

Harry sank down into the armchair, shaking his head. “Mate, you wouldn’t believe me if I told you.”

Some secrets were best kept to himself, for now.

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The defence club — which, to avoid using the term ‘club’ around Umbridge’s keen ears, had begun to be referred to as ‘the Hogwarts Alliance’, HA for short, ‘Harry’s Army’ if people were feeling particularly cheeky — was rapidly becoming Harry’s favourite part of the week, just below spending time with Draco. His students were coming on in leaps and bounds, once they started to get their confidence in spellcasting. Harry had them working on Stunning charms now; a standard part of the OWL curriculum, but also a very handy spell to have in a fight.

He wasn’t training them to become killers. Not like Snape was training him. He just wanted them to be able to incapacitate their opponent, and escape the fight safely. Once they had those skills, he’d look at teaching them some more combative spells.

Everyone was taking it in turns to stun each other, cushions piled up on the floor to stop any major injuries. Some of them seemed to be enjoying the opportunity to hex each other far too much — especially Justin Finch-Fletchley, who was paired with Zacharias Smith.

“You’re all doing brilliantly,” Harry enthused, walking between the pairs with a spring in his step.

“Thanks, Professor Potter,” the twins chirped, winking. Harry’s cheeks reddened — they had started calling him that as a joke in the last meeting, but it was starting to catch on amongst the rest of them. Harry couldn’t deny the little spark of pleasure in his chest that burst each time someone said it.

Maybe he’d go into teaching, once he was done with his professional quidditch career. It was oddly satisfying, seeing people improve from lesson to lesson, watching their delight as they started to master spells they’d previously struggled with.

Neville was possibly Harry’s most improved student. The blond Gryffindor had started out incredibly nervous, stuttering his incantations and giving up before he’d even properly tried. With some coaching from Harry, he was really starting to find his stride. Privately, Harry wondered if the boy’s wand — his father’s wand — was the problem; Neville had magic, that much was clear, but the conduit was distorting things along the way. Neville wouldn’t hear a word about the possibility of replacing it, though. “Gran would kill me,” he kept insisting, so Harry let it be. For now, at least.

As Harry observed his classmates, he noticed that more than a few of them had reddened skin on the backs of their hands. He scowled to himself — how many detentions was Umbridge giving these days? Surely someone on staff had noticed? Other than Snape, of course, who couldn’t risk his reputation to say anything. Was everyone else hiding it, just like Harry had?