

## Chapter 4

Christmas break arrived none too soon. Ron and Hermione already had their plans lined up. Hermione would be staying at the Burrow for the holiday break. Harry would return to number twelve, Grimmauld Place, bringing Dobby and Kreacher. He invited Professor Albright to stay with him, in hopes that she might give him some insights about the secret plan she mentioned before. The professor gladly accepted Harry's invitation, since Professor McGonagall wished for Professor Albright to keep an eye on Harry during the holiday break.

Harry's thoughts wandered to Ginny. Maybe they could spend some secret time together. Up to now, they had been secretly meeting each other in the Screaming Shack, or the secret passage to Honeydukes.

Harry hoped to have some quality time with Ginny, where there was less concern about school and homework. Harry and Professor Albright returned to Grimmauld Place by wizard taxi. He helped Professor Albright into the house. In two days it would be Christmas. He and the professor were invited to the Weasleys, but two days seemed like an eternity to wait to see Ginny. Besides, they would not be able to do anything at the Burrow. Their affair was a secret from everyone, except Professor Albright.

After Harry helped the professor get settled, he went back out into the drawing room and lit a fire. Harry stared for a moment into the crackling flames then broke from his trance and summoned Hedwig. He had written a note asking Ginny if she could escape for a couple of hours. Harry opened the front door, and with the chill rushing in, he sent Hedwig to the Burrow.

The day had grown dark early. Harry and Professor Albright had finished supper then the professor retired to the first floor bedroom. Harry went into the drawing room to sit by the fire. Using a poker, he poked at the log still flaming. Suddenly there was a tapping against the drawing room window. Harry looked up; his heart leaped with hope. Hedwig had returned and she was carrying a letter in her beak. Harry ran to the window and opened it to give Hedwig entrance. A cold chill rushed in the moment Harry opened the window. Once inside, Hedwig perched herself on an armchair. Harry recovered the note from her beak and hastily opened it.

*Dear Harry,*

*Dad has to go back to the Ministry for an important meeting, so I'll be able to come with him. I told him I wanted to go into Diagon Alley for some last minute Christmas shopping. He bought it. Actually, it's not a complete lie, I need to buy Phlegm a gift. I'll see you tomorrow at 1:00. I can only stay for a little while. I promised my dad I would meet him at three back at the Ministry. Even though it's only an hour or two, any time alone with you is better than none at all.*

*Love,*

*Ginny*

Harry read the letter two more times before stuffing it into his pocket. He sensed Kreacher was spying on him. His suspicions were confirmed when he turned abruptly around toward the drawing room doorway.

“Kreacher, where’s Dobby?” Harry asked, with a tone of annoyance.

“Kreacher isn’t Dobby’s caretaker. Master needs to look for Dobby himself.”

Harry grunted at the stubborn elf, pushed him out of the way, and ran upstairs. Harry found Dobby in the fourth floor bedroom. Harry remembered Sirius telling him it was Sirius’ mother’s bedroom. Dobby was in the closet, appearing to be rummaging through an old sack.

“Dobby, what are you doing with that sack?”

“Dobby is helping Harry Potter clean the house for the holidays,” replied the little elf, clutching a portion of the sack in his hand.

“Well, that’s very kind of you Dobby, but I doubt we’re going to have any visitors here for Christmas. They wouldn’t be in this room anyway,” Harry replied. “So, what’s in that manky old sack?”

“Trinkets, Master.”

“Trinkets? What sort of trinkets?”

“Here, Master. Harry Potter should look for himself,” Dobby replied, handing Harry the part of the sack clutched in his hands.

Harry pulled the sack closer to him. The sack was rather deep. Harry had to open it up on the floor to get a better look inside. Inside the sack, Harry found the music box and some old broken silver frames. Harry remembered that Sirius had thrown these things into a sack over two years ago, when he was cleaning the house. Harry continued to rummage through the old sack, when suddenly he saw something that started to make his heart pound. He slowly reached into the sack as far as his arm would reach. His fingers grasped the long chain.

