

Chapter 88

On Sunday evening, Harry put his wand to the silver plate on the bottom of his HA inkwell for the first time that year.

On Monday morning, half his year mates — and plenty in the years above and below — had a certain kind of glint in their eye when they met Harry's gaze at breakfast. They were more than ready for another meeting, at last.

And with Dumbledore out of the castle most days it seemed, Harry couldn't think of a better time to start.

They were back in the Room of Requirement now — no reason to head down to the Chamber, not now they didn't have Umbridge trailing their every steps. Only a few faces looked disappointed; most people seemed relieved not to be in Salazar's enormous underground hideaway.

"It's good to see you all," Harry greeted, once he was fairly sure the whole group had arrived. "I'm glad you're all back. It was... a long summer." Several sympathetic nods and grimaces answered him. "You've probably noticed we've got a few new faces with us. I can promise you, they're all trustworthy — most of them were getting HA training in secret one way or another last year."

He gestured with an arm to the cluster of Slytherins stood behind him. Draco, Theo, and five of the kids from the Pottery. With their allegiances now known, there was no point in keeping things secret. Unfortunately not all of his Slytherin allies could be so open; especially not since he'd burned the HA contract at the end of the previous year.

"Just how long have you been befriending Slytherins in secret, Potter?" Terry Boot asked, looking more amused than anything else. Harry shrugged sheepishly.

"Longer than most of you would expect." He admitted. "And I'm sure none of you will be surprised that these aren't the only Slytherins I'm friends with. There are plenty more who aren't able to be quite so open with their friendships, so don't start assuming that everyone who isn't in this room is a Death Eater."

Several people snorted, Blaise being one of them, his lips quirking.

"So," Harry continued, "I know this group started as a way to make sure we all passed our exams. And I know we kept it secret because we didn't want Umbridge on our backs. But things are bigger than that now. There's a war coming."

Every face looking back at him was dead serious, determined. Harry resisted the urge to smile. "I'm not going to put another contract in place, but I'm going to ask you to continue to pretend this club doesn't exist. If you know someone who genuinely wants to be involved, send them my way. But we aren't just about passing exams anymore." He ran a hand through his hair, thinking over his next words. He didn't want to scare anyone, but...