not made as much of a move against Cedric and Krum.

Seeing the water begin to pulse with power, Harry cleared his throat, and Juno's magic immediately receded. "If Fleur—the veela champion—comes here, just tell her we're rescuing her sister, just in case."

He let his magic seep into the water, not with malice, but with unyielding intent. The threat of violence was enough to make the merpeople retreat, as it had last time. Unlike last time, it wasn't empty posturing—even with the water slowing his movements, Harry was certain he could knock them all out. And that was without Juno joining in.

A moment later, Juno had already untied Gabby and holstered her over her shoulder like a sack of potatoes.

"Are we going to swim up?"

"Nope." An almost childlike smile tugged at her lips. "I found a friend. *Maea!*"

Harry had not expected Juno's new friend to be a swamp-green sea serpent a hundred feet long, with a body as thick as the Whomping Willow's trunk and opaque blue fins as large as hippogryph wings. It rushed through the water with surprising speed and agility for its size, forcing them to hold on to the beast's horns or be left behind. The sea serpent slowed only when it reached the surface, with only the back of its head emerging above water.

He had not expected to be greeted with a complete cacophony either. Skittering sounds, screeches, the hum of spells, and the pained shrieks of the wounded and dying melded into something ugly and terrible.

Outside was complete chaos: wizards and witches, spiders, dementors, and other hooded figures attacking from the shadows that looked like vampires. Students and spectators were running in all directions, while masked figures with black robes fought against Aurors or attacked the vicious crowd. The top box at the stands was shrouded by spellfire so thick that he struggled to see what was going on, and explosions and the crack of thunder rang from the judging stands on the opposite side.

Harry had never seen them in person before, but the masks were notorious across Europe. Emberwick's Fire Knights.

Then he saw the corpses.

Across the ground, dozens of bodies lay strewn haphazardly, some wrapped in spider silk and dragged back into the forbidden forest by the fleeing acromantula. His eyes shifted despite himself, allowing him to see every gash, every wound, and every fallen body in minute detail. Many of them were not moving, deathly still without the slightest rise in his chest.

He had seen fewer corpses that day when he walked to his death.

The world turned red.

'Master,' Nyx's anxious voice was far too distant. 'Wake up—'

His magic roared, and his phoenix let out a loud, ferocious shriek in his mind, igniting his fury and reason. All his thoughts burned away, and only one thing remained: to turn everything to ash. The world would burn.

The air shimmered, and the dampness evaporated from his robes in an instant; the surrounding water began to bubble, and curtains of steam rose.

A pair of cool hands seized his face, and he found himself staring into two orbs of ice.

"Control yourself." The hiss pulsed through his mind, extinguishing the flames that had taken hold.
"Otherwise you'll kill everything."

Harry took a deep, shuddering breath. It took him a long moment to peel away the feelings Ashwing had ignited. Once he took full control of his magic, he nodded.

'That was scary,' Nyx wailed in his mind. *'Once you lost control, I couldn't even leave.'*

"I'm fine now," he croaked out, sending a mental apology to his familiar. The number of bodies had increased, and Harry witnessed yet another dementor leave a fallen body behind, slumped on the ground.

He couldn't wait any longer. A single meaningful glance was enough for Juno to understand, and she urged the sea serpent forward.

He tugged on his magic, drawing as much as he could at the tip of his wand. Pushing aside all distracting thoughts, he moulded anger and the desire to protect. **"PROTEGO DIABOLICA!"**

His insides lurched and twisted as magic churned through his veins, rushing into his wand faster than ever. Streaks of green fire bloomed across the water, spreading through the sky and across Hogwarts grounds in an instant.

It phased through the scattered students and spectators without issue, instead latching onto dementors, vampires, and the fleeing acromantula. Once the green flames hit, they slowly grew stronger and enveloped the whole body until only ash remained. In contrast, Harry only hit a few of the masked figures, and half of them dodged or shielded themselves from the fire. Some of those struck managed to dispel it before it grew stronger.

It was enough. Harry could scarcely control the fire once it fanned out; aiming it was even harder, and it lost strength the further it flew without a target to feed on. A third of his and Nyx's magic to get rid of all the creatures and some of the masked wizards was a great price.

