

“It’s true,” he confirmed, and Parvati squealed halfway through giving the password, making the Fat Lady scowl at her.

“I knew Anthony wouldn’t lie to me about that! That’s really great, Harry; you two will look good together.”

“We’re just friends,” Harry insisted. Both girls giggled.

“We know,” Lavender chirped. “But that doesn’t mean you can’t make a great pair. And Sally-Anne is *fuming*, which is always a plus.”

Harry frowned at that. “She doesn’t— Sally-Anne doesn’t fancy me or something, does she?” he asked in mild alarm. He didn’t think the Hufflepuff girl even *liked* him — she was always glaring!

Both girls giggled, exchanging a look. “No,” Parvati assured. “But, well— she’s always been mean to Susan. As soon as the ball was announced she started saying that no one would ask Susan because she was too fat to get a date.” That made both of them scowl, and Harry’s eyes widened.

“That’s awful!” He was now even more glad he’d asked Susan to go with him. Who the hell did Sally-Anne Perks think she was, saying such things?

“She’s just jealous,” Lavender huffed. “She thinks all the boys should fancy her because she’s skinny. But Susan’s way prettier *and* nicer. So now Sally-Anne’s going with Wayne Hopkins, even though she really wanted to go with Roger Malone but he turned her down.”

Parvati let out a quiet, wistful sigh at Roger’s name — Harry knew the Ravenclaw boy was, according to many of the girls, the most attractive boy in their year.

“Well I’m just glad Susan agreed to go with me,” he said, not sure he wanted to get deeper into the gossip spiral. “I kept getting asked by girls I don’t even know, it was weird!”

“You’re a Triwizard champion,” Parvati reminded him, grinning. “And unlike Cedric, you’re actually single. Can you blame them for taking a chance?”

Harry managed a smile, even as something in his chest twisted painfully. He *wasn’t* single, but he couldn’t tell the girls that. Couldn’t tell anyone.

The common room was fairly busy, and the two girls bid Harry goodbye to head up to their dorm and... he was pretty sure they said something about trying out hairstyles. Either way he left them to it, intending on heading up to put his books away and then go find the twins for a little light hexing of random floor tiles in the Entrance Hall. Instead, he paused when a voice called his name.

“Harry, can we talk for a minute?” Hermione and Ron were sat on the sofa in the corner, Hermione’s brown eyes imploring. Ron didn’t look thrilled to be there, but he wasn’t actively glaring at Harry. Harry shrugged, changing course.

“What do you need?” he asked, sinking into the chair opposite. Hermione bit her lip.