

“You’ve been a great teacher, Hagrid,” Harry said earnestly. “And it’s a fun subject.” It just wasn’t the career path for Harry. “I’ll still come visit, when I can.”

“That’s alright, then,” Hagrid declared, the matter settled. “We were friends before I started teaching yeh, and we’ll be friends long after, I ‘ope.”

Harry hoped desperately that was true.

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He stayed with Hagrid for a little while longer, remaining evasive about what he meant about Dumbledore — the same way Hagrid remained evasive regarding all the injuries he’d been getting all year, just insisting he ‘had it handled’. As lunch drew closer, Harry decided to head back towards the castle. Neville seemed to have disappeared, either back to the castle or off to the greenhouses, so Harry was alone on his way back up.

In the entrance hall, he froze; Draco, Crabbe and Goyle had just emerged from a door to the side, coming up from their common room. They stopped at the sight of him. Harry’s heart clenched.

He hadn’t had the chance to spend time with Draco since he’d got back from the Ministry; both of them were under far too much scrutiny to risk trying to meet up. There were only a few more days of term; they could wait. But it still hurt Harry to see his boyfriend drifting around the school like a ghost in the wake of his father’s death.

It hurt not to know how much of that was just a performance.

Draco sneered at him, clearly gearing up to say something, and Harry prepared himself for a performance — and then the door opened behind him, and Draco’s face went even paler.

“Everything alright, gentlemen?”

Harry wheeled around at the voice, face lighting up. “Professor McGonagall!”

The Gryffindor housemistress looked more frail than Harry was used to seeing her, leaning heavily on a walking stick, but her eyes were as sharp as ever.

When Harry glanced back, the three Slytherins were gone.

“Oh— let me help you with that, Professor,” Harry insisted, stepping forward to reach for her bag. He waited for the nod of permission, then took it from her hand, along with her travelling cloak. “It’s good to see you back.”

“I hear there was quite the ruckus in my absence,” she replied, and even though he hadn’t been involved in the mutiny against Umbridge, Harry still blushed. “Walk with me, Potter.”

He did as bid, keeping pace with her slow, limping walk. She refused assistance on the stairs, but Harry remained a step behind her, just in case. “I have been in touch with the rest of the staff while I was away, Mr Potter. And, of course, I read the *Prophet*.”