

“I’ve got some books back home you might like, if you want to borrow them,” Harry volunteered, then glanced at the rest of the compartment. “Or if any of you want to take a look. To understand things a bit better.”

“That would be great, Harry,” Neville said, quietly relieved. He looked up at Sully. “Like Ginny said, I don’t really know what that means, but I’ll do what I can to make you happy. And I’ll apologise now if I slip up or say something I shouldn’t.”

“Oh, no, it’s fine,” Sully assured quickly, going wide-eyed. “It’s unusual, I know, it’ll take some getting used to. But... I’ve never felt comfortable, being a boy. I didn’t really know why until I met Tonks. And I’d like to see if this feels better.” They laughed. “I still slip up sometimes, I’m not expecting you all to be perfect!”

“Then I’m glad you and Tonks met,” Harry said with a grin.

“Me, too,” Sully said softly. “And... thanks for getting me out of my parents’ house. I... they sent a howler, once they realised I was gone. It was pretty brutal.”

All of them frowned, and Ginny, as the closest to Sully, reached out to squeeze their arm. “That’s rough, I’m sorry,” she murmured. Sully shrugged.

“It’s about what I expected — how I’ve let the family down, I should be smart enough to recognise what the winning side is, all that.”

“You are smart enough,” Daphne remarked, smirking. “That’s why you’re here with us.”

Sully grinned back. “That’s exactly what Theo said.”

All of a sudden, there was a knock on the door, and a timid third-year Hufflepuff girl peeked in. “Hi. Sorry. I’m uh, supposed to give these to Harry Potter and Neville Longbottom,” she said breathlessly, awe in her eyes as she handed parchment to Harry. Then she glanced at Draco, and squeaked. “Oh.” Her wide brown eyes trailed the whole compartment. “Wait. Are you Blaise Zabini?” Blaise nodded, looking baffled. “There’s one for you, too.” She handed over the scroll, then disappeared.

“Well,” Sully murmured. “On that note, I’m out before I get dragged into any of your weird shenanigans. See you later!” They left before any of the crowd could protest the shenanigans comment.

Harry frowned down at the scroll, opening it. As he read, his heart sank.

“So it begins,” Draco murmured amusedly, kissing his cheek.

“Who’s Professor Slughorn?” Neville asked, staring at his own scroll in confusion. “What does he want?”

“New Defence professor?” Blaise presumed, and Harry grimaced.

“Not quite. Potions.”