

It was *nothing* like any Wardstone he'd seen before. Not that he'd seen many — just the Pottery, and Grimmauld. But the Hogwarts wardstone was easily twice the size of either of those, a perfect crystal sphere sat on a stone pedestal, shining with internal lights; blue and red and green and yellow, all dancing around each other, pulsing with the faint rhythm of the castle's magic. The heartbeat of Hogwarts.

"This shouldn't be possible," Neville murmured, astonished. "Hannah's the only one of us who's of age!"

"When things become necessary, the castle has ways of speeding up the inheritance process," Luna declared, that strange Other tone to her voice. Harry looked up, hopeful, and she shook her head at him. "Not for the rest of your family magics. Only Slytherin." She was apologetic — she knew how important it was for Harry to reach his full potential quickly.

"Slytherin?" Hannah repeated, staring at Harry incredulously. Harry nodded.

"Conquering heir," he confirmed. He turned to the Wardstone, the magic washing over him like a tidal wave. "Looks like it's time for us to take up our duties." The first time in centuries the Hogwarts heirs had been needed.

Of course it was him. Of course it was now.

As if he needed anything else to make him special.

"What... what do we do?" Neville took a half-step closer. Harry wondered if he was feeling the call, too — the urge to press his hands to the Wardstone and just sink into it.

"We answer the call," Luna replied, as if it were obvious. "But we must do it all together."

No one argued, and within moments the four of them were stood around the Wardstone — stood at the four cardinal points, the points that felt *right*, had the castle humming with satisfaction. Harry had a strong feeling of *deja-vu* — only it wasn't him he was remembering, but Salazar himself, and all the Hogwarts heirs that had come since. All the Slytherin-blooded wixen who had once stood in this exact spot, who had lent their magic to the castle, drawn magic in return.

Each of them raised their dominant hand, and in unison, pressed it to the surprisingly warm surface of the Wardstone.

Immediately, Harry's spine stiffened with the force of the power that rushed through him. It was jumbled at first, a discordant clash of magics and wards and sensation that made him dizzy — then, as it began to twine with his own, the sensation calmed down.

It was at that point that he realised just how *desperate* the wards were.

It made his heart hurt, to feel such incredible wards so clearly languishing. Huge holes ripped in the tight weave, patched clumsily by a somewhat recent-feeling magic, certain aspects flooded with power while others were utterly ignored.

Dumbledore had been manipulating the school wards for his own gains for *decades*.