Both Dobby and Kreacher were standing behind Harry. Their eyes were agape with anticipation. Harry slowly lifted the chain up out of the sack. The gold from the chain picked up the light from the bedroom and twinkled in response. As Harry continued to pull the chain up out from the sack, he felt something weighing it down. Once he had the

chain completely out of the sack, the answer was clear as to what it was. It was a large gold locket.

Harry gingerly took the locket in his hand. His mind was racing, "*the locket, the cup, the snake, something from Ravenclaw or Gryffindor.*" *Could it be? No! It couldn't be this easy.* Harry continued to carefully examine the locket. Yes. It had an "S" engraved on it. Maybe the locket wasn't destroyed after all. R.A.B never had the chance to destroy it. It was here all this time. Harry was excited. He knew he had to tell Ron and Hermione immediately, but how? He peered out the bedroom window and witnessed the snow falling furiously outside. He couldn't send Hedwig back out there--not in that.

Then, instantly, another thought came to Harry's mind, only much more terrifying. Harry was holding a piece of Voldemort's soul in his hand. Without thinking, Harry threw the locket on the floor. It landed in a small heap. Dobby went to pick it up.

"Dobby, no!" Harry yelled.

"But Harry Potter dropped his locket," Dobby whimpered, close to tears. It was always Dobby's response whenever Harry would raise his voice.

"Dobby, please don't cry. I just didn't want you to get hurt."

"Dobby is touched. Harry Potter was concerned for Dobby's life," Dobby sobbed loudly.

Kreacher looked on. He didn't dare say a word. Harry's mind was racing faster than ever. He needed to destroy the locket, but how? The diary was easy. It was 'stabable'. Dumbledore destroyed the ring, but never told Harry exactly how. 'Snape's quick thinking.' The thought of Snape left a terrible feeling in Harry's chest. Harry suddenly got a plan in his head. He needed his wand, which was in his jacket in the kitchen. Harry mustered up the courage to pick up the locket. Dobby and Kreacher looked on wide-eyed.

Harry began his decent down the stairs to the kitchen, with Dobby and Kreacher hurrying along close behind. Harry was careful to hold the locket a safe distance from the rest of his body. Some of the chain was hanging out from his clutched fist.

As Harry, Dobby and Kreacher ran into the kitchen. Professor Albright, standing at the stove startled them. She was heating a kettle of water for tea. Harry's heart felt like it would leap through his chest. He knew she saw a piece of the chain hanging from his hand. Harry swallowed hard as he looked into the professor's accusing green eyes.

"Harry, what do you have there?" Professor Albright asked suspiciously.

Harry had to think fast. "Er ... it's ... nothing...a present...for Ginny."

“A present for Ginny?” Professor Albright questioned, looking over her bifocals, as she was known to do, when catching someone off guard. “May I see it?”

“Er... well...it’s just a necklace,” Harry stuttered.

“A necklace! How nice! So, why can’t I just take a look at it?”

Harry realized there was nothing he could do then it dawned on him. He need not be afraid to show the professor the locket. There was nothing about it that would indicate what it was carrying. Harry shrugged his shoulders and handed the locket to the professor.

Professor Albright took the locket from Harry and examined it. Immediately, a shock ran through her chest. Fear quickly surfaced on her face. Harry watched her and suddenly felt a surge of fear come over him. At that moment, he realized that she knew more about this locket than he had figured. Professor Albright looked up at Harry in horror.

“Harry, where did you get this locket?” she questioned in a low and foreboding voice.

“I ...er...” Harry had no answer.

“Harry, did someone give you this locket?” she continued with urgency in her voice.

“No...I...” Harry kept stumbling on his words. Then he tried to turn the interrogation around on Professor Albright. “Why, is there something wrong with it?” It suddenly dawned on Harry. She knew a great deal about Horcruxes. Had he listened to Hermione, and made more of an effort getting to know the professor, he would have found out sooner that she was key to finding and destroying them.

“Harry,” Professor Albright began, but was accosted by the high-pitched whistle from the teakettle. The sound made everyone in the kitchen jump. Strangely enough, the abrupt whistle broke the ever-growing tension in the kitchen. Professor Albright turned around to the stove and moved the kettle to another burner.

