

noticed the headmaster hated the inter-house mixing just as much as she did. Indeed, the man looked quite jovial up at the head table, happily spreading jam on a slice of toast.

It made Harry's stomach turn, to see rows of only red-lined robes at the Gryffindor table. Everyone looked disgruntled, picking morosely at their meals and muttering to each other in annoyance, sending longing looks at friends on other tables. It was funny how this would have been a perfectly ordinary thing in Harry's first or second or even third year; while a few people might occasionally join a friend elsewhere, the majority of students stuck to their own houses.

How quickly things could change.

The only person more pleased than Dumbledore was Umbridge, who was surveying the students with smug glee. Just for a moment, Harry was so very tempted to send a wandless, wordless hex in her direction. No one would even know it was him.

Knowing her vendetta, he'd probably get blamed regardless.

Not nearly as hungry as he had been before he'd read the announcement, Harry reached for some scrambled egg, nibbling on a corner of toast. And that's when he saw it.

Over at the Ravenclaw table, Cho was sat the wrong way on the bench. Her back to the table and her plate in her lap, she grinned at the boy sat at the Hufflepuff table opposite her. Patrick, Cedric's best friend.

Harry watched as Patrick turned around, raised his eyebrows, then grinned. Suddenly, he was swinging his legs over the bench, copying Cho's position; plate in his lap, sat facing Cho, conversing happily as if there were an invisible table between them.

A hush fell over the hall. Then, Parvati Patil shuffled down the bench at the Gryffindor table, until she was sat opposite her twin sister. They copied Cho and Patrick, resting their plates on their knees, facing away from their own tables. Across the room, a Hufflepuff fourth year turned around to face the Slytherin table, and was met by a Slytherin third year. One by one, students swivelled around on their benches, facing whoever happened to be sat opposite them. Students who had never spoken before started up cheerful conversation, reaching back to add food to their plates. Harry shifted around to face the Ravenclaw table, and found himself staring at one of their chasers whose name he couldn't remember for the life of him. The boy grinned. "Think you're ready for the first match of the season, Potter?" he asked, challenge in his eyes.

Not every student moved. Plenty stayed put, and obviously those on the far sides of the Gryffindor and Slytherin tables had nothing but a wall at their backs. But it was enough — the hall filled with chatter, the bright energy returning to the room at large. Up at the staff table, Sprout was beaming widely, and Flitwick looked so proud Harry thought he might faint.

Umbridge, on the other hand, was spitting feathers. "ENOUGH!" she screeched, chair scraping on stone as she stood abruptly. "This is— all of you, sit properly! This is *most* inappropriate, put your plates back on the tables! Five points from each of you, every student