



## CHAPTER SEVEN



roduced myself? Sir Nicholas de Mimsy-Porpington at your service. Resident ghost of Gryffindor Tower.”

“I know who you are!” said Ron suddenly. “My brothers told me about you — you’re Nearly Headless Nick!”

“I would *prefer* you to call me Sir Nicholas de Mimsy —” the ghost began stiffly, but sandy-haired Seamus Finnigan interrupted.

“*Nearly* Headless? How can you be *nearly* headless?”

Sir Nicholas looked extremely miffed, as if their little chat wasn’t going at all the way he wanted.

“Like *this*,” he said irritably. He seized his left ear and pulled. His whole head swung off his neck and fell onto his shoulder as if it was on a hinge. Someone had obviously tried to behead him, but not done it properly. Looking pleased at the stunned looks on their faces, Nearly Headless Nick flipped his head back onto his neck, coughed, and said, “So — new Gryffindors! I hope you’re going to help us win the House Championship this year? Gryffindors have never gone so long without winning. Slytherins have got the cup six years in a row! The Bloody Baron’s becoming almost unbearable — he’s the Slytherin ghost.”

Harry looked over at the Slytherin table and saw a horrible ghost sitting there, with blank staring eyes, a gaunt face, and robes stained with silver blood. He was right next to Malfoy who, Harry was pleased to see, didn’t look too pleased with the seating arrangements.

“How did he get covered in blood?” asked Seamus with great interest.

“I’ve never asked,” said Nearly Headless Nick delicately.

When everyone had eaten as much as they could, the remains of the food faded from the plates, leaving them sparkling clean as be-



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fore. A moment later the desserts appeared. Blocks of ice cream in every flavor you could think of, apple pies, treacle tarts, chocolate éclairs and jam doughnuts, trifle, strawberries, Jell-O, rice pudding . . .

As Harry helped himself to a treacle tart, the talk turned to their families.

"I'm half-and-half," said Seamus. "Me dad's a Muggle. Mom didn't tell him she was a witch 'til after they were married. Bit of a nasty shock for him."

The others laughed.

"What about you, Neville?" said Ron.

"Well, my gran brought me up and she's a witch," said Neville, "but the family thought I was all-Muggle for ages. My Great Uncle Algie kept trying to catch me off my guard and force some magic out of me — he pushed me off the end of Blackpool pier once, I nearly drowned — but nothing happened until I was eight. Great Uncle Algie came round for dinner, and he was hanging me out of an upstairs window by the ankles when my Great Auntie Enid offered him a meringue and he accidentally let go. But I bounced — all the way down the garden and into the road. They were all really pleased, Gran was crying, she was so happy. And you should have seen their faces when I got in here — they thought I might not be magic enough to come, you see. Great Uncle Algie was so pleased he bought me my toad."

On Harry's other side, Percy Weasley and Hermione were talking about lessons ("I *do* hope they start right away, there's so much to learn, I'm particularly interested in Transfiguration, you know, turning something into something else, of course, it's supposed to



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be very difficult —”; “You’ll be starting small, just matches into needles and that sort of thing —”).

Harry, who was starting to feel warm and sleepy, looked up at the High Table again. Hagrid was drinking deeply from his goblet. Professor McGonagall was talking to Professor Dumbledore. Professor Quirrell, in his absurd turban, was talking to a teacher with greasy black hair, a hooked nose, and sallow skin.

It happened very suddenly. The hook-nosed teacher looked past Quirrell’s turban straight into Harry’s eyes — and a sharp, hot pain shot across the scar on Harry’s forehead.

“Ouch!” Harry clapped a hand to his head.

“What is it?” asked Percy.

“N-nothing.”

The pain had gone as quickly as it had come. Harder to shake off was the feeling Harry had gotten from the teachers look — a feeling that he didn’t like Harry at all.

“Who’s that teacher talking to Professor Quirrell?” he asked Percy.

“Oh, you know Quirrell already, do you? No wonder he’s looking so nervous, that’s Professor Snape. He teaches Potions, but he doesn’t want to — everyone knows he’s after Quirrell’s job. Knows an awful lot about the Dark Arts, Snape.”

Harry watched Snape for a while, but Snape didn’t look at him again.

At last, the desserts too disappeared, and Professor Dumbledore got to his feet again. The hall fell silent.

“Ahem — just a few more words now that we are all fed and watered. I have a few start-of-term notices to give you.



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“First years should note that the forest on the grounds is forbidden to all pupils. And a few of our older students would do well to remember that as well.”

Dumbledore’s twinkling eyes flashed in the direction of the Weasley twins.

“I have also been asked by Mr. Filch, the caretaker, to remind you all that no magic should be used between classes in the corridors.

“Quidditch trials will be held in the second week of the term. Anyone interested in playing for their House teams should contact Madam Hooch.

“And finally, I must tell you that this year, the third-floor corridor on the right-hand side is out of bounds to everyone who does not wish to die a very painful death.”

Harry laughed, but he was one of the few who did.

“He’s not serious?” he muttered to Percy.

“Must be,” said Percy, frowning at Dumbledore. “It’s odd, because he usually gives us a reason why we’re not allowed to go somewhere — the forest’s full of dangerous beasts, everyone knows that. I do think he might have told us prefects, at least.”

“And now, before we go to bed, let us sing the school song!” cried Dumbledore. Harry noticed that the other teachers’ smiles had become rather fixed.

Dumbledore gave his wand a little flick, as if he was trying to get a fly off the end, and a long golden ribbon flew out of it, which rose high above the tables and twisted itself, snakelike, into words.

“Everyone pick their favorite tune,” said Dumbledore, “and off we go!”



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And the school bellowed:

*“Hogwarts, Hogwarts, Hoggy Warty Hogwarts,  
Teach us something please,  
Whether we be old and bald  
Or young with scabby knees,  
Our heads could do with filling  
With some interesting stuff,  
For now they’re bare and full of air,  
Dead flies and bits of fluff,  
So teach us things worth knowing,  
Bring back what we’ve forgot,  
Just do your best, we’ll do the rest,  
And learn until our brains all rot.”*

Everybody finished the song at different times. At last, only the Weasley twins were left singing along to a very slow funeral march. Dumbledore conducted their last few lines with his wand and when they had finished, he was one of those who clapped loudest.

“Ah, music,” he said, wiping his eyes. “A magic beyond all we do here! And now, bedtime. Off you trot!”

The Gryffindor first years followed Percy through the chattering crowds, out of the Great Hall, and up the marble staircase. Harry’s legs were like lead again, but only because he was so tired and full of food. He was too sleepy even to be surprised that the people in the portraits along the corridors whispered and pointed as they passed, or that twice Percy led them through doorways hidden behind sliding panels and hanging tapestries. They climbed more