

Chapter 86

Harry and Neville — and by association, Ginny — made sure to get down to breakfast early the next morning. Both to avoid the incessant gossip in the common room, and to make sure they gave Professor McGonagall plenty of time to sort out their schedules. The housemistress had to confirm with every sixth year that they had gained the necessary OWL grades to continue their chosen classes to NEWT level, and both boys had things they needed to confirm.

McGonagall looked a little stressed already by the time she reached them, the boys catching the tail end of a discussion with Lavender about the Divination NEWT and how Firenze would be taking the sixth years; it seemed Lavender wanted to learn from both Firenze *and* Trelawney this year. Or, rather, she wanted to learn from Trelawney and ogle Firenze. Harry smiled to himself at hearing her huff as she walked off to her first class.

“Ah, Mr Longbottom. Congratulations on your Herbology grade, I know Professor Sprout will be delighted to have you continue her class,” she greeted, making Neville smile bashfully. “I did want to discuss some of your other choices, however — while I’m very impressed that you managed an Exceeds Expectations in Transfiguration, I do have to ask if you’re absolutely sure about wanting to continue the subject. The coursework is quite intense, and being perfectly honest with you, Longbottom, I think you might struggle as the year goes on. Have you considered continuing Charms instead? Professor Flitwick has always been impressed with your work, and from what he’s told me you seem to enjoy the class far more than I can say you’ve ever enjoyed mine.”

There was no judgement in her tone, but Neville flushed.

“Gran says Charms is a soft option,” he mumbled, and McGonagall huffed.

“But you, Longbottom? What do you think?”

I — I like Charms. Um. Better than Transfiguration? Sorry, Professor.”

McGonagall’s lips twitched with faint amusement. “My class is not for everyone. Now, you could always continue both—“ Neville shook his head in mild alarm, “I thought not. I suggest you continue Charms, and I will remind Augusta that just because she failed Charms, that does not make it a *soft option*.” Her gaze turned pointed, and Neville gaped. Evidently, his gran had not shared *that* part of her opinion on the subject.

“Y-yeah, that sounds great. Thanks, Professor,” he stuttered, shoulders slumping in relief. Harry grinned encouragingly at him; they both knew that only his determined studying with the heirs had brought his Transfiguration grade up from an A to a low E, and Neville had spent half the summer worrying about taking the NEWT and failing dismally.

McGonagall tapped his schedule with her wand to rearrange it, and handed it over. Then she turned to Harry, who straightened up under her gaze. There was pride shining in those dark