

“Harry, have you ever heard of Occlumency?”

“Can’t say I have,” Harry replied, running the strange word over in his head. “What is it?”

“It’s a form of magic, just about every pureblood kid is taught it growing up. It protects your thoughts. See, there’s this magic called Legilimency — that’s reading peoples’ thoughts. Getting into their minds, seeing their memories, all that. Occlumency is the prevention of that. It forms shields around your mind so that no one can get in and steal your secrets.”

Harry’s jaw dropped in horror. “People can *read my mind*?”

“Not everyone,” Neville hastened to assure him. “It’s a really rare skill. But Dumbledore is famous for it. There’s rumours that Snape is really good at it, too. If you’re going to be keeping secrets from Dumbledore, you’ll want to learn Occlumency. I’ll write to you tomorrow, get you some books.”

“Do you know it?”

“Oh, yeah, I learned before I came to Hogwarts,” Neville said. “Every family needs to be able to protect their secrets. I’m not amazing at it — if someone was really trying, I probably wouldn’t be able to keep them out. But, well, no one has needed to really try. Not yet, anyway.”

“But what if Dumbledore’s already read my mind?” Harry thought of all the times that could’ve been possible — during mealtimes, or even in lessons. How close did someone have to be to read minds?

“Legilimency needs eye contact. As long as you don’t look him in the eye, you should be alright.”

Harry let out a sigh of relief. Don’t look him in the eye. He could do that. That also explained why the book said eye contact was a show of trust. “Thanks, Neville. God, there’s still so much I don’t know. It’s gonna take me forever to catch up.”

“You’ll get there, Harry,” Neville said supportively, squeezing his shoulder again. “D’you mind if I, uh, go? Only I’ve got homework, and...”

Harry belatedly realised his wards were still up, and waved his wand to cancel them. He pulled his curtains aside, and froze when he saw Ron sat on his own bed beside him. The redhead eyed the pair suspiciously. “What’ve you two been up to?”

Harry and Neville shared a look. “Studying,” they both said eventually, Neville heading back towards his own bed. Ron stared at Harry for a bit longer, but let it go.

“Whatever. Harry, d’you think Scabbers has lost more weight? It’s that bloody cat of Hermione’s, he’s got it out for him I swear.” Scabbers was laid out on the bedspread in front of Ron, and Harry had to admit he’d definitely seen better days. Privately, he thought that was more due to him being old than anything Crookshanks was doing, but Ron wouldn’t hear a word of it.