

The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore

The sun was coming up: the pure, colourless vastness of the sky stretched over him, indifferent to him and his suffering. Harry sat down in the tent entrance and took a deep breath of clean air. Simply to be alive to watch the sun rise over the sparkling snowy hillside ought to have been the greatest treasure on earth, yet he could not appreciate it: his senses had been spiked by the calamity of losing his wand. He looked out over a valley blanketed in snow, distant church bells chiming through the glittering silence.

Without realising it, he was digging his fingers into his arms as if he were trying to resist physical pain. He had spilled his own blood more times than he could count; he had lost all the bones in his right arm once; this journey had already given him scars to his chest and forearm to join those on his hand and forehead, but never, until this moment, had he felt himself to be fatally weakened, vulnerable and naked, as though the best part of his magical power had been torn from him. He knew exactly what Hermione would say if he expressed any of this: the wand is only as good as the wizard. But she was wrong, his case was different. She had not felt the wand spin like the needle of a compass and shoot golden flames at his enemy. He had lost the protection of the twin cores, and only now that it was gone did he realise how much he had been counting upon it.

He pulled the pieces of the broken wand out of his pocket and, without looking at them, tucked them away in Hagrid's pouch around his neck. The pouch was now too full of broken and

useless objects to take any more. Harry's hand brushed the old Snitch through the Mokeskin and for a moment he had to fight the temptation to pull it out and throw it away. Impenetrable, unhelpful, useless like everything else Dumbledore had left behind –

And his fury at Dumbledore broke over him now like lava, scorching him inside, wiping out every other feeling. Out of sheer desperation they had talked themselves into believing that Godric's Hollow held answers, and convinced themselves that they were supposed to go back, that it was all part of some secret path laid out for them by Dumbledore; but there was no map, no plan. Dumbledore had left them to grope in the darkness, to wrestle with unknown and undreamed of terrors alone and unaided: nothing was explained, nothing was given freely, they had no sword, and now, Harry had no wand. And he had dropped the photograph of the thief, and it would surely be easy, now, for Voldemort to find out who he was ... Voldemort had all the information now ...

'Harry?'

Hermione looked frightened that he might curse her with her own wand. Her face streaked with tears, she crouched down beside him, two cups of tea trembling in her hands and something bulky under her arm.

'Thanks,' he said, taking one of the cups.

'Do you mind if I talk to you?'

'No,' he said, because he did not want to hurt her feelings.

'Harry, you wanted to know who that man in the picture was. Well ... I've got the book.'

Timidly she pushed it on to his lap, a pristine copy of *The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore*.

'Where – how –?'

'It was in Bathilda's sitting room, just lying there ... this note was sticking out of the top of it.'

Hermione read the few lines of spiky, acid-green writing aloud.

'"Dear Batty, Thanks for your help. Here's a copy of the book, hope you like it. You said everything, even if you don't remember it. Rita." I think it must have arrived while the real Bathilda was alive, but perhaps she wasn't in any fit state to read it?'