

'The remains of Potter manor.' Harry mused, taking in the sight of burned wood and a mostly grown mini forest atop the destroyed remains of the manor.

"There was nothing we could do at the time to restore it. Voldemort and his death eaters were hunting for your parents across the country. I suppose they looked here first and when they didn't find what they want they burned it down." said Sirius, genuinely sad to see his old home getting destroyed.

"You lived here huh?" Harry asked.

"Oh, yes. The best years of my life. Your grandparents were good people, Harry. They took me in and treated me like their own son. I lived with your dad until I joined the Aurors and moved out." said Sirius, a reminiscent look on his face.

"I'll have the manor restored before the winter holidays."

"Why? For what? You are living with me." Sirius protested.

"I know. But I don't want to leave this place in this condition. It's time for the home of Potters to rise again." said Harry, frowning at the sorry state of the manor.

"Then I'll have it restored. I owe it to James and your grandparents." said Sirius. "And I'll not take no for an answer." he quickly added seeing Harry was about to protest.

"All right." Harry eventually nodded seeing the conviction in Sirius' eyes.

He was not comfortable using Sirius' wealth to restore the Potter manor. But he was not going to argue it out with Sirius now of all times. There was a time and place for that sort of thing.

"You know anyone in the business of building manors?" Harry asked instead.

"I don't but Andromeda might. I'll keep you informed." said Sirius.

"Thanks. So, shall we go then?" Harry asked.

"It's nearly time huh?" Sirius muttered looking at his pocket watch. "All right then kid. You hold on tight."

Harry took the offered hand of Sirius and gripped it firmly. The sensation of squeezing through a tube assaulted him for a minute and then his feet hit solid ground. Harry let go of his breath as the scenery around him changed. He was now inside the secret platform of the Kings Cross station with a bustling crowd around him. The Hogwarts Express was right on time and was waiting on the platform as Hogwarts students steadily began to fill up the compartments.

"Seeing this big old lump of metal sure brings back memories." Sirius let out a sigh smiling at the Hogwarts Express which chose that moment to blare out its horn.

"Don't get too carried away with those memories old man."

"Hey! I'm not old." Sirius shouted indignantly.

Harry snickered and said his goodbyes before boarding the train. The one good thing he did before leaving Grimmulad Place was shrinking his trunk to the size of a matchbox that conveniently fit in his pocket. Hedwig was allowed to fly her way to Hogwarts which left him fewer things to worry about while boarding the train. He didn't know why most wizards and witches don't do the same. It was not as if the shrinking and unshrinking spells were difficult to perform.

Unfortunately, he didn't have time to waste thinking about the habits of wizards and witches when he was required to report early at the Prefect's cabin.

"So, the first compartment." Harry muttered looking straight ahead.

There was a lot of room to cover but he was early to arrive on the train.

'Maybe I should've just walked straight to the first compartment from the platform.' he thought, as he slowly made it to the front traversing through a sea of students all looking for their friends or good seats on the train.

It took him a minute but he finally managed to reach the first compartment. Just as he gathered he was not the first to arrive.

"Hey, Harry." Hermione waved at him.

"Hey, Hermione. Hello there, Crookshanks." he reached out with his hand and scratched the feline behind its ears earning an approving purr.

Harry looked around the compartment and found nothing special in it except it was more open with fewer seats. The only thing that stood apart was the storage facility for their trunks with their names on the personal cabins.

"Yeah. It's not much. I had the same look as you do when I became a prefect." said Cedric Diggory.

Harry smiled as he took in the new Head Prefect of Hogwarts.

"It seems congratulations are in order, Cedric."

"Oh, this? I think Professor Dumbledore didn't want the hassle of going through the seventh years and just dumped the position on me." Cedric said humbly.

"Don't be like that Cedric. You deserve the position." said Hermione.

"Thanks, Hermione." Cedric smiled in appreciation. "Keep in mind that just because I happened to become the Head Boy there won't be any leniency in the Quidditch pitch."

"Oh, yes. So long as no Dementors choose not to visit the pitch I promise we'll have a good game." said Harry.

"You are never going to let that go, are you?" Cedric shook his head.

Harry moved back with Hermione as Cedric went about welcoming other prefects.

"Oh, look. Malfoy and Parkinson made prefect." Hermione whispered to him.

"No surprises there. Snape would lose sleep if his bootlicker is not made prefect."

"Harry!" Hermione hit him on the arm.