By then, the rocky shore was nearing. Maea stopped by the shallows, and Juno conjured a wooden raft.

"Keep her safe," Juno said, lowering the now awake but frightened Gabby between the serpent's horns.

Harry and Juno stepped onto the swaying raft; the enormous snout gave it a strong push, sending it sliding to shore.

Magic exploded across the ground, sending bits of earth and shards of rock everywhere. Of the judges, only two were standing. Amelia Bones and Irina barely kept Incendius at bay, their movements sluggish, while Professor McGonagall was locked in a fierce battle with a masked figure.

"Serpensortia!" Juno's wand blurred as she kept summoning one snake after another until the waters around them twitched with serpents. *"Attack the masked man!"*

Harry did not idle either. Once he was close enough to aim, he conjured arrows in sets of three and launched them at Incendius. His wand kept sweeping out, relentlessly pelting at the enemy. The dark wizard swatted them away with a flick of his wand, avoided some, or was forced to conjure a shield, but that alone gave the two headmistresses breathing room.

That only irritated the dark wizard further. But even with Harry's harassment, his movements were swift and decisive, and the sheer power of his spells made Harry's hair stand on end even from afar.

Harry redoubled his efforts, the number of arrows conjured growing rapidly as they drew closer. One glanced by his shoulder, tearing through his bright crimson robe.

"Potter!" Emberwick roared as he ducked under another volley of arrows, swiped back two curses at the headmistresses and turned to face him, face twisted with fury.

Harry felt the air thicken. Thick smoke rose from Emberwick, shrouding his figure in grey. A dark-red burst of cursed fire rushed at him and the raft. Juno cleaved with her wand, raising a torrent of lake water to meet it.

Fire and water met with a loud hiss as steam exploded everywhere, cloaking everything in a thick white haze. Harry conjured a shield, but no other spells came his way. Dull light pulsed in the fog—Emberwick was attacking Amelia Bones and Irina Zagorska again, no doubt intending to finish them off quickly and move on to Harry and Juno.

"He's very strong," Juno said, voice strained. "Stronger than anyone else I've fought. He's broken through two limits—magic for certain, the second, either intent or soul."

He was swift, his spellwork no slower than Harry's, and far more experienced in combat. This wasn't the first time Harry had been outclassed in endurance, body, magic, and experience. It wasn't even the worst time, but it was still bad. This wasn't Voldemort, but he wasn't much weaker.

Regardless, Harry could not afford to lose.

"Focus on Emberwick first, then we sweep through the rest," he spat. "Cast to kill. Ventus!"

A gust of wind blew away all the steam and fog just as their raft came ashore. Irina Zagorska had already fallen, her figure enveloped in purple fire, while Amelia Bones had huddled behind an ice wall, robes soaked in crimson.

Harry stepped forward, wand blazing, moulding his surging fury and intent to kill into one. He used no complex magic, nor anything that took much concentration, focusing on power and speed.

'Ignis Sectum! Expulso! Ignis Sectum! Confringo! Ignis Sectum!'

Magic erupted like a hailstorm. Crescents of red, streaks of pale blue, and fiery orange rained down on Ascalon Emberwick. Juno's methods were far more insidious. Her curses came slower, but each one was darker than the last. Her eyes glowed a deep purple, assaulting Emberwick's mental shields between each cast.

Emberwick conjured a granite wall, but the explosive curses blasted it apart. Within moments, the dark wizard was on the back foot. But the dense barrage of lethal spells left him no time to retaliate, forcing him to retreat as he shielded and dodged with every step.

Harry and Juno followed, not letting up even for a second.

Amelia chose that moment to emerge from her icy shield and fling two frigid shadows at the dark lord, then turned her spells to the ground beneath and behind Emberwick.

To his credit, he held off their combined assault with some effort. A jagged spin of his wand seared through the ghosts; a stab in the ground turned the marshy ground solid, while his shields barely protected his vitals. But with Apparition and Portkeys blocked on Hogwarts grounds, he could no longer retreat as he pleased, not without defeating the three of them. Harry began aiming the blasting curses at his feet, each explosion sending stone shrapnel at Emberwick.

