

“What do you want us to do, march into the Wizengamot and demand to take our seats early?” Sullivan Fawley scoffed. Harry shook his head.

“No, no, that won’t work. I had something a little more... simple in mind. Dumbledore’s counting on house rivalries to keep people isolated — not just with the Slytherins. If people don’t socialise outside their house, they get more and more narrow-minded, until no one can see anyone else’s point of view. And those who need help aren’t willing to ask for it because it often means going to someone outside their house. If people keep telling Slytherins they’re all dark wizards, of course they’re going to end up going down that path. I was thinking that, since the theme of this year seems to be international magical cooperation and unity and all that bollocks, we could start off a little closer to home.”

“Hmm.” Padma frowned thoughtfully. “What did you have in mind?”

“I’m not really sure yet. Obviously I’d like to spend more time with all of you, but it can’t just be me — if Dumbledore thinks I’m up to something, he’ll start pushing. He’s got a lot riding on me being the good little Gryffindor Golden Boy.” He hadn’t told them about the Compulsion charm, but everyone with eyes could see that the way Dumbledore treated Harry wasn’t a normal headmaster-student relationship. “If all of you start hanging out with people in other houses — it doesn’t even have to be the people in this room, it could be anyone — then when I start doing it, it won’t look as out of place. I hope.”

“What about a study group?” Hannah suggested. “We could have a smaller, private group — just us, meeting every other week or so, to make plans. But then outside of that we could have a big group, any house welcome, any year. We could say that with the tournament disrupting the school year so much, we want to make sure we don’t fall behind in our classes. I bet a bunch of the fifth and seventh years would go for it, too; they’ve got exams they won’t want to fail. Then it doesn’t have to come from you, Harry.”

“Hannah, that’s brilliant,” Harry enthused. “It wouldn’t even have to involve everyone meeting up together all at once; they could meet based on year and subject, get everyone studying the same thing studying together.” If there was one thing that would give people common ground, it was complaining about homework.

“I’ll talk to some of the other prefects,” Cassius volunteered. “It might be too early to start yet; term’s only just begun, and the tournament hasn’t even started yet. Besides, half the sixth and seventh years are planning on entering the tournament, so they’re a little preoccupied. But we can start branching out our friendship groups in preparation.”

“What about the rest of the Slytherins?” Ernie asked, holding his hands up defensively when Daphne whipped around to glare at him. “Obviously you three are alright, but how do we know who else is trustworthy? We don’t know who might already be on You-Know-Who’s side.”

“Do you really think anyone who’s still a school kid can be on his side?” Harry pointed out wryly. “Even if they think they are, they have no idea what war is really like. I’m not saying go out and hug every Slytherin, but don’t treat them any differently than you would a Ravenclaw or Gryffindor or Hufflepuff. If we automatically write them off just because of their house, we’re as bad as Dumbledore.” How many Slytherins could they save just by