

## Chapter 19

Appearing with a small pop in the middle of a wood, Connie shivered in the freezing temperatures of Scotland in January, just after midnight. Using a Heating Charm on herself, she began the familiar quarter-mile trek towards Brown manor.

She always hated making this walk at night. Every rustle, every snap of a twig set her on edge. There were only two days left until the Wizengamot meeting, which meant if Voldemort was going to make a move, he'd need to do it soon.

As she neared the edge of the property, Connie waved her wand and sent out a discrete detection Charm towards the wards. It had taken three days of hard work, but Kingsley had managed to bore a man-sized hole in the wards without detection.

Finding the hole, Connie slipped through, then stopped and whistled twice. A moment later, she heard a responding whistle to her left, followed by the sound of snow crunching underfoot. When the steps came to a stop, Elizabeth's head appeared out of thin air as she pulled back the hood of her invisibility cloak.

"I'm so glad you're here," she said, her words coming out a little slurred. "It's bloody freezing, and I swear Heating Charms stop working after the third time."

"Sorry," Connie said. "I ran into Minerva on my way out of the castle and got held up. Anything new?"

"Same as yesterday," Elizabeth said, bouncing on the balls of her feet.

Taking pity on her friend, Connie sent a Warming Charm at her. Instantly, Elizabeth's shoulders sagged in relief, and she let out a cloud of steam from her mouth as she sighed.

"Oh, that feels good," she moaned.

“Maybe you’re just shit at Heating Charms,” Connie smirked.

Elizabeth snorted, “Thanks,” she said sarcastically.

“Come on, then,” Connie said, holding out her hand. “Give me the cloak and go home and cuddle with Shack. I’m sure he’ll keep you warm.”

“That sounds like a brilliant idea,” Elizabeth smiled.

Taking off the cloak, she handed it to Connie. As she pulled her hand back, Elizabeth froze and stared at something over Connie’s shoulder.

“Who’s that?” she asked nervously.

Connie spun around and looked towards the front of the house. A lone, dark figure stood illuminated only by the moonlight. The figure’s unnatural stillness sent a shiver down her spine.

“I’ve got a bad feeling about this,” Connie said.

“Should I call for backup?” Elizabeth asked.

Before Connie could answer, a series of loud cracks echoed through the night as half a dozen cloaked and masked Deth Eaters Apparated next to the figure.

“Shit,” Elizabeth cursed.

Rummaging through her robes frantically, she fumbled with the Galleon Harry had made - linked to one held by each of their little group – and dropped it in the snow. Cursing again, she scrambled to pick it up and tap it with her wand.

Connie continued to watch the Death Eaters as they raised their wands and assaulted the wards.

“Now what?” Elizabeth asked.

“Get inside,” Connie said, pulling Elizabeth towards the house with her eyes still on the Death Eaters. “Find Brown and his family and barricade them in a room until help gets here.”

As they turned to run towards the house, Connie saw the tall, still figure turn and look directly at her. Knowing it was Voldemort, a surge of adrenaline pushed her into a sprint. Reaching the door, she blasted it open and stopped inside the kitchen.

“Mr. Brown!” she yelled. “We’re Aurors. We’re here to protect you.”

“Oh, thank Merlin,” A woman said.

Suddenly, an elderly couple stepped out from around the corner. The woman had her hair done up in pink curlers and wore a fluffy white bathrobe. The man was bald with a long, curly mustache and had on a set of white and blue striped pajamas.

“What’s happening?” Philston asked, his mustache twitching as his brow furrowed.

“Voldemort and his Death Eaters are here to kill you,” Connie replied bluntly.

The woman gasped and held a hand to her chest in shock while Philston stared at her intently.

“You got here awful fast,” he noted.

“We –”

The sound of the wards shattering like glass interrupted Connie.

“What’s the strongest room in the house?” she asked urgently.

“The parlor,” Philston replied. “It’s part of the stone building we expanded from.”

“We need to go there, now!” Connie barked.

