

“Or Ron’s father just respects when things are supposed to stay *secret*,” Hermione said icily. Draco laughed.

“As if everyone else’s parents didn’t tell them immediately. They probably just don’t talk about the important things in front of him.” Happy with his annual pre-sorting mocking of Ron Weasley, Draco let it go, his eyes turning to Harry once more. Harry wished he could somehow arrange a way to talk to the blond in private, but that would have to wait until they got to school. The train was far too crowded to risk it. Instead he merely quirked his lips in the briefest smile, which turned into a glare when he caught Ron looking at him. When Draco left, Ron slammed the compartment door shut so hard the window cracked.

“Oh, honestly, Ron,” Hermione muttered, whipping out her wand to fix it. “You shouldn’t let him get to you like that.”

Ron, who had been sulking on and off for various reasons since he’d been given the dress robes, merely scowled and squashed the last remaining cauldron cake between his hands. Harry shared an uneasy look with Neville. Rooming with Ron in such a mood was going to be interesting; hopefully he would perk up once the Tournament was announced.

When they reached Hogsmeade station, they hurried to the carriages, not wanting to be out in the deluge of rain any longer than they had to be. “Has the weather ever been so bad they can’t take the first years across in boats?” Harry wondered aloud, watching Hagrid lead the group of tiny, bedraggled eleven year-olds towards the lake.

“I don’t think so,” Hermione replied. “I’ve certainly never read about it. They always find a way.”

Harry cast a quick Drying charm over himself, even though he knew he’d just end up getting soaked again when he reached the castle. It beat having to sit in the carriage in sodden robes.

Thankfully, he was eventually at the Gryffindor table in the Great Hall, spelled dry for the third time — thanks to Peeves and his water balloons — and eagerly awaiting the start of the feast. As the sopping first years were led in, leaving a veritable stream of water in their wake, Harry realised it was the first sorting he’d actually been present for since his own. He was surprised when the Sorting Hat’s song was completely different, impressing upon them the virtues of each house individually. Harry’s mind cast back to Sirius’ words the night before he’d left Seren Du; his insistence that the war would only be won by the houses working together. Perhaps the hat was trying to tell them something.

There seemed to be a thousand first years to sort as Harry’s stomach rumbled expectantly, the golden plates in front of him staying frustratingly empty. He tried to pay attention, to keep an eye out for any names that sounded familiar from all his books about the Wizengamot, but other than the Carrow twins — both of whom went to Slytherin — there weren’t any he recognised.

At last it was time to eat, and Harry ravenously filled his plate, tuning out most of the conversation around him. He grimaced when Nearly-Headless Nick let slip that Hogwarts was staffed by house elves, immediately setting Hermione off again. That was going to be a problem this year, wasn’t it?