A minute later, and after over two hundred spells, he faltered. A cutting curse grazed his thigh, then Juno struck him with a sickly yellow streak across the arm. His sleeve turned to dust, then his flesh rotted across the elbow. It didn't spread, but with no ligament, muscle, or skin holding the hand together, the forearm simply fell off, wand still squeezed in its gloved hand.

The next cutting curse cut clean through Emberwick's knee, and the one following sliced through his neck.

Emberwick's head rolled down, unwillingness frozen on his face.

Harry felt no guilt, not even a shred of remorse. Euphoria surged within him, laughter bubbled in his throat, but Harry barely swallowed it. Now was not the time, not when there were more enemies to kill.

He turned to help Professor McGonagall, but her enemy was already fleeing, and the old transfiguration mistress couldn't chase him down.

Meanwhile, Juno reached the wheezing Amelia, who looked like she might collapse at any moment.

"How are you, Professor?" she asked, face full of concern.

"I'll live." Amelia spat a mouthful of blood. Her left hand hung limp at her side, and a nasty gash ran across her collar, revealing mangled flesh. "But I can't fight any longer. Minerva?"

"I'm unharmed, only tired," the transfiguration mistress wheezed out, leaning on a wooden staff she had just conjured. "Damned Crouch! Each curse struck harder than Emberwick's."

Crouch?

A thousand questions swirled through his mind, but Harry vigorously shook his head, pushing them away. Now was not the time for reflection. A dull ache pulsed through his body—the cost of his previous feats. Never before had he poured out so much magic so quickly, with each curse overcharged to the limit. The ground around Emberwick's body was churned and completely devastated, with craters looking no different from a moon painting and rock blasted to shards and fine powder. Behind him, charred gashes ran deep into the dirt, left by where the dodged cutters had landed.

Harry took a moment to calm his magic, soothe his surging emotions, and suppress the inner phoenix tugging at his mind once again. The fight against this dark lord only went so easily because the headmistresses had tied down his attention and worn him down.

All those thoughts rushed through his head, but only a few moments had passed since Emberwick fell.

Juno trotted over to Irina Zagorska's fallen form and waved her wand over her smouldering robes.

"She'll make it with some healing, but—"

"Juno!" Harry said forcefully, after taking stock of his condition. His body and mind were fresh, and little less than half of his magic still remained. It was enough. "Leave this to the professors. We have more dark wizards to kill."

Juno frowned. "What of the task? The Goblet's magical contract..."

"You finished the task the moment we stepped out of the lake. No Auror reinforcements have shown up—so they must be tied up somewhere. We have to deal with these dark wizards ourselves. Come, every moment might cost us a life."

"Right." Juno straightened, then, with a hooking motion, summoned Emberwick's head. Hoisting him by the red mane, she skewered the head through a conjured silver spear and lifted it high like a banner.

Spear in the left hand, wand in the right, Juno strode by his side.

Some nearby masked wizards had seen Emberwick's fall and already turned to flee, while others still chased down students, flinging curses with abandon.

Any notions of mercy perished the moment he saw the first mangled body sprawled on the ground, fallen right on the pathway between the stands and the gates. He took a look at the face, and his insides lurched. *Colin Creevy*.

'Bombarda!'

The purplish jet struck the nearest masked figure in the chest, and he exploded, sending bits of bone and flesh everywhere.

The next enemy saw him and hurled a *Cruciatius*. Juno flicked her wand, conjuring a stone block in its path, while Harry jabbed his wand. *'Ignis Sectum!'*

The pulsing crimson crescent cleaved through the masked man's shield, slicing through his wand arm and torso as if they were made of paper.

A nearby Fire Knight hurled a bone-breaking curse, and Harry caught it with the tip of his wand and flung it straight back into his mask, shattering his skull.

The fourth enemy was quick on his feet, dodging three of Harry's spells, but Juno turned the ground beneath him to ice and bludgeoned him with a *Legilimens*, which required no aiming, only eye contact. The man's movements stiffened for a moment, and that was all that Harry needed to strike with a *Confringo*, exploding his head like an overripe melon.