Nodding, Philston grabbed his wife by the hand and dragged her out of the room. Connie and Elizabeth followed quickly, walking down a long hall next to the stairs to a room at the end. The Parlor had a fireplace at the back and tall bookshelves along the left and right walls. The stone floor was covered with a square rug, upon which sat two chairs next to the fireplace with a drinks table in between. Between Connie and the chairs were a large couch and a low coffee table.

“Mr. Brown, try the Floo. Elizabeth, move some of those bookcases in front of the door,” Connie barked.

While they did their tasks, she moved the couch so that it was directly in line with the door and transfigured it into granite. Levitating one bookcase at a time, Elizabeth used them to barricade the door.

“Leave a gap for us to fire through, and then reinforce it,” Connie told her.

“The Floo’s not working,” Philston said.

"Fuck," Connie said.

Taking a deep breath, she closed her eyes and tried to calm her racing heart. At that moment, there was a tremendous crash as the front door was blasted apart.

"Take cover behind the couch," Connie said.

"Those bastards aren't taking me without a fight," Philston said, wand drawn with a fierce look.

"There's only room for two of us up here," Connie said, standing next to the bookcases and peeking through the holes Elizabeth had made. "Stay behind the couch and hit them when they get through the door."

"Phil, please," his wife pleaded when he looked ready to argue.

Looking at her intently, his eyes softened, and he nodded. Connie used her wand to knock out the gas light in the hall, plunging it into darkness.

"Come on, Harry. Get here," Connie muttered.

"You really think he's good enough to take on Voldemort?" Elizabeth asked quietly.

"Yes," Connie said confidently. "We just need to hold out long enough for him to get here."

"Shack and the other should be on their way, too," Elizabeth said.

Connie nodded, but she knew even with Moody and Kingsley, they couldn't hold out long without Harry.

“Here they come,” Connie whispered, spotting a Death Eater walking past the hall. “They’ve already broken into the house of a Wizengamot member, so no holding back. Hit them hard.”

Elizabeth nodded and readied her wand. For over a minute, they waited silently as the Death Eaters searched through parts of the house, hearing the sounds of doors being blasted open and glass being broken.

“Check down that hall,” A cold, cruel voice hissed. “They’re here somewhere.”

A lone Death Eater turned the corner and marched confidently down the hall. Connie took aim and waited until he was halfway to the door before unleashing a powerful Cutting Curse. The Death Eaters’ eyes widened before it slammed into his chest and knocked him off his feet. He lay motionless, a dark pool growing around his body.

“They’re down there!” someone shouted.

Connie and Elizabeth ducked back from the doorway as a hail of curses came their way. Spell after spell impacted the bookcases, shattering them into splinters. Philston’s wife screamed and hunkered down behind the couch as debris flew into the room. Sticking their wands through the gaps in the bookcases, Connie and Elizabeth fired back blindly.

Suddenly, Elizabeth hissed and jerked her arm back. A large splinter had been blasted off from a near miss and lodged itself deep in her forearm.

“You alright?” Connie asked.

“I’m fine,” Elizabeth said, yanking it out with a hiss. “It’s my left arm anyways.”

Before Connie could respond, a powerful Blasting Hex slammed into the bookcases, completely destroying them and knocking her and Elizabeth back.

“Shit,” Connie cursed. “Get behind the couch!”

Elizabeth and Connie fell back further into the room and took cover behind the stone couch. Philston popped up and sent a barrage of arrows through the door. A scream came from the darkness before several blue shields lit up the Death Eaters.

Three bodies lay unmoving on the floor while four Death Eaters worked their way down the hall. Wising up, two of them held constant shields while the other two threw curses through the doorway. They peppered the back of the couch, and Connie, Elizabeth, and Philston took turns popping up and sending out curses of their own.

One of Elizabeth’s Piercing Curses got through a gap in the shields and struck a Death Eater in the head. Like a puppet with its strings cut, his body collapsed to the floor with a dull thud.

“No!” one of the other Death Eaters screamed. “I’ll kill you bitch!”

Rushing past the shields, the Death Eater sprinted forward, a stream of deadly curses spewing from his wand. Connie popped up and cast her most powerful Bludgeoning Hex at him before dropping back down, a Cruciatus Curse just missing her shoulder.

