

# A Candle Against the Dark of Night

*by yarrow and thyme*

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*Chapter 1 of 1*

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Disclaimer: This fanfiction is based upon the works of J. K. Rowling, including all characters and places named, and no profit is being made.

From little spark may burst a mighty flame. - Paradise (canto I, l. 34) Dante Alighieri

It is dark in the halls of Hogwarts. Though on the surface all appears well, there are cracks in the veneer of normality if one knows where to look. Even the firsties can feel the strangeness in the air, though they cannot tell from the empty seats who is missing from each table; they do not know the faces, do not know the names.

In the dim hallways near the dungeon kitchens of Hogwarts, Hannah and Ernie are leading a straggling clutch of wide-eyed new Hufflepuffs. It is a noticeably smaller batch than last year. Understandable really, considering that nearly everyone has lost someone on one side of the war or the other. Yet still a few brave souls kiss their sons and daughters and send them away to the dubious safety of a school so much changed from what it once was. Hoping that their children will at least be able to defend themselves when the time comes, as it assuredly will. Hoping that the hallowed halls will be able to shield them from the horrors of the real world while they are still young enough to be sheltered.

Hannah holds up one small hand for silence, and six pairs of eyes fix on her in the semi-dark of flickering, yellow flames: yellow for house and yellow for home. Four girls and two boys, the smallest turnout in years, beat only by Ravenclaw house, and then only by one. Gryffindor and Slytherin can boast of only four each, so there really is naught to complain of, and it is heartening to see so much hope for the future in those small, round faces.

Ernie's countenance is serious as he speaks to the children of loyalty and honesty, of truth and steadfastness. It is a testament to Hannah's loyal spirit that she returned at all this year. But the wizarding world, with all of its faults, is her home now, much more than the world into which she was born. Her pale blue eyes glimmer in her wan but determined face as she attempts to impart what little wisdom that she can to these young and earnest children before they must face the world in the meager light of day. As a united front, showing no discord amongst themselves.

For Hufflepuffs are strong when others are weak. They are loyal when others falter. Their feet are sure when others' stray from their paths. And, most importantly, Hufflepuffs are never afraid of the dark.