

CHAPTER 7

RE-COMMENCING OCCLUMENCY

The following morning, the members of Grimmauld Places' rivaling Quidditch teams had gathered around the breakfast table engaging in lively banter about the previous night's match and rambling on about how amazingly Harry and Hannah had flown. Everyone was quick to concur that Hannah's gymnastic routine clearly defied the laws of physics and swiftly deduced that Harry had finally met his match.

The instant Hannah emerged through the kitchen door and found a seat at the table with the rest of the group, Mrs. Weasley took to fussing over the massive welt on her head. She tried relentlessly to reduce the swelling with a Reducto Charm, shaming anyone who would listen for allowing Hannah to participate in what she declared to be a merciless sport.

Fred and George had also nestled themselves empathetically around Hannah, catering to her as they would have a wounded cat. They took turns pouring her pumpkin juice, fetching her coffee, fluffing the cloth napkin draped over her lap, and piling her plate full of nosh — everything short of actually feeding her.

Harry felt his insides smoldering with pangs of what he recognized was envy. He listened on with a sour stomach while the twins invited Hannah to their joke shop for the day and insisted on treating her to lunch at the finest restaurant money could buy, as their goodwill gesture for neglecting their key responsibilities as her Beaters.

Hermione and Ginny rolled their eyes and made exaggerated gagging gestures to one another, their wordless equivalent of spitting out, *Okay, okay... enough all ready!*

Harry sat at the table, openly seething, watching Hannah wave off the twins' exceedingly overly dramatic apologies with the planting of a series of sweet kisses on their cheeks. It was almost as if she had deemed it an outright privilege to have the opportunity to spend the full day pampered by the grace of their full attentions. Meanwhile, Fred and George looked as though they were about ready to take flight. They continued to dote over her in a blatant and royally pathetic effort at fetching more kisses from her.

Finding himself becoming completely consumed by his resentment toward the twins, Harry shoved away from the breakfast table in a huff, having barely eaten so much as a morsel. He stormed off into the living area, seated himself by the fireside, and stared irritably into the flames. The trouble of the matter was, *he* wanted to be the one she was kissing and spending time with. He wished for her face to light up for *him* the way it did when she was around Fred and George.

Having taken notice of Harry's brisk and heated exit, Hannah promptly excused herself and hurried after him. She stepped through the swinging doorway and entered the living space, seated herself beside him, and brushed the side of her arm affectionately against his.

"Hey handsome; what's going on?" she inquired softly.

"Nothing. I'm just a bit restless, that's all." lied Harry.

"Why don't you head down to the Quidditch pitch for a few laps to clear your mind?"

"Nah. I think I'll just hang out down here for the day.

Hannah considered him briefly and then said, "Harry, I need to talk to you about something."

"What's that?" he asked, straightening himself out and looking hopeful.

"Well, before Dumbledore died, he asked me to do something very important for you."

"Oh? What?" inquired Harry, choking on his words and sinking back into himself, having been wholly trodden by the very mention of the former Headmaster's name.

"He asked me to re-commence Occlumency lessons with you, straight away. He was rather adamant about it. I thought perhaps we could begin tonight at seven o'clock, if that suits you."

"Whatever. Sounds great," grumbled Harry miserably.

Privy to his every thought, Hannah smoothed her hand up and down his back consolingly and pulled him into her compassionate hug. Harry closed his eyes, welcoming every second of her warm embrace.

Appealing to him benevolently, Hannah said, "If it's alright by you, I'm going to head off to Diagon Alley with Fred and George and help them with their shop for the day. Poor blokes, they're so distraught by their piteous performance at the match yesterday that they feel this incessant need to kiss my bum."

She laughed. Harry let out a light chuckle too, as he truly found her remarks and the way she delivered them to be adorably humorous.

"Alright then. Will I see you at dinner?" inquired Harry with a hint of resurrected optimism in his composure.

"Yup," said Hannah, with a soft reassuring smile, grabbing hold of his hands and squeezing them affectionately.

Harry breathed deeply when he received her touch again. He was entirely grateful for every bit of it.

“Later then,” said Hannah, letting go of him and heading back into the kitchen.

“Yeah, later,” said Harry with a deep exhale, staring longingly after her until she had disappeared behind the kitchen door.

The day passed painstakingly slowly for Harry, who had spent most of it pacing restlessly about the Grimmauld living room. He remained unusually subdued as Ron, Ginny, and Hermione carried on in hysterics over the latest edition of the Quibbler, which had added an innovative life-style section called, *Create and deface your own Death Eater*.

