

That last one made Harry snicker. “Should I be flattered that people think I know that kind of magic?” he asked Neville in an undertone.

“I don’t know, Mr Eight Os, would it really be such a surprise?” came Neville’s amused retort.

“Hey, Potter!” The call came from behind him; it was Zacharias Smith, at the Hufflepuff table. “So what’s the plan with the HA this year?” He dropped his voice a little, but Harry still saw several heads swivel in their direction. Harry bit back a sigh.

“Don’t know yet,” he replied, as he had done to everyone else. “Give me a few days to get my bearings, yeah? I don’t even know what my schedule is yet. But don’t spread it around, yeah? I don’t want things getting out of hand.” He didn’t want the entire school hearing about the HA and deciding it sounded like fun.

Zacharias didn’t look impressed, but merely sniffed, turning back to his food.

“You’re going to have to do something,” Ginny told Harry quietly, reaching past him as dinner vanished and was replaced by dessert, her gaze set on a decadent looking chocolate trifle. “People got way too much out of the HA to want to stop now, especially with the Ministry the way it is.”

“I know,” Harry agreed, grimacing. “I’ll figure something out.” He wanted to continue the meetings — Snape wasn’t going to be able to properly prepare everyone while still playing his role — but it was more difficult this year, with things the way they were. Many of the HA members would likely think that with Umbridge gone they could be open about the club, like it was as harmless as the Gobstones Club or Debate Society.

Harry doubted Dumbledore would let it continue that way, not if he thought Harry was turning Dark.

Then again, he might be delighted with the idea of his prize pawn training all his other pawns up, ready to die for the cause.

He shuddered, suddenly no longer as eager to eat his treacle tart as he had been a moment ago.

When dessert ended, Harry sat back to listen to Dumbledore give his usual welcome speech — and tried to act as surprised as the rest when it was announced Slughorn was taking over Potions, rather than DADA. The hall filled with the buzz of conversation, and Dumbledore let it go on for a few moments before clearing his throat pointedly.

“Now, as you all know,” he said, face turning grave, “the Ministry of Magic is now under the control of Lord Voldemort and his Death Eaters.” There were several gasps throughout the hall, and more than a few flinches. “These are difficult and dangerous times we live in, and I cannot emphasise enough how important it is to remain vigilant here at school. We may be safe from outside forces within these wards, but there is always darkness lingering within, and we must be careful.”