

“What’s been the matter wi’ you then, these days, anyways?” Hagrid asked, eyeing Harry shrewdly. “Hardly ever see yeh wi’ Ron and Hermione anymore.”

Harry grimaced, running a hand through his hair. “Well, Ron’s still not over me being in the tournament,” he said ruefully. “And Hermione... we’re growing older, Hagrid. People change. I’m sure the friends you had when you were eleven aren’t the same friends you have now.”

“But the three o’ you’ve been through so much together.” Hagrid was frowning now, and Harry sighed, wishing there was an easy way to make the man explain. He couldn’t tell him the truth about Dumbledore; it would break the man’s heart. Hagrid worshipped Dumbledore.

“Sometimes shared trauma isn’t enough to keep people together,” he said eventually. “I’m not saying we’ll never be friends again, but... I dunno, it’s weird right now. I’ve been hanging out with Neville a lot lately, though.”

“Aye, ‘e’s a good kid, the Longbottom lad. Always helpin’ Professor Sprout wi’ the greenhouses.” Hagrid’s faint smile returned. “As long as yer not by yerself too long, Harry. That’ll get yeh nowhere good. ‘Specially not at your age.”

“I’m not alone, Hagrid,” he promised. “And if I am, I know I’ve always got you, right?”

“Always,” Hagrid vowed, covering Harry’s hand gently with his own. “No matter what, Harry, I’m on your side.”

Harry hoped that proved true. “Thanks, Hagrid.” He glanced at his watch; if he was quick, he’d have time to run to the kitchens and grab something to eat before his next class. “Look, I’ve got to go back to classes, but... don’t lock yourself away in here, alright? And don’t listen to whatever’s in those letters. There’s always gonna be people who like to complain about things.”

Harry gave the man one last hug before leaving, hurrying up to the castle the best he could in the snow.

If Dumbledore’s manipulations ever cost him his friendship with Hagrid, Harry would obliterate the old headmaster where he stood.