

Before Harry could say anything, Mrs Weasley screeched up the stairs for them all to gather before they would be late. Harry hugged Sirius tight. “I love you,” he murmured. “I’ll see you at Christmas. And talk to you on the mirror.”

“As often as you need me,” Sirius vowed, smiling. “I love you too, pup. Give ‘em hell for me, yeah?” He winked, and Harry was laughing as he left his room, jogging downstairs while Sirius levitated his trunk for him. The whole entourage was crammed in the entrance hall, waiting — the school-age Weasley kids, Mr and Mrs Weasley, Moody, and Remus. Tonks was waiting elsewhere, as Harry discovered when Mrs Weasley practically forced him out the door. With one last wave to Sirius, he was off.

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Getting everyone safely and discreetly to the platform — at least, as discreetly as possible when one person was Harry Potter and the rest had hair like traffic cones — was quite an ordeal, and Harry breathed a sigh of relief when he was finally on the train.

“Ron and I are supposed to go to the prefect carriage,” Hermione declared, once the twins had disappeared to find Lee. Harry shrugged. That was fine by him.

“Cool. Ginny?” He gestured down the train, and she led the way without even glancing back at Ron and Hermione, checking each compartment for familiar faces. To Harry’s delight, they found Neville also wandering the train — and then found Luna in a compartment by herself.

“Oh, good; I was hoping you’d find me,” she said by way of greeting, beaming at Ginny.

“Hi, Luna,” Harry greeted cheerfully, bemused by the strange glasses resting on the girl’s face, a copy of the *Quibbler* upside-down in her hand.

There was a brief awkward moment as Ginny squeezed too close past Neville to go sit with Luna, but they managed to get settled with their trunks up in the luggage rack just as the train sped out of central London.

“How was the rest of your summer?” Neville asked, hazel eyes sympathetic. Harry shrugged.

“Oh, y’know. Ups and downs.” He’d had a little contact with Neville while at Grimmauld, but only through tacking paragraphs on the end of Ginny’s letters to the other Gryffindor.

To Harry’s surprise, there was a knock on the door, and it slid open to reveal Susan Bones’ smiling face. “There you are! I’ve been looking for you since I saw Ron Weasley go into the prefect carriage.” She screwed up her nose to show what she thought of that decision, and Harry laughed.

“I would’ve thought you’d be in there with them.” Susan was a shoe-in for prefect, he’d thought.

“Nah, Dumbledore knows he can’t control me. Hannah and Ernie got the badges,” she explained. “Of course, he can’t control them either, but he doesn’t know that.” She winked. “I’ll let them have their romantic corridor patrols together; I’m far too busy this year.”