

A Penny for Her Thoughts

by Lacrymosa

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Chapter One: An Honest Face

Chapter 1 of 2

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Chapter One:

An Honest Face

The smile on my face as I entered the Great Hall out-shone all of the candles which lit up the room. It felt good to be back; this was my final year at Hogwarts, and I was determined to make this year count.

My two closest friends, Kate and Tanya, were by my side as we arrived just in time for the feast. We shooed some second years out of our usual seats at the Ravenclaw table. Our seats were in the center of the table and had been ever since our first year. Tanya produced her wand and aimed it at the second years who we had scared off, a mischievous smile on her face. I lightly hit her in the arm to stop her from causing any harm.

"What?" she said defensively. "They're just second years."

"Exactly," I said. "If you want to hex someone, hex someone like Flint or his whore."

"Speak of the devil..." Kate said, her head jerking in the direction behind them.

We turned to see Marcus Flint enter with his girlfriend, Jenna George. A pack of Slytherins followed. They looked over in our direction just as Emmett Evans and Michael Tanner came up behind us. Emmett and Michael were two other seventh year Ravenclaws who had immediately clashed with the Slytherin bunch on the very first day of their first year. That was impressive even for a Gryffindor.

The five of us together had been friends since our first year at Hogwarts. We were inseparable. The most obvious reason why we had bonded was the fact that each of us had a certain knack for trouble. We were intelligent, yes, because we were in Ravenclaw, but we could not be expected to sit and read our text books like good little students; that was too "Hufflepuff" for all of us.

"They better not cause any drama this year," Kate said, narrowing her pretty blue eyes at the Slytherins.

Sweet, gentle Kate was perhaps the least mischievous out of the five of us. However, she did have a remarkable talent for jinxes.

Tanya looked at Kate with raised eyebrows. "Where would the fun be in that?"

"You think they'll start something tonight?" Michael asked.

Emmett took out his wand. "Well, if they do we'll be ready for them."

Flint nodded once in our direction. Jenna George gave us the dirtiest look she could muster, which wasn't hard for her since her nose was always crinkled up like she had just smelled a stink bomb. The Slytherins walked off in the direction of their table.

I folded my arms across my chest and shook my head with an amused smile. "You guys sound like a bunch of Gryffindors begging for a fight." I sighed and sat down at our table.

"Nah," Emmett said, sitting down beside me. "Just paranoid Ravenclaws, is all."

I laughed at that as the first years came in and the sorting began. We had gotten bored of the Sorting Ceremony a long time ago, and none of us paid any attention to it that evening.

"Hey, did you guys hear the news while you were in the carriages?" Michael asked.

I looked at him, waiting for the inevitable.

"Remember when the dementors came on the train?" he said.

Kate shuddered, and I could literally see the goose bumps rising on her skin. "How could we forget...?" Emmett reached over and rubbed her arms in a comforting gesture.

Michael continued, "Harry Potter fainted!"

Tanya actually got a kick out of this piece of information. She laughed, her spiky hair trembling. "No!"

"Yeah," Michael said, pleased to see that at least someone other than himself found it amusing. "The Boy Who Lived can't even handle a dementor when he survived You-Know-Who."

He and Tanya fell into peals of laughter. Emmett grinned and kept an arm around Kate. I turned around in my seat to look over at the Gryffindor House table. My brown eyes settled on Harry Potter. He had just entered with his friend escorted by Professor McGonagall. Something must have happened.

My scrutiny was put to an end once the headmaster rose to his feet to give an opening speech. Emmett's stomach grumbled, and he patted it with a soft groan. "This old man better be quick about it, or I'll turn cannibal."

Kate giggled softly. Her blond curls bounced as she tried to stifle her amusement.

"Welcome!" Dumbledore exclaimed to the Great Hall. "I have a few things to say to you all, and as one of them is very serious, I think it best to get it out of the way before you become too befuddled by our excellent feast...."

"Oh, do hurry up," Tanya muttered.

Dumbledore coughed softly to clear his throat and went on to say, "As you will all be aware after their search of the Hogwarts Express, our school is presently playing host to some of the dementors of Azkaban, who are here on Ministry of Magic business."