"Well, if it isn't Potter and his Mud..."

Harry swatted his hand as if he was batting away a fly and Draco's was swept off his feet leaving the wannabe bully flat on his ass. The whole compartment looked at Malfoy for a moment and dissolved into laughter.

"I'm sure we all wish Malfoy learn some basic skills like walking and generally being a good wizard but I believe our new Head Boy was about to explain our duties." Harry said blandly giving a dismissive snort at the reddening face of Draco Malfoy.

"Yes, thank you, Harry. Now, the duties of the prefects are quite simple on the train. Your patrol duties are as follows..."

Cedric began listing out compartments and assigning a pair of prefects to those compartments. Harry was a bit surprised to know that each compartment gets a pair of prefects. Percy Weasley was the only prefect he had seen patrolling on the Hogwarts train. He along with Hermione was assigned to watch over compartment five.

"Also, one more thing. Fifth-year prefects are supposed to escort first-year students to their dorms. So, you are excused from any patrol duty tonight. You'll have to report to your respective Head of House after the sorting ceremony. The rest of you lot will meet me outside the Great Hall to discuss patrol duties..."

The compartment door suddenly was forced open attracting the attention of everyone. Harry raised an eyebrow when he met the brown eyes of one Barbara Collins. If he was surprised by the Head Girl badge pinned on the seventh-year Slytherin's robes he didn't show it.

"Oh, hey everyone. I got delayed by the crowd." Barbara gave them an innocent smile. "So, what did I miss?"

Harry and Hermione exited the prefects' compartment just as the Hogwarts Express lurched from the platform. While Hermione was gushing about the fact that they get to escort a bunch of firsties as if that was some great honour, he was thinking more about the fact that the Head Girl was his ritual colleague from last year. Oh, he knew Collins was well-connected in Hogwarts but he never thought she'd be considered Head Girl material.

"Harry! Are you listening?" Hermione jabbed his side.

"Sure, I am," Harry replied rubbing his side. "Let's not waste more time and do our patrols. I think I'm famished."

The drawback of working with Hermione was that she was not satisfied with simply doing the job. As an avid perfectionist, she goes well beyond the range of what was asked or expected of her. So, by the time Harry was 'allowed' to take some rest by the she-demon that was Hermione he was just about ready to sleep his way throughout the rest of the train ride.

"You alright Harry?" asked Neville, offering him a chocolate frog his friend saved.

"I love you, Neville." Harry teared up and gave the Longbottom heir a manly hug before gorging on the chocolate frog like a caveman.

"What did you do to him?" Neville asked looking at Hermione who turned her nose up.

"Nothing. He is just being overly dramatic."

"My feet are killing me all thanks to you and your insistence on patrolling the compartment and making sure to visit all cabins."

"Neville. Who's that?" Hermione asked, trying her best to sound inconspicuous but failing pathetically.

"Hey, Luna. You don't mind if I sleep for the rest of the ride, right?" Harry asked.

"Not at all Harry. I can see those Nargles are being a bother. A good sleep should keep them away." Luna said airily, peeking at him from the top of a magazine in her hand.

"You know who that is?" Hermione asked in a whisper looking between him and Luna.

"Of course. You should introduce yourself. Luna is a fun person to talk to." Harry said before making himself comfortable on his seat and slipping into a peaceful slumber.

When he woke up it was to see Ron shouting something by their cabin door and going away in a fit of anger muttering something unintelligent under his breath.

"What did I miss?" Harry cranked his neck coming out of some much-needed sleep.

"Nothing much. Ron made some stupid comments and Hermione became annoyed, ending in a fight. The usual." said Ginny, who was now sitting opposite him near Luna.

"Hi, Harry. Did the Nargles disturb you in your sleep?" Luna asked brightly, her eyes now covered by strange-looking spectacles.

"No. Thankfully, I had a peaceful sleep." Harry said happily.

"Good. Then let's go. We need to do one last patrol to make sure everything is fine. We are nearly at the Hogsmeade station." said Hermione, standing up from her seat and looking expectantly at him.

"Oh, come on."

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Several hours later Harry was cursing himself for thinking gaining the position of a prefect was somehow a good thing. It might have been a good thing as he could see his fellow fifth-year prefects in Ravenclaw, Slytherin and Hufflepuff rather happily conversing with their friends as opposed to Harry who was just about ready to eat an elephant and call it a night.

