

“Would your aunt mind if I wrote to her again? About Rita Skeeter?” he asked. “I don’t know if you saw the article about Hagrid, but it’s ridiculous, and there’s got to be something I can do about it legally. Or someone could do.”

“Aunt Amelia would love to hear from you, Harry, but I don’t know if she can be of any help. Trust me, if there was a way to get Skeeter arrested, she would’ve done it by now,” Susan added with a sour look. “The worst the DMLE can do is slap her with a few fines, and the Prophet is happy to pay those; she brings in way too much money for them slinging her muck about.” She paused thoughtfully. “What about that lawyer you got in touch with? Maybe she’ll have an idea?”

“I can ask.” Harry hadn’t spoken much to his lawyer, but Evelyn Frobisher seemed to be one of the best. Harry expected as much, if she came on the recommendation of the head of the DMLE herself. “But I can’t exactly have her banned from talking to everyone. Especially not the people who can consent for themselves.” If only Hagrid had turned around and told her no comment. Then again, she probably would’ve written that crap regardless.

“Maybe we can get her banned from the grounds except on tournament days,” Susan said slowly. “On the claim of disrupting our learning. If Skeeter’s allowed to just wander around and interrupt classes for interviews, what’s to stop other random adults coming in and doing it?”

Harry grinned; he could put up with Skeeter on tournament days if it meant being rid of her the rest of the time. “That could work! I’ll write to Mrs Frobisher and ask. Thanks, Susan.” He was about to turn away, when suddenly a thought occurred to him. “Hey, Susan? Are you going to the ball with anyone?”

She blinked at him, eyebrows rising. “Not yet. Why do you ask?”

“Would you want to maybe go with me? As friends,” he clarified quickly, feeling his cheeks grow hot. “I have to have a partner to open the ball, and I thought it’d be good to go with someone from a different house. If you’d rather not, I completely understand,” he added. “That sort of attention isn’t for everyone. But... it could be fun.” He wasn’t quite bold enough to go with a boy — especially one that wasn’t Draco. But going with a Hufflepuff, he could do.

Susan eyed him contemplatively. At her side, Ernie was grinning. “I’ll warn you, I’ve never danced a step in my life,” Harry added, wondering if that was a dealbreaker. “But I’m willing to learn.”

“I don’t have time to teach you, but if you promise to get good enough not to embarrass yourself, I’ll go with you,” she agreed, folding her arms over her chest. “Even if you’re terrible, it’ll still be good for my image to be seen with you. And for our little house unity side-project,” she added with a grin.

“Your image?” Harry repeated, baffled. She nodded.

“If I want to be Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot by the time I’m thirty, I have to start somewhere, don’t I? I’m a Hufflepuff; we don’t make waves. Being Harry Potter’s date to the