

“All what, exactly?” George’s voice just got colder. “Remember who you’re talking to, Ronnikins.” It seemed to hit Ron that his brother had gone to the Yule Ball with another boy, and he let out a quiet little ‘meep’ noise.

“Don’t worry, I haven’t been perving on you while you’re changing,” Harry said with a roll of his eyes. Of *course* Ron would have a problem with it. “You’re not my type.” That made George smirk.

“If you’ve got a problem with Harry, you’ve got a problem with us,” Dean piped up, gesturing to himself and Seamus. “We like boys and girls. But you’re not either of our types either, Ron,” he added dryly.

“Welcome to the club, Harry,” Seamus added cheerily, winking.

“But I— but you—“ Ron didn’t seem to know what to say, and Harry didn’t really want to stick around for whatever awful jumble of words made it out of his mouth.

“I’m not here to argue with anyone. I just thought you might like to know before the article comes out in the morning. Now I’m gonna go to bed. So, uh, thanks, I guess.” Harry got to his feet, and when he did, he ended up bundled in a hug between the three Gryffindor chasers.

“We’re proud of you, Harry,” Katie said with a grin, kissing him on the cheek. Harry beamed at them.

“This is because of me, isn’t it.” He turned at the voice, meeting Hermione’s sad gaze. Her hands were still a little raw from re-growing skin. “Because of all the hate-mail I got.”

“Not completely,” Harry insisted. “I just want Skeeter to know that she can’t bully me or my friends. I’ll do things on my terms, my way, and she can stuff it. But yeah, it’ll be nice if you and Ginny stop getting hate-mail.” Hermione’s lower lip began to wobble, and Harry sighed. “I’m doing this for me, Hermione. I’m not waiting to be forced out whenever someone wants public opinion of me to take a hit. Might as well get it over with now.”

She stared at him for a long moment, then nodded. “As long as it’s on your own terms.”

Harry turned away to head to the dorms, and from the sound of flesh smacking flesh behind him, Ron had finally managed to get a sentence out. Harry kept walking; George had it handled. It wasn’t his problem.

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He went down to breakfast with Neville on one side and George on the other, Fred and Ginny trailing close behind. Ron was once again not speaking to him, and Hermione didn’t seem to know what to do about the whole thing, but Harry continued not to care.

Luna waved at him from the Ravenclaw table, and he waved back, otherwise keeping his head down. An unfamiliar owl flew towards him with the morning post, a rolled up magazine attached to its leg. Harry’s stomach swooped like he was doing a Wronski Feint. The front