"I hate you." Harry whimpered glaring at Hermione.

"What happened to you?" Katie asked, looking between Harry and Hermione.

"Don't mind him. He is just being dramatic." Hermione said, waving her hand dismissively.

"I think I've got a right to be as dramatic as possible considering you had me patrol our assigned compartment more than eight times and then patrol other compartments just for fun." Harry complained rubbing his forehead which was beginning to throb with a headache.

"The other prefects were not doing their job..."

"Because they were smart." Harry interrupted but Hermione acted as if she never heard him.

"...and it is our duty as prefects to keep watch over the students, especially the young ones. I'm sure you remember how thankful a couple of first-year students were when we helped them find the washroom or helped them find their friends." said Hermione.

Harry really wanted to argue against that but his throbbing head and the sudden toning down of the buzzing in the feast hall made Harry sit up alert. Not a moment later the doors to the hall opened as Professor McGonagall walked in followed by several first-year students for the sorting ceremony. His stomach let out a growl of protest making Harry redden while Katie and Ginny snickered at his expense.

“Here, Harry.” Neville offered him another chocolate frog.

“How will I ever repay you?” Harry asked, taking the offered chocolate with a grateful look.

In the background, he could hear McGonagall calling out the names of the first-year students as the sorting ceremony commenced in earnest after a long song by the sorting hat emphasising the need to stand united in darker times. He was not particularly interested in the new students or the unusual song delivered by the sorting hat but he was interested in the teaching faculty of Hogwarts. Professors Babbling and Vector were as usual sitting side by side near Professor Flitwick. On the other hand, Snape was his usual greasy self, looking down from the high table with a look of thinly veiled contempt and beginnings of a sneer on his pale face. Beside Snape, there was the horrid woman he was looking for, Dolores Umbridge. The fact that Fudge went with her spoke volumes of the man’s ire at Dumbledore. While his sources in the Ministry have claimed there was some respite in the clash between Fudge and Dumbledore it was certainly not enough to keep the Minister not to send his Undersecretary to undermine Dumbledore.

He had hoped the pink monster won’t be saddled on Hogwarts students this year but he gathered it was too nice an opportunity for the Ministry not to interfere especially if Dumbledore was unable to find a suitable replacement for Mad-eye Moody.

‘By the looks of it, Dumbledore failed.’ Harry thought, shaking his head disappointedly as it was most likely going to be an unpleasant academic year with the pink monster hovering around Hogwarts.

The hall descended into thunderous applause as the last first-year student was sorted into Hufflepuff bringing the sorting ceremony to a speedy end. As Dumbledore officially declared the sorting ceremony’s end, the plates began to get filled with delicious food. Harry enthusiastically cut into his food taking great care to fill up his demanding stomach. When an hour passed, Harry was quite ready to find a good bed and forget this day ever even happened.

“Now that we are all well fed and watered, I’d like to make a few announcements.” Dumbledore said, once again on his feet looking at the hall through his half-crescent glasses. “The Forbidden Forest remains forbidden for students as always.”

“Mr Filch has also asked me to remind you all that magic is not permitted in the corridors between daily classes. There is also a list of banned items which can be found pinned on Mr Filch’s office door. Also, we have two changes in staffing this year. Many of you might be already familiar with Professor Grubbly-Plank. She’ll be taking over the Care of Magical Creatures and there is Professor Dolores Umbridge who’ll be your Defence against the Dark Arts teacher.”

There was a round of polite applause after the announcement.

“What happened to Hagrid?” Hermione asked, her eyes alight with panic.

“We’ll know soon enough.” Harry said.

Heedless of the scattered buzzing conversations going around Dumbledore continued. “Tryouts for the respective Quidditch teams of the four houses will take place on the second week...”

“Hem, hem,” Umbridge cleared her throat loudly interrupting Dumbledore.

‘And here it comes.’ Harry internally groaned watching Dumbledore yield the platform to Umbridge who was sporting a sickeningly sweet smile that screamed creepiness of the highest degree.

“Thank you, Headmaster Dumbledore, for those kind words of welcome.” Umbridge gave the headmaster her branded smile making the man take his seat gracefully.

The new DADA professor was dressed in an unholy pink garb that was frankly exacerbating his headache. It forced him to look elsewhere. His eyes inevitably went to the Ravenclaw table only to remember that Fleur was not present among the house of ravens. His mood took another dive on that realization and the squeaky high-pitched voice of the pink devil did not help one bit.

