

Hundreds of students filed into the Great Hall with the general chatter one would expect from so many young adults. A summer storm was raging outside, drenching them on their way up to the castle. As a result, many of them pulled out their wands to dry themselves off.

A bolt of lightning lit up the enchanted ceiling and the boom of thunder that followed shook the tables. One of the second year Ravenclaws fell from the bench, drawing laughter from both his own table and the others.

Harry sat with Hermione on his left and Ginny to his right. Ron was across from him with Parvati beside him. But his attention was on the head table, from what he could see it was mostly the familiar faces. McGonagall was off dealing with the first years. The more notable absences were those of the Headmaster and Snape. *Probably off dealing with Draco.*

The only obvious change was the same as seemingly every year. They had a new Defense Against the Dark Arts Professor. He was hard to miss sitting next to their History Professor, Eamon Mulroney. The Irishman stood in stark contrast to the grizzled man by his side.

“That’s Mad-Eye Moody,” Ron said excitedly from across the table, “he’s the most famous Auror in Britain. Half the dark wizards in Azkaban are there because of him.” It looked to Harry like he’d paid dearly for that success. His face appeared as though it was roughly carved from wood with his scars like the grain and knots. He was missing a chunk of his nose and he’d lost one of his eyes, replacing it with an electric-blue magical one. Then there was the wooden leg with a clawed foot. *Well, his lessons should certainly be interesting. And somehow, I doubt he’s as concerned with his looks as Lockhart.*

Draco skulked into the hall from one of the side doors. Snape and Dumbledore followed behind him, the former looking as if a single glance could curdle milk. It looked to Harry like the Headmaster was clenching his jaw in frustration, but he managed to hide it behind his usual good humor quickly.

McGonagall entered through the main door and looked to the Headmaster. When he took his seat at the center of the head table, he gave her a nod to proceed.

A few short seconds later, she guided the firsties into the Great Hall, just as she had every year as Deputy. The Transfiguration Professor stood beside a stool where the raggedy old Sorting Hat waited. The first years had differing reactions to the Hall. A few of them tried to remain calm and aloof, looking at it all dispassionately. *Bloody teenagers needing to keep up their appearances.* But most of them had the same wide-eyed wonder he could remember from his first entrance into Hogwarts. Even four years later, the imposing castle still brought him wonder every time he saw it against the Scottish sky or learned another of its secrets.

The Sorting Hat came to life upon its stool and started its annual song. It spoke of its origins and the house traits and how it’d been devised. And when it was finished, the Deputy unfurled a long parchment.

“Ackley, Stewart.” McGonagall called the first name. An incredibly nervous, gangly teen approached the stool. When the hat was placed upon his head, he twitched and trembled. *That might be the most nervous one I’ve ever seen. Even Neville wasn’t that bad.*

The sorting went on with Harry only half paying attention. He did take notice when Dennis Creevey was sorted into Gryffindor much to his brother’s delight. Harry resisted the urge to thump his head against

the table. Colin was nice enough, if a bit overbearing in his idolization. He wasn't sure if he'd be able to handle two of them. *Hopefully, it doesn't mean even more candid pictures.*

When it was done, Dumbledore stood, "There's much to say tonight, but I think it'll be better if we're all fed and watered first. It's easier to listen to long-winded speeches on a full-belly. Dig in." With those words spoken, the tables filled with dozens of delicious dishes; Roast beef, yorkies, fish and chips, bangers and mash. There was no shortage of options, and in Harry's opinion, the school elves had outdone themselves. *I think that every year though.*

Hermione scowled at the food for a moment but glanced at Ron and seemed to remember their earlier conversation so slowly started filling her plate.

All around there was general chatter as people shared stories about their summer. Across from him, Lavender fished for gossip, "So Harry, you had quite the summer?"

"Yep," he wasn't going to just spill it all without any effort on her part.

"Did you really fight Death Eaters at the World Cup?"

He resisted the urge to roll his eyes, there was plenty of news coverage of that particular incident, "That's how I remember it. And I must be right, otherwise Draco wouldn't have had much reason to attack me."

Lavender ignored his sass, "So brave... I can't believe you saved two Veela, too."

"Me neither, but I'm glad that I was there."

Leaning forward, she put her impressive cleavage on display. Harry glanced down briefly. Honestly, he didn't care for Lavender and her insipidness, but he could recognize she had some very pleasant assets.

She asked him quietly, "And what about Sirius Black? How long did you know he was innocent? That he's your godfather? And did you really save him from dementors at the end of last year?" Harry glanced at Ron whose ears were noticeably red.

