

Chapter 30

With the news that Rita Skeeter was sneaking around the castle, Harry's paranoia ramped back up to a hundred. He had far too many secrets to risk slipping up with any one of them. If he wasn't in or between classes, he was under his invisibility cloak or enveloped by a privacy ward. He made sure to pass the information on to those who shared his secrets, too, which turned into an impromptu study group on privacy wards and silencing spells.

"I don't know how she's getting around, so she could be anywhere," he told the other heirs in their fortnightly meeting. "Just make sure you're never discussing secrets — mine or your own — without putting some kind of warding up."

"Thanks for the heads up, Harry," Ernie said, looking grim-faced. "I had wondered how she was getting all those quotes from the Slytherins. Obviously they're in the know."

Several heads turned towards the trio of Slytherins in the group, but all of them shook their heads. "I haven't heard anything," Blaise said, "but people know I'm at least civil with Harry now, so they're not likely to tell me. These two, either." After the Yule Ball, it was somewhat established that Harry was on good terms with the three Slytherins, and willing to spend time with others. There were plenty of people — Dumbledore most significantly — who didn't seem thrilled by the Boy-Who-Lived's extended social group, but at this point Harry was past caring. He couldn't hide away forever, especially not if he wanted to be able to make real changes when he came of age.

Harry remembered seeing quotes from Crabbe and Goyle in the article, as well as from Parkinson, and made a mental note to ask Draco about it all. He had to warn his boyfriend to be vigilant as it was; perhaps the blond would be able to get information from his housemates. They still trusted him, they'd surely tell him.

"Okay, well, enough about Skeeter," Harry said eventually. "Who wants to help me with some Arithmancy?" With the holidays over, his self-study was back on track as well, with Snape slipping assignments in with his returned Potions homework at the behest of Remus and Sirius. On any given day there was an inter-house study group meeting in the library now, but no one outside his trusted circle could know that Harry was studying the extra two subjects. That left helping him to this lot, or occasionally Fred.

There were a few groans around the table, before Anthony Goldstein pulled out the empty chair between him and Padma. "Come on, Potter," he said with a grin. "Let's get this over with."

Harry grinned back, shifting around the table to take the chair and reaching into his bag. Hermione had it all wrong, seeing the other students as obstacles to her success.

Hogwarts was so much better with more friends.

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