

The bottom dropped out of his stomach. “What?” An awful thought hit him. “It wasn’t because of...?” He gestured vaguely to her wheelchair, wondering if he had vastly misjudged Ernie Macmillan’s character.

Hannah shook her head insistently. “No, no, not at all!” she assured. “We, ah, actually technically broke up before this even happened. Sort of.” He eyed her in bewilderment. “We got talking one night, about the future — what we wanted to do if we both lived through the battle. And we realised, well... both of us had very different ideas of what we wanted our lives to look like.” She fiddled with the end of her honey-blonde braid at her shoulder. “Ernie wants to travel; he’s looking at a career with Gringotts, like Bill Weasley, only not staying at one single branch. And I— even before the whole Heir of Hufflepuff thing, I knew I wouldn’t go far from Hogwarts.” She shrugged. “I’ve always been a homebody. I don’t need to see the world — which is good, because that would be a little bit harder these days,” she added ruefully. “I’ve been learning a lot from Madam Pomfrey, living in here. I don’t know if I want to be a healer necessarily, and it’s going to be a long time before I’m up to any sort of serious training. But I like the idea of being her... assistant of sorts. Helping with the standard school shenanigans, making sure the students are alright. Helping Hogwarts feel like their home away from home.”

Harry could absolutely see it; Hannah working in the Hospital Wing, her sunny smiles brightening up the day of any poor student with a bludger-related injury or a hex gone wrong. Always available with a kind word and a listening ear for the homesick and the bullied and the troubled.

And he could understand not wanting to leave the castle, either.

“Feels like a part of you, doesn’t it?” he mused knowingly. She nodded.

“Does that go away? When you’re not here?”

Harry shrugged, contemplating his answer. “Not really. It’s quieter, for sure — I can’t feel everyone like I can when I’m inside the wards.” If he was back at Seren Du, he couldn’t pinpoint McGonagall or Pomfrey or anyone at the school. “But it’s always there. Waiting for me to come back.” If there was ever an emergency at the school, he would know about it, no matter how far he travelled. He was linked to Hogwarts on a soul-deep level, now.

“Makes sense.”

The silence that stretched between them was comfortable, an acknowledgment of this bond they shared that only two others could begin to comprehend.

“It’ll be good, to have at least one of us in the castle full-time,” he said.

“Yeah. Though I’ll eat my wand if Nev doesn’t take over when Sprout retires.”

“Oh, that’s a given,” Harry agreed easily.

Hannah shifted slightly, grimacing in pain, and Harry realised how long they’d been talking. “I’ll let you get on,” he said, patting her hand, “but it’s really great to see you up and about.