"He doesn't look to be pleased about that, does he?" I said in a whisper to my friends.

"Who would be pleased with a bunch of soul-sucking creatures running around?" Emmett said jokingly.

I gave him a look that said that it was not a laughing matter. He shrugged and returned his attention back to Dumbledore.

"They are stationed at every entrance to the grounds, and while they are here, I must make it plain that nobody is to leave the school without permission. Dementors are not to be fooled by tricks or disguises -- or even Invisibility Cloaks. It is not in the nature of a dementor to understand pleading or excuses. I therefore warn each and every one of you to give them no reason to harm you. I look to the prefects, and our new Head Boy and Girl, to make sure that no student run afoul of the dementors."

We didn't speak for a very long time as Dumbledore's blue eyes swept the hall in a very serious manner. Indeed, it was not a laughing matter.

Suddenly, he beamed. "On a happier note, I am pleased to welcome two new teachers to our ranks this year.

"First, Professor Lupin, who has kindly consented to fill the post of Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher."

Myself and others craned their neck to get a good look at the new professor as we clapped. I saw a middle-aged man dressed in shabby and tattered robes stand up to accept the introduction and applause. I took in his tired appearance and the worn features of his face. He looked as though he needed a good night's rest and some good food.

"As to our second appointment," Dumbledore continued. "Well, I am sorry to tell you all that Professor Kettleburn, our Care of Magical Creatures teacher, retired at the end of last year in order to enjoy more time with his remaining limbs--"

"It's about time!" Emmett called.

Everyone turned to look at him and laugh in agreement. I punched him in the shoulder, but couldn't help but laugh myself. Kettleburn was an old, grumpy wizard who no one had liked.

Dumbledore continued as though Emmett had not interrupted him, "However, I am delighted to say that his place will be filled by none other than our own Rubeus Hagrid, who has agreed to take on this teaching job in addition to his game keeping duties."

"Yeah!" Michael yelled enthusiastically and clapping hard. He and Emmett stood up and expressed their pleasure by hooting deeply and loudly. The Gryffindor House table clapped even harder, and a few whistled. Hagrid, the half-giant, blushed ruby-red. I laughed and grabbed a fistful of Emmett's and Michael's robes and pulled them back down.

"Well, I think that's everything of importance. Let the feast begin!" Dumbledore exclaimed.

The tables were suddenly filled with more food and drink than a king and his royal court could consume. Emmett and Michael, the hungry pigs, piled their plates with all the food available. They even got up and went further down the table to get a drumstick off a roasted chicken.

Once they returned, they started to feast. I wrinkled my nose as Michael began to talk to Emmett about the summer holidays with his mouth full. I quickly looked away and focused on cutting my steak.

When dessert was served, Jenna George stood up from her table, followed by two other Slytherin girls, Carol Walker and Jessica Ruggles. I watched them, warily, as they came over to our table. Tanya stiffened in her seat next to me. Gently, I touched her wrist, staying her. Once my skin came in contact with hers, I could see clearly in my mind what she was plotting to do to Jenna George should she threaten us, and it wasn't good. I tightened my grip, and Tanya turned to look at me, the plot vanishing from her mind.

"Well, well," Jenna said, breaking my concentration. "Isn't it amazing that we're all seventh years now? Though, I have to say, you guys haven't changed much since first year."

"I wonder, Jenna," I spoke, "how long have you and Flint been an item?"

"Oh, we just met up on the train earlier and hit it off rather quickly," she replied proudly.

"Why am I not surprised?" Tanya asked.

"Because she'll wrap her legs around anyone with a galleon or two," I answered for her.

Jenna was only phased for a second before she said, "Hilarious, Karen, but when was the last time you've had a boyfriend? Six months? A year, maybe?"

I felt the flush creeping up my neck, and it threatened to flood into my cheeks like a fire. My hands clenched my seat, keeping me seated and turning my knuckles white. Jenna laughed to see that she had struck a chord deep within me.

