

“...And that’s not something you want?”

Nott’s face turned incredulous. “Of course not. I’ve seen the way that lunatic treats his followers.” Then he grew hesitant. “And— he’s wrong. The Dark Lord. He’s going to get us all killed.”

That was a surprise. Neville looked equally shocked, his quill slowly dripping ink onto his half-written essay.

“So you don’t want the Mark because you don’t like to bow?” Harry asked sharply. “Or because you don’t believe in torturing and killing muggleborns?”

“Both,” Nott said with a twist of a grimace. “Magical blood shouldn’t be spilt.”

“What about muggles?”

Nott flinched under Harry’s intense stare, looking like he might bolt. “Look, Potter, I’m trying here. I heard— I overheard Blaise talking to some other Slytherins, in the common room. He said there’s a way to avoid *him* without having to debase ourselves to Dumbledore.” His gaze turned cautious, hopeful. “He said you could offer sanctuary.”

Harry would have to have a word with Blaise Zabini about what exactly he was promising people on Harry’s behalf.

“I could,” Harry agreed slowly.

“Name your price and I’ll pay it,” came Nott’s immediate reply. “Money, connections, knowledge; whatever you want. If it’s in my power, it’s yours. Just *please* get me out of my father’s house by this summer. He—“

Nott met Harry’s gaze, and Harry’s heart sank. He recognised that wild-eyed, frantic sort of look.

It was the same look he saw in the mirror when he lived at the Dursleys.

“He hits you?” Harry asked urgently, and Nott’s lips turned down bitterly.

“Like a muggle? He’d never be so crass.” He laughed, and the sound was haunted. “My father likes a good old-fashioned Cruciatus curse. Really makes the punishment *memorable*.” He shook his head, dark hair falling carelessly into his eyes. “If I’m lucky, he’ll hex me into such a gibbering mess that I’m no use to the Dark Lord.” Then he froze, flinching, and looked at Neville. “I’m sorry, Longbottom. That was uncalled for.”

Beside Harry, Neville had gone chalk-white. He swallowed hard. “If Harry can’t offer you sanctuary, I will,” he said, surprising them both. “No— no-one should suffer that fate. Not even you.”

“I’ll sort something out,” Harry promised. Slowly, telegraphing his move quite obviously, he reached out to place a hand on Nott’s shoulder. “You’ll have a safe place to go by the