“Harry, sit down. I need to discuss something with you,” said Professor Albright.

Harry took a seat at the table across from the professor. Professor Albright poured two cups of tea and placed them on the table, then sat down. She gingerly laid the locket on table between them. Harry looked at the locket then back up to meet the professor’s green eyes. Dobby and Kreacher continued to watch attentively.

“Harry,” Professor Albright began, “I know you and Professor Dumbledore had been taking trips down his...memory lane.”

Harry giggled nervously at the professor's light-hearted comment. Professor Albright was going to continue then noticed the elves were in the room. She looked disturbed by their presence. Harry noticed her concern.

"Don't worry, they've been sworn to not say anything about what goes on in the house," Harry reassured, giving both elves a threatening look.

Professor Albright smiled then continued. "Harry, I know the professor discussed the Horcruxes with you. You do know this locket is one of them?"

"Yeah, well, I do now," Harry replied.

"Harry, you lied to me about this locket," Professor Albright accused, her forehead crinkled.

Harry felt extremely uncomfortable. "Well, er...I didn't know you knew anything about Horcruxes. Dumbledore made me swear not to say anything to anyone, except Ron and Hermione."

"I understand," Professor Albright assured, "but Harry, if I am to be your mentor, we need to be able to trust one another--no secrets. Understand?"

"Yes, Professor," Harry replied, taken back by the professor's statement.

"You are aware that this Horcrux must be destroyed?"

"Yes," Harry replied.

"And you know how to destroy it?"

"Yeah...well...no, not really, but I was going to use my wand," Harry explained. "That's what I came down here for."

"And do you know the spell to destroy it?"

"Er...well...not exactly. Why, is there a specific one?" Harry asked.

Professor Albright cringed at Harry's ignorance. "Yes, there is."

"Well, I haven't learned it," Harry growled, defensively.

“Well of course not, Harry. Just like you haven’t been taught about Horcruxes. They’re evil devices. Their dark magic is as unspeakable, as the name of the wizard that has managed to abuse them,” Professor Albright explained.

“Do *you* know the spell?” Harry asked eagerly.

Professor Albright was reluctant to answer. To admit to having knowledge of such a spell would mean having to reveal her true identity and business at the Ministry. In spite of her concern, she decided to tell Harry the truth.

“Yes, I do, but before I reveal the spell to you, I must ask you, do you know about the other Horcruxes?”

“Well, the diary and the ring were destroyed.”

“Yes, Dumbledore told me about them. Nice job on the diary,” Professor Albright added, to break the tension. Harry smiled. “I was referring to the remaining four,” she continued.

“Well, the seventh piece of His soul is still inside Him. He couldn’t exist without it.”

“Very good. You’ve learned well,” Professor Albright complemented.

“I had a great teacher,” Harry murmured, staring down into his tea. *When was this feeling of loss going to go away*, he thought to himself. It seemed as if memories of Professor Dumbledore kept creeping up into his mind, continuously.

“Yes, you did have a great teacher,” Professor Albright agreed. “ You always will...in here.” She gestured to her heart and Harry smiled. “The other three Horcruxes, do you have any idea where to look for them?” she asked, helping Harry stay focused.

“No,” Harry replied, feeling disheartened.

“Harry, recall the remaining Horcruxes,” Professor Albright instructed.

“There’s the cup, Nagini, and something from Ravenclaw and Gryffindor,” Harry repeated the mantra.

Professor Albright smiled and giggled at him. “Nagini, the snake?” she mocked.

“Yeah, Vold, I mean His snake,” Harry clarified showing annoyance at his own slip-up.

Professor Albright giggled again. “Harry, what makes you think Nagini would have a piece of His soul?”

“Well, that’s what Professor Dumbledore said,” Harry replied defensively.

“Hmm. Well, Professor Dumbledore was not quite as well versed on Horcruxes,” Professor Albright revealed. “Horcruxes only work with inanimate objects. In some cases they will work with something that has died, but it is only in extremely rare circumstances.”

Harry felt a pang of anger in his stomach over the professor’s comment. She seemed to be belittling Professor Dumbledore. *How dare she betray his memory. She had no right. At least he kept **his** title.*

“How do *you* know so much about them?” Harry asked, challenging the professor.

