

Chapter 26

The last week of term was dragging. Everyone was even more eager for the Christmas holidays than usual; hardly anyone fourth year or over would be going home, and the few younger students that had managed to snag invites to the ball. Harry watched the clock tick down on the last few minutes of Divination, completely ignoring Trelawney's lecture about... whatever it was she was talking about. Harry would happily admit he'd given up completely on Divination. As long as he checked which bit of the textbook they were at and filled his homework with lots of unfortunate mishaps and ominous predictions, he was making straight Os.

At last, the bell rang, and the entire class scrambled to their feet, making a mad dash for the trapdoor. Harry headed back to the tower with Parvati and Lavender, who were both discussing their dress robes. "Padma and I are wearing saris," Parvati told them, beaming. "Grandma sent them all the way from India. They're *gorgeous*." Parvati was going with Anthony Goldstein, and Harry was pretty sure Lavender was going with Seamus. Or maybe that fifth year Slytherin boy he'd seen her snogging in the library the other week. It was hard to keep track, sometimes.

"Do you have much family back in India, then?" Harry asked before he could help himself.

"Almost all of Papa's side of the family," Parvati confirmed. "We spend a month every summer out there, and sometimes Yule. We were supposed to go this year, but they understood when we wrote to say we were staying here."

"I wonder if I have any family in India," he mused, speaking more to himself than the girls. "Y'know, extended." He knew the Potters had been in and out of Britain since the 1600s, but Sirius said James' mother was born in India, so maybe he had family there.

"Have you ever been?" Lavender asked curiously. Harry snorted.

"Nope. I've never even left Britain. My relatives don't like me, remember?" The Dursleys would sooner cut their own limbs off than take him anywhere. "They like to pretend I'm just a bit tan."

Parvati grimaced, squeezing his shoulder sympathetically. "If you ever want to go, you can come stay with our family. The House of Patil would be honoured to host you."

That hit Harry with more emotion than he expected, and he faltered on the stairs for the briefest moment. "Thanks, Parvati." He imagined what it would be like, going to the place his family originated. He didn't speak the language, or know any of the culture or his own family history; it would probably be more embarrassing than insightful. Maybe he'd wait until he'd had the chance to raid the Potter vaults a bit, learn more about his heritage.

"I heard a rumour," Lavender drawled, bringing the conversation back to safer topics as they neared Gryffindor Tower, "that you, Harry, are going to the ball with Susan Bones. Care to comment?"