

devotion to this school, if Hogwarts has decided to awaken you all. And I am curious which families have ended up carrying my friends' lines with them." Then he smirked, that Slytherin deviousness returning. "Then, if you have no pressing engagements, I shall teach you how to properly utilise your new connection to the wards — for the castle's benefit, and your own."

Harry grinned, making himself more comfortable. His homework could wait.

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Carrying even a fraction of the wards of Hogwarts took a little time to get used to, for all four of the heirs. Even with the tips from Salazar, Harry had to work hard not to accidentally pull from the wards, or focus too hard on trying to feel them. It was exhausting, having a low-level awareness of the entire school in the back of his mind.

But already, the castle felt better — stronger, happier. The students seemed to feel it, too, even if they didn't know why. And Dumbledore certainly felt it, if the thinly veiled confusion on his face was anything to go by.

The Hogwarts heirs were getting used to it. It would be easier, Salazar assured, when all of them were seventeen and fully developed; right now it was a bit of a strain on their adolescent magical cores, but the castle would do its best to ease that strain. Either way, it was just another oddity on the list for Harry to get used to.

By the first Hogsmeade weekend near the end of October, Harry was both desperate to leave the castle and terrified of doing so. He wasn't sure how the connection would stretch, even though Salazar assured him it would be fine. The wards hadn't been designed to keep them trapped within the castle, after all.

"It'll be fine," Neville assured optimistically as the pair of them headed down to breakfast, dressed for a day in the village. "Come on, Harry; you've been looking forward to this for ages. Hannah and I are both staying here, it'll be fine."

He was right, and Harry knew it. Forcing his anxiety away, he managed a smile, nodding tightly. Neville grinned, gently bumping his shoulder. "Stop being such a control freak," he teased, making Harry stick his tongue out. He wasn't a control freak! He was just... usually the epicentre of trouble, and liked to be on top of things when it occurred.

Still, he kept silent, not sure Neville would see it his way.

Reaching the Entrance Hall, Harry had more of a spring in his step, remembering the reason he'd been looking forward to the Hogsmeade weekend for so long. Draco stood near the doors, two wrapped sandwiches in his hands, his Slytherin scarf wrapped around his neck to ward off the late October chill. His grey eyes looked even more vivid against the dark green wool, and Harry felt a tingle travel down his spine.

"I'll see you later, then," Neville drawled, amused. Harry snapped back to attention, feeling heat rise on his cheeks. Neville just laughed. "Be careful out there. Remember, you're just friends, yeah?"