Professor Albright picked up on Harry’s sudden annoyance with her. “Harry, I meant no disrespect to Professor Dumbledore. He and I were good friends. As far as your question is concerned, Horcruxes fall under the category of Transfiguration. It’s the dark side of Transfiguration,” she explained. “Harry, are you aware that Hogwarts used to hold academic competitions in the subjects taught?”

“Er, well, Hermione discovered something about Eileen Prince, Snape’s mother,” Harry recalled.

“Yes, and what was that?”

“She was captain of some team.”

“Yes, Harry, the Gobstones team, and very good, if I may add. Her son, Severus, followed in her footsteps. Do you know what the awards were for winning a competition?”

“No,” Harry admitted, with an eager look on his face. Professor Albright had piqued his curiosity.

“They were valuable antique artifacts with the emblems of the four houses. If you were from Hufflepuff, as was Cedric’s father, who won his award in Care of Magical Creatures, then you would win an artifact with the Hufflepuff crest on it. Sirius’ brother, Regulus, won this locket. There are records in the library about the years the competition was held, who won in which subject and which award was given to them.”

Harry suddenly recalled that Hermione was planning to look up the records on awards. Harry smiled at the old professor. For someone who had all her magic repossessed, she certainly didn’t lack in intellect.

“Finish your tea, Harry. We have work to do,” Professor Albright commanded, indicating her interest in the locket. Harry nodded and gulped down his tea.

Professor Albright and Harry walked back into the drawing room with the locket. The professor carefully handed the locket to Harry and instructed him to place it down on the floor, in the middle of the room. Harry followed her instructions.

“Now, Harry, I’m going to teach you the incantation for removing a piece of someone’s soul from an inanimate object, ergo, destroying a Horcrux,” Professor Albright announced. “The incantation is ‘Expono Animum.’ Can you repeat that?”

“Expono Animum,” Harry repeated, gaging the professor’s expression.

“Very good. You’re a fast learner,” Professor Albright praised. “Now take out your wand and point it directly at the locket, repeating the incantation three times.”

Harry pulled out his wand from his back pocket and readied himself. Harry was about to say the first incantation, when Professor Albright interrupted him.

“Oh, Harry, this spell causes a violent reaction. You may want to step back a bit.”

“Oh,” Harry replied, increasing his distance between himself and the locket, then readjusting his footing. Harry readied himself again, periodically looking back at the professor for further instruction and approval.

“Go ahead, Harry,” Rose encouraged.

Harry nervously pointed his wand directly at the locket, then spoke the incantation. “*Expono Animum.*” He had a look of confusion on his face, when he did not see anything happen.

“Remember, Harry, three times,” Rose reminded.

Harry nodded then looked back intently at the locket. “*Expono Animum. Expono Animum,*” Harry repeated loudly.

Not a second later a bright flash of deep purple light filled the center of the room. Then instantly the light around the locket changed to a black circle haloed in yellow. A loud explosion, shaking the chandelier in the dining room, downstairs, followed the yellow light. Professor Albright quickly grasped onto an armchair to steady herself from the violent quake.

Harry, not expecting this reaction, was not as fortunate enough to protect himself in time, and was thrown very hard against the wall. He felt the air briskly leave his lungs, as he slumped down to the floor. With his body still leaning partially against the wall, his glasses hanging half off his face and his wand lying by his side, Harry’s head wobbled to and fro. Dobby peered around the drawing room entrance, shaking with fear. Kreacher began leaping and laughing at Harry.

Professor Albright regained her balance and moved as quickly as she could to check on Harry's condition. She lifted her cane in a threatening manner at Kreacher, who immediately ducked into the hallway.

"Harry," Professor Albright called, gingerly poking Harry with her cane. "You did it," she proudly proclaimed.

Harry lifted his head to look up at the professor, his eyes suddenly crossed over then he slumped back down and passed out.

"Well, at least the locket's no threat to us now," Professor Albright chuckled to the elves. "Dobby, Kreacher, come help me sit Harry up against the wall."