That information hadn't come up in the trial, so only his ginger friend could have told her. Harry couldn't entirely blame him. Lavender was unrelenting about this sort of thing and after a certain point, you wanted to tell her what she wanted to know just so she'd leave you alone. Her eyes gleamed with interest. She absolutely loved the idea of knowing a little bit of gossip that no one else did.

Harry shrugged his shoulders, chewing threw a tender piece of beef. He didn't really see a reason to keep it a secret, "I found out that he was my godfather last winter and that he was innocent at the end of the year. And yes, I did save him from the dementors." He answered her loudly enough that others could hear, much to her displeasure. He was denying her exclusive ability to spread the news and she didn't like it.

He noticed there were other people at the table who had stopped their conversations to listen to him. It was rare that any of the trio ever discussed the details of their odd adventures in public, "I managed to cast a corporeal Patronus that drove them away before they could suck his soul from his body." Lavender leaned back in her seat looking satisfied and blessedly left him be. She would at least be able

to spread that gossip across all the other houses to her hearts content. *I'll probably hear whispers about as early as dinner tomorrow night.*

Harry dropped his fork and knife to his plate, finished with his meal and looking forward to the treacle tart that would surely appear in a few short minutes. He didn't really notice that every Gryffindor within earshot save Hermione and the Weasleys were looking at him with obvious disbelief.

The dishes on the table disappeared to be replaced with sweets and he immediately dug into the treacle tart that just happened to appear directly in front of him. He wasn't sure if the house elves paid attention to what each person liked or if he just always got lucky but that always seemed to be the case.

It happened then, just as it seemed to every day since the events at the World Cup. He'd become so accustomed to it in the last couple weeks that he easily managed to hide any reaction to his suddenly rigid length pressing along his thigh.

As well as he managed to control his reaction to this new part of his life, he couldn't stop some of his body's natural response. He could feel the heat in his face, and unfortunately for him, others noticed too, "You alright, Harry?" Hermione asked from his left, eyeing him carefully, "You look flush."

"Still getting past the chill from the storm," he lied casually as he could manage. Hermione didn't look convinced, but she let it go. No one else seemed any the wiser, nor even remotely aware about his not-so-little problem.

He almost jumped when he felt something rub against the bulge in his trousers. He looked to his right to find Ginny was in conversation with Demelza, seemingly paying him no mind. However, that wasn't the case. Discreetly as he could, he looked beneath the table.

Slow and firm, Ginny ran her small hand along his length. Her heavy school robes doing more than enough to disguise the methodical movements.

He couldn't stop a sigh of pleasure from escaping him at her attentions. Yet again, Hermione noticed. *Damn that over-observant girl.* Though fortunately for him, she mistook it for pain, "Are you sure that you're alright?" She leaned in close so that only he could hear, "It's not your scar, is it?"

Harry had yet to tell anybody save Sirius that his scar was no longer of any concern, so he laughed it off, "No, Hermione, definitely not. The scar... hasn't hurt me in a while." She quirked an eyebrow at that declaration but let the matter go.

Ginny was focusing her ministrations right toward the head of his cock. He could feel precum leaking from his slit staining the fabric of his trousers. Leaning to his right as inconspicuously as he could, he whispered in Ginny's ear, "What do you think you're doing?"

Turning, she smiled innocently, and kept her voice low, so that no one could hear her but him, "I don't know what you're talking about?"

If they weren't in the middle of the Great Hall surrounded by every student in Hogwarts and the staff as well, he would probably bend her over and give her a spanking, among other things, for her cheekiness. *Though, she would probably enjoy that, the naughty minx.* But they were, so he couldn't do that.

Instead, he reached down and grabbed her hand, stilling her incessant movement, "That's what I'm talking about." He growled out, a bit louder than he meant.

Ginny giggled, but kept her voice low, "I thought you could use some help. You're so hard after all, and it must be uncomfortable."

Their private conversation didn't go unnoticed as he could feel Ron looking at them from across the table. The lanky ginger was watching them intently, slowly chewing on a piece of cherry pie far longer than was perfectly necessary.

Harry pulled away from Ginny, giving a fake laugh trying to play the whole situation off. Ron seemed satisfied that they were sharing some little joke as Ginny turned back to Demelza. Of course, she never stopped her tender, wonderful attentions to his covered length.

It was ridiculously frustrating for Harry having to sit there while she teased him incessantly. His rigid length throbbed with need inside his trousers, and he knew she could feel it. But her speed and pressure stayed the same, never enough to bring anywhere near his peak but enough to stoke his arousal with every pass.

