

“That Dumbledore isn’t happy they’re no longer keeping an eye on you, and told them to get back in your good books?” George finished grimly. “I’d bet my broom on it, mate.”

Harry’s blood became ice in his veins, and George squeezed his shoulder sympathetically. “I’m sorry,” the redhead murmured. “If I thought they were honest, I’d let it go, but... there’s too much at stake for you to risk this. And honestly, some of the stuff Ron’s said about you lately when you’re not around, I find it hard to believe he’s had a change of heart, even with Hermione pestering him.”

“Right.” Harry definitely didn’t want to know what Ron had said. He wasn’t sure he could take it. “Yeah. I... shit.” He ran a hand through his hair, hating the way his eyes were starting to itch. He didn’t even *like* Ron and Hermione that much anymore; why did it hurt so much to have his fears confirmed?

All of a sudden he was wrapped in a hug, his face pressed against George’s chest. “You’re still family,” George promised, hand warm and solid on Harry’s spine. “You’ve got us, and Bill and Charlie, and even Ginny. If Ron and Hermione are working for Dumbledore, you’re better off without them.”

That was true, but it didn’t change the fact that they were the first friends Harry had made at Hogwarts; the *only* friends he’d had for a long time. To learn it was all a lie — even if it had been genuine once, it wasn’t anymore — Harry couldn’t help but feel his heart break just a little bit.

“Thanks for telling me, George,” he said eventually, pulling away and trying to compose himself. “I’d love to say I’m surprised, but...” George shared his uneasy look. “I should go. They’ll be wondering what’s taking me so long.”

“If you need a rescue, you know the signal,” George told him, not arguing when Harry left the dorm.

Hurrying up to his own dorm to grab the book he’d originally gone up for, Harry went back down to the common room with a smile on his face like nothing had happened. Hermione smiled back at him when he approached. “Everything alright?”

“Yeah, fine,” he lied breezily, cracking open the textbook. They would definitely get suspicious if he turned on them so quickly after agreeing to make friends again, but Harry was pretty sure they’d end up arguing within a week or two and he could break away then. It might be worth trying for a little longer, to give them something to take back to Dumbledore. Reassurance that Harry was still his old self — still under the Compulsion charm and blissfully unaware of anything to do with his inheritance or pureblood culture or the Wizengamot.

If they were going to spy on him, he might as well use it to his advantage.

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Being friends with Ron again meant it was difficult for Harry to sneak out of the dorm to meet Draco, but he managed it eventually, filling the blond in on the situation as they sat