

“How did Skeeter even find out all this?” Harry asked, leaning against the kitchen counter. Hagrid sniffed.

“No idea. I was... I was tellin’ Olympe — Madame Maxime — but... there weren’t no one about when I told her. We were at the Yule Ball, everyone was inside. I jus’ thought... it’s daft,” he said with a shake of his head. “Bloody big bones, I never.” That was muttered under his breath, and made little sense to Harry, but he presumed it had something to do with Maxime, and why she’d been curt with everyone since the ball according to Fleur.

“Skeeter couldn’t have been at the Yule Ball. Someone would have seen her.” Unless she had a way of getting around undetected. Maybe she had an invisibility cloak, like Harry.

“What’s it matter ‘ow she found out?” Hagrid wailed. “Everyone knows, now!”

“So?” Harry argued. “No one cares, Hagrid; not anyone that matters!” He was still trying to block out Draco’s taunts about it, knowing the boy had no choice when he had an audience. Surely Draco didn’t really care about Hagrid’s blood status. “Class won’t be the same without you. Hogwarts won’t be the same without you.” Harry reached up to put a hand on the man’s elbow. “You were the first friend I ever had in the wizarding world, Hagrid. Don’t let this be what takes you away from it.”

Hagrid sank into a chair, choking on another sob. “Y’know, Harry,” he said once he’d composed himself a little. “When I firs’ met yeh, yeh reminded me a bit o’ meself, like. Parents gone, not quite sure ‘ow yeh were gonna fit in at Hogwarts. But yeh did. Look at yeh now.” Pride shone in his eyes.

“That’s partly because of you,” Harry insisted softly. “I thought I wouldn’t fit in, and you looked at me like I was mad for thinking it. You told me Hogwarts would be home, and it was. I reckon I wouldn’t have even been brave enough to get on the train if I didn’t know you were there at the end of it.” He’d been desperate to get away from the Dursleys, to do anything to leave that house. But he might have just run away into muggle London instead.

“Don’t say that, Harry. Yer a Gryffindor.”

“And so are you,” Harry reminded, remembering what Tom Riddle’s diary had shown him. “The Sorting Hat knows what it’s talking about.” It certainly had with Harry, telling him he would’ve done well in Slytherin. If only he’d listened.

Hagrid was silent for a long moment, wiping at his eyes, until finally he managed a small smile in Harry’s direction. “Yer wise beyond yer years, y’know that?” he said. “Yer gonna be a great wizard someday.”

“I’ll be a better one if you go back to teaching me,” Harry replied with a grin. Hagrid sighed.

“I... I can’, yet,” he murmured. “But maybe after a bit. Lie low, like. See if it all blows over.” Harry figured that was the best he could get, and he patted Hagrid’s hand supportively.

“That’s the spirit.” And in the meantime, Harry would figure out how the hell Rita Skeeter was getting her information.