It was only added to by the fact that at any moment, they might be caught. It was delicious torture, and he couldn't decide if he wanted to savor every second of it or stop it immediately. It lasted for what felt like a half an hour and might have been even longer.

Fisting the cylinder of hard cock-flesh through his trousers, she gave special care to his tip and that incredibly sensitive spot just below it. Even through the layers of clothing, every movement felt electric. The muscles in his neck tightened as he willed himself not to moan out in pleasure.

Looking around the room, he tried to distract himself from what was going on beneath the table. He was desperate for anything that might give him something else to focus on.

He noticed Susan looking at him. When he met her eye, she gave him a warm smile but her eyes seemed to be calculating. *She doesn't know what's happening, does she? How could she? The people right next to us don't even know.* He was pulled from that brief panic as Ginny ran her hand the whole length of his cock with more pressure than she had at any point.

Pulsing in his trousers again, he released even more precum. It was enough that it gathered on the fabric of his trousers. It was covering Ginny's hand, but she very deliberately dipped her finger into the small pool of sticky liquid that had formed.

Bringing her hand up from underneath the table, she feigned picking something up from her plate and then brought those slick fingers to her lips. He stopped himself from showing his shock, as she moaned softly, sending a jolt right to his crotch. His knuckles went white as he gripped the silverware hard enough that it bent slightly in

"This really is delicious." She told him idly, seemingly talking about her half-eaten pumpkin pasty. But the wicked little smile she sent him left no doubt in his mind what she actually meant. With that, the dirty little tease seemed to be satisfied with her efforts as her hand never returned to his desperate cock. He wasn't sure he was delighted or devastated by that decision. *Little fucking minx, but I doubt I could have hidden a full-blown orgasm.*

Hiding his disappointment admirably, he knew he needed to remove the evidence that he'd had Ginny drawing precum from his cock beneath the table. He grabbed the goblet in front of him and as he went to take a drink, he intentionally knocked his arm into Ginny drawing a quick glare from her. He spilled the pumpkin juice down his front and onto his trousers.

"Harry!" Hermione yelled indignantly, some of the spillage hitting her.

"Sorry, Hermione." Though in all honesty he wasn't sorry one bit, he was just happy to have an excuse to clean himself up. It didn't do anything to get rid of his erection, but a quick *Tergeo* removed not only the pumpkin juice but the precum as well.

Luckily, he was given a distraction as he slowly felt the blood leave his shaft. Though the painful throbbing in his bollocks spoke volumes about what his body thought of being denied release.

The food and plates disappeared as Dumbledore stood, "Warmest of welcomes to all students both new and old. The staff and I look forward to another wonderful year at Hogwarts. I assure you all, it will be an exciting one!"

Pausing, the Headmaster looked out at all the gathered students, "This year Hogwarts will play host to Beauxbatons Academy of Magic and the Durmstrang Institute for the European Tournament of Magic." Whispers erupted around the hall that quickly rose to full-blown chatter, and Dumbledore let it go on for a few moments before raising his hand for silence.

"Yes, this Tournament will be the first of its kind. Each school will have teams from each year competing in academic challenges, dueling and quidditch. For the academic challenges, two students from each house will be selected via testing to represent their year for Hogwarts. Dueling will feature a house-by-house tournament in which again two students from each year, save first, will compete with the winners representing the school. And just as every year for quidditch, there will be try-outs; however, all houses will be competing together. There shall be two teams one comprised of students from first to fourth year, the other fifth to seventh. Every member of the winning teams will receive fifty galleons in recognition of their victory."

Ron, Ginny and Hermione all seemed to vibrate in excitement. Though in all fairness, they certainly weren't alone. Everyone in the hall was invigorated by the news. It was all brand new and promised a truly unique year.

Ron had worked all summer on in front of the goalposts in the Weasley's orchard. He'd intended to try for Oliver's old spot, but this sounded just as good. And with no upperclassmen to compete against, it gave him an even better chance to win the spot.

For Ginny, it offered an opportunity to start playing a year earlier than she ever expected. She knew full well that there was no chance of supplanting one of the Flying Vixens but, she wouldn't have to thanks to this opportunity.

Hermione just loved the idea of competitive academic rigor. She couldn't think of anything she would enjoy more.

Ron shook his head, "No wonder Charlie said he'd love to be back this year."

"It's going to be a hell of year." Harry agreed.

“Still can’t believe they managed to keep something so massive a secret.” Ginny sounded impressed.

“Quidditch?” Harry asked both Weasleys.

