

“The Golden Trio isn’t so golden anymore, is it?” he murmured knowingly. Harry shrugged.

“My priorities are different now. Theirs... aren’t quite matching up.” He was hoping to spend as long as possible avoiding the inevitable confrontation when they realised he was mostly avoiding them. He just felt so *suffocated* around them. Ron especially, but if that friendship fractured he couldn’t guarantee what side Hermione would land on.

When the plates were cleared, Dumbledore stood once more, and Harry realised that the two empty chairs at the staff table had been filled. When had Bagman and Crouch arrived?

Filch hauled in the huge casket, which revealed the Goblet of Fire — an impressive object, to be sure. Harry should’ve known the ‘impartial judge’ was a magical artefact. Wizards did love giving decision-making power to inanimate objects.

When they all gathered to head up to their common rooms, Harry found himself bookended by Ron and Hermione once more, though the twins quickly nudged them aside. “An age line!” Fred crowed. “That’s easy to fool! And once our names are in the Goblet, we’re golden!”

“How about it, Harry? Sure you don’t wanna try for it?” George asked. Harry laughed, shaking his head.

“Nah, it’s not for me. But good luck with that.” He doubted something as simple as an Ageing Potion would fool the line, but then again, it was Dumbledore. He was all about encouraging reckless rule-breaking.

At the door to the Entrance Hall, they met up with a cluster of Durmstrang students and their headmaster, Karkaroff. Harry stepped back to let them go through, hoping Karkaroff hadn’t seen him, but it was too late. The man was staring. Harry tried not to squirm; Snape had warned him about Karkaroff. The man was a Death Eater, and a slippery one at that.

Karkaroff’s eyes were fixed firmly on his scar, and behind him his students were staring too, whispering to each other as they realised who Harry was. The only one not staring was Krum. “If you don’t mind, Igor,” Snape’s voice carried over the hushed crowd. “Potter’s ego is big enough as it is without foreigners gawping at him as well. His head may not fit through the door if you keep at it much longer.”

Karkaroff seemed to have realised he’d gathered a crowd, and coughed, heading through the doorway. Harry shot Snape a grateful look, but the man ignored him.

And so it began.

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It didn’t escape Harry’s notice that the day the names would be drawn from the Goblet was also Halloween. He woke up with a bad feeling in his gut, and slipped from the dorm before anyone else was awake, wrapped in a dark blue knitted jumper that still smelled faintly of the detergent Ceri used at Seren Du, and the cloak he’d been given for his birthday. He put the two-way mirror in his pocket on his way out, slowly drawing together a plan in his mind.