Dobby and Kreacher came out from the hallway and each grabbed one of Harry's arms. They pulled Harry back up into a sitting position; His head was slumped forward and his glasses now rested in his lap.

"Kreacher, quickly, go into the bathroom and get me a cold cloth to put on Harry's face," Professor Albright commanded.

Kreacher followed her instructions remarkably well. While Kreacher was gone, Professor Albright looked back at Dobby, who was holding Harry's hand and sniffing.

"Dobby, why are you crying?" Professor Albright inquired.

"Dobby cries for his dead master, Harry Potter," Dobby whimpered, looking up at the professor with tear-filled eyes.

"Oh, Dobby. Harry's not dead. He just got the wind knocked out of him," Professor Albright explained.

Kreacher returned to the drawing room with a cloth, dripping wet with cold water.

"Very good, Kreacher," Rose approved. "Now place it on Harry's face."

Kreacher took the cold, dripping wet cloth and threw it hard at Harry's face, making a terrible slapping sound as it hit. Water splattered against the wall. Harry immediately jolted awake. The cloth, soaking wet, landed in Harry's lap. Harry opened his eyes and looked dizzily around for a moment. Dobby smiled at him. Harry looked up at the professor.

Kreacher watched Harry for a moment, then with a sneaky grin on his face proclaimed, "Master's awake now."

"Yes," Professor Albright replied, glaring at Kreacher, "thank you."

Harry picked up the wet cloth from his lap and handed it to Dobby then returned his glasses to his face. While still leaning against the wall, he eased himself up into a standing position. Professor Albright observed him. Dobby went back into the hallway with the dripping cloth and Kreacher followed him.

“How are you feeling?” Professor Albright asked.

Harry nodded while rubbing the back of his head. He looked around on the floor to find his wand. He found it not too far from where he was standing, picked it up and returned it to his back pocket. He glanced over to where the locket was lying. Nothing about it appeared to be different. Harry had a disappointed look on his face, and the professor immediately picked up on his sense of failure.

“Oh, don’t worry, Harry. The incantation worked. You should be very proud of yourself,” she smiled.

“But nothing happened to it. It looks just like it did before I did the incantation,” replied a frustrated Harry.

“Well, did the ring look any different? Did the diary? Other than some ink on the diary and a crack in the ring’s stone, both objects remained in tact. Take a careful look at the locket,” Professor Albright instructed.

Harry walked over to the center of the room, bent down, and cautiously picked the locket up by its chain with his two fingers. He held it up to the light. Sure enough a small crack had run halfway up through the ‘S’. Harry was pleased and smiled back at the professor.

“Well, we’ve had enough excitement for one evening,” Professor Albright declared, “I’m retiring to bed. Good night, dear.” Professor Albright smiled, reaching out and squeezing Harry’s hand.

Harry looked at her and smiled, “Good night, Professor.”

It was Christmas Eve morning. Harry woke up very happy, for today would be the day he and Ginny would finally spend some time together. He quickly leaped out of bed and ran into the bathroom to get cleaned up. Harry then rushed back to his bedroom to get dressed and then returned to the bathroom. He surveyed himself in the mirror and looked at his unkempt hair. A feeble attempt by a comb didn’t satisfy him, so he ran his fingers through his black hair. He breathed a sigh of discontent upon realizing it did no good.

Harry made his way down stairs to find Professor Albright having breakfast.

“Morning, Harry,” greeted Professor Albright.

“Good morning,” Harry replied in an unusually cheerful mood. He took a seat across from the professor and helped himself to some toast.

“You seem especially happy today,” Professor Albright remarked, giving Harry that same look over her bifocals.

“Er...no...just glad we destroyed another Horcrux,” Harry lied.

Harry’s answer did not fool the old professor. “ Oh, by the way, I would bring down that small blanket from your bed. Blankets like that one add to the coziness of a romantic afternoon,” she teased, watching Harry’s reaction.

“Huh?” Harry replied, looking up innocently from his toast. He saw the look on Professor Albright’s face and immediately realized she caught him again.

Rose returned the smile, “I was young once too, Harry.”

Harry smiled with a guilty expression on his face. *How did she know*, he wondered.