

When the letter from Hagrid arrived at breakfast, a few days after Black broke into the tower, Harry knew something was up. The way it was addressed to just the two of them, not Hermione...

With a sinking realisation, Harry checked the calendar. Buckbeak's trial was at the end of the week. He had completely forgotten about his promise to help with the research; and from the look on Ron's face when Harry mentioned it to him on the way down to meet Hagrid at the entrance hall, so had he.

"We're really sorry, Hagrid," Harry said once they were inside the cabin. Buckbeak was curled up in the corner, snuffling at what looked like half a dead stoat. "We should've been helping more with Buckbeak's case. We've just been so busy lately—"

"I'm not angry about that," Hagrid assured, pouring them tea and offering a plate of Bath buns, which neither boy touched. "Yeh've had a lot on yer plate, practisin' quidditch all hours o' the day an' night. I wanted to talk t' yeh both about Hermione."

"What about her?" Ron asked, a scowl coming to his face at the name. He still wasn't over Scabbers' assumed death.

"She's bin down 'ere a lot since Christmas, helpin' with Buckbeak an' all. Cried a fair few times — she's goin' through a bit of a rough time at the minute. Bit off more than she can chew, I think, with all those classes o' hers. But more'n that, I think she's lonely. I've barely seen the three o' you together these days."

Harry winced, glancing at Ron.

"If she'd just get rid of that bloody cat, I'd speak to her again!" he insisted. "But she won't hear a word against it!"

"Ah, well, people can be a bit stupid about their pets," Hagrid said, looking over at Buckbeak with sad eyes. "I jus' thought yer friendship was worth more than rats, or broomsticks," he added with a glance to Harry.

"I had no problem with her handing the Firebolt to McGonagall!" he said defensively. "I'd happily spend more time with Hermione, but I can never bloody find her. It's like you said, she's taking a million classes at once. And I'm at quidditch every free hour I've got." He knew he was making excuses, but he didn't want Hagrid to think he was purposefully ignoring Hermione, or taking Ron's side. He wasn't spending much time with Ron lately, either. "We'll talk to her, Hagrid, I promise." He elbowed Ron in the side until the redhead nodded, though he didn't look happy about it.

They spent the rest of their visit discussing Gryffindor's chances at the Quidditch Cup, and when they made their way back up to the castle, they found a cluster of students around the notice board in the Gryffindor common room. "Hogsmeade, next weekend. Brilliant! Oh, sorry Harry," he added belatedly. Harry bit his lip. He still hadn't told Ron and Hermione about the map yet. Maybe it was time to start mending some bridges.

Harry nudged Ron over towards Hermione. "Can I talk to you two for a minute? Privately?"