My last boyfriend had cheated on me with a pretty pure-blood with no intelligence to speak of. He only preferred her because she didn't hesitate to sleep with him.

I took a deep breath and sighed, trying to calm myself down as Jenna smirked and stalked off with her small posse. Kate reached across Emmett to comfort me. "Karen? Are you all right?"

I shrugged away from her. I did not want to make skin contact with her. If I did, her thoughts would pour into my mind like water into a glass; my own thoughts were torture enough.

The others continued eating while I found that I had lost all my appetite. My friends were silent, and I noticed that Emmett and Michael were eating slower; they all snuck glances at me out of the corners of their eyes. I didn't need my power of telepathy to know that they were thinking.

My gift of telepathic sight was both a blessing and a curse. I could see into the minds of others with just skin-on-skin contact. I could know all of their hopes, dreams, fears, and secrets with a single touch. I hated it because when I experienced their thoughts I felt what they felt. It was like what had happened or was happening to them was happening to me, too. I didn't want to fear what they feared or experience some of the awful things that they did. My own life was terrifying enough.

No one knew my secret except for my parents. I hadn't the heart to tell my friends because I was afraid to lose their friendship. The only other soul in the world who knew of my abilities was the headmaster. My parents had told him personally, and amazingly enough, he took it in stride and promised not to tell anyone. He was in my strictest confidence.

The feast ended and the Great Hall slowly emptied. In the entrance hall, the body of students separated into fourths as different Houses went in the direction of their dormitory. The Ravenclaw dormitories were up towards the Astronomy tower. Considering that we were on the ground floor, we had a long way to go.

The sound of my name being called above the chatter around me made me look up. I saw the headmaster weave his way through the crowd, his pointed hat towering up above the sea of students. Professor Flitwick was directly behind him, trying not to be trampled.

I urged my friends to go up without me. Kate, as Head Girl, told me the password to the Ravenclaw common room before she hurried after the others.

The headmaster finally reached me where I stood and smiled. "There you are, Miss Brooke."

I raised one eyebrow at the sight of Professor Flitwick coming up behind him, quickly dodging a very tall student. "Is there something you wanted to speak to me about, Professor?" I asked the headmaster.

"Yes," he said. "Are you still interested in being a teacher's assistant this year?"

I nodded. "I am."

"Good. I have found a teacher who will be willing to take you on as an assistant. That is, of course, you are willing to drop Divination." He looked at me over the top of his half-moon spectacles.

I smiled. "Anything would be better than Divination, sir."

He beamed at me. "Pray that Professor Trelawney never hears you say that."

"Yes, I wouldn't want her predicting my death," I said. "Which teacher will I be with?" I looked expectantly at my Head of House.

Professor Flitwick shook his head and squeaked, "Oh, no, my dear. Not me. Professor Lupin."

"Oh," I said. "Yes, all right." I turned to the headmaster. "Have you spoken to him, then?"

"I did suggest that he take on an assistant since it was his first year teaching here. It would help him get into the routine of things if someone was to help him," the headmaster explained. "He agreed but only on the condition that he was allowed to choose his assistant."

I listened warily, not entirely understanding.

"Professor Lupin approached me during the feast and requested you specifically."

"He then discussed it with me," Flitwick said, "and I agreed that he had made a good choice."

I blinked in surprise at all of this. "But he doesn't even know me."

"Professor Lupin knows a good personality when he sees one, and a pretty face." The headmaster let out a chuckle.

I stared at the two of them in disbelief.

"Your Divination class will be dropped, Miss Brooke," Flitwick said. "You're to report to Professor Lupin's classroom during that period now."

"Which period?" I asked.

"You'll know when I pass out schedules tomorrow morning, Miss Brooke," Flitwick said. "Have a pleasant evening."

I wasn't finished yet: I still had questions. However, Flitwick turned and disappeared from the entrance hall.

"Goodnight, Miss Brooke," Dumbledore said.

"Goodnight, sir," I replied before he left me as well.

With a sigh, I turned around and almost walked straight into someone. I let out a soft cry of surprise as I nearly fell backward. Two gentle, but firm hands gripped my upper arms to keep me upright.