There was a loud grunt, followed by two more and a series of thuds. Peeking over the back of the couch, Connie saw the three Death eaters on the floor, much further back than they had been before. While two of them struggled to their feet, the third sat up, his legs bent at odd angles.

Connie raised her wand to curse them again, then stopped abruptly when Voldemort stepped into view. His glowing red eyes pinned her in place before he looked down at the Death Eater on the floor.

“Useless,” he hissed, his voice quiet but carrying in an unnatural fashion.

“My Lord, please –”

“Avada Kedavra,” Voldemort hissed.

A jet of green light streaked from his wand and struck the Death eater in the chest. He collapsed dead, eyes still open and staring lifelessly down the hall.

“I grow bored of this,” Voldemort said casually.

Pointing his wand down the hall, a torrent of flames spewed forth. Connie and the others threw up shields and ducked behind the couch as the flames rushed over them. The heat was stifling, making every breath difficult. In seconds, Connie felt her skin begin to sting as it burned.

For a moment, she feared she would slowly cook to death.

Then, as suddenly as it came, the fire vanished. Oddly, nothing in the room looked to have been touched by the flames. Taking a cautious look over the couch, Connie saw a wall of orange and red flames blocking the door.

“Get ready,” she said, standing up.

Elizabeth stood next to her, a worried look on her face.

“What is he doing?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” Connie admitted.

Suddenly, a blue streak pierced the flames and hit the back of the couch. The stone exploded, knocking everyone in the room against the back wall and raining pieces on top of them.



Connie's ears rang, and her back throbbed as she tried to get her bearings. Reaching for her wand, which had slipped out of her hand, she clutched it tightly and looked up just as Voldemort strode into the room.

"Well, isn't this a surprise," he said, gazing around the room. "I'd didn't expect you to have guests, Philston."

"Get out of my house," Philston said, struggling to his feet with a grimace.

Voldemort gave a cold, cruel laugh.

"Let it not be said Lord Voldemort isn't merciful," he said as his Death Eaters moved into the room behind him. "I will give you a choice. All of you will join me now, pledge yourself to my cause, or you will die."

The four Deather eaters around him laughed menacingly.

"Go to hell," Philston said.

Voldemort smiled, his red eyes burning with excitement, before looking over at Connie.

"And you?" he asked.

"Not a chance," Connie said, raising her wand.

"Very well," Voldemort said.

Raising his wand, he aimed it at Philston before jerking his head to look at the fireplace. Eyes widening, he threw up a bright, silver shield a moment before the wall and fireplace exploded

inwards. As the Death Eaters covered themselves from the debris, a silver streak of light hit Voldemort's shield with a reverberating gong. He was launched backwards, disappearing down the dark hall. As hexes and curses rained down on the remaining Death Eaters, Connie spun around and looked through the new hole in the wall. Her heart leapt as she spotted Harry. Next to him stood Moody, Kingsley, Greyson, and Jenna.

"Get Philston out of here," he said, eyes burning bright green and never leaving the place where Voldemort disappeared.

Jerking into motion, Connie and Elizabeth led Philston and his wife out of the house as the others took care of the remaining Death Eater.

"I couldn't tear down the anti-Apparation Wards. We need to get to the tree line," Kingsley said.

Connie began to follow him before looking back and noticing Harry wasn't moving.

"Harry?" she called.

"Don't wait for me," he said. "Go! I'll leave once you're gone."

Connie had just opened her mouth to argue with him when Voldemort literally flew out of the house, his bare feet landing lightly on the ground.

"You," he growled, glaring at Harry. "You've become quite the thorn in my side, boy."

"Oh, I'm much more than that, Tom," Harry said.

A look of rage came over Voldemort's face as his wand blurred. Connie gasped as she watched the green light of the Killing Curse fly straight for Harry's chest. Standing perfectly calm, Harry

thrust his wand forward so that the curse impacted the tip. Impossibly, the Killing Curse shattered like so much glass, pieces falling to the snow where they burned up in a sputter of emerald flames.

