

It was a grim time indeed when they were talking about it so plainly. “As long as he doesn’t find out I’ve lost the magical block,” Harry replied. “How do I make sure he doesn’t find out?”

“The check was easy for the goblins, but it’s a complicated bit of magic for wizards. He’d need to have you alone and unaware for at least thirty minutes,” Snape explained. “Don’t end up in the Hospital Wing, and you should manage to avoid it.”

Harry had managed to stay out of Pomfrey’s care for most of the previous year — up until the end, at least. “I’ll try my best.”

“You’ll have to be very careful meeting the other heirs, this year,” Sirius said. “The closer the lot of you get to coming of age, the more Albus will want to keep you separated. Isn’t one of them seventeen now? The Warrington kid?”

“Yeah. His uncle won’t let him take the family seat, though.” Harry had a thought, and he turned to Snape. “What’s going to happen with the Slytherins? All the ones whose parents are Death Eaters?”

“As of yet, nothing,” Snape assured. “The Dark Lord is not yet desperate enough to want to mark underage wizards. They will have their roles to play at school, of course — some more openly than others. And I too must play my role. But Slytherins are nothing if not resourceful.”

Harry was even more glad that he’d managed to get to almost all of the Slytherin heirs before Voldemort returned. There were other students with Death Eater parents, of course, but the ones in his year made up a solid chunk of them, and they needed to know they had options. With any luck, the younger years would avoid the war, and the older years... Harry prayed they could keep the casualties to a minimum.

“We’ll try and keep the inter-house relations strong with the Slytherins, especially the younger ones,” he promised. “Those who have to play their parts are one thing, but the reputation of Slytherin house is bad enough as it is. The last thing we want is a bunch of eleven and twelve year-olds thinking the rest of the wizarding world hates them. That’s how we got in this mess to begin with.” And that too was Dumbledore’s fault. Cunning and ambitious never meant evil before.

“I will protect my charges the best I can,” Snape said. “Unfortunately, as the Dark Lord must believe me loyal, those who are questioning their loyalty would never come to me. Having other avenues for them would be appreciated.”

“Maybe Blaise could be that for them. His mother is neutral, everyone knows that. I’ll owl him about it as soon as I can.” Harry had a long, long list of owls to send as soon as possible.

“Speaking of owls, do you know if the twins have made any progress on solving our little monitoring problem?” Sirius asked. Harry shrugged.

“No idea, I only managed to ask them on the train. I suppose I just have to hope no one owls me until they figure it out. Am I being monitored already?”