The next two tried to flee—perhaps unwilling to fight or having lost courage after seeing Emberwick's head on the spear—only to be cut down by the rain of conjured spikes Harry had cast after them.

The Fire Knights had now started noticing Harry and Juno, and began to group up. In a moment, they found themselves besieged by six enemies: two kept defending, two hurled Unforgivables as if handing out candy at All Hallow's Eve, and the last kept to ordinary curses. Juno swiftly blocked a few coming curses, while he dodged the rest.

Mouth twitching, Harry made a complex motion with his wand, melding his intent to kill into his next spell, and for the second time today, voiced an incantation. "Flamma Vinculata!"

A fiery chain surged from his wand, piercing the enemy's double *Protego*, blasting straight through a hastily conjured block of granite and drilling into a Fire Knight's chest. Then it leapt to the nearest target in an instant, piercing another chest, then the one beside it, until all six enemies were linked in one fiery chain.

A moment later, the flames faded, leaving burning holes in their chests that quickly spread. All six enemies collapsed at once, already dead.

"Master's magic?" Juno asked, intrigued.

Harry nodded tightly. As much as it galled to admit it, Gellert Grindelwald was generous when it came to teaching magic—and his curses were extremely tricky to deal with or packed a punch.

Those were the last enemies willing to fight. Every Fire Knight who saw them turned around and tried to flee. It didn't save them, only exposed their backs.

A few minutes later, they reached the stands, with corpses strewn all over the entrance. Some were Fire Knights, but the rest were ordinary-looking wizards and witches, and even some students. Harry recognised at least a dozen Hufflepuffs, Ravenclaws, and Slytherins.

The crack of spellfire and explosions echoed around the top box. Narcissa was still under siege. No longer bothering to conserve stamina, Harry and Juno leapt up three stairs at a time. Over three dozen wizards were locked in a fierce battle around the top box.

"Surrender," one said in a rough voice, "Once Lord Incendius comes, you'll receive no mer—"

Harry's *Ignis Sectum* parted his head from his shoulders, and his body tumbled down the stairs like a puppet with its string cut. Juno's wand erupted with dark magic, cutting down the dark wizards from the back.

Before they could even rally, more than a handful had fallen. One of the Fire Knights who tried to shield saw Juno's spear hoisted in the air; his eyes widened, and he roared, "The Lord is dead!"

"Emberwick is dead!"

Harry redoubled his effort, pouring all his magic into curse after curse, shredding shields, flesh, and bone. To their credit, the Fire Knights didn't break down right away.

Some of them turned to face Harry and Juno, but that only exposed their backs to the Ministry's experts.

Every moment, an enemy fell down. In half a minute, over half of the attackers had fallen.

Stuck between a rock and a hard place, the rest turned to flee. Some suddenly flew skyward like a cork pushed too deep underwater, pulled brooms from their pouches, mounted them, and flew away hastily. Some had no brooms and glided down the outer walls, while those still on the ground rushed between the wrecked stands, jumping down the railing.

About a dozen managed to flee, with the Aurors stunning the two slowest to withdraw, disarming them and tying them up with rope until only their heads could be seen.

For a long moment, Harry and Juno found themselves in a stare-off against the Aurors, both sides refusing to lower their wands. Their red robes were torn in places, covered in blood, soot, and green ichor. Amongst them were three men in yellow and blue robes. Foreign dignitaries from France and Sweden, looking just as battered as the Aurors and twice as wary.

“Potter and Black?” Moody’s gruff voice rang out as the Aurors parted. The familiar figure limped to the front, good eye narrowed and his magical eye fixed on them. “You look the part. Tell me something only you know. Black, Filius, come over.”

His wand didn’t lower either. Sirius emerged at his side, a deep gash running across his cheek, and Professor Flitwick looked unharmed, save for the cracks in his glass.

“My Marauder’s name is Ashwing,” Harry offered tightly.

“It’s Harry, alright,” his godfather said. “Merlin, I’m glad to see you both unharmed.”

Not quite sure how to face his godfather, Harry settled for a soft nod. “Right back at you, Sirius. Though I didn’t expect to see you here.”