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry," I gasped automatically.

"The fault is mine, Miss Brooke," said a kind, tenor voice a few inches above my head.

I looked up at Professor Lupin and my jaw nearly dropped. Up close he looked even more worse for wear than he had by a distance. I could even see some premature gray hair coming in at his temples. There were faint scratches on his face that were almost healed. What had happened to this man?

"I should have declared myself," he finished softly before he released me.

I suddenly found my voice and replied, "It's all right, sir. No harm done."

There was a moment of silence. It was then that I realized that the entrance hall was completely empty. Everyone else had gone to their dormitories for the night. The torchlight flickered across my professor's face, a mixture of light and shadow.

"I trust that the headmaster spoke to you already?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered. "I am pleased to know that you picked me yourself."

"Are you?" he asked, obviously not believing me. "Why don't you tell me what you really think?"

"Well," I began, unsure of myself, "it's just that I find it strange that you chose me when you didn't even know me. And you still don't know me," I added.

He smiled at my defensive nature as though it hardly bothered him. "I know a honest face when I see one, Miss Brooke, and I must say that you have great potential."

He was confident in believing that I was a good choice as his assistant. That was easy to see. However, he did not boast, and I respected that in him at least. I would not compliment him on the matter, though.

"An honest face can distract from the many hidden secrets on the inside," I said quietly.

Professor Lupin watched me with his steady blue gaze. "Well, we'll see about that as we get to know each other better, Miss Brooke."

I nodded. "Goodnight, Professor. Sleep well." I quickly swept past him.

"And may you sleep well, Miss Brooke," he called after me.

I hurried up several flights of stairs on my way to the Ravenclaw dormitories. My thoughts were filled with what had just progressed moments ago, playing over my conversation with Lupin over and over. Why did he pick me? How could he possibly tell that I would be a good assistant during the school year? He didn't even know me.

I spoke the password that Kate had given me earlier to the statue of a griffin at the base of the Astronomy tower. The griffin came to life, raising its magnificent head and stretching its wings. It then gracefully sidestepped and the wall behind it slid back, revealing a staircase that twisted up and around a pillar with creatures and gods of mythology carved into it. I stepped forward to climb the stairs up to the Ravenclaw common room.

The common room was almost empty when I entered: only a few people remained sitting by the fire, talking quietly to each other. Everyone else was fast asleep in their respective dormitories. I went to join the majority.

When I entered the seventh year girls dormitory, I found that Kate and Tanya had waited up for me. They sat together on Tanya's bed already dressed in their pajamas and playing gin rummy.

They looked up when I entered. "What did Dumbledore want?" Tanya asked immediately.

I replied, "I'm to be Professor Lupin's teacher assistant this year." My voice was forced to sound as calm as possible.

Kate arranged the cards in her hand as she spoke, "Well, that does kinda make sense. I mean, this is his first year here, and he's going to need the extra help."

"Grading first year essays... yippee!" Tanya said sarcastically.

"Well, at least I get out of Divination," I said, shrugging off my robes.

"Yeah, that's true," Tanya said, staring off into space as she thought about it.

"Gin," Kate declared.

"What?"

I smiled and continued to undress. As I searched through my trunk for some pajamas, Tanya was trying to find fault in Kate's hand. "No way," she said. "We've only been playing for five minutes!"

Kate giggled and hopped off the bed. She buried herself deep in her covers as I slipped on some comfortable pajamas. "Goodnight," she said and used her wand to draw the blue curtains around her bed.

"Night, Kate," I answered.

"No way she won," Tanya muttered as I climbed into my own bed and leaned over to blow out the candle.

Bad Eggs and Suspicious Natures

Chapter Two:

Bad Eggs & Suspicious Natures

I awoke the next morning with the sudden blow of a pillow across my head. It wasn't the first time I had been awakened in this manner, so I guess anyone could say that I was used to it. However, I groaned and rolled over onto my stomach, pulling my own pillow around to cover my head. There was an exasperated sigh, and the bed sheets were whipped off the bed. I shuddered against the cold as I blindly felt around for the covers.

