

“Indeed,” Mrs Longbottom said. “I’ve heard quite a bit about you.”

Neville blushed brightly, making Harry wonder exactly what his friend had told his grandmother about the Weasley girl. “Come along, Neville. Visiting hours won’t last forever.”

Neville nodded, then paused, turning back to the pair of them. “Would you—I mean— do you want to come meet my parents?” He looked hopeful, and Harry’s chest squeezed.

“We’d love to,” he said immediately, and Ginny nodded at her side. “If— if it’s alright, of course, Lady Longbottom.” Harry added hesitantly, not wanting to overstep. Neville’s time with his parents was precious; he didn’t want to intrude.

“If Neville is happy with it, then that is alright by me. This way.”

She led them in the direction of the Janus Thickey ward, and Harry stayed respectfully half a step behind her.

“How are you faring, Mr Potter?” she questioned, glancing his way. “I have heard some from Neville, of course — he’s told me all about how *enterprising* young Miss Bones is.” There was the faintest smile flickering at her wrinkled cheeks. “But with things the way they are at school, correspondance has been rather sparse. I have to make do with what I see in the papers, and I can’t say I’m overly impressed.”

By the look on her face, there were several things she’d like to say to Dolores Umbridge, and Harry wished he could sit in on the next Wizengamot session where both women were present.

“I’m preparing for my OWLs as best I can,” he replied, not wanting to say too much in such a public place. “And helping my friends with their studies, too.”

“Glad to hear it. Getting on well with your teachers? The headmaster?” Her gaze was shrewd. Again, Harry nodded.

“They’re all rather busy, though, with the inspections happening. Especially Professor Dumbledore.”

Mrs Longbottom harrumphed, removing her wand to unlock the door of the ward. Harry glanced over his shoulder — behind them, Neville and Ginny were walking close together; so close their hands were brushing. When Neville realised his gran was watching, he cleared his throat and put his hands in his pockets.

“They’re, uh, over here,” he said, leading the way towards two curtained-off beds in the back corner. Harry tried not to stare at the rest of the patients — though he did a double-take at the sight of Gilderoy Lockhart, sat writing his name over and over with a peacock feather quill, smiling happily to himself.

He didn’t have long to think about it, though; Neville stopped in front of the beds and pulled the curtain back carefully, a shaky smile on his face. “Hi, Mum. Hi, Dad. Merry Christmas.”