Sirius rubbed the back of his neck. “Narcissa invited me with a fine seat, and I wanted to see what all the rage was about.” *And talk*, he mouthed silently.

“Is this really Incendius?” Kingsley motioned at the tip of the silver spear, his face all strained.

“The one and only.” Juno’s voice was thick with pride. “Harry cut his head off.”

“I hardly did it alone,” Harry murmured. “Without you or Professor Bones, who would’ve lived or died is hard to say.” Even counting Nyx, Emberwick had more magic than him, more experience, had broken more limits, and his curses were all polished to perfection. Harry matched him in speed, but that would eventually leave him exhausted and at the dark wizard’s mercy.

“Look at him, trying to act all humble,” one of the Aurors murmured.

“There’s no doubt,” Flitwick said, his tone laden with pride and grief. “I saw them tearing through dark wizards as if they were vegetables to be chopped.”

The respect in the Aurors’ eyes only grew. It... felt good. Unlike the praise heaped upon the Boy Who Lived, this was something he had achieved with his own two hands. This was the result of his countless hours of hard work.

Harry cleared his throat. “Where’s Minister Malfoy?”

“I’m here,” a hoarse voice drifted from the top box. “Bring Mr Potter and my niece over.”

An indignant voice shot back a swift response. “But Madam—”

“No buts.”

Kingsley quickly ushered Harry and Juno into the top box. Each seat was wide and cushioned, and Narcissa was lying in the centre row, robes soaked with blood and a bundle nestled at her chest.

“My... cousin?” Juno’s voice came out strangled.

“Yes.” Narcissa gave a bitter smile, then eyed Emberwick’s head. “I never thought I’d have the fate to give birth to a battle-born. Now’s a good time to name her. Victoria Cassiopeia Malfoy. Sister, take her.”

Only then did Harry notice that Andromeda was standing respectfully to the side, face grim. The witch carefully picked up the wrap as if the baby was made out of glass. Behind her trailed Nymphadora, actually wearing an exotic-looking fur-lined robe.

Harry took a closer look at the newborn, though all he saw was reddish skin, and for a moment, he thought it was dead. But the faint rise and fall of her chest suggested she was deep asleep despite all the racket. Sleeping Charm, it had to be. But it was no surprise—a baby crying would have only disturbed the Aurors.

Then, Narcissa raised her voice. “Hear my command, all Aurors—obey Harry Potter and Auror Alastor Moody.”

“But Madam—”

Her head already slumped onto her pillow.

A man in blue silk robes quickly rushed to her side, waving his wand. “She’s fine, just exhausted from the birth. It wasn’t exactly easy, after all.” *The French Minister of Magic*, Harry recalled after taking a closer look.

Only then did Harry have the time to inspect the rest of the top box. A few corpses lay to one side, and Harry’s heart lurched the moment he took a closer look. Lucius Malfoy. Horace Slughorn. Two wizards and a witch he hadn’t seen before, wearing torn Auror robes.

A tall, older witch with a dignified expression emerged from the corner’s shadows, her hair a pale shade of gold that approached Fleur’s but lacked its lustre. Her gaze fixed on his face, as if she wanted to see straight through him.

“Madam Malfoy is certainly bold.” Her accent was crisp and measured. “I saw him use Grindelwald’s magic, and he killed without blinking. Can this boy be entrusted with command?”

Harry’s neck prickled when all turned to look at him, even Andromeda.

“Aye,” Moody said firmly. “Potter has been granted a license to kill and use any and all magic against enemies of Wizarding Britain. His age is even less of an issue for a boy who’s surpassed a peak.”

“Marvellous!” the French Minister clapped his hands, eyes lighting up. “Add in a mastery, and we’d have a fourteen-year-old archmage! Mr Potter, I most humbly invite you to join France—”

“Gespard,” Moody growled out. “Now’s not the time for this.”

“Right, a thousand pardons,” Gespard said without a hint of remorse.

Unlike what Harry expected, Moody didn’t take command; instead, he looked at him with a hint of amusement. A test of his capability, then. Even Professor Flitwick inclined his head with a strained smile when Harry looked his way.

Their expectations weighed heavily on his shoulders.