"Oh, wake up," Tanya said, throwing the pillow at me.

Slowly, I sat up and rubbed my eyes before I stretched towards the canopy of my bed.

As my eyes adjusted to the sudden lightness of the room, Kate said very sweetly, "You wouldn't want to be late for your first class, would you?"

She danced across the room to get something out of her trunk. I watched her do this, and observed that she was already dressed. On the bed next to mine, Tanya was trying to tie her tie. She let out a growl of frustration and gave up. Kate came to her rescue.

Finally, I managed to get out of bed and take a shower. By the time I had fixed my hair, my two friends were waiting rather impatiently: Tanya more impatient than Kate. "Oh, do come on, Karen," she whined. "I'm hungry enough to eat a bloody dragon."

We went down to breakfast together, meeting Michael and Emmett in the common room. They looked as if they were suffering from a late night celebration party in their dormitory.

"Have fun last night?" I asked them casually, knowing the answer.

Michael laughed softly. "You should have been there. You'll never believe what Emmett did."

Emmett stretched and yawned tiredly. "What did I do?"

"You stuck Leo's head in a toilet and flushed!" Michael reminded him.

"Leo who?" Tanya asked.

"Some stupid fourth year," Michael explained. "Can't remember his last name, though. Everyone just calls him Leo."

"Hey, that's him!" Emmett said, pointing to a boy walking a few yards ahead of us down the corridor.

"Yeah! Hey, Leo!" Michael called and they both raced over to him.

Leo, a small looking boy, jumped and turned around. He immediately shrank against the wall in fright at the sight of them. I winced when they suddenly crowded him, laughing and joking.

"Poor boy," I said.

"He's rather small for a fourth year, isn't he?" Tanya said, unsympathetic. "He needs to toughen up."

Kate rolled her eyes and whipped a lock of blond hair out of her face with a toss of her head. "Honestly, Tanya, you're so heartless."

The three of us sat down to breakfast in the Great Hall. All the tables were loaded down with steaming plates of sausages, eggs, bacon, toast and more. Kate, an active vegetarian, resorted to a small bowl of cereal and a piece of toast. Tanya loaded her plate down with everything within arms reach. Kate wrinkled her nose at her when Tanya bit into a juicy sausage link.

Professor Flitwick was walking down the table handing out school schedules. The pile of papers was nearly as tall as him. When he came to our spot at the table, he dropped the papers onto one of the seats with a grunt. Kate immediately jumped up to assist him while Tanya and I watched in little interest.

"Thank you, Miss Kingston," he said. "Here is your schedule."

Kate took the piece of parchment from him, and her blue eyes scanned down the page rapidly while Tanya was handed hers. Tanya seemed not to care about what her classes were. She sighed and took one glance at the parchment before tossing it aside to finish her breakfast.

When Professor Flitwick handed mine over, I was in the middle of putting some ketchup on my eggs. My eyes were immediately drawn to one thing at the bottom of the schedule. I saw that Divination had been crossed out with a single line, and Teacher's Assistant was printed directly next to it. Kate had to take the ketchup bottle away from me before I emptied half of it onto my eggs.

"Is everything to your liking, Miss Brooke?" Flitwick asked, staring at me intently.

"Yes, everything is perfect," was my automatic response before my eyes ran up the length of the table and came to a rest in the direction of the staff table.

Flitwick produced two more schedules from his stack. "These schedules are for Mistert Tanner and Evans, who don't appear to be down for breakfast just yet. Will you make sure that they get them?"

Kate took them and said that she would personally make sure that they received them. I could only sit there and wonder what I had gotten myself into.

Tanya leaned over and looked at my schedule. "The rest of us don't have Defense until tomorrow. Since you're Lupin's TA, you'll tell us what he's like, won't you?"

I nodded mutely in response.

Jenna George and her "posse" flounced over to our table after she had stopped to ridicule and bully some students over at the Gryffindor table. She had fixed her hair especially for the first day of classes and put on a little extra makeup. She looked like a common whore flouncing around the castle. I made sure to point this out to her when she walked by.

