

last year. They know I was friendly with your lot. But they're *always* there and when they're not, Umbridge is, and I can't trust that no one's reading my letters so I can hardly talk to the one person who *actually* gives a shit, and my workload is getting worse and I just— I have nowhere to go, Harry,” he said, voice cracking. “I’m almost eighteen and it still doesn’t matter. I’m still stuck with them. If I want the chance to save the family name, if I want to have even a *knut* to my name when I graduate, I have to do what they say. Disinheriting me would be the kindest thing they’d do — I’d much more likely end up dead.”

“What about Oliver?” Harry asked, and Cassius’ whole body went stiff, his hazel eyes filling with fear for the briefest moment. Then he relaxed, turning sheepish.

“Did he tell you?” he asked knowingly, and Harry shook his head.

“I guessed.”

A short laugh rang through their quiet corner. “What gave me away? Anything I need to worry about?”

Harry shook his head before the older boy could second-guess himself. “Only because I know you, and him. It was a bit suspect when you were both so friendly at the World Cup, and then how happy you were listening to the match commentary that one time... Plus a couple things the twins said, here and there.” Because Fred and George absolutely knew about the relationship, and Harry wouldn’t be even a little bit surprised if one or both of them had had a hand in it.

A long, slow breath whistled through Cassius’ clenched jaw. “He asked me to marry him, at Christmas. When I graduate.”

Harry’s eyes widened. “Blimey. I, uh, hadn’t realised you were that serious.” He should have, though; Oliver Wood was a very committed individual, to whatever he decided to give his heart to, be it quidditch or a person. And they had been together quite a while, it seemed; longer than Harry and Draco.

Not that Harry had asked Draco to marry him or anything. He was way too young to do that.

“I still don’t know what he sees in me,” Cassius remarked. “But I love the crazy bastard. When I’m with him... I can forget what kind of man my uncle is making me become. With Ollie I feel like I actually might amount to something better.” He shook his head, eyes filled with pain. “I want to marry him, more than anything. But I can’t. If my family got word that I even *spoke* to Oliver, they’d kill him in front of me and then kill me too for good measure.”

There wasn’t even a hint of exaggeration in his tone, and Harry believed every word.

“You have somewhere to go, Cassius,” he said, but the Slytherin shook his head.

“I can’t put Ollie in danger like that.”

“I’m not talking about Ollie. I’m talking about me.” That made Cassius pause, brows rising. “I’ve offered Theo sanctuary, and a few of the neutral families who have come to Blaise for