

He looked around the room, a faint frown coming to his lips. The pairings were much the same as they always had been; the same people tended to drift together, much like they would in class.

A firework burst from his wand, and immediately the room fell silent. “This is going great,” Harry began, “but there’s something I’ve noticed. Look around a minute. What do you see?”

Everyone peered around the room, confused.

“We’re all fighting our friends,” Susan said eventually, eyes going wide. Harry nodded.

“I don’t blame you. It’s natural to want to practice these spells with someone who feels safe to you. But always working with the same people can make you too comfortable — you start to learn their tells, and their weaknesses, and you target them. Then, if you fight someone new, it’s harder to get a grip on *their* weaknesses. It’s not as big a deal now, since we aren’t really fighting each other,” he added, before anyone could protest, “but as things go on, it’ll become more obvious. Especially when we start working on fighting in groups. You get too used to the same person protecting you, you start to leave openings with the assumption they’ll cover it.”

He’d listened to a dozen lectures on the matter from Sirius, who apparently had taken personal offence to the Auror department always pairing the same people together for training, back when he’d been one of them.

“Everyone in here is on the same side,” Harry declared firmly. “You could end up fighting alongside any one of them. If you know their strengths, their fighting style — that’s a huge advantage. I want us to start changing up our pairings. Find someone you’ve never spoken to before; someone from a different year, a different house. Someone you don’t really know anything about. If we keep switching it up, it’ll keep things interesting.”

“You just want us all to be *friends*, Potter,” Daphne called, stood beside Blaise and the rest of the Slytherins in the room. Harry winked at her.

“I will neither confirm nor deny that,” he joked. “Seriously, guys. We’ve all been going to school together for years now, and yet I’m learning new things about all of you just from watching you work. And Daphne isn’t wrong — you might find your new best friend in this room, you just overlooked them because they wear a different coloured tie.”

He watched them, expectantly. At first, nobody moved. Then, slowly, the divides were crossed. Harry felt a swell of fondness in his chest as George Weasley strode across the room, offering his hand to Blaise Zabini. Susan walked up to Luna with a tentative smile; Cho bravely approached Angelina Johnson. One by one, people extended the hand of friendship to each other, and the room filled with noise once more as they resumed their spell practice. The atmosphere was different, this time; Harry could feel it. Everyone was a little more on their toes, keen-eyed — they were learning to spot the differences in each other’s movements, to look for their advantages. There was regular conversation, too; Patrick kept up a lively chat with Lavender Brown as the pair exchanged Stunning and Shield charms, trying to catch one another off guard. Harry smirked, seeing the way Lavender’s eyes trailed over the handsome