The trio took great pleasure in selecting a replica of Draco Malfoy and decorating him like a clown and then in drag, a charge that under normal circumstances would have amused Harry entirely. His friends cackled loudly while they forced the simulated Draco’s sniveling little voice to croak out ridiculous limericks while manipulating its bewitched body to perform the strangest acrobats, every so often fully flashing his polka dotted pantaloons with the slightest flick of their wands.

Harry literally ignored the lot of them the entire afternoon, excusing his behavior by simply claiming he wasn’t feeling well, when truly, he was counting down the hours until suppertime when he would find himself in Hannah’s presence again. It was the strangest feeling for him, having only known her for a few short days, to find that every inch of her was like a dose of euphoria. The more of her he saw, the more he wanted her.

Ultimately, half past six rolled around, and Harry hurried into the kitchen. Much to his dismay, both Hannah and the Weasley twins had failed to turn up. He later overheard Mrs. Weasley relaying to Lupin that the trio had decided to enjoy a special supper at the *L’Oranger*, one of the most prestigious French restaurants in central London, and would return to Grimmauld after their meal. Harry felt sick to his stomach when he pictured Hannah laughing and enjoying herself entirely with Fred and George, who no doubt were collecting more of her precious kisses along the way. He shoveled in his dinner in complete silence, noting that the time was nearing seven o’clock; he was soon set to begin his Occlumency Lessons.

“Hey, Harry, Mum’s given me permission to stay at Grimmauld for the rest of the summer!” said Ron excitably.

“Oh, yeah?” answered Harry distractedly, watching the timepiece on the kitchen mantle as the big hand drew nearer to claiming the hour.

“Hermione’s to stay on, as well. Mum’s cleared it with her parents.”

“That’s great,” said Harry half-heartedly.

“Want to take a few rounds around the Quidditch pitch after supper?”

“Can’t. I’ve got Occlumency with Hannah.”

“That’s right. Say, where is she, anyway?”

“Dunno. She told me my lesson is to start at seven o’clock. There’s only one way to find out,” said Harry, hopping to his feet the instant the mantle timepiece rang out with seven high-pitched chimes.

“Alright then, we’ll see you in the main living space later,” said Ron.

“Yeah, see you then,” said Harry, pushing his way out of the kitchen and heading for the secret room.

When he cleared the entryway, he found Hannah stretched across on the couch in front of the fire, scantily clad in a coral-colored silken tank and mini shorts pajama set, which Harry thought looked far more like undergarments than bedclothes. Hannah was paging diligently through a tatty black leather book when Harry approached her. Once again, he thought her choice of evening attire was entirely inappropriate. Not that he was lodging a formal complaint, mind you. He was merely thinking to himself that if her current wardrobe was her idea of the suitable garments that Fred and George had mentioned she had been so intent on shopping for, he was in for a long four weeks there.

“Oh, hey, Harry,” Hannah greeted him lazily, closing the black book and tossing it recklessly onto the coffee table beside her. She stood to her feet, stretching her arms proudly over her head, causing her tank top to rise and flaunt most of her midriff.

“Hey,” replied Harry pensively, reveling in the unexpected flash of her alluring skin and tripping mindlessly into the chair beside her. “You weren’t at dinner. Mrs. Weasley said Fred and George took you out again.”

Hannah completed her stretch and casually replied, “Oh, well, they were still feeling guilty, and I love French food, so I didn’t hesitate for a second when they offered. Besides, you haven’t had the opportunity to spend much quality time with your friends in a while. I figured I’d back off a bit and give you lot a chance to catch up on everything without me hanging all over you. Fred and George told me that you and Ginny are going out,” she continued awkwardly, fussing with the neckline of her top.

“Oh, Ginny’s not my girlfriend anymore,” said Harry in a brisk effort to correct her. “We broke up at the end of the school year, last spring. We’re just good friends now.”

“Oh,” said Hannah with a look that Harry was more than willing to interpret as relief.

“It was sort of a dull day today, anyway,” said Harry in a rambling nature. “We just sort of hung out and talked about everything that’s been happening at the Ministry and caught up on all the gossip in the *Daily Prophet* and the *Quibbler*. Stuff like that.” He glanced around the room uneasily, tapping his fingers on the arms of the chair and thinking of something interesting to discuss. He felt that she seemed rather dulled by his conversation so far. “So, Slytherin, eh?”

Hannah’s face contorted with confusion. “What?”

“Hermione told me that you were sorted into the Slytherin house when you studied at Hogwarts with Dumbledore...and **SNAPE**.” Harry was certain to take extra care to accent the name of his greatest foe, suddenly finding himself becoming fully consumed with rage by it.