Harry straightened. Confidence would not make your followers stronger, but it would inspire their courage. Grindelwald had taught him a few things about leadership. “First... why are no reinforcements coming?”

“There’s a fierce battle at Portsmouth,” said Kingsley. “Giants and werewolves and wild trolls struck at the harbour, drawing all the Aurors on duty. We got word just before the task began, and the fighting might still be going strong.”

So no help was coming.

“Auror Shacklebolt,” Harry began, “Professor Flitwick, Sirius—escort Madam Malfoy and the other guests to the hospital wing and summon as many healers as you can get from Saint Mungos.”

His gaze flicked to the devastated Hogwarts grounds. A few flickers of green fire still persisted, but the sea serpent poked its head out of the water and began spewing torrents at it.

“Auror Moody, take four Aurors and conscript any students you see—I count on you to deal with the prisoners and check for survivors.”

Harry took a deep breath, taking stock of his magic that now ran sluggishly through his body.

“Proudmore, follow me and Juno into the Forbidden Forest. We have arcomantula to kill and, perhaps, some of their victims can still be saved.” The acromantula venom wasn't lethal on its own, but in large quantities it could stop the heart. Those webbed could easily suffocate, too.

Only in the evening did Harry have the chance to take a breather. Two dozen students were saved from the spiderweb of the forbidden forest; their nests were all destroyed. Most of the acromantula had been hunted down; the Aurors who had arrived after the Battle at Portsmouth were now scouring the woodland for any remaining spiders.

Hogwarts’ Great Hall had turned into an infirmary, while the bodies had all been transported to the Ministry for safekeeping.

Juno, Harry, and Moody had retreated to the headmaster’s office.

“What a bloody mess.” Moody slumped on a chair, robes covered in dirt and ichor and blood. His scarred mouth twitched. “Congratulations, lads. You won your first battle.”

Harry was no better; he estimated that not an inch of him remained clean. His limbs felt as heavy as lead, and his magic guttered at the limit—even a single Lumos would see him collapse. God, he had lost count of how many spells he had cast today and how many spiders and wizards had fallen to his wand. Nyx was already in a deep slumber, though she hadn’t missed the chance to gobble up three *‘juicy eight-legged snacks’*. He barely had the strength to lift a fork and shove a handful of bacon and mashed potatoes into his mouth.

Juno, unconcerned with her image for once, had already wolfed down a bowl of stew and was now sprawled on the carpet and staring blankly at the ceiling.

“Could be far worse,” Dumbledore said from the wall. “If Emberwick had succeeded, they would have gutted Wizarding Britain’s leadership in a single day.”

Harry shuddered to think of it. Voldemort, as heavy-handed as he was...

By now, they had pieced together the order of events. Crouch Jr. had impersonated his father with Polyjuice. From Crouch Senior, he had gotten a part of the schedule, the defences, and the layout of the task. He had also smuggled in most of the vampires and enemy wizards.

At the start, he had killed Bagman in an instant and almost taken Madame Olympe if not for Madame Zagorska’s quick reactions. The Beauxbatons headmistress was still gravely wounded by Emberwick. If Professor McGonagall hadn’t been nearby to hold off Crouch, all the judges would have perished, and then Emberwick and Crouch would have easily killed their way through the top box and even Hogwarts.

By then, even Harry and Juno would have been powerless against a dark lord, a handful of peak wizards, and dozens of his followers, and they’d be forced to either die or flee.

Then, once they regrouped, both the Ministry and the Aurors still fighting at Portsmouth would have been easy pickings. With the core of the Ministry dead and its fighting strength exhausted, most children either killed or taken hostage, Wizarding Britain would easily fall into the hands of Voldemort.

They had won, yes, but too many had died. Over two hundred, half of whom were students, and a good part of them had been trampled to death in the panicked stampede at the beginning of the attack. Even more would have perished if the Orachilcum statues at the castle’s entrance hadn’t come to life the moment the spiders and dark wizards approached, tearing them all apart. All the Hogwarts teachers fought the attackers. Sprout, Slughorn, Babbling, and Alfred Perrywinkle had all died protecting the students, with Merula Snyder, Madame Hooch, and Septima Vector heavily wounded. The worst of them was Hagrid, barely clinging to life. “I can’t believe he survived enough acromantula venom to kill an elephant twice over,” Ted Tonks had said.

