

Chapter 22

Going into the castle for lunch was exactly as awful as Harry thought it would be.

The Great Hall was full of people when he and Neville entered, and all of them looked up at his entry, immediately breaking out into whispers. Harry made to turn around, but Neville yanked him forward. "You're not going to the kitchens," he insisted. "Come on, let's sit with Parvati."

The Indian girl looked up when the two boys sat beside her, and she glanced at Harry. "You look awful," she declared, making him snort.

"Thanks."

Her gaze turned considering. "Some people are saying you didn't put your name in."

"I didn't," Harry insisted. The Hogwarts rumour mill was a vicious thing, but there wasn't a single scrap of it that didn't end up past Parvati Patil or Lavender Brown at some point or another. If Harry wanted an accurate idea of peoples' opinions, she was the one to ask. "What am I looking at, here?" He pointedly ignored all the people staring and murmuring around him. Parvati twirled a lock of hair around her finger, lips pursing.

"Obviously there are those who think you tricked your way in. Others think you bribed someone else to put your name in for you. Most people are realising that still wouldn't explain how there's four champions. But they don't care whether you did it on purpose or not — they're just angry it happened at all. Especially the Hufflepuffs," Parvati reported. Harry sighed; it could be worse, he supposed.

He didn't really blame the Hufflepuffs, to be honest. He'd be angry too in their shoes. He was stealing the glory from their rightful champion, overshadowing Cedric with all his drama. They had a right to be pissed about it.

He helped himself to some chicken, staring resolutely at his plate, even when the whispers rose dramatically. He didn't look up until a throat cleared behind him. Expecting some nosy person asking about the Goblet, Harry turned with a scowl on his face, which dropped quickly when he saw the person stood there. "Cedric?" he greeted, bewildered. Cedric flashed him a nervous smile.

"Hiya, Harry. Mind if I sit here?" He gestured to the seat beside him. Harry blinked.

"At the Gryffindor table?" he asked dumbly.

"Yeah." Cedric had his shoulders squared, but his eyes looked like he might bolt any minute. Everyone was staring at them.

"Yeah, go ahead." Harry scooted up the bench to make room for the sixth year, staring at him incredulously. "What're you playing at, Cedric?" he asked under his breath. Cedric's smile