“You’ll need to do better than that, Tom,” Harry said.

“Move it, lass!” Moody growled at Connie, dragging her away by the arm. “The soon we get out of here, the sooner Potter can leave.”

Nodding, Connie jogged with the others as they moved towards the treeline.

“Come on, Marie,” Philston said to his wife, who was struggling to keep up.

“I’m sorry, it’s my hip,” Marie said. “You know what this weather does to it. Oh!”

Marie gasped when Kingsley lifted her bridal style and carried her easily. As soon as they reached the treeline, Connie turned back to check on Harry. He stood toe to toe with Voldemort, their wands flashing as they cast spells with inhuman speed and incredible power.

“Harry, we’re clear!” Connie yelled.

“Thomas, Franklin, get these two to the Ministry and get back up,” Moody growled.

“Yes, sir,” Greyson nodded.

Grabbing Philston, Jenna grabbed Marie after Kingsley set her down. With a loud crack, the four of them vanished.

“Should we go help him?” Connie asked worriedly.

“The lad knows what he’s doing,” Moody said. “We’ll just get in the way or wind up dead.”

“He’ll be fine,” Kingsley said, resting a hand on her shoulder.

As they watched the ongoing duel, Voldemort unleashed a torrent of Fiendfyre that coalesced into a flaming, towering serpent two stories tall.

“Holy shit,” Elizabeth gasped.

Harry stood still as the snake lunged for him, its massive body coiling around him and blocking him from sight.

“Harry!” Connie shouted fearfully.

When she tried to move forward, Kingsley’s hand clamped down on her shoulder firmly and held her in place.

“Let me go!” she barked at him.

“Look,” Kingsley told her firmly.

Connie looked closer and noticed Voldemort seemed to be struggling. The snake writhed, seemingly in pain, a moment before it exploded outwards. Voldemort stumbled, a shield springing from his wand.

With a barely audible pop, Harry appeared next to them, the smell of smoke wafting from his clothes.

“Let’s go,” he said.

Breathing a sigh of relief, Connie threw herself at him and hugged him tightly.

“Don’t scare me like that,” she mumbled into the crook of his neck.

“Sorry,” Harry said, rubbing her back soothingly.

Pulling back, he took her arm and nodded to the others. With a twist, they vanished on the spot.

A hundred yards away, Voldemort screamed in rage as the house rumbled and collapsed behind him.

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Harry followed Moody’s Apparation, which led them to the entrance of the Ministry. Connie clung to him for a moment longer before letting go.

“You alright?” he asked.

“Fine,” she said, letting out a shaky breath. “You got there just in time.”

“Sorry,” Harry said. “I got there as quick as I could. It took some time for me to get outside the wards.”

“You made it,” Connie smiled. “That’s all that matters.”

Harry nodded with a smile but still thought he should find a way to get out of the castle faster.

“We need to get our stories straight,” Moody grumbled.

“Connie and I were talking about that couple of days ago,” Elizabeth said, Kingsley’s arm around her shoulders. “We overheard someone talking about an attack on the Browns and went to check it out before calling it in. We got there right before Voldemort showed up and put up his wards.”

“We need to find out how they took out the Floo,” Connie said.

“They’ve checked it before and haven’t found anything,” Kingsley said.

“Then it’s probably someone on the inside,” Harry said. “Can you find out who was in the office tonight, even anyone who visited it?”

“I’ll take care of that,” Moody said. “Mitchell, in records, owes me a favor.”

“What about Greyson and Jenna?” Elizabeth asked suddenly. “They’ve already talked to the Aurors.”

“They know what to say,” Moody assured her, then turned to Harry. “You should get back to the castle, lad.”

“Yeah,” Harry agreed. “I’ll see you Friday.”

Turning to Connie, he smiled and gave her shoulder a squeeze. Stepping back, he twisted on the spot and Disapparated. Appearing in Hogsmeade, near the Shrieking Shack, he looked behind the house for when he’d hidden his broom and mounted it. Pulling his cloak over his shoulders,

he flew back to Gryffindor tower. Slipping through the window of his dorm, Harry snuck back in and closed it behind him.

