

incredulously. “No wonder you were always covered in bruises!”

“‘E’s my little brother, I couldn’t just leave ‘im there!” Hagrid reasoned. “We was doin’ fine, right up until that Umbridge woman interfered. An’ then I asked Ron and Hermione, I told ‘em all they had to do was go and check on ‘im once in a while, see ‘e didn’t get lonely, maybe work on ‘is English if they were up to it. But they didn’t go see ‘im once!”

Harry shook his head in dismay, though in Ron and Hermione’s position he likely would have made the same call. “I’m sorry, Hagrid. But I’m glad you’ve managed to get him set up somewhere better, now.”

Hagrid brightened at that. “Yeah, the cave Dumbledore found is great for ‘im.” He fussed with whatever he was cooking. “I s’pose I’m not really mad at ‘em for dropping my class. It’s always a small one at NEWTs; not many careers involving creatures. I’m more upset they left Grawp on his own for so long.”

“Well I’m still not exactly on speaking terms with either of them, so I’m afraid you’re on your own with that one,” Harry said with a slight grimace. Hagrid looked him over in consideration.

“Aye, I suspected as much. What’s this I hear about you an’ Draco Malfoy bein’ friends?”

Harry fought a smile. “It’s a bit of a long story,” he admitted. “We’ve been friends for a while, just in secret. His dad... well, you can imagine how that would’ve gone if he’d found out.” Hagrid nodded, face darkening. “After Lucius died, and Narcissa made it clear where the family stood, Draco and I decided it was a bit pointless pretending to hate each other when we had no reason to. And Sirius and Narcissa are cousins, so I saw a lot of the Malfoys over the summer.”

“Well, I can’t say I’m too fond of him, but he did apologise for the trouble with Beaky an’ all. And he’s behavin’ himself in my classes, so far. Still can’t believe he’s actually takin’ Care for NEWTs.”

“Just give him a chance, Hagrid,” Harry asked earnestly. “He doesn’t deserve to be judged for the things his father made him do.”

“Aye, that’s fair,” Hagrid agreed, nodding.

A strange sort of squelching noise came from the corner, and Harry looked over at a barrel he hadn’t noticed before. It was full of huge white maggot-looking creatures. Harry’s stomach turned. “Uh— what are those for, Hagrid?” he asked, wondering if he should be warning Draco about the successor to the Blast-Ended Skrewt.

“Oh, I got ‘em to feed to Aragog.”

Harry frowned in confusion — and the next thing he knew, Hagrid was slumped in the chair opposite him, sniffing into a handkerchief. “He’s dying, ‘Arry. He got ill over the summer an’ nothin’ I do seems to help...” He sobbed, huge shoulders shaking, and Harry scooted over to pat him on the arm. “Dunno what I’ll do if he... we’ve been together so long!”