She stopped and turned at my comment to stare down her dainty little nose at me. "That's rich coming from someone like you, Brooke," she said accusingly.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Michael asked. He and Emmett had finally joined us for breakfast and were standing there, ready for a fight.

I gently said, "She's obviously talking about something that happened last year, which no one remembers."

The fact was that everyone who was in the conversation knew exactly what Jenna George was talking about. It was a sharp kick in the gut for any loyal Ravenclaw who knew. Since I was that loyal Ravenclaw who turned and fooled around with a Slytherin, it was a low blow to my reputation; especially when that Slytherin was the boyfriend of Jenna George at the time.

Jenna George's lips curled into a malicious smile at the sight of regret deep in my eyes. "Not that he really liked you, of course. He just had an itch. All boys do--especially the men. And they have to scratch it, that's all there is to it," she laughed with a little shrug. "Enjoy your breakfast," she said, her eyes lowering down to my now cold, ketchup-covered eggs. "If you can."

When she walked away, my eyes stared down at the bad eggs, and I wondered what would be the best way to murder Jenna George.

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Our first class of the day we all had together: Transfiguration. "McGonagall" and "morning" do not belong in the same sentence. The entire period she lectured on and on about how we seventh years need to make this year count and take things seriously. Not only because it was our last year but also because our performance this year would reflect on our future.

I hadn't a clue what I wanted to do with my future. During our fifth year of school, our Head of House sat us all down and discussed our future plans before O.W.L.s. Professor Flitwick and I must have sat down and gone over all the possibilities for the longest time, but we had little luck. He tried to reassure me that I had plenty of time to sort things out before graduation; I still felt like he was rushing me.

My first idea was becoming a teacher. That idea vanished within the hour. Then I thought about being an artist of some kind. I could draw fairly well and my singing skills weren't so bad either. Still, those who took up drawing or painting usually did not get famous until they were dead, and my vocals were nothing compared to the Weird Sisters.

"Shut the bloody hell up, already," Tanya muttered next to me.

I had been shaken out of my reverie only to realize that I had tuned McGonagall out completely. All around me students were slumped in their chairs, bored out of their minds. Michael was falling asleep and jerking himself awake every five minutes. Oliver Wood was scribbling away on a piece of parchment. From where I sat, it looked like a Quidditch game plan of some sort. Kate was staring at McGonagall with her eyes glazed over and her head in her hand, not really listening either.

The rest of the day followed in the same manner; every teacher added his or her own element to the same old lecture, though. Professor Snape went on about the art of potion making in everyday society. The way he talked about it made me picture myself with greasy long hair and poor hygiene standing over a cauldron, brewing something disgusting. In Arithmancy, Professor Vector wanted us all to imagine complicated numbers in our future. This idea only terrified me.

Before the last period of the day, I parted ways with my friends and headed in the direction of the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom. I climbed the many staircases, my mind traveling many different tracks.

I slipped into the classroom which had served as my Defense classroom for the past six years. This time, however, I found it transformed into an entirely new style which was different from anything I had seen from Professors Quirrel and Lockhart. Quirrel had been famous for hanging strings of garlic from the ceiling, and Lockhart was known to have portraits of himself hanging on the walls or propped up on easels.

The new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, Professor Lupin, had added his own uniqueness to the room. He had skulls of magical creatures used as bookends for rows of books regarding the Dark Arts and defensive magic. The familiar skeleton of a dragon, which belonged to the school, hung from the ceiling this year. It had been found in different locations of the classroom previously.

A few students had already arrived early. They were sitting at desks and chatting to each other quietly. When I came in, they eyed me curiously and I studied them in return, recognizing them as fourth years.

"What are you doing here? It's fourth years this period, stupid," one know-it-all Gryffindor, Lyle, said rather cockily. "I think seventh years have Defense class tomorrow."

How he knew this, I would never know, but I wasn't about to put up with his bossiness. I was a seventh year after all, and I had authority as a Teacher's Assistant.

"There is no need for your toffee-nosed attitude, Mr. Lyle," I said, sounding very much like a teacher. "So shut your mouth before I permanently seal it shut with stitches."

He flinched when I produced my wