

flinched.

“The Dark Lord is dead.”

“Is he?” Harry met her eyes with a knowing gaze. Parkinson faltered. “You know as well as the rest of us it’s just a matter of time. Draco tells me neither of you ladies want to follow your parents. No one here will make you. Cassius is here for the same reason. But we aren’t going to tell you to go to Dumbledore for help, either.”

“So what are our options, then?” Bulstrode cut in sharply. “You?”

“If you like,” Harry agreed. “For various reasons, I’m not going to be able to sit this war out. But even if I could, I don’t think I’d want to. Neither side has a particularly fantastic political manifesto, and we in this room plan to offer... let’s call it a third side.” He hadn’t been quite so bold in stating it before, but the others had to know it was where he was headed. “We are the future of the government, as long as we manage to get Dumbledore’s claws out of the Wizengamot and Voldemort’s lunacy removed from society entirely. If you’d like to join us, we would gladly appreciate the extra numbers. If you’d like to turn around and keep your mouth shut and wait for Voldemort to come back, that’s fine. The offer of help stands regardless of what you do from this point on; if you and those you care about ever need a place to avoid either side of the war, you have my word that the Noble and Most Ancient House of Potter will be ready to assist.”

Both girls’ eyes went a fraction wider at the magic that accompanied his vow. “You’re really serious about this,” Bulstrode murmured. Harry nodded.

“I have to be.”

“We aren’t going to let the wizarding world languish like it has been for the last century,” Susan said, unflinching as she eyed the Slytherins. “And we’re certainly not going to let it stay in Dumbledore’s hands. We know that we can be better. But we will do so with all magical people as equals. Purebloods, half-bloods, muggleborns, even those with creature blood; all of them have just as much right to be here as anyone else. If you have a problem with that, you can leave now.”

“I don’t want muggleborns dead,” Parkinson sniffed, “I just want them to stop bringing their filthy habits and customs into our world. If we’re not careful, the Statute will be broken, and it’ll be the Witch Trials all over again.”

“If they have magic in their blood, they have the right to use it,” Draco agreed. “But we also have the right to teach them to be like us, rather than being expected to become like them.”

“That’s fair,” Anthony murmured, relaxing a little. Clearly a few of the heirs had been expecting a rant about blood purity. Harry smiled to himself, wishing he could take Draco’s hand under the table. One meeting wouldn’t change the years of animosity built up in the group, but... it was a start.

“We’ll have plenty of time to talk politics in future,” Harry said, reaching into his school bag. “But I *really* need to get this essay done.” He set his Potions textbook on the table, digging