

appears to be the life I have chosen for myself.” This came with a long-suffering sigh that made Harry laugh.

“You know the Sorting Hat almost put me in Slytherin?” he said, watching Snape’s dark eyebrows rise.

“What a disaster that would have been. Dumbledore might have had a stroke on the spot.” Snape turned to Harry, looking him over appraisingly. “I have hope that between myself and Draco, we’ll be able to make enough of a Slytherin out of you for you to survive in this world. Rest assured, Mr Potter; while we may have started off on the wrong foot, we are on the same side now.” He strode towards the door, beckoning Harry to follow. “As we still have some time before dinner, I would like you to follow me to the parlour. I wish to check your Occlumency shields one last time before you face the headmaster.”

Harry nodded, and the pair of them went upstairs to the empty parlour. Harry took a seat, knowing he would need it if Snape was about to be as ruthless as he feared.

The Slytherin didn’t give Harry time to prepare; as soon as they made eye contact, he was working away at Harry’s shields. Harry kept his breathing steady and his mental defences tight, unsure how long he sat there for. Snape tried everything; brute force, sneaking through cracks, even trying to convince Harry that he’d disappeared, only to try and creep in when he let his guard down. Through it all, Harry refused to let him in. Eventually, the attack ceased, for real this time.

“Very good, Potter,” Snape said with an approving nod. “You should be able to withstand any discreet attempts at entering your mind. Should the headmaster wish to put in any more force than that, it’ll be obvious to you and also any bystanders, and I believe if it ever gets to that point you will have bigger things to worry about.” He looked at Harry with a serious expression. “Make sure you have your shields up at all times, especially if you’re in large crowds or around the headmaster. Eventually it will become second nature, but at first it may get exhausting.”

“I’ll do my best,” Harry promised. “Thank you for helping me with this, Professor.” He’d made more progress in the last month and a half than he had in the entire nine months he’d been working on it by himself.

“You’re welcome, Potter. You’re free to go.”

Nodding in thanks, Harry got to his feet, leaving the parlour with his hands in his pockets. Now, how to spend the rest of his day... perhaps he’d set a few parting pranks for his beloved godfather.

.-.-.-.

All too soon, it was Saturday night. Harry’s school trunk was packed and ready, after a long, drawn-out selection process of his bookshelves, which culminated in Remus promising to send him any books he left behind if he decided he wanted them. It was a refreshing concept for Harry, having a bedroom he could leave stuff in during the school year without worrying