

He bumped into Hermione in the corridor, expecting her to scold him again about the map. Instead, she had tears in her eyes, her hands trembling. “Hermione? What’s wrong?” Had Ron said something awful to her?

She wordlessly handed over a crumpled piece of parchment, and Harry’s heart sank. Buckbeak lost his trial.

“They can’t do this,” he murmured, taking her arm to lead her back to Gryffindor Tower. “Buckbeak isn’t dangerous.”

“Malfoy’s dad thinks he is, and he’s got the whole committee in his pocket,” she retorted, wiping at her eyes.

Ron was in the common room when they entered, and he scowled at first, before he realised Hermione was crying. “Don’t tell me she told on you, mate,” he hissed, glaring at the curly-haired girl. Hermione’s lip quivered, and she bit back a sob.

“I did no such thing,” she bit out. “I just thought you might like to know, Hagrid lost the case. They’re going to execute Buckbeak.”

Ron’s freckles stood out stark against his pale face as it drained of colour. “What?” Harry passed him the letter. “But that’s not fair! Buckbeak did nothing wrong, it was all Malfoy!”

“We know that, but the committee doesn’t care! There’ll be an appeal, there always is, but... I can’t see how it will help. Nothing will have changed.”

“Yeah it will,” Ron said fiercely. “You won’t have to do all the work alone this time. I’ll help.”

“Oh, Ron!” Hermione flung herself into Ron’s arms, sobbing on his shoulder, and Ron sent Harry an alarmed look as he patted her awkwardly on the top of the head. Through her sobs, she managed to stutter out an apology for Scabbers, and Ron shook his head, entirely out of his comfort zone.

“He was old, y’know— and a bit useless. It’s alright.” He kept patting Hermione’s head until she finally drew away. She met Ron’s eyes, offering him a tentative smile, which he returned. Another small sob escaped Hermione’s lips.

Harry could only hope they were *finally* done fighting. They had more important things on their mind, now.

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As a cold and dreary February rolled into a slightly less cold and dreary March, Harry was beginning to feel like he was almost as busy as Hermione. His curly-haired friend was drowning under her workload, always doing some sort of work and looking increasingly hysterical while she was at it. But Harry had his classes, plus a truly absurd amount of quidditch practices — they were so close to the cup they could *taste* it, and Wood wanted them at their best. Add in his patronus lessons, his private study and his secret late-night