

“No, no — I was going to anyway. I... it was actually really nice, up until everything went to shit. I was... somewhere safe, at first, with Sirius and Remus. They started teaching me how to duel properly.” Neville didn’t know about Snape, and it was best kept that way.

The blond boy grew serious. “You’re getting ready to fight him, then?”

Harry nodded. “I have to. Sooner the better, right?” He couldn’t say anything about horcruxes either, but he could tell Neville about some of the things he’d learned.

“Draco came to visit for my birthday, too,” he added, a smile tugging at his lips. Neville’s eyes danced.

“Oh, did he, now?” he drawled. “How nice of him.” Harry elbowed him in the side, ducking his face to hide his blush. Neville laughed. “Have you seen him yet? Y’know, properly?”

Harry shook his head sadly. “No, and all my new detentions won’t make that any easier.” With any luck, Umbridge would only keep him for an hour or two, and he’d still have the nighttime free to meet Draco without falling hugely behind on his homework.

Harry doubted it.

“If you need me to cover for you, just say the word,” Neville offered. Harry’s chest grew warm; Neville really was an excellent friend to have.

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Flitwick and McGonagall were also of the mind to overload their students with work, each starting their classes with a fifteen minute lecture about the importance of OWLs and how difficult they were going to be. Harry wondered if that was actually the case, or if all the Hogwarts teachers had decided the best way to prepare their students was to over-prepare them, by making them expect much harder exams than they would get.

That seemed more like a surefire way to intimidate students into a breakdown, but perhaps mental fortitude was supposed to be part of it, too. Harry wasn’t sure. Either way, he was wondering how he was going to find time for all his extra-curricular activities on top of his existing schoolwork; especially if Umbridge had him in detention as often as she clearly wanted to.

Though it was very entertaining to watch Hermione frantically re-adjusting her revision schedule after every class, once she realised how much time she would have to devote to homework instead of her own study plans.

He kept up his small rebellions against the house divides in class, sitting with Anthony in Transfiguration and Susan in Charms — blending houses was easier, in classes that didn’t involve Slytherins. It made Harry’s heart ache to see how withdrawn the snake house had become, and he hoped it wouldn’t be quite so bad in the lower years; they were far, far too young to be forced to choose sides in such a way.