

widened, more confident, and he reached for a bread roll.

“We’re in this together, aren’t we?” he said, loud enough for his voice to carry over the whispers of people shamelessly eavesdropping. “Both Hogwarts champions and all. Besides, if the rumours are true, and someone is out to do you in over this, then I reckon it’s my responsibility to help you through this in one piece.”

Harry could hardly believe what the older boy was saying. He was willing to give up his moment, to share it with Harry, just so people would leave him alone? “You are *such* a Hufflepuff,” he hissed. Cedric beamed.

“Thanks, Harry. Knew you’d see it my way. Pass the soup, would you?”

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After Cedric’s little display at lunch, things got easier. Several of the Hufflepuffs still seemed resentful, but they were keeping it to themselves; if Cedric wasn’t angry with Harry, they couldn’t be either. After a couple of days, people had mostly settled down about the whole thing. Parvati was right; people didn’t care *how* it had happened, they just wanted to see what would happen next. And a fourteen year-old boy, Boy-Who-Lived or not, being part of the most dangerous event to happen in centuries... that was something to talk about.

Harry got used to hearing people discuss his chances of survival as he walked through the halls. He told himself it was better than hearing them jeer at him, or call him a glory-hunter. He just had to not let it get to him.

Easier said than done.

Hermione didn’t seem to know what to do with herself, flitting between Harry and Ron with an anxious look on her face, refusing to abandon the redhead but not wanting Harry to think she was on Ron’s side. If that wasn’t a clear sign to Harry that he couldn’t trust her, he didn’t know what was; if she was really his friend, she’d tell Ron that he was being a jealous arsehole and needed to get over himself. How could she be like that after the way he’d treated her last year, when he thought Crookshanks had eaten Scabbers?

Because of that, Harry was spending most of his time trying to avoid people, hanging out in the dorms — when Ron wasn’t there — or in the library. It was one such afternoon that Harry was walking through the common room, on his way up to see if his dorm was empty, when an arm draped over his shoulder. “Hey, Harry. Mind if I borrow you for a bit?” It was George, and Harry automatically looked around for the other Weasley twin. He was nowhere to be found. How odd.

“Yeah, sure.” Perhaps Fred was waiting wherever George was taking him; he braced himself for some kind of prank planning. Instead, he was surprised when George led him to his own dorm room, which was empty. Harry had never been in there before; it was messier than his own, with evidence of Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes all over the place. One of the beds had the curtains firmly shut, and a two-foot radius of clean floor all around it. George shut the door, heading over to the bed warily. “Oi, Kenny, you in here?” He edged closer to the bed, knocking on the invisible wall that surrounded it. There was no response. He turned to Harry,