

their allied families—“

“You end up with a lot of people who vote against you just to spite you,” Harry surmised. Neville nodded.

“Exactly. So our behaviour is really, really important.”

Harry looked back down at the next paragraph in the book, and as such didn't notice they had company until a throat was cleared. Susan Bones and Hannah Abbott stood beside their table; Susan eyed Harry warily for a second before turning to Neville. “Ernie wants to know if you'll help him with his Herbology homework on Friday.”

“Of course, yeah. Why didn't he ask me himself?” Neville paused, then sighed. “Don't tell me he's *still* hiding after the butterbeer incident?” Both girls giggled, and Hannah nodded. “Idiot. It's completely fine, my gran even thought it was funny. Tell him I'll meet him in the usual spot after dinner.”

Susan turned as if to leave, but then she glanced down at the book open in front of the two boys. Harry fought the urge to cover it up. “*No*,” she murmured, a slow smile creeping across her face. “Really?” The question was directed at Neville, who grinned, nodding.

“Really. But it's all hush-hush for now. Reasons,” he added, as if that was in any way helpful. Harry had officially lost the plot of the conversation.

Susan and Hannah both looked at Harry, studying him like they hadn't seen him before. Eventually, Hannah bowed her head with open palms. “Well met, Heir Potter.”

Susan repeated the greeting. Harry spluttered. Neville kicked him in the shin, giving him a pointed look. “I, uh, well met, Heir Bones, Heir Abbott,” he returned, bowing his head at each of them. “You two as well?”

He knew Abbott was one of the Sacred 28 lines, but he hadn't seen anything about the Bones family. He really had to read that book on all the pureblood families.

“We were starting to think you'd never take your title,” Hannah said, keeping her voice low. “What took you so long?”

“I— It's a long story,” Harry said, running his hand through his hair. “How many are there at Hogwarts?”

“Oh, loads,” Susan replied with a dismissive wave of her hand. “Basically all the Slytherins in our year. Ernie MacMillan. Sully Fawley, in the year below. Anthony Goldstein. Cassius Warrington, that tall bloke on the Slytherin quidditch team. Loads more, too.”

“They do it on purpose. Our parents, I mean,” Hannah explained. “They all try and have kids the same age so that we all meet at school and start early. There's a few outliers — the Weasleys have always been off-cycle, and the Flints duffed up a bit — but for the most part, it's all our lot. Good to have you in the ranks.” She grinned, winking briefly. “We'd love to hear that long story of yours, one day.”