

Harry was quickly tying up the laces of his shoes as breakfast was about to begin and he needed to fuel up for the first day of class. First in the morning was Snape and that was an arrow to the heart he was going to suffer for two full hours before skipping his way to the circus that was DADA with Umbridge. His morning schedule was packed to the brim but thankfully he got two free hours in the afternoon followed by an hour of Charms to end the day.

“You seem to be in a hurry.” Ron said, walking into their dorm after getting freshened up.

The gingerhead has been rather reserved so far compared to last year and Harry was happy about it. So long as Ron was not looking to restore their ‘friendship’ to what was before the Tournament he was quite happy.

“I’m famished. I could eat a Nundu and have room for more in my stomach.” said Harry, quickly finishing up his laces. “See you in the Great Hall.”

Harry ran out of the shared dorm only to come to a halt upon seeing a dangerous sight in the Common room. Hermione was there with all the firsties assembled all prim and proper.

“Oh, good. You are finally here Harry. We can escort the first-year students to the Great Hall for their breakfast.” said Hermione, as if that ought to make him happy.

It didn’t help all those curious little eyes were being trained on him and he felt like he was swimming in an ocean surrounded by hungry sharks.

“Hey, Hermione. A minute if you will.” Harry pulled his bushy haired friend out of earshot of the firsties before turning on Hermione frowning in displeasure.

“What the hell are you doing? There was nothing about escorting the firsties to the Great Hall in the job description. I don’t remember any prefects doing that for us in our first year. We found out the layout of Hogwarts on our own or by asking around.” Harry whispered angrily.

“Exactly! We didn’t get any help so we should set a good example by being helpful to the first-year students.” Hermione whispered back.

“If we were to hold hands for the first-year students in everything, how will they learn on their own? Hermione, learning about Hogwarts is not some subject you can cram into their heads like some words in a textbook. It helps them in socializing better to find some things on their own.”

“You are just saying that because you are lazy.” Hermione accused to which he shamelessly grinned.

“I can be lazy and speak sense at the same time.”

Harry suddenly felt a poke on his arm. Turning around he found a small boy with brown hair looking at him curiously.

“Can you show us the scar?” the boy squeaked out.

Harry turned away from the boy and looked at Hermione accusingly.

“You deal with this mess. I’ve got better things to do than entertain a bunch of curious firsties.” said Harry before quickly making his escape from the Gryffindor tower.

He could hear Hermione admonishing the kid about being polite to others and in the same vein asking Harry to act more responsibly. But he paid it no mind as he suspected Hermione would soon get bogged down by taking too much responsibility. Harry happily skipped over to the Great Hall

firing off a bunch of greetings to some familiar faces along the way. But his plan to make a beeline for the Gryffindor table was put on hold when he was stopped by Barbara Collins.

“Oi, Potter. Here is your patrol schedule.”

The Head girl handed him a parchment filled with details of patrolling times and areas under his name.

“Oh, nice. What is this? A complimentary side dish for breakfast?” Harry joked.

“Very funny.” Barbara deadpanned. “I’m also supposed to tell you that you are limited to reducing a maximum of fifty points in a month from other houses. Anything more will be scrutinized by Cedric and myself. If we find you have misused your position, we’ll report you to Professor McGonagall which may lead to revoking your prefect badge. Any questions?”

“Yeah, one. If I see a prefect abusing his or her position, am I allowed to dock points?” Harry asked.

“Prefects are part of the student body. Their behaviour reflects on the house they represent in the school. You are allowed to judge them.”

Harry nodded thinking to himself that it’d come in handy soon enough with Malfoy and Parkinson as Slytherin prefects.

“However, prefects are allowed to protest and make their case before the Head Boy and Head Girl. We’ll discuss the issue and may restore the points at our discretion.” Barbara continued seamlessly.

“You know what. I think it’d have been convenient if all the dos and don’ts are listed in a rule book.” Harry said.