Of the D.A., only Morag Macdougall had died, with Cedric, Diana, Ron, Hannah, and Luna heavily wounded, and Draco knocked out and evacuated by Eros Tonks to a safe house. Their corporeal patroni saved many students from dementors, though they lacked the power to chase them away completely.

Luna’s mother had killed a handful of dark wizards and a lot of vampires, but had been overwhelmed and barely retreated to the castle at the cost of a leg.

Dementors had kissed fourteen students and five spectators, leaving only empty shells behind. Protego Diabolica destroyed the dementors, but it didn’t restore the victims’ souls—Harry knew all too well that the enchanted flames could clean through the target, leaving *nothing* behind. Protego Diabolica was acknowledged as Dark Magic only second to the Unforgivables for a reason.

In fact, anything powerful enough to destroy dementors would also destroy souls, but even so, Harry felt a pang of guilt.

The silence only grew thicker. They didn’t discuss plans or countermeasures. As devastating as their losses were, Voldemort’s side had suffered far more. His puppet, his sharpest dagger, had been slain, and among the slain Fire Knights were six who had broken a limit; it would be a long time before he could muster an attack of such magnitude.

“Look on the bright side, Harry,” Dumbledore’s voice drifted over. “True strength is found in adversity.”

“I was just lucky,” Harry murmured. “At most, Juno and I were the feather that tipped the scales of victory.” It felt cheap to see this victory pinned on him. He hadn’t done all that much, when so many had stayed and fought.

Moody barked out a laugh. “A rather heavy feather, I’d say. Don’t underestimate yourself, Potter. The right wand in the right place can make all the difference.”

“While true, I meant something completely different,” the portrait said. “Fighting to the death with an archmage is the fastest way to improve for any wizard, and you’ve already felt the limit in Magic and control. While the victory might not be enough to make that final push, the respect, recognition of your power, and the intangible authority won through battle might just do the trick, seeing that your first true public display of might has been so spectacular.”

Authority.

Gellert and Dumbledore had said the same thing. On its own, authority could never forge a magical powerhouse or make a great difference, but for those already powerful, every shred counted. How much could Harry ever gain through a single battle?

Harry shook his head. He never thought much of authority, fame, or anything like that.

“I suggest you two go rest,” Moody said. “You’ve done enough, so leave the rest to the adults.”

Uncaring for propriety, he and Juno barely dragged their legs back to her apartment—the one she had been awarded as the Hogwarts champion. Thankfully, the rest of the students were either in the hospital wing, the Great Hall, or their common rooms, and they avoided a flood of questions neither felt like answering. After a quick shower, they collapsed into a tangle of limbs on her bed and fell asleep as soon as their heads hit the pillow.

Harry woke up, feeling surprisingly refreshed. Untangling himself from Juno’s limbs, he slipped out of the bed and stretched. The stiffness slowly left his joints, but heaviness lingered in his limbs. That didn’t stop him from his morning routine, though he only intended to do enough to get his blood pumping.

As soon as he hit the floor and started push-ups, his magic began to pulse. He felt it grow thicker and thicker until even his skin began to prickle, but instead of exhaustion, strength flooded his limbs. Harry kept at it until his hands grew numb.

He couldn’t help but smile wryly. His magic had doubled, and it carried a newfound *weight*. Each spell would be at least a third stronger; his enchantments would last longer, too. This was not the end of it. Even now, it thickened and grew heavier by a small fraction with every heartbeat, and this transformation would last from a few weeks to months, according to what he knew.

He had broken through, surpassing the peak of Magic, just as Dumbledore had said. Now, he could claim the title of archmage even without a mastery.

That was not necessarily a good thing. *‘Why couldn’t it be control or mind?’*

He quickly sat cross-legged on the floor, clearing his thoughts. A second later, Ashwing had already stirred, sending searing waves of emotion through his whole being. Harry was not surprised—as his magic grew stronger, so did the phoenix's flame.

