

“Don’t worry, Mr Potter,” one of the adults with the large family said, her brown eyes sharp. “We all know what you’re sacrificing to help us.”

“What about school?” Mrs Scalby piped up, her hands on her son’s shoulders. “What happens when the kids go back?”

“Again, I’m not going to force anyone,” Harry said. “We don’t know what things will look like by the end of the summer. If you don’t feel it’s safe for your children to go to Hogwarts, they’re welcome to stay here with you.” He couldn’t promise the school would be a safe haven. He wasn’t too thrilled about having to return himself. “Your welcome here lasts until Voldemort is dead; until things are safe for you outside these wards. Provided you don’t test my hospitality,” he added pointedly. “If circumstances change, we’ll figure it out when we get there, but... I’m offering what safety I can. Between us, we should manage to preserve it.”

He hoped he could trust these people in his home. They were all hiding from the same evil, and they were too Slytherin to risk angering someone with as much power over them as Harry currently had. “I’ll have friends coming by every now and then just to make sure everything is going fine,” he said anyway, just to make it clear they would have more supervision than two house elves. “Also the *Prophet* should be delivered daily, so you can keep up with the outside world. Other than that... help yourselves to food, and you have the run of the house. Though — if you try a door and it’s locked, there’s a reason for that, so leave it be.” There were some rooms that were for family only, and Harry had the wards locked tight on those ones.

At his cue, the gathered crowd tentatively approached the table, and soon everyone had full plates and was chatting away — not *happily*, but comfortably enough. Harry could tell it would take a few days for it to settle in that they were safe there. He slunk back to the corner where Theo was stood, a plate of his own in hand. “You think you can handle them?” he asked quietly, gaze on the room at large. Theo hummed thoughtfully.

“I know most of them at least in passing. They’re not the troublemaking type,” he said. “But we’ll see how it goes after a few weeks in close quarters. Might have to duke it out with a duel or two, some of them, but I’ll keep it non-lethal,” he added with a small grin. Harry snorted.

“That’s all I can ask.” He paused, chewing on his ham and cheese sandwich. “I’m sorry I can’t share the secret with Susan. I just... necessary people only, y’know?” It had been difficult enough deciding whether he could trust the Weasley boys and Tonks, but ultimately he had no choice if he wanted to get people there safely.

“I understand. I can still go see her,” Theo replied. “I, uh, haven’t met her aunt yet. But she knows about me.” His cheeks coloured slightly. Harry grinned.

“Good luck with that.” The relationship between the Slytherin and the Hufflepuff still baffled him a little, as even amongst the heirs they were fairly reserved. But he could see how strongly they cared about each other.

It was no stranger a pairing than him and Draco, really.