“Oh, that reminds me.” Barbara suddenly reached into her backpack and pulled out a small handbook. “There you go. Your rulebook. Read it properly before enforcing your prefect privileges.”

Harry accepted the rulebook with a smudge of surprise written on his face. “Okay. I did not see that coming.”

“Oh, I almost forgot. There’ll be a meeting of prefects at four in the evening. Be on time outside the Prefects bathroom. We’ll be discussing the usage of the bathroom and quarters as well as any issues that might come up.” Barbara said, matter-of-factly before skipping away to the Slytherin table in a jiffy.

‘Just fantastic. More meetings. I’m hating this already.’ Harry thought morosely, making his way to the Gryffindor table for breakfast.

“You are here early.” said Angelina as he passed by the Quidditch captain of Gryffindor.

“Oh hey, Angelina. I didn’t see you there.”

“No one does.” she let out an exaggerated sigh while peeking at him over the Prophet with her dark eyes.

‘Maybe you ought to keep the Prophet folded instead of making a tent out of it.’ Harry thought but he didn’t air those thoughts.

Harry took a seat across from Angelina with his back to the Hufflepuff table.

“Just out of curiosity was Dumbledore true? Is You-Know-who really back from the dead?” Angelina asked out of the blue.

Harry froze and looked around to see whether anyone was listening in on their conversation. Thankfully, they were well removed from most of the students.

“What brought this on?” he asked, hoping to get some breathing space.

“Just curious. The Prophet is trying very hard in painting the Headmaster as some sort of senile old man. I mean... we all know Dumbledore is eccentric but he is not that senile as the Prophet makes him out to be?” Angelina pondered, her eyes zeroing in on the high table where the headmaster’s seat remained vacant.

She quickly turned back to eye Harry and set aside the Prophet. “So, tell me. Was the Headmaster speaking the truth?”

Harry gave it a brief thought to give a noncommittal answer but this was Angelina. He could play aloof with many in Hogwarts but not with his Quidditch captain who was also a close friend. Besides, Voldemort was not going to hide for long.

“Yes, Dumbledore is right. The Dark Lord is alive.” Harry confirmed making Angelina openly gape at him.

“Wha?! You... you’re not messing around, right?”

“No. He is back.”

“Bu... but! Why didn’t you say anything?” Angelina gasped.

“Say what?” Harry asked, letting out a scoff. “Hey everyone. You know that dead Dark Lord you are so afraid to say even his name. yeah, he’s alive. Enjoy the holidays with your family.”

“Like that’ll go over smooth with these bunch of wusses.” Harry shook his head, loading his plate with some bread and bacon.

“Beg your pardon?” Angelina looked at him with wide eyes.

Harry sighed seeing the fear and alarm written all over Angelina’s face.

“You’ve to understand not all people know me as you do. They might find it hard to believe if I just come out and say the Dark Lord is alive and going to launch another war after a year or so. Look at what happened to Dumbledore. His credibility is being attacked and I was not willing to put myself on the line so that some bunch of snot-nosed cowards who can’t even say the name Voldemort get the better of me.” Harry sighed, noting that he seems to be sighing a lot these days. “I just don’t have the interest in having a repeat of last year again.”

“I think I understand. But Harry... you’re giving yourself little credit. A whole lot of people would’ve believed you.” said Angelina.

“I gave a whole lot of clues to the Ministry. I gave the real name of Voldemort and the Ministry is blaming everything on the crouches and Tom Riddle even though they have no idea who Tom Riddle really is.”

“Are you saying the real name of You-Know-Who is Tom Riddle?” Angelina asked incredulously in a whisper as the Great Hall was getting filled.

“Yep. So, those who are familiar with the Dark Lord will warn their friends and family. Besides, Dumbledore is talking about the guy to anyone who’d listen. For now, that’s enough.”

“Huh! You lead an interesting life, Harry.” Angelina settled on saying after a moment of silence.

