

The conversation turned less crude as they strode in to breakfast, Harry smirking when he saw Snape was conspicuously absent from the head table. Dean and Seamus broke off to go sit with Parvati and Lavender, while Harry and Neville wandered towards the twins.

“Morning, boys!” the redheads greeted, shuffling down to make room. “Merry Christmas!”

“Merry Christmas,” Harry replied. “Thanks for the present!” They’d given him a selection box of some of their latest inventions, with a note encouraging him to use them on their youngest brother when he was being a prat.

“You too, mate!” George said, grinning. Harry’s present for the twins was a voucher for Slug and Jigger’s apothecary, as he knew how many potion ingredients they went through making their products and pranks.

“All set for the ball, are we?” Fred asked, passing the orange juice Harry’s way. “Ready to dance your little socks off in front of everyone, champion?”

“As ready as I’ll ever be,” Harry said, shrugging. “I figured once the first dance is out of the way, it won’t be so bad.” Professor McGonagall had promised him that the champions only had to open the dance by themselves; one song, and then everyone else would be dancing and he didn’t have to step foot on the dance floor again if he hated it. He didn’t think Susan would let him get away with that, but it was a nice hope.

A thought occurred to Harry, and he turned to George. “Who are you going to the ball with?” he asked, realising he had no idea. He’d seen Fred ask Angelina, but George had been surprisingly quiet on the matter.

George’s face turned almost as red as his hair, and Fred’s lit up in a grin. “Our dear brother is crossing enemy lines,” he teased. “Going with that bloke from Durmstrang, the one who reffed your quidditch match.”

“Boris?” Harry checked, humming thoughtfully. The Durmstrang boy was very handsome, and he seemed to have enough of a sense of humour to keep up with George for a night.

“Nice one, well done.” George grinned, though he was still pink.

“Figured I’d do my bit for international cooperation.”

“Oh, I’m sure you’ll be *cooperating* with him plenty,” Fred ribbed, nudging his brother in the side.

“Is it true you got asked by Adrian Pucey?” Neville cut in, not batting an eyelash at the news that George was going with another boy. George snorted.

“Yeah. Probably would’ve said yes if I hadn’t asked Boris already,” he admitted. “Felt a bit bad about turning him down, actually.”

Harry opened his mouth to argue instinctively, then shut it again; Pucey had never actually attempted to foul anyone on the Gryffindor team when they played one another, unlike most of the rest of his team. Even Draco. Harry certainly had no room to judge there. He remembered what George said about Slytherins being attractive, and wondered if the Weasley