

“Everything has been a bit of a mess lately,” Hermione said earnestly. “Between the tournament, and Viktor, and... everything else.” Harry wondered if she was referring to Ron’s attitude, or his many other friends. “I think it all just got out of hand, and we let it. But Harry, the three of us have been best friends since first year. Surely we can’t let a little drama and a boy get in the way of all that?”

She was oversimplifying things so enormously that Harry goggled at her a little. “First off, I’ve never had a problem with Viktor,” he pointed out. “He’s great, we’re friends, if you want to date him then go right ahead. Ron’s the one with that issue there.” The redhead flushed, looking a little angry, but after a glance at Hermione he swallowed it back.

“Ronald and I have worked out our differences,” Hermione assured him. Harry doubted it, but let her keep up her illusion. “We miss you, Harry. I know you’ve been busy with the tournament, but all that aside, this year has been different for all of us. We’ve hardly spent any time together. It feels like we’re losing you.” Her voice cracked slightly, and guilt reared within Harry’s chest. It wasn’t their fault he now had a mountain of secrets he was keeping from them.

“That hasn’t all been my fault,” Harry pointed out, thinking of the multiple arguments he’d had with both of them over the last couple of months. Hermione ducked her head.

“No, it hasn’t,” she agreed. “Which is why I thought it’d be best if we just drew a line under all of that and started over, back how things were. You, me, and Ron.”

Obviously the tentative truce they’d agreed upon before the Yule Ball wasn’t enough for her. Part of Harry wondered why she was trying so hard to salvage a failing friendship; then he realised she didn’t exactly have anyone else to turn to. Maybe he’d been too hard on her lately. On both of them. It had to be strange from their perspective, seeing Harry change so drastically as a person seemingly for no reason. They didn’t know about the Compulsion charm.

Once again, Ron was being very silent, and Harry glanced at the redheaded boy. “What do you reckon?”

Ron looked up at him, smiling very faintly. “I reckon if some nutter’s out to kill you again, you could use all the friends you can get.”

Harry cracked a grin in return, even as his stomach churned uneasily. Ron and Hermione really did deserve more of a chance than he’d been giving them lately, after everything they had been through. Harry wasn’t quite ready to start sharing his secrets, but he could at least stop expecting the worst of them.

“Have you two done the essay for McGonagall yet?” he asked tentatively, offering an olive branch. Hermione beamed, even as Ron groaned at the mention of homework.

“We were just about to start,” Hermione said, reaching into her bulging backpack. “Do you want to join us? I’ll help you if you like.”