“Let’s talk about something else. Tell me about the Quidditch tryouts.” Harry nicely changed the subject and Angelina, bless her soul, complied.

“Well, we do have our reserve team all setup thanks to some mock games last year. All we have to do is to look out for a good keeper to replace Oliver.”

“There is McLaggen. He performed well in the mock games last year.” said Harry.

“Yes, he did.” Angelina nodded slowly. “That doesn’t mean someone better might not turn up this year.”

“Uh-huh.” Harry eyed her suspiciously.

“Oh, fine. I don’t like that ponce and would rather play without a keeper if that guy came on top in the tryouts. McLaggen has the skill but he has a big mouth.”

“I hear you, Captain. So, a new keeper huh? Well, let’s hope we get a suitable replacement in the tryouts.” said Harry before focusing on clearing out his plate.

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‘You can expect a lot of things to change but never the greasy bat of the Hogwarts dungeons.’ Harry thought as Snape barged into the Potions classroom with his usual theatrics.

The door closed with a bang startling many in the classroom while Snape swept into the centre of the class with his black robes billowing behind him.

‘It definitely has to be a spell.’ Harry mused, eyeing Snape’s robes thinking about their unnatural tendencies showcased whenever the Potion master moved.

Harry as usual was with Neville who looked a bit intimidated as Snape’s coal eyes passed over them. Harry raised an eyebrow when Snape’s eyes lingered on him more.

“Settle down.” Snape said, his lips curling with the beginning of a sneer. “Come June you’ll be taking your OWLs exams. I don’t have to tell you the importance of the OWLs. You’ll have to prove how much you dunderheads have learned since you first stepped into these hallowed halls. While I consider most of you moronic... I expect you dunderheads to at least scrape together an Acceptable in Potions. Otherwise, you shall suffer my... displeasure.”

Snape came to gaze at Harry and Neville. Harry could feel his friend shrink into his seat under the cold gaze of Snape.

“On a more positive note, I suspect many of you will not be having Potions class after this year. I only accept those who have scored an Outstanding in my subject into the NEWTs class of Potions.” Snape was now sporting a full-blown sneer on his ugly mug.

Harry couldn't wait to have this dude thrown in Azkaban. Truly, Snape deserved to be put in that place. He suspected the dementors would be happy to have one more of its kind in their group. The man has an uncanny ability to suck out even a sliver of joy and hope from anyone's life. The grave and fearful faces he saw on his classmates were a testament to this fact.

"Unfortunately, we have several months ahead of us until you dunderheads are taken away from this class. Therefore, advise you all to concentrate on your studies and classes to get the grade necessary for NEWT level potions class." Snape said silkily, "Now, today we'll be brewing a potion called the Draught of Peace. It is often a common potion asked to brew in the OWL practical exam. As its name suggests, it is a potion to calm anxiety."

"The list of ingredients..." Snape waved his wand "...and the instructions to prepare them are on the board. You'll find everything you need in the cupboard."

"Now, what are you dunderheads waiting for!" Snape snapped coldly. "Prepare the potion."

Harry sprang into action by writing down the list of things he needed from the board on a small piece of paper before rummaging through the cupboard for supplies. It took him nearly half an hour to prepare the ingredients as per the instructions. A lot of grinding, crushing and cutting involved in the potion-making process tested Harry's patience. Then comes the difficult task of following the instructions in brewing because once the cauldron is heated the herculean task of giving a proper number of stirs after each ingredient was added comes into play. It was the first day of the new academic year and Snape chose one of the most difficult potions to brew.

'Yep. Snape will fit in with the Dementors of Azkaban.' Harry thought, wiping away the sweat that was forming on his brow.

After who knows how long he added the last series of counterclockwise stirs that spelled the end of the preparation process. A pale white vapour could be seen rising from his potion as he took the cauldron from the fire allowing it to cool off.

"Phew." Harry let out a relieved sigh seeing that his efforts were not in vain. "It at least looks like a potion of some sort."