“Harry?” Remus asked, peeking out of his curtains.

“Er, hey,” Harry whispered.

“What are you doing?” he asked curiously. “And why do you smell like smoke?”

“I couldn’t sleep,” Harry said. “I went for a fly and got a bit cold, so I warmed up next to a fire before coming back.”

Remus smirked and shook his head.

“On second thought, I don’t want to know,” he said.

“How’s that potion working for you?” Harry asked, changing the subject.

“Great,” Remus smiled. “It’s amazing. I can’t thank you enough for finding it.”

“Don’t mention it,” Harry said.

Ducking behind his curtains, he changed back into his pajamas, completely missing the guilty look that crossed Remus’ face.

“I’m sorry I haven’t spoken to you much lately,” Remus said. “James has always had a thing for Lily, and now that you two are dating...”

"It's fine," Harry said, opening his curtains and sitting on the edge of his bed. "I get it."

"You're way too nice," Remus said, shaking his head with a smile. "How did you end up dating three girls, anyways? Lily never struck me as the kind of girl that would go for that sort of thing."

"Honestly, I have no idea," Harry said. "You'd have to ask her."

"Fair enough," Remus shrugged. "You know, Sirius is probably just as jealous as James. The last time he tried to date two girls at one time, they both hexed his bits."

Harry winced in sympathy.

"Ouch," he said.

"Yeah, that was an uncomfortable week for him," Remus grinned. "anyways, I'll let you get back to sleep. Night, Harry."

"Night," Harry said.

Laying back in his bed and closing the curtains, Harry closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep.

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Harry yawned as he sat down next to Lily at the Gryffindor table. This morning, Narcissa and Bellatrix had decided to join them, creating a slightly awkward atmosphere.

"Your girlfriends keep you up late last night?" Alice asked with a smirk.



"I wish," Harry said. "I just couldn't sleep."

"You know, Professor Hammer is looking pretty tired, too," Dorcas teased.

Looking up at the Head table, Harry could see that Connie looked just as tired as he felt. Bellatrix smirked and slipped her foot into his lap under the table.

"Look," Narcissa said, nodding towards the door.

James and Sirius walked into the hall, literally attached at the hip. They were bickering back and forth, arguing about where they wanted to sit as people started to laugh. Looking over at the satisfied looks on Lily's, Narcissa's, and Bellatrix's faces, he furrowed his brow.

"How did you manage that?" he asked.

"I'll tell you later," Lily whispered with a smile.

"Watch this," Narcissa said.

Raising her hand as if she was holding a cup, tipped it over her lap. Down the table, James, who was about to take a sip of pumpkin juice, poured his entire goblet into his lap. Yelling, he jumped up, which pulled a surprised Sirius along with him. Losing their balance, the two of them fell backwards onto the floor just as Professor McGonagall walked in.

"What is the meaning of this?" she asked sharply.

"Oh Merlin, that's brilliant," Alice said, her eyes sparkling with amusement.

"And completely deserved," Dorcas nodded.

“Absolutely,” Marlene agreed.

Harry chuckled and shook his head. He wasn't too bothered about getting back at James and Sirius. It was hard to hold any real animosity towards them. Still, he was glad to see the girls giving them a taste of their own medicine.

Pushing Bellatrix's foot out of his later, he mouthed the word 'later' when she pouted. The last thing he needed was to walk through the hall with a massive erection. Even James and Sirius couldn't distract people from that.

A few minutes later, owls descended from the ceiling with the morning post. Opening his copy of the Daily Prophet, Harry was presented with a full, front page story of the attack at Brown Manor. It recounted the story of how a few brave Aurors, mentioning only Connie and Moody by name, saved the Browns from Voldemort and his Death Eaters. Thankfully, there was no mention of him anywhere in the article.

It filled him with a sense of pride, knowing that he was partly responsible for that, but he also felt a bit guilty. He hadn't told Lily, Narcissa, or Bellatrix about what he was doing, and the Black sisters still didn't even know the truth about where he was from.

It was time to tell them, he decided.