

“It’s my owl, Professor.” He skidded to a halt in front of her. “She’s hurt. Her wing—“

“Yes, I see.” Grubbly-Plank’s frown deepened, and she studied Hedwig carefully. “Looks like she’s been attacked. Odd; the animals around here are used to owls, they tend to leave them alone. Especially a larger one like this.”

Harry could think of one thing that might have reason to attack Hedwig, and it wasn’t an animal. “Can you help her?”

“I should be able to get her back to rights, if you leave her with me for a few days,” the professor assured. “Seems like a fairly straightforward wing dislocation.”

That sounded painful, and Harry stroked Hedwig’s head. She cooed feebly, butting into his hand. “You’ll be alright, girl,” he promised, carefully handing her over to Grubbly-Plank, careful not to touch her damaged wing. Her eyes were sad, and it broke his heart. “It’ll all be better soon.”

“I’ll take good care of her, Potter,” Grubbly-Plank assured, her usually brusque manner softening in the face of his care for the owl.

“Thank you, Professor. She’s— Hedwig means a lot to me.” She was his very first friend in the world. He wasn’t sure what he’d do without her.

Grubbly-Plank nodded in assurance, then set off towards the castle at a brisk pace; hopefully to take Hedwig somewhere to set her wing. Harry watched her go, feeling like she was taking part of him with her.

He wished Hagrid would come back. Grubbly-Plank was perfectly competent, he was sure, but... Hagrid was the one who had given him Hedwig in the first place. He knew how important she was.

He looked down at the crumpled letter in his hands. It was Bill’s writing, on the front. Perhaps that was why the letter was still unopened; the curse-breaker took privacy very seriously. His magic was all over the parchment, though it dissipated when Harry broke the seal.

There were four pieces of parchment inside. Bill, Charlie, Tonks and Fleur. Harry’s stomach churned.

Thank Merlin Bill had warded the letter — that particular combination of people, all coming from the same place, could have been *very* suspect. That was before he even got to the potential contents of the letters.

He pocketed them, jogging back towards Neville and Hannah, his heart heavy.

If Umbridge had damaged Hedwig in any kind of permanent way, Harry would *end her*.

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