Making friends with Slytherins. I'm not sure I like it."

Before Harry could say anything more, Ron ripped his arm out of the green-eyed boy's grasp and stalked off to the greenhouses, leaving Harry alone in the courtyard. Suddenly, Hermione appeared at his side. "What was all that about?" She seemed a little breathless, which was odd, because they'd just come from Transfiguration and it wasn't that far a walk.

"Nothing. Ron being a git," Harry muttered, shoving his hands in his pockets and carrying on his way. He knew the redhead didn't really mean it — he just wanted to take his anger out on someone — but it still made the ever-present guilt rise like a snake, twisting in his belly. He really had been neglecting his friend this year. He just… the older he got, the more he found Ron's personality hard to deal with. Especially after getting used to spending more time around people like Neville, and even Malfoy.

Ron was his first friend at Hogwarts, and he'd always be grateful for that. But did that make him the best choice?

.-.-.

After that argument, Ron avoided Harry just as much as he was already avoiding Hermione.

"I'm sure he doesn't mean it," Neville said one day, after Ron had grabbed him to partner up in Potions to avoid having to work with either Harry or Hermione. The result was a melted cauldron, and a scorch mark on the dungeon ceiling. Snape had not been impressed. "He's just got a quick temper."

"Yeah, well maybe I'm sick of it," Harry replied. "I keep feeling awful about having all these secrets, but how am I supposed to trust him when the wrong word sets him off? And the way he talks about the Slytherins, like they're not even *people*…"

"They *have* been pretty awful to you in the past, Harry," Neville pointed out cautiously. "Malfoy especially. Most of them are alright, yeah, but there are some."

"Oh, there are definitely some Slytherins that would happily see me dead," Harry agreed. "But I don't think Malfoy's one of them. Not anymore. Things have been different, this year." Neville knew that Malfoy knew about Harry being the Potter heir. He didn't know that Malfoy had started being actually civil to him, if not outright friendly, when it was just the two of them around. It wasn't often they crossed paths in the middle of the night, but it was frequent enough to possibly be considered a habit. One that Harry wasn't entirely sure he wanted to break.

Harry told him. Neville's eyebrows shot up to his hairline. "Malfoy? Really?"

"He's actually alright, when he doesn't have Crabbe and Goyle breathing down his neck," Harry confided. The other Gryffindor boy frowned.

"But he's still being a prat in classes. And the whole Buckbeak thing." Everyone in the school knew that Lucius Malfoy was trying to get Buckbeak killed.