

## Chapter 87

Even with free periods thrown in the mix, Harry felt just as busy with classwork as he had at the start of his OWL year. Now that everyone in the room was there by choice — and by achieving a certain level of competency — all the teachers seemed to have much higher expectations. Snape wasn't the only one insisting on the use of non-verbal magic; all of their spellcasting classes encouraged such, with the warning that they would be marked down in their NEWTs for any verbal casting.

On the bright side, Slughorn was fairly sure Harry was the greatest student he'd ever had the pleasure of teaching, thanks to Snape's notes. It was odd for Harry to have Potions become one of his best subjects so rapidly, but not unwelcome. On the whole, Harry was just glad that he was actually *coping* with the NEWT-level course load, especially with six classes. Part of him had worried his OWL results had been a fluke, just a product of excessive studying. But he was keeping up just fine, even if the homework was stressful. He was certainly doing no worse than any of his peers — a lot better than many of them, in fact.

It was a heavy burden, but not heavy enough for people to stop pestering Harry about the HA. Nor for the heirs to turn their study meetings into *actual* study groups, not just yet.

The free periods did make it easier for them to meet, however; with Cassius graduated, Luna and Sully were the only non-sixth-years in the group. So they met during the free period that was designated for History of Magic, which literally nobody took at NEWT — self-study was a much better route than listening to Binns for another two years.

"There's not much we can do, is there?" Anthony remarked flatly, leaning back in his chair. He seemed to be taking it remarkably well that his parents were now Death Eaters, and he was technically pretending to be one as well. Harry supposed it helped that most of his friends knew the truth; and the ones that didn't were oblivious anyway. "You-Know-Who has the Ministry — even when we turn seventeen, we can't take our seats."

"There's nothing we can do politically," Susan agreed, "but that doesn't mean we're dead in the water. It just means we need to change our approach." She turned to Harry, gaze knowing. "We're all yours, Potter. You promised me a clear path to the Wizengamot by graduation, so; what's the plan?"

For a moment, Harry could only stare. Susan was entirely serious — with the same sort of determination and Hufflepuff work ethic that she had previously dedicated to her future Wizengamot career, she would now do whatever he directed in the fight against Voldemort. Looking around, she was not the only one with that steadfast, expectant look in their eye.

This was not a room full of people who expected him to take down Voldemort for them, like Harry was used to. This was a room full of people ready to *help him* take down Voldemort.

How had he gotten so lucky, to have friends like that?