

most of Fudge refusing to believe he's back — gathering his forces in secret while no one's really looking for him.”

Harry hummed in agreement; that fit with what little Snape had told him, and what he'd seen through his scar.

“Do you... have you been getting the *Prophet*, wherever you were?” Ginny asked cautiously. Harry winced; he understood her trepidation.

“Unfortunately, yes.” Even without Rita Skeeter on the payroll, the *Prophet* was doing a fine job of coming up with ridiculous stories painting Harry as a lunatic and Dumbledore the same. Harry couldn't say he was surprised, and he didn't entirely hate the way they were discrediting the headmaster. He wasn't looking forward to going back to school, though.

The twins exchanged identical grimaces. “Yeah, it's all a bit of a mess,” Fred muttered.

“Have you seen much of Dumbledore?” Harry asked. While he'd been working on his plans for the upcoming year, he'd toyed with the worry that some of his friends might be under similar Compulsion charms like he once had. Maybe that was the reason Ron and Hermione were reporting back to the headmaster on him.

He could hope.

“He's been in and out for Order meetings. Stayed for dinner once or twice,” George volunteered. “I haven't seen him talk much to Ron or Hermione, though — except for when he told them not to tell you anything sensitive in letters.”

“What letters?” Harry remarked, rolling his eyes. “I bet he didn't care a bit that I wasn't leaving the house, that they knew.”

Here, Ginny bit her lip. “Dad brought it up a few times. He was part of your guard at first. Dumbledore reassigned him when Dad started talking about sending a note through your window to check you were okay.”

“I did wonder if anyone was remotely concerned that I didn't seem to leave my room ever,” Harry said derisively.

“They were all just told to let you grieve,” Fred confirmed. “We tried to explain that you'd told us your relatives wouldn't let you have mail, and what they were like and all. Dumbledore wouldn't have any of it; he convinced everyone that he'd know if you were harmed in any way, and they just had to leave you be. He said it might upset you more to have contact with the magical world before you were done *grieving your loss of innocence*.” He made a face, and Harry did the same. What a load of bullshit!

“I'm so glad it was all a ruse, or I'd really have been fucked this summer,” he mused. A shudder ran down his spine when he imagined it; being tossed to the Dursleys alone and unaided, after watching a friend die and Voldemort rise again right in front of his face. That gaping hole in his chest, left to fester all summer... he would have been in a dark, dark place.