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The four of them stuck together on the way off the train, Harry hiding a smile at the sight of Hermione bossing first years about while Ron stood by her side looking longingly at the carriages up to the castle. His gaze slid over to where Hagrid would be waiting to take them to the boats — and he paused. Hagrid wasn't there. Instead, Professor Grubbly-Plank was the one calling for the first years to gather round.

Where was Hagrid??

Harry knew the man had been on some sort of mission for the Order over the summer — something to do with giants in France, Remus hadn't been too knowledgeable on the details. But surely he wasn't still there? Fear gripped his chest; had something happened to Hagrid?

No. Someone would have told him.

"Harry, you're blocking the door," Ginny said with a roll of her eyes, grabbing him by the elbow. He let her drag him over to the carriages, and got his second surprise of the evening, in the form of huge black skeletal horses hooked up to the previously self-driving carriages.

"What the..."

"They're thestrals." He jumped, whipping around to see Cassius stood at his shoulder, gaze fixed on the ghoulish creatures. Harry stared at him; the Slytherin boy was thin, his usually tanned face pale. His already prominent cheekbones looked painfully sharp, and there was a faint distortion of magic around his eyes that betrayed the glamour he was using, no doubt to hide dark circles from sleepless nights.

Or worse, bruises.

"Cassius..." Harry breathed, watching the boy's face harden. There were students all around them, this was not the time nor place to ask about Cassius' summer. But, God, it looked like he'd had a shittier one than even Harry.

A halfhearted glare was all Harry got, before the Slytherin was stalking off to join his housemates in a carriage. Harry went with his three friends, lips pursed in thought as the carriage rolled towards the castle.

He'd read about thestrals; they could only be seen by people who had seen death. It made sense to Harry, why he could see them now.

Had Cassius always been able to, or was that a product of his summer?

He hoped Draco could talk to the older Slytherin, even if no one else could.

Hagrid wasn't in the Great Hall either, when they filed in to take their seats. Luna danced off towards the Ravenclaw table, and Ginny moved to sit with Colin and some of her other year mates. Firmly ignoring Ron and Hermione, Harry and Neville continued a little further down the table to sit near the rest of the Gryffindor quidditch team, and Lee Jordan.