

Blaise would be the beacon for the light, lurking in the shadows. Blaise would quietly position himself to be the guiding hand for any students questioning their desire to follow their parents' footsteps. To become everything the rest of the world said Slytherins were. To fall right into the trap Dumbledore had spent decades priming.

It was dangerous. Blaise knew it, and so did Draco. But someone had to do it, or Slytherin House may crumble, and that wasn't a possibility they were willing to risk.

Draco turned away from Blaise — their friendship would have to end here, in public. If Blaise was about to start making overtures to the light, Draco couldn't be seen to approve it. Just another relationship for him to keep hidden.

"Draco, darling, stop lurking over there and show the boys to their dormitory," Pansy called, offering a slight smile. She was in the same boat as him — worse, even, because her father was already surveying the ranks of eligible young men in the Dark faction, and might not wait until Pansy was graduated to make a decision.

"Coming, dear," he assured drily, stepping forward to do his duty.

At least he had some of his friends, still.

Crossing the common room, he almost bumped into a tall figure, and reached a hand out to steady himself.

"Oh, sorry, Draco. I wasn't looking." Cassius Warrington offered the weakest attempt at a smile. "Long day, you know? See you in the morning." He was off before Draco could say anything — if Draco wasn't mistaken, there was an ever so slight limp to his walk.

Draco scowled to himself. He'd have to watch that one carefully. Cassius didn't have the luxury of time, like the rest of them.

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Severus was scowling as he stepped out of the fireplace at Seren Du. A minute later, Remus appeared opposite him, holding on to Ceri's hand. The house elf vanished as quickly as she'd appeared, leaving the greying werewolf behind. "Sev?" Remus greeted, perplexed. "What's the matter?"

"*Umbridge*," he growled out. Breathing steadily and trying not to shatter the crockery, Severus explained the scene he'd been *blindsided* with upon his arrival at the welcoming feast. Remus' eyes grew more horrified with every word.

"How could they allow that *bitch* to teach children??" he gasped. Severus glared at the wall.

"Albus was unable to find a suitable appointment, so the Ministry was *forced* to step in." If this wasn't a long-standing plan of Fudge's — and likely Lucius Malfoy's — Severus would eat his cauldrons. He was surprised Lucius hadn't mentioned it to him; then again, he didn't often talk to Severus about his Ministry dealings, except to gloat when they were successful. And Severus had been avoiding him somewhat, this summer.