

Hands

by Tarie

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Chapter 1 of 1

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The first couple of times I caught him looking at them, I thought he was reading the lines that that cow Umbridge had made him scratch into himself all those years ago. *must not tell lies*. They weren't as noticeable anymore like they'd been during fifth year, right after all those shite detentions he'd had. You had to sort of squint your eyes and tilt your head in just the right way, but you could still see them there, if you wanted. They'd faded a lot, but they were still there. They'd always be there.

He doesn't know I've been watching his hands and the way he watches them. Or maybe he does and doesn't let on otherwise. I don't know. I know Harry better than I know myself, but sometimes I convince myself that I don't. And that's when he surprises me.

One day I study Harry and then look at his hands, watching the way he threads his fingers together and rubs his thumb over the forefinger on the opposite hand. Then I chew on the inside of my cheek out of worry when he pulls his hands apart and starts *pulling* at them, like he's trying to tear the skin right off of himself.

I don't know what to say at first. I don't know what to *do*. So I don't do anything. I just watch, frozen.

And then I hear him say something. I hear him say something to me.

"What?" I ask, my voice all scratchy.

He repeats himself, still pulling at his hands, his eyes round and shiny and *odd*. "Help me." He sounds odd, too. Like he can barely get the words out.

I'm not sure what to say to that, 'cos he should know that I'd help him, no matter what. Saying something like that to him might not be a good idea right now, I think, so I don't say anything. I just get off my chair and go over to Harry. My knees hit the floor hard and it hurts, but I don't care. I don't care about anything but helping my best mate, so that's what I do. His hands are moving faster now, all frantic-like, and I tell him to stop and try to wrap my fingers around his wrists so I can pull his hands apart. But I don't think he hears me, 'cos he's still doing that and his skin's all red and he's— Bloody hell, he's *crying* now and I can't remember ever seeing him like this, with big fat tears running down his cheeks and it's dead scary.

"STOP!" I yell again, getting right in his face, and I put my hands on his cheeks, pressing my fingers in so hard that I can see his skin get red all about my fingers.

He makes a choking sound and there's warm stuff running all over my hands. Tears. Then I feel something on top of my hands. His.

They don't do anything. They just stay there, his hands on top of mine.

"What're you doing, mate?" I ask quietly.

"Want it off," he says in a voice so quiet that I have to lean in more to hear him.

I don't understand what he means.

"Want what off?" I ask slowly. "Those ruddy words?" I don't wait for him to answer me. "You know they can't come off, Harry. Scars from magic are dead difficult to get off. Impossible, even."

"Not those. Don't care about those." He's nearly moaning now, a sound I haven't heard him make since he broke his leg while duelling a Death Eater outside of Exeter nearly a year ago when we'd got ambushed.

"What, then?"

"S-stains. The stains. Can't get them off. I want 'em off, Ron."

I slide my hands out from under his and take hold of his hands, flipping them over and back again. I don't see anything, other than the red colour that's showed up on account of all his rubbing and pulling.

"There's nothing there, Harry."

"There is," he says, shaking his head. "There is."

I lean in closer and smooth my thumb out over a palm, watching as the red slowly fades way to the pinky-white that it should be. It's a lot quieter now. I can hear our breathing – mine low and shallow, his all sort of jumpy, like he's just done a Wronski Feint and is trying to come off of that high. "See it?" he asks, sounding like he wants me to say yes more than anything in the world.

But I can't lie to Harry. I've always been a crap liar anyway, and I wouldn't ever want to lie to my best mate, so I don't. "No. I don't see anything."

"It's there."

"What is?"

"Blood," he says simply, and then he pulls his hands out of mine and presses them against his face.

I understand. I understand now. I understand and I don't know how I'm going to help Harry get rid of it, or forget about it, but I'll help him do it.

I'm not sure how to start with helping him, but I'll try my best.

And I ought to start trying now.

"Hey," I say quietly, pulling one of his hands away from his face.

"Hey," he returns, pushing his glasses back up his nose with his free hand and rubbing at his cheeks. He looks all embarrassed and stuff, but I don't think he should be. He's been through too fucking much not to get like this sometimes. And that's okay with me, 'cos he's my best mate and I'll be there for him no matter what he's like.

"I don't see blood, Harry," I say. "I only see you."

I don't know if that's much help, but it's my way of starting.