25th of February, Saturday 1995

The Dark Lord

"My lord." Barty was kneeling at his door again. "Please punish me for my failure!"

He suppressed his surging anger. The plan, which by all accounts should have brought Wizarding Britain to its knees, failed spectacularly. Emberwick was dead, along with half of the most powerful recruits.

Truth be told, Voldemort wasn't angry about the defeat, Crouch, or those who had managed to return. Not after learning the details. No, he was furious at himself for the miscalculation. Olympe Maxime, Kingsley Shacklebolt, Filius Flitwick and Alastor Moody. Four archmages, easy to overwhelm in a direct confrontation with power and numbers. They should've been even easier to kill in a well-organised ambush, and the Hogwarts wards would've prevented them from fleeing.

Instead, those same wards turned into a death trap for Emberwick and the Fire Knights.

Pandora Lovegood. Irina Zagorska. Minerva McGonagall. Amelia Bones. Sirius Black. *Harry Potter*. Juno Bellatrix Black. Gustaf Frostlund—the Swedish Minister's chief guard.

Eight wizards and witches who had transcended a limit without anyone the wiser. The boy was the most powerful among them, as if to mock him. His presence alone had tipped the scales of victory. The Potter name was like a shadow of death that refused to go away.

'I should have killed that boy in his first year, fulfilled prophecy be damned.'

Voldemort let go of his anger just before his magic stirred. He had learned to let go in this last month, and it made things easier. But letting go didn't mean he would forget or forgive.

First, he had far more urgent problems to address.

"Barty," he began, "I want you to go and take control of the Fire Knights before any daring fool starts getting ideas; take as many men of the Death Eaters as you need. Rookwood, contact the werewolves and the vampires—"

Fleur

She kept pacing across the stone floor, but it did little to calm her. Gabby was well, but the same couldn't be said for everyone else.

The chamber felt stuffy, even though it was far bigger than their carriage accommodation. But the carriage was gone, burned to cinders with only a charred frame remaining. Although its loss stung, the loss of her personal effects, textbooks, and wardrobe hurt more, and the death of Montclair and Dupont

kept like a slap in the face. Two more had died amongst the second and third years that Fleur didn't know by name.

The Beauxbatons students all found themselves spending the night at Hogwarts, with Fleur among the lucky ones—she could enjoy the cosy champion's chamber with Adeline, unlike her schoolmates, who were crammed into dormitories in groups of four or five.

Worse, Madame Olympe still hadn't awoken, and nobody knew when she would, though the tired healers strongly assured her she was out of danger. The only silver lining was that Gabby was completely unharmed, and her newfound friend Ron had survived, albeit quite battered.

Then, there was the task. It was technically finished, but two of the judges were dead, and three were infirm. Fleur had no idea what would happen with the Triwizard Tournament now.

"I had the weirdest dream," Adeline groaned out, drowsily rubbing her eyes as she rose from her bed, her whole face bandaged. "We got attacked by the dark lord and a horde of giant spiders, only for the Boy-Who-Slept to defeat them all..."

Fleur laughed despite herself. "It wasn't a dream, Addy."

Her friend scoffed. "Do you take me for a fool?"

Fleur stopped by the table, glancing at the Daily Prophet she had bought from a delivery owl.

Emberwick Falls after a Fierce Battle at Hogwarts. The Rise of the Bane of Dark Lords?

An image of Harry Potter, face fierce, flung a crescent that decapitated Lord Incendius every two seconds played on a loop.

Lips curling, she threw it at Adeline's bed. The more she read, the wider her eyes grew until they looked like they would pop out.

Author's Endnote: Okay, that battle was a mess. Also, I had to go back and rework Harry's entrance twice into something far more logical/reasonable (I'd planned it to be a lot cooler in my head until I sat down to go over everything and realised that bloody battles aren't cool). A lot happened, and I had to choose what to show, when, and how. I finally decided to put a title to those who have broken the limits of magic for brevity (something I should have done a long time ago). Roughly speaking, it goes like this:

1 limit + mastery at a branch of magic = archmage

2 limits = archmage

3+ limits = a titan of magic

I'll be implementing this in previous public chapters as I post.