Feeling eyes on him he looked around until his eyes connected with a familiar shade of blue. Daphne raised a delicate eyebrow upon their eyes connecting but Harry didn’t respond in any way. He was suddenly reminded of the conversation that he had with Perenelle Flamel about the Hallows. Some of the things the woman said about the Peverell brothers and the Hallows didn’t make much sense with what he knew so far about the Hallows. According to his immortal grandmother, the Peverell brothers predated the Founders of Hogwarts by several centuries which didn’t make much sense because he had seen the headstone of Ignotus Peverell at Godric’s Hollow. The illustrious ancestor of house Potter was born after the time of Hogwarts according to the date carved on the headstone.

Not that he trusted the version of the story illustrated in Beedle the Bard’s book about the Deathly Hallows. He already knew that the story of Cadmus Peverell was gunk seeing as the second brother didn’t die childless. The Gaunts were the descendants of Cadmus Peverell just as the Potters were the descendants of Ignotus Peverell. If his grandmother was to be trusted then she was a descendant of Antioch Peverell and thus the root of her interest in him. His blood was the meeting point of three exceptional wizards long lost in history whose tales remain a fairytale. And for some reason, his grandmother was interested in him for this simple fact. Most curiously she was dismissive of the entire plot about being the Master of Death as illustrated by Beedle the Bard.

‘It’s all a bunch of made-up nonsense by an airheaded cochon.’ Harry remembered his grandmother’s response.

If one aspect of the story was wrong then it was not a leap of logic to assume the rest of the tale was also similarly wrong.

The question was, did Beedle use a familiar tale and gave his own twist to spice things up or was there an agenda behind the whole tale? If his grandmother was right and the Peverell brothers predated Hogwarts and its founders then he suspected the Chamber holds more secrets than he previously believed. If Cadmus’ bloodline became merged with Slytherin’s then it was a reasonable assumption that Salazar Slytherin was a descendant of the illustrious second brother. It could be even possible that Cadmus faked his death and allowed his descendants into obscurity by killing the trail of the Resurrection stone with his alleged suicide.

Frankly, he didn’t know what to believe.

‘I suppose I’ll soon find out provided Cadmus’ bloodline merged into Slytherin’s before Salazar’s time.’ he thought.

If that was the case and he hoped that it’d be, then he’d have the advantage against his immortal grandmother and whatever scheme she was cooking. If he could find and learn necessary

information about the Hallows and the Peverells from Slytherin's dusty old scrolls and books then he'd be one step closer to know what his grandmother and her shady followers are after.

'It was a very bad idea to give those books to Daphne and her family.' Harry thought, cursing his past self for being an idiot.

He had all but announced to his grandmother and the Greengrasses that he has access to Slytherin's Chamber. It was now going to bite him in the ass because Perenelle wants access to the Chamber in return for her help in eradicating Voldemort. It was a good deal as far as he was concerned because having a dead Dark Lord was in his interest for continual survival. The sword that hangs over his neck would be gone but he was equally cautious of aiding an even bigger monster.

'I need to know more about the Peverells and more about the Flamels.' Harry thought resolutely.

He was broken out of his musings by the lone clapping coming from Dumbledore.

Harry frowned at the headmaster wondering whether the man finally lost his marbles. He was heartened to note that was the prevailing look among most students or they were confused as hell by the long arduous speech delivered by Umbridge.

"What the hell..."

"...was that?"

The twins were looking at the new DADA professor as if she just spoke Gobbledegook.

"That, Messrs George and Fred, is Umbridge saying she's going to be one giant itch on our backs for this whole year." said Harry.

"Thank you very much, Professor Umbridge. That was most illuminating," said Dumbledore, once again taking centre stage while Umbridge slinked back to her seat. "Now as I was saying...oh dear me where was I? Ah, yes! The Quidditch tryouts shall be..."

Harry shook his head and turned his attention away from the high table. He was wondering whether Dumbledore purposefully left the DADA position unfilled as bait for Fudge. It was not the first time Dumbledore used Hogwarts as a bait. This one seems far more benign compared to what was in store in the first year.

When the time finally came for the students to retire to their beds, he was left with the unpleasant task of escorting first-year Gryffindor boys to their dorms. It didn't help that all of them were sporting stars in their eyes and a million inane questions along the way. He just gritted his teeth and faced the firsties with a smile on his face. The faster he was done here the faster he could sleep in his bed.