

“I’m not going to force you to fight in this war. No one should be forced into that kind of a fight. But I also can’t promise that the war will leave you alone — we all know how ruthless the other side can be. All I can do is give you the tools to defend yourselves, whether or not you choose to seek out the fight when it arrives. The headmaster doesn’t want me to do this — he thinks that if everyone sits back and lets the adults handle things, the Death Eaters will be perfectly happy to leave us kids out of it.” He rolled his eyes, and was glad to see several expressions of disgust in his audience. “So if Dumbledore asks, we disbanded at the end of last year. If *anyone* asks, we disbanded.”

“What’s the deal with you and Dumbledore, anyway?” Cho asked boldly, raising her eyebrows at him. “All that stuff in the paper over the summer...”

Harry grimaced. “Let’s just say that Dumbledore has been planning for his own glory far too long to consider I might not want to be used as a weapon.” He didn’t dare say anything more, not when half this group didn’t know the truth, but he hoped that would be enough. It would certainly get them thinking.

Still, he didn’t want their first session back to turn into an interrogation. He clapped his hands together, grinning. “Right, then. Let’s get started.”

They had a lot to get through, after all.

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It was a rare evening that found Harry alone in the Gryffindor common room. Normally, he tried his best *not* to be in that space for any decent length of time, but Neville and Ginny had gone for a romantic walk by the lake before curfew, and Harry had been out doing something or another every night that week so far — he didn’t want people to start getting suspicious about where he spent his evenings.

Unfortunately, being alone in the common room made him a target for exactly the kind of thing he was hoping to avoid.

“I know what you’re doing, you know.” Hermione stood over him, arms folded and eyes narrowed. Harry glanced at the parchment in front of him.

“...My Transfiguration essay?” His facetiousness made her scowl, and he fought a smile. There were any number of things she could’ve figured out that he was up to; which one had a bee in her bonnet now?

“All your new friends. I didn’t think anything of it until I came across a book about the Wizengamot this summer. But it all makes sense — Susan Bones, Zabini and Greengrass, even Neville! And now you’re all cosy with Malfoy; conveniently right after his mum takes over a whole load of seats!”

As she got more progressively worked up, Harry leaned back in his chair, setting his quill down. He had to admit, he was surprised it had taken Hermione this long to figure things out.