

other; he just wanted them to think for themselves, to start to question the information they were being fed so blindly. To be prepared to fight if it came to it.

There were far too many puppetmasters pulling strings for his liking — his best bet would be to just cut every single one he could.

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The teachers seemed to be determined to make their students very aware from the start that they were now preparing for their OWL examinations — even after one single day of classes, Harry and his year mates had a small mountain of homework. After dinner, Harry and Neville went up to the common room to get started on it; with the number of people still talking about Dudley, Harry didn't want to face the library to try and find an inter-house study group.

Hermione had already claimed the comfortable chairs by the fire, Ron at her side, so Harry and Neville set themselves up on the opposite side of the common room. Not far off, Fred and George were handing out sweets to a bunch of first and second years, holding clipboards and grinning. One by one, the first years slumped unconscious, caught by the Cushioning charms the twins had layered up. Harry nudged Neville to get his attention as Hermione stormed over, fury burning in her eyes. They watched amusedly as the fifth year prefect tried to go toe-to-toe with the twins, who were utterly unbothered by it, continuing their experiment. The first years did seem totally fine, once Lee had given them the other half of the Fainting Fancies — not that Hermione was placated by that in any way.

“You going to put us in detention?” George dared cockily. Hermione squared her shoulders, narrowing her eyes at him.

“I'll write to your mother,” she retorted, and a low ‘oohh’ resonated around the common room.

“Low blow,” Neville murmured, wincing. Indeed, the twins looked horrified at the very prospect.

“Won't stop them, though,” Harry said knowingly. “They'll just get sneakier about it.” Fred and George Weasley were not going to be stopped by one single prefect, not when they were so close to their dream.

After that, the noise in the common room ramped up, starting to nag at Harry's headache. Glancing around, he raised a discreet privacy ward around the pair of them; one that would dampen the noise. Neville gave a small sigh of relief. “Thanks, Harry.”

“No problem.”

They worked in silence for a few more minutes, and then Neville cleared his throat. “So, uh... how *was* your summer, really? Other than, y'know.” He waved a hand, as if to encompass the dementor attack and Ron and Hermione's pestering and Harry's total lack of privacy in one single gesture. “I know there's stuff you wouldn't tell Ginny or anyone. Not that you have to tell me,” Neville added quickly.