“Damn right, Potter.” Ginny grinned.

“Dueling too maybe,” Ron said looking pensive, “Same for you I imagine.” He looked toward Hermione, “And I can guess who’s going to be on the academic team.”

“Damn right, Weasley.” She responded, mimicking Ginny. It was so rare to hear Hermione swear that it caused everyone around her to laugh.

They weren’t the only ones who started discussing this new development, but Dumbledore retook their attention as he magically enhanced his voice, “The last competition of this outstanding event shall see one student from each of years four, five, six and seven selected by an impartial adjudicator. These individuals will compete against a student of the corresponding year from Durmstrang and Beauxbatons, in what will be the spiritual successor to the Tri-Wizard Tournament. The winner from each year will win a prize of 5,000 galleons.” Dumbledore was forced to stop at that declaration. Even to the wealthy students of Hogwarts that was no small sum of money.

The Headmaster let them go for a few seconds this time but mother nature quieted them for him. A clap of thunder outside silenced the hall and gave the Headmaster the chance to continue, “The decision to enter in this particular event shouldn’t be taken lightly, the challenges are designed to test the participants mentally, physically and magically. And while every precaution has been taken to help ensure the safety of the participants, there can be no guarantees. It will be dangerous, and that shouldn’t be taken lightly.”

With that sobering warning in the minds of every hopeful student, Dumbledore smiled, “Make no mistake, if you represent this school, you should endeavor to do your absolute best and win. But first and foremost, the purpose of this tournament is to give all of you a chance to make new friends and create connections both here at Hogwarts and across the continent. With that in mind, you will show our visitors nothing but respect, anything less and you will suffer the consequences.” His twinkling blue eyes narrowed as he seemed to look right at every single one of the students in turn, stopping on those he thought might cause problems.

“There will be other events in which everyone will be able to participate throughout the year that will be discussed at a later date. Of course, lessons will continue as normal, and our guests will also be welcome to join in on any of our clubs, organizations, and Hogsmeade visits.” He clapped his hands together, “I think that’s more than enough talking from me in a single night, and it’s getting late. So, prefects please escort the first years to their dormitories and pleasant dreams to all of you.”

They all waited while the prefects escorted the firsties out of the hall. Once that was done the rest of the students stood and made their way to the door. As he started walking with his friends, he was stopped by Professor McGonagall, “Potter, the Headmaster needs a word with you.”

“I’ll see you lot up in the tower,” Harry told them. He expected Dumbledore to ask for him, he just wasn’t expecting it the very first night. He walked toward the head table. The other professors had already left for their own quarters. The next morning would be busy, and they all wanted a good night’s sleep.

Dumbledore waited for him by the side-entrance to the Great Hall, "Harry, it's good to see you again. It was unfortunate we didn't get a chance to speak at the Wizengamot but it was quite the hectic day."

"It was Professor," Harry agreed.

"Though I'm sure you can imagine that's not what I need to speak with you about."

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Diggory explained what happened on the train," Dumbledore began, "though he didn't have all the details and none of your... purported assailants were forthcoming with the details. Mr. Diggory's description of the situation was more than enough for me to punish them. But depending on what you tell me, I may be forced to reevaluate."

"I was in a compartment with Ginny Weasley and Luna Lovegood. Draco and his friends barged in with wands drawn and fired off Blasting Curses." Harry explained.

"Blasting Curses? But nobody informed me of any damage to the train."

"I managed to raise a shield before they fired their curses. When they collided... it didn't just deflect them but seemed to absorb them." He didn't know why it happened, but he had a reasonable hunch. *Must have something to do with my magic changing after the removal of the Horcrux.*

"How interesting," Dumbledore rubbed at his beard, "your shield must have been overwhelmingly powerful in comparison to their spells to achieve such a thing. It just affirms that we'll need to start lessons on your control sooner rather than later. Tomorrow morning, 6 AM, I think. Bright and early before it can be a problem in any of your lessons. Hopefully, you're a quick study, though I have every confidence you will be."

Harry resisted the urge to groan at the early hour, but could understand the reasoning, "So what of Draco and his friends?"

"They already received a month's detention for the event." Dumbledore revealed to him. The whole school would know by lunch tomorrow anyway, "Given the fact they didn't just attack you but attempted to do you serious physical harm or worse, putting every other student in that cart in danger as well, they will receive a much harsher punishment. And any further transgressions will result in their immediate and permanent expulsion."

Harry managed not to show his satisfaction at the Headmaster's decision, "If that's what you think is best, sir."

