

could and would, but he allowed himself to be bullied out of the castle all the same. He'd been reading up on merpeople for the last four days straight, and it was starting to give him a headache.

Instead, he focused his attention on his companions — Neville and Ginny had been hanging out a lot ever since the Yule Ball. Harry couldn't figure out if they were dating or not. He'd never seen them kiss; but then again, he'd never seen Remus and Snape kiss, yet those two were definitely in love. As they walked, Ginny's shoulder bumped Neville's arm every few steps, and the older Gryffindor didn't seem to mind. Harry's eyes narrowed on their hands as they almost linked between them. Yeah, there was definitely something going on there.

"Let's go to Honeydukes," Ginny suggested, nudging Neville until he changed direction. "I'm out of sugar quills."

Harry was always happy to buy sweets, and owed Remus some Honeydukes' Finest, so he trailed after the maybe-couple into the sweet shop.

As they strolled from shop to shop, mostly at Ginny's urging, Harry kept an eye out for Hagrid. The half-giant still hadn't worked up the courage to leave his hut, even after a week. The fuss from the article had mostly died down, but Hagrid wouldn't hear it, insisting to Harry that he wasn't ready yet. Harry wondered how much longer it would take for him to *be* ready.

Shopping finished, Harry suggested they head to the Three Broomsticks, as much as he was dreading the crowd. There was a chance Hagrid could be in there — and he wasn't quite done observing Ginny and Neville yet. Both of them were easy to blush, and there had been a *lot* of blushing going on all day. It made Harry smile, and he wondered if it had been like this for Sirius watching him and Draco over the summer. His godfather took a lot of joy in insisting they were both oblivious and besotted even then.

Once inside the pub, Harry wished he'd brought his invisibility cloak. When he was inside Hogwarts, it was easy to forget he was a Triwizard Champion; most people had stopped caring by now. Outside, however, was an entirely different matter. Heads turned, whispers started up, and Harry grimaced.

"We can go somewhere else if you want?" Neville suggested quietly. "Back to Gryffindor or whatever."

"No, it's fine," Harry assured, squeezing through the crowd towards the bar. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Ginny's fingers curl around Neville's as they entered the fray. He smirked to himself. "What do you two want? I'm buying."

"Harry, my boy!" He resisted the urge to groan, turning to face Ludo Bagman, who was making his way over from a table full of unhappy-looking goblins. "Good to see you, good to see you! Had a good Christmas?" Bagman glanced back at Neville and Ginny. "You two don't mind if I borrow Harry here for a quick private chat, do you?"

"Actually, we do," Ginny retorted blithely. "He's about to buy us drinks. Come on, Harry." Without giving Bagman time to argue, Ginny hooked her free hand around Harry's elbow and