

In Defence of a Weasley

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It was cold and dank in the mountain Chateau where Voldemort had taken Ginny. Suits of armour – dark, twisted armour with angry black dragons on their breastplates, very unlike the armour featured in the halls of Hogwarts – lined the corridors here. The sinking sun filtered languidly through the thick glass windows and cast pallid shadows from their tentative footsteps. Their situation demanded stealth, but speed was vital.

Hermione and Ron refused to let Harry rescue Ginny alone, and he was glad he let them come. It was Ron that found the trick statue that led them into the dungeon where Ginny had been manacled to a moss-covered stone wall. Sweet, blessed relief coursed through him as he watched Ron blast her free and support her on her tender limbs. It was then that he knew the reason Voldemort had chosen to kidnap her, and he vowed that the day wouldn't end without her knowing why, too.

They turned a corner and entered a large, opulent room. It wasn't the sweeping staircases that wrapped around the sides and came together to form a balcony at the top that grabbed their attention. Nor was it the multitude of Muggle swords, maces, and other war implements that were proudly displayed on the walls. What captured their eight eyes were the twelve Death Eaters standing on the other side of the room, just in front of the double doors that led to freedom. That, and the looming dark figure behind them that was Lord Voldemort.

"How nice of you to bring the prisoner," hissed their nemesis. "It's much more convenient for me to not have to retrieve her before I torture her in front of you and kill you all."

Harry didn't say a word, but felt the growing pressure on his scar that indicated Voldemort's attempts to penetrate his mind. He squinted in concentration and the pressure dissipated. His scar was free of the pain that would normally have debilitated him in the presence of his adversary.

There weren't very many options for them, so Harry made a quick decision. He turned to Ron, keeping an eye on the array of opponents before him and said, "Take her home. Both of you."

Hermione opened her mouth to protest, but Harry silenced her with a glance. "I'll handle them."

"Handle them?" Ginny said from where she still clung to Ron. "You think you can take on *twelve* Death Eaters, let alone Tom?" There was a flash of something between them and Harry knew she meant to stay with him because she cared, not because she thought he couldn't win. "You need us, Harry," she pleaded. "I need you," she whispered.

Wishing he could tell her then what he had just discovered, he released a small burst of air from his mouth. "Remind me to tell you something when we get back." Surprise surfaced on her face before it was swallowed up in her concern for him. "About us."

Then, comprehension dawned and she straightened a little by her brother. "Right," she said with conviction. "I saw another exit when they were dragging me into the dungeon."

With the tiniest of smiles, he nodded his head to Ron and they fled to the back of the castle.

Two of the Death Eaters stepped forward in a half-hearted attempt to reach their escaping prey, but Voldemort summoned them back. "They mean nothing. Only Potter matters."

Harry gripped his wand and listened to the door close behind him as he faced his adversaries. The door squelched shut as Hermione put her best Locking Spell on it and then vibrated with an Unbreakable Charm. There was only one way out for him, and it was through Voldemort and his minions.

Voldemort stared at Harry while the Death Eaters looked on. Harry knew that whatever happened, he had to give Ron and Hermione enough time to get Ginny out, and he also knew that Unbreakable Charms wouldn't keep Voldemort from Apparating out of the room.

"Kill him."

Three Stunning Spells, two Impediment Jinxes, and one Killing Curse flew in his direction; the latter could have only come from Malfoy's wand. His instincts kicking in, Harry ducked, twisted, and dodged every beam of light that came his way with incredible accuracy and skill. His months of duelling with every member of the Order and finally Dumbledore himself were now bearing fruit.

Harry's own curses landed with surprising accuracy, incapacitating three of his opponents within the first ten seconds of the fight. He wandlessly enhanced his dodging skills, jumping and hovering to deliver physical and magical blows to his enemy. Voldemort seemed content to watch the display from his position by the front door as Harry dispatched two more of his followers.

His hair tingling on the nape of his neck, Harry executed a perfect back flip up and over the angry purple light. He landed and jabbed his wand at his attacker, sending a red spell that splintered her wand and likely broke her wand hand – the bludgeoning spell doing exactly what Harry had hoped.

Another bolt blasted its way toward Harry, but he only had to move his head a fraction of an inch to avoid being hit. More spells came as his attacker closed on him, with Harry now whipping his head left and right, never taking his eyes off the Death Eater. Finally, the man made a mistake, second-guessing his aim and hesitating a fraction of a second. It was all Harry needed to lunge forward and land a perfect right-cross on the man's face. Blood gushed from his broken nose while Harry used the momentum of his swing to rotate around and land a kick in his midsection. His opponent crumpled to the ground and his wand snapped when Harry landed on it with his boot.

The five remaining attackers took a moment to gather their attack strategy while Harry Summoned one of the swords from the display on the wall. The Japanese Katana's hilt landed perfectly in Harry's outstretched hand as he cast his first Shield Charm to ward off another Stunning Spell.

Bending his knees to duck two Cruciatus Curses, Harry then pushed with his magic and legs until he leapt over the railing and onto the balcony. Three Death Eaters ran up one staircase, while the other two levitated themselves awkwardly onto his other side.

Sword in his left hand, wand in the other, Harry dodged another spell with an armless cartwheel and was immediately in slashing range of two hooded men. One fell immediately to Harry's blade, his wand hand completely severed from his arm, still holding the willow wand. The next man ducked Harry's lateral thrust and blocked the blade's sweeping arc with a shield spell as Harry swung it around his head for another attack.

Harry cocked a brow as the ancient sword vibrated against the magic. He'd never considered the possibility that *Protego* could deflect physical attacks as well as magical ones. His wand came up automatically and blasted the shield apart, sending the man flying over the balcony and onto the hard floor below.

Performing another bending manoeuvre to avoid two Stunning Spells, Harry idly thought that Hermione would be fascinated with the Arithmencal aspects of hand-to-magical combat.

His ruminations cost him, however, as the four remaining men surrounded him and began to shoot spells in his direction. For the briefest of moments, Harry considered simply banishing them off the balcony to join their comrade, but he knew he needed to conserve a little bit of magic to fight Voldemort once his cronies were dispatched.

Moving faster than he had ever moved in his life, he worked two of the opposite facing attackers into a line with each other before stopping enough for them to get a bead on him. And then he Disapparated, breaking through the relatively weak Anti-Apparation wards that had been cast on the chateau. The Stunning spells flew just over and under the other and collided with their opposite casters' bodies.

Harry re-appeared behind one of the Death Eaters and dispatched him with the most powerful sleeping spell he knew. Not even *Ennervate* would wake him up. When he spun around to face his last attacker, a lock of white-grey hair fell from his hood and a wicked smile crept onto Harry's face. *Malfoy*.

There was fear in the blue eyes behind the mask and rightly so. Harry prolonged a single, modified shield spell to deflect every spell the older man could cast, and slowly advanced on his target. Malfoy backed into the balcony and with a quick look behind him, vanished with a *crack*.

When Harry turned to look for Voldemort, he saw a door closing with a pair of bright red eyes flashing behind them.

Next time, Potter, came the words unbidden into his mind before Harry could re-close their connection. His scar flashed in pain for the first time in a year and then it abated.

Reaching out with his senses, he pushed his magic into an every-growing sphere that encompassed the castle and onto the grounds. He let it snap back into place when he didn't find sign of anyone within the radius of his spell. With a sigh of relief and the beginning of a tremble in his limbs, Harry focused on the gates of Hogwarts before rending the air once more with a loud *crack*.