

“Struggling to see what *friendship* looks like, Ron?” he retorted. “What a surprise.” He picked up his pace, wanting to put as much distance between himself and the redhead as possible, and the two girls jogged to catch up with him.

“Was he always that awful?” Parvati remarked in disgust. Harry shrugged.

“If he was, I never realised. I think he’s gotten worse since last year though.”

“He’s been going downhill since the Yule Ball,” Lavender said. “The whole Viktor Krum thing.”

Now that Harry thought about it, she was right — somewhere between Hermione’s relationship with Krum, and Harry coming out in the *Quibbler*, Ron had become mightily sensitive on the topic of relationships.

“It’s not my fault he can’t get his head out of his arse where Hermione’s concerned,” Harry grouched. “They spent the whole summer together, he had plenty of opportunities.”

“Are Hermione and Krum over for good, then?” Lavender asked, always keen for gossip. Harry shrugged.

“He told me she hardly wrote to him over the summer, so I’d imagine so.” That reminded him, he had to write to Viktor at the weekend, now he was away from Grimmauld.

“You kept in touch? That’s so nice.” Parvati smiled. “If he’s single again, think you could put in a good word for us?” she joked, and she and Lavender both giggled as Harry blushed.

The good mood died quickly as they reached the Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom, waiting outside. To no one’s surprise, they shared this class with the Slytherins, too — Dumbledore did love pairing the two volatile houses together in the more potentially catastrophic subjects.

“Nice to see you’ve lost your shadows, Potter,” Blaise drawled in greeting, giving a pointed glance over to Ron and Hermione further down the hall. Harry smirked briefly.

“These things happen. How was your summer?” He focused on the Italian boy purely to stop himself from staring at Draco. The blond Slytherin looked exceptionally attractive today, his slightly-longer hair swept neatly away from his face.

Blaise was saved having to answer by the classroom door swinging open. The Slytherin eyed it warily, then stepped back, giving an ‘after you’ gesture. Harry rolled his eyes, leading the way into the classroom.

Over the years, he had seen this room in a lot of different ways; from the dozens of portraits of Gilderoy Lockhart, to the huge stockpile of Dark Detectors Crouch-As-Moody had chosen to decorate with. But he’d never seen it so...bare.

There was nothing on the walls. The shelves contained only piles of extra Slinkhard books — *Defensive Magical Theory*, and the others that the younger students were using — and at the