

Chapter 4

As Ron and Hermione continued to fight over their pets, Harry found himself spending less and less time with the pair. It was giving him a headache, and both of them expected him to take their side — it just wasn't worth the hassle. Instead, he spent time alone, or with Neville. He was surprised at how close he was becoming to the shy Gryffindor since he'd revealed his secret. He was easy to get along with; much easier, Harry thought guiltily, than Ron and Hermione.

True to his word, Neville had sent an owl to his gran explaining Harry's circumstances. She'd responded with a long letter about what she'd like to do and say to Albus Dumbledore, but also with several rolls of parchment with notes for Harry to study about proper etiquette and behaviour, and a book called *Occlumency For Beginners*. Thanks to her, Harry was now in the habit of trying to clear his mind and organise his thoughts before bedtime. He wasn't sure if it was helping, but Neville insisted it was the best starting point.

Harry and Neville were in the school library — where for once, Hermione was not — looking at some of the books that wouldn't be too suspicious for him to be seen studying in public. Just in case anyone came across them. Harry should've known there would be plenty of books in the Hogwarts library.

"So technically, none of us are responsible for anything until we come of age," Neville was explaining. He sounded more confident than Harry had ever heard him, except perhaps for when he was talking about Herbology. "We're just heirs — it's not until you're the head of your house that you really have any influence. For most people that wouldn't happen for ages. Usually a Lord or Lady will keep their seat until their heir is married and has kids — just in case they need to change the line of succession, y'know? If they don't like who their heir has married or whoever. But, well, we don't have any other options," he added with a bitter smile. Harry bit his lip. He knew Neville was raised by his gran, but he'd never asked what happened to his parents. He didn't really know how to bring it up.

"Then why do all the books make it sound like such a big deal from birth?"

"The family heirs are the ones responsible for securing good family ties for the future," Neville told him. "Everything relies on the heir. If the head of the household is awful, sure, that's not great. But the future lies on the heir, so if they're not great, that's another generation of bad to deal with. Say one heir offends another heir when they're like, twelve, right? That grudge will carry through the family for the next fifty or sixty years, however long it takes for the next heir to take over. And Merlin help them if the grudge has been passed down. Some families have had grudges going on for centuries."

"Like the Malfoys and the Weasleys," Harry realised. That bad blood was far too deep to have started with Lucius and Arthur. Neville nodded.

"Exactly. And family grudges can make politics really difficult, especially when there's only fifty seats on the Wizengamot at any one time. If you piss off one family, and they tell all