Dumbledore gave him a brief smile, "I will confirm the events with the two young ladies as well and would request the memory from you in our meeting tomorrow. Both would go a long way in appeasing Severus on this matter."

Head of Houses usually dealt with punishments for issues that didn't occur in class, and then the Deputy if it was deemed necessary. But this was of great enough severity that it demanded the Headmaster's direct intervention. The only time he could remember Dumbledore doing it in the past was when Snape tried to unilaterally give students, mainly him, excessive punishments for minor or nonexistent infringements.

It had gotten bad enough early in his first year that McGonagall started reviewing all Snape's punitive decisions at Dumbledore's insistence. As a result, their last few years together had been frosty but professional. Harry made the potions and Snape judged them fairly as he would any other student. *It's the least I deserved coming in as a first year.*

The only petty little thing left to him was his ability to give meaningless punishments to the worst of his snakes.

"That wouldn't be a problem, Professor."

"Wonderful, my boy." Dumbledore gave him an appraising look, "There is one more thing that might be of interest to you."

"Oh?"

"Last week there was a request at the Department of Magical Immigration from two Bulgarian Veela for residence. They cited entwined magic after the World Cup as cause and when your name came up, I was informed as your magical guardian. Given everything that was going on, very little attention was paid to it, and I managed to ensure that the request was approved without any problem... or questions."

"Thank you, sir." Harry hadn't been expecting that but was genuinely happy at the news.

"I believe the two young ladies have moved to Hogsmeade. Something to think about next time you're down in the village." With that the two bid each other goodnight.

Nearing the enchanted staircase, Harry stopped when he had a thought. He figured there was no time like the present and he didn't know how busy he was going to be in the coming days, "Dobby?"

The diminutive creature appeared in front of him silently, and not for the first time Harry wondered how house elves managed it. Their magic had certain intricacies he'd love to understand better. *Especially if it means there's a way of traveling that isn't as uncomfortable as Apparition.*

Dobby's bat-like ears flopped around as he bounced on the balls of his feet excitedly, "Great Harry Potter, sir has called for Dobby."

"Hello, Dobby, have you been well?"

"Sir is kind to ask. Dobby is being happy, sir. Dobby struggled to find work after being freed. Dobby wanted to be paid, you see." He tugged on one of his ears anxiously, "Professor Dumbledore offered me ten galleons a week and weekends off, but it was too much. So, Dobby works for Hogwarts for one galleon a week and a day a month off."

Harry rose one eyebrow in surprise, "I'm happy to hear that, Dobby." *Well looks Dobby isn't in need of any work.* "My godfather needs help from a proper house elf, and I thought of you first. But it seems you have plenty of work."

"No, Dobby would love to help you, sir. Dobby doesn't need to stay at Hogwarts. Dobby is tied to Hogwarts magic, but still a free elf, sir." The little elf looked absolutely thrilled at the idea of helping him. His big green eyes were glistening.



"I'll send my godfather a letter and tell him," He bent down to Dobby's level, "There's another elf I met recently, Winky, who was freed... It devastated her."

"It did, sir, it did. Winky is Dobby's friend but she drinks far too much butterbeer down in the kitchens." His ears turned down with his mood as he thought of his despondent friend.

"Would she be happier with a new master?" Harry asked.

"Most definitely, sir. Winky wants nothing more than a proper wizarding home to serve as a bonded elf."

"I'm sure Sirius would be happy to have her. He'll call you both and she can have a proper wizarding home again."

Dobby hugged his leg with all the strength in his little body, "Harry Potter is truly the greatest wizard, sir."

"Uhhh... thank you, Dobby. I'd say you're the greatest house elf, too." Dobby started shaking in joy and Harry couldn't keep the smile from his face. "I need to get up to the dorms before the prefects start patrolling. I'll see you soon, Dobby." The house elf disappeared as quietly as he appeared, and Harry took a solitary journey all the way up to Gryffindor Tower. *I should've asked him if he could give me a lift.*

By the time he reached the dorms, he was happy to see his bed. Ron and Neville were still up, "So what did Dumbledore want?" Ron asked.

"He needed to know exactly what happened with Draco. The ponce wouldn't tell him, and Cedric didn't see the whole thing."

"Please tell me he's been expelled?" Neville was excited at the prospect. Not even Harry had been tormented by Malfoy as much as the young Longbottom.

"Not yet, but if he steps another toe out of line he will be." That was music to both boys' ears.

All three boys knew they'd have an early morning. Harry's earlier than any of them. He fell asleep quickly once his head hit the pillow, and as had become commonplace since the removal of the Horcrux, he had pleasant dreams.