

“Up to no good, as always,” he assured. “Marauder’s honour.”

“That’s my boy!” Sirius squeezed his shoulders.

“I’ll see you at Yule, Dad.”

The animagus blinked rapidly, smile stretching across his face. “See you at Yule, son.” Then he paused. “But you’ve got the mirror if you need me. Or if you just want a chat. Save Hedwig for the rest of the family.”

“I’ll call once a week, at least, promise.”

Harry had to repeat that promise several times to the twins as they hugged his legs, and then it was onto the train with the warning whistle, steam already billowing from the chimney. Others were doing the same, calling their last goodbyes and hurrying onto the red steam engine, eager to find good compartments with their friends. Nashira and Frankie disappeared quickly, eager to find friends they hadn’t seen in over a year now.

Waving to his family one last time before the train rounded the corner, Harry squeezed Draco’s hand and turned away from the window.

“Here’s the real challenge,” Ginny declared, “trying to figure out how to fit all of us in the same bloody compartment.”

Harry looked around, snorting. Their group had certainly grown a bit. “We’ll figure something out,” he said confidently.

‘Figuring something out’ ended up being two compartments next to each other, crammed full to bursting with the occupants regularly hopping between the two. For the first time, Harry wasn’t spared the tedium of the Prefects’ meeting — he walked in beside Susan, their badges proudly pinned to their chest. Susan’s eye patch was yellow with the words ‘Head Girl’ in bold black letters, just in case someone didn’t get the memo.

Watching Hermione swallow her tongue at the sight of them was worth every second of the boring meeting.

With the new fifth year prefects assigned to train patrols, the seventh years and their one sixth year companion were free to return to their compartments. Harry made sure he was walking behind Sullivan, tapping the Ravenclaw on the shoulder.

“Hi, Harry!” they greeted cheerfully. “Ready for your last year?”

“Just about,” Harry replied, easily pushing down the reflexive wave of emotion. “Now I’ve got a question for you Sullivan Fawley,” he drawled softly, watching Sully’s eyebrow raise warily. Harry’s face became pure mischief. “Is Justin Finch-Fletchley as good a kisser as the rumour mill says?”

Sullivan paled dramatically, then went beet red. “What— no one was around, we checked!”