Harry looked at the potion in Neville's cauldron and saw it was pale yellow while Ron's was greenish. Hermione's looked milky white which he supposed was the correct look for the potion.

Snape routinely inspected the cauldrons and the potion master passed by his potion without any comment. Harry took that as a job well done.

"Those of you who have completed the potion can take a sample of your potion in a vial and label it. Have it brought to my desk for testing." Snape ordered.

Harry quickly scooped a portion of his potion into a vial and submitted the vial after sticking a label with his name. Snape didn't even bat his eye and Harry quite happily skipped back to his seat. It made his day when Goyle screamed as his potion spilt outside the glass vial and the boy's robes caught fire. He didn't know how the Draught of Peace could end up working as an accelerant but it was quite a funny sight to see.

So, it was with high spirits that he came to Umbridge's class with his fellow fifth-year Gryffindors despite getting a boatload of assignments from Snape. A class with Snape that didn't end in a shouting match or some sort of drama was a good time spent in his book as far as Potion classes go. The DADA classroom didn't disappoint him the slightest. There was an annoying scent in the air as he

walked into the room. The pink demon sent by the Ministry was already seated behind her desk with a sickeningly sweet smile on her toadyish face. She was dressed in an awful pink cardigan and a pink bow on top of her head. There was even a pair of pink earrings on her ears.

Harry could feel the eyes of the Ministry stooge following him as he took his seat. He set his backpack down and made himself comfortable all the while doing his best to avoid Umbridge. He didn't have to wait long as all the seats became filled and the class remained quiet waiting for Umbridge.

"Well, good afternoon." she said, taking to her feet after everyone settled down.

There were some half-hearted mumbled 'good afternoons' in reply but that didn't satisfy Umbridge.

"Tut tut. That won't do." Umbridge said, a pout on her thin lips. "That's not how you greet your professor. Now repeat after me, Good afternoon Professor Umbridge."

"Well, come on. Say it children." Umbridge urged sweetly.

"Good afternoon Professor Umbridge." they chorused after a brief moment of hesitation.

"Now, that wasn't so difficult, was it? You won't be needing wands for your lesson. Take out your quills. We'll begin from the basics."

A lot of uneasy looks were passed around at that strange mix of instruction and declaration. The basics of DADA without wands were not exactly going to be a fun lesson.

A few minutes later Harry was peacefully adrift in a wet dream of him and Fleur in bed while pretending there was some hidden well of knowledge in the frankly ludicrous book Umbridge had them purchase. Defensive Magical Theory by Wilbert Slinkhard was a book that Harry thought deserved an award of some sort for the dumbest book ever written by a wizard. He was quite frankly wondering if this Slinkhard fellow must have been a gifted wizard by the God of Idiots to have written this book. At some point, Harry was even seriously considering the author must be a magic-hating squib who wanted the wizards and witches to do as much magic as this guy can muster. No other explanation made sense to Harry.

A cursory look at the first chapter of the book revealed to Harry a general gist of what the author was aiming at. According to the author, the best thing a wizard can do when confronted with a dangerous situation is to run away and let experienced people handle the situation namely the Ministry. It was also the author's fervent wish that ordinary witches and wizards do their best to never come in contact with dangerous creatures for their safety. Seeing as he got the general gist Harry was quite happy to daydream about Fleur and spend the time productively. He didn't even bat an eye when Hermione and others began questioning Umbridge about the integrity or even practical use of the book.

Harry however had to bite his cheek when he heard Hermione ask about using defensive spells. The answer Umbridge gave was truly epic.

"Defensive spells?" Umbridge asked in faux horror. "My dear, whatever do you need to use that for?"

Here was a witch boldly claiming with a straight face that there was no need for young wizards and witches to learn defensive spells in a school that was supposed to teach them magic. It was with some effort that he managed to bottle in his laughter. Not only did he manage it he also maintained his focus on the book.

'I suppose I could convert DADA classes into Occlumency practice sessions or something.' Harry mused.