Hannah realized *exactly* where Harry was headed with his inquiry and was quick to defend herself, snapping out, “Not everyone sorted into Slytherin House is evil, Harry. And you would do well to know that much of my greatest and most prized knowledge was acquired through Professor Snape’s teachings. He’s a VERY talented wizard.”

“Well, does he know who you truly are? I mean, what if he knows?” asked Harry concernedly.

Bitterly and defensively, Hannah rebuked, “As far as Professor Snape is concerned, Harry, I AM Hannah Morley. Now, enough of this prejudice! This isn’t about MY past and ME. This is about YOUR future and the training that YOU have yet to acquire if you *ever* expect to defeat Voldemort!”

Harry realized that he had thoroughly insulted her and instantly silenced himself, fearing his further pollution of their conversation. Hannah cleared her throat and began to address him in such a stark professional manner, it practically crushed him.

“So then, shall we begin?”

“Uh, yeah,” replied Harry tensely.

“Dumbledore was certain to confide in me about your private studies with Professor Snape. I think we should take it from where you left off with him.”

Harry squirmed all the way down to his trainers at the very mention of his lessons with Snape. He wondered exactly how much Dumbledore had revealed to her about his disastrous attempts at Occlumency with him.

“Now, I want you to clear your mind of all thoughts and *concentrate* on emptying your mind,” said Hannah, entirely unaware of his discomfort, seeing as how she was thoroughly engaged in preparing her own mind for his lesson. “Okay. On the count of three, we shall begin. I want you to feel free to defend yourself however you deem

necessary. Oh, and Harry, I'm far tougher than I look, so don't patronize me. I shall know if you are not trying your best."

"Okay," he answered passively, scrambling to clear his mind.

Hannah waved her wand as she spoke, "One, two, three...Legilimens!"

Harry watched her fade from his sight. His life was suddenly flashing before his eyes.

His Aunt Marge was belittling him at the supper table; Snape was ridiculing him about the Marauder's Map; his godfather was talking to him in the flames of the Gryffindor common room; the Dementors were closing in on him and his cousin Dudley, and the night was growing darker and darker...

"Noooooo!" he shouted, suddenly finding himself on his knees in front of the fire.

Hannah was clutching her chest in surprise, exclaiming aloud, "Harry, that was an excellent start!"

Harry noticed that he had inadvertently knocked the wind out of her somehow.

"Are you alright? What happened?" inquired Harry concernedly.

"Stinging Hex...and you didn't even use your wand!" said Hannah, panting and tending to the center of her chest. "Let's continue, then, shall we?"

Harry nodded eagerly. He actually found himself beginning to enjoy the challenge of the lesson, all the while acknowledging that his growing enthusiasm for the Occlumency practice was most likely attributed to his fantastic teacher.

"One, two, Legilimens!" shouted Hannah.

Harry felt himself being ripped from the present again.

He and Dumbledore were heading to the castle after seeing the Dark Mark floating above it. The Death Eaters were coming toward them, he was frozen, he couldn't move, Draco was closing in on Dumbledore...

"NOOOO!" he shouted out.

Hannah was knocked off her feet.

She jumped up and started toward Harry again, belting out, "LEGIMENS!"

Harry was right back where he left off, frozen. Snape was standing before Dumbledore with his wand arm outstretched, looking livid. His face was etched with revulsion and

hatred as he shouted out, “AVADA KEDAVRA!” Dumbledore was blown several feet into the air and crumpled into a heap on the ground...

This time Harry didn't even attempt to stop Hannah. *She* had been the one to lower her wand. He remained hovered over the ground in tears as though he were actually kneeling over Dumbledore's dead body.

“Harry!” shouted Hannah. She hurried to embrace him, to absorb the burden of his virtual reality while he sobbed uncontrollably against her shoulder.

“I didn't stop Snape! I couldn't move! I let Dumbledore die! It was all my fault!” Harry wailed.

“Shhhh. It's all right, Harry. It's over. It was just a memory, that's all, just a memory. Here, come here. Let's sit down. I think that's enough for tonight.”

She led him over to the couch and sat down beside him, collecting him into her consoling embrace. He lay there in her arms for what seemed like ages before he gathered enough courage to confront her with his dried tears cracking over the skin of his face.

“I think I'm going to go downstairs for a bit. I believe everyone's waiting for me. So, I'll see you later,” he uttered quietly.

“Sure — sure,” Hannah answered gently, then added, “Harry, it's going to be alright. I promise you.”

Harry stared blankly at her and forced out a half-hearted, “Yeah,” and left the room. For the first time, he didn't believe her.