

At last, the magic melted back into the Wardstone, and Harry was able to remove his hand. But the awareness was still there, in the back of his mind, waiting for him to need it. *Hogwarts* was there, waiting.

It didn't feel like the oily, suffocating press of foreign magic, not like he'd experienced before. It wasn't his own, that much was clear, but it nestled in beside his without issue. It felt like an extension of his Slytherin family magics, almost — magics that were now fully functional and coursing through him, as if he were of-age, though his other family magics remained dormant.

“Wow,” Hannah breathed, reminding him of his company. Harry surveyed his three friends, noting the way they stood that little bit straighter, their eyes bright and their faces flushed. They felt more powerful, too. They felt like *family*.

“The wards were so broken,” Neville breathed, horrified. “He let them get that way. He *made* them that way.”

Harry understood his disgust — now, aware of all the things the Hogwarts wards were *supposed* to do, he couldn't believe Dumbledore had taken all that away. Not just sneaking dangerous artefacts and creatures into the school — the wards were old enough not to have the same ideals of Light and Dark as modern day — but even as far as making sure students couldn't seriously harm one another, or themselves.

How many student injuries could have been prevented with the wards at full capacity? How many sexual assaults? He wasn't so naive to think it didn't happen.

How many suicides had there been in the last seventy-odd years, that could have been avoided?

Harry felt sick at the thought of it.

“His reign is over,” Luna declared quietly. “The school is ours, now.”

Harry reached out, placing one hand on Luna's shoulder and the other on Hannah's. Opposite him, Neville did the same, and the girls reached out too until all four of them were huddled together around the glowing Wardstone.

“This is going to turn the whole world upside-down, once word gets out,” Hannah mused. Then she smirked, laughing quietly. “Susan is going to *flip*.”

Harry snorted; yes, the future Chief Warlock was certainly going to have plenty to say about the Founders' seats being active for the first time since the eighteenth century. Once it was safe to go to the Ministry and claim them, after all.

“We should keep it secret, for now,” he suggested. “No one will know what's happened. Even Dumbledore won't know the truth.” He would feel his connection to the wards had changed, but he wouldn't understand why. The castle would protect them. “It's an advantage we can't afford to give away.”