Ron was itching for a fight.

That much was obvious to Harry. Between his worry for Scabbers and his anger at Hermione turning the Firebolt in to McGonagall, Ron was a tightly wound ball of rage that would explode at any moment. Harry himself wasn't even mad about the Firebolt; he, too, was suspicious of its origin. He just hoped he could have it back before the match against Ravenclaw.

"Parkinson's looking at you funny," Ron muttered as the two of them walked to the greenhouses for Herbology. Harry glanced over his shoulder — Pansy Parkinson was indeed looking at him, but it was more calculating than anything, arm in arm with an oblivious Tracy Davis. Harry thought back to his odd meeting with Zabini and Greengrass, before Christmas. Perhaps word was spreading further. Or maybe Malfoy had said something, after one of their mostly-accidental late-night meetings.

"She's not doing anything, Ron," Harry assured, grabbing Ron's elbow and tugging him forward, away from the Slytherins. "It's fine." If Ron was going to pick a fight, he didn't want to be part of it.

"I swear, Malfoy hasn't given us a good reason to hex him in ages," Ron groused. "It's like you don't even exist to him anymore."

"Maybe he feels guilty about Buckbeak." Malfoy wasn't completely ignoring Harry in public these days, but he wasn't quite as eager to mock him as he used to be. Harry was honestly surprised this was the first time Ron was bringing it up.

"Doubt it. Git's probably just waiting til after the trial so he can rub it in our faces some more. Oh, look, there's Zabini!"

"Leave him alone, Ron," Harry said with a scowl, blocking him from going after the tall Slytherin.

"What's with you, lately?" Ron asked, a dark look on his freckled face. "You getting chummy with the Slytherins or something? You never get back at them anymore."

"Maybe I've just got bigger things to worry about than the Slytherins." The Slytherins weren't really bothering him anymore, he had no reason to be angry with them. Besides, the whole house rivalry thing had sort of lost its shine. Sirius Black was a Gryffindor, after all. Houses clearly didn't mean much.

"That doesn't mean you can just let them go around acting like they own the school!"

"Oh, grow up, Ron," Harry snapped before he could help himself. The redhead recoiled, shocked, before a venomous look crept in. "I didn't mean it like that," Harry hastened to soothe his friend. "I just… it all feels a bit petty, doesn't it? To be going after someone just because they're in a different house. It's stupid."

"Petty and stupid, am I?" Ron asked bitingly. "You've changed, Harry. I figured it was just about Black, but you're weird this year. Always off by yourself, doing Merlin knows what.