

He was just beginning to hope he might get a peaceful afternoon, too — perhaps enough privacy to call Draco on the mirror, even — when Ron claimed the seat beside him at the table. “Alright, mate. You seem to be feeling better.”

Harry didn’t answer.

“I guess Hermione’s staying in her room for the day,” Ron continued, unperturbed. “Look, d’you think that, y’know, while she’s not around — could I take a look at your Charms essay? She won’t let me copy hers, not even just to get cliff notes so I can write my own version. You keep telling her you’ve done it already. Unless you were lying? You can tell me, mate — we can do them together, before she finds out and yells at you. Merlin, she’s gonna be a *nightmare* this year with OWLs coming up.” He chuckled. Harry didn’t.

“I’ve written my essay,” he confirmed.

“Brilliant!” Ron grinned. “So can I borrow it?”

“No.”

The redhead faltered. “What? Come on, mate. I’m not gonna copy it, I just wanna see what you’ve written so I know I’m on the right track.”

Harry gritted his teeth. The low-level headache he’d had since he’d woken up was rapidly spreading, his pulse thudding in his temples. He could already feel his magic buzzing under his skin — after stretching it to its limits while training with Snape the first half of the summer, it was not doing well being cooped up these last few weeks.

“We’re going into fifth year, Ron. You should be able to write your own damned Charms essay by now,” he bit out. Ron snorted.

“You sound like Hermione,” he complained. “Mate, seriously, I—“

“No, Ron,” Harry cut him off, voice louder than intended. Around them, everyone went silent. “You can’t copy my essay, and I’m *not your ‘mate’*.” His tenuous hold on his emotions shattered, along with the jug of pumpkin juice in the middle of the table. Chair scraping against the tiles, he got to his feet. “Do your own bloody homework, and leave me alone!”

He’d hardly eaten, but he didn’t care, storming from the kitchen before anyone could call him back. It was a stupid thing to get so upset over — he didn’t even *care* about the Charms essay, but Ron talking to him as if the entire last year hadn’t happened, as if he and Harry were still best friends... it was the final straw.

He reached his room and slammed the door in his wake, throwing himself down on his bed. His magic leapt eagerly to ward the door, and Harry wished more than anything that he could curse something, or go flying, or just get out of this damned *house*. He almost called Ceri to take him over to Seren Du, consequences be damned. Sirius had managed to escape for a few hours a week before Harry had moved there; surely they could do *something* to give him the same freedom?