

Instinctually, Harry rubbed at the back of his hand, where the Blood Quill scars still glared up at him.

“At first I thought you might not want the badge,” she admitted. “That giving you such responsibility after you have just managed to shed such a large burden off your shoulders may hinder your enjoyment of your final year. And then,” she said, gaze narrowing knowingly, “I thought about how much trouble you might get into if I did not give you *some* kind of responsibility to keep you entertained.”

Harry put on his best offended expression. “Professor! I’m hurt that you think I would ever cause trouble out of *boredom*!”

McGonagall just stared at him, the flat stare of someone who had survived both the Marauders and the Weasley twins. “That look did not work for your father *or* your mother, and it certainly will not work for you.”

Harry laughed, letting the pout drop. He reached for a biscuit, and when he looked back up McGonagall was surprisingly earnest. “You have talent, Harry,” she said softly. “You have more magical power than any of us know what to do with, and now that you’re willing to use it, a brain that will have no problems with the NEWT curriculum. There is little Hogwarts can offer you to stretch that talent aside from your own self-study projects, and I get the feeling that will not be enough to keep you out of mischief. But you have a love for this school and ideas for how we can make it better — ideas that I would very much like to hear. I’m making Miss Bones Head Girl, and between the three of us I like to think we can begin to make Hogwarts the shining institution of magical education it deserves to be once more.”

To hear his head of house speak so plainly of him — so *highly* of him — made a knot form in Harry’s chest. He had always assumed he was somewhat of a difficult student, always off on his shenanigans and ending up in the Hospital Wing. That McGonagall, famously stern and unmoved, had such positive opinions... it meant a lot.

“If you would rather not,” she continued, “if you would rather enjoy your final year with little more than quidditch and exams to trouble your mind, I would understand completely. If anyone has earned respite, it is you. That is why I asked to speak to you today; you have a choice, Harry. You always have a choice, in this school. I’m sorry that has not been the case in the past.”

The knot tightened, knocking the breath from him. His hands shook around his teacup. “I... you really think I’ll make a good Head Boy?” he asked, voice small. McGonagall smiled at him.

“I think you would make a fine Head Boy indeed. You have a good head on your shoulders, and the younger students look up to you.”

“But— that’s just because of the whole Boy-Who-Lived thing,” he dismissed, feeling the heat rise in his cheeks. One of McGonagall’s eyebrows rose skeptically.

“Indeed? So it’s not because of the way you have always believed in the students of this school, when no one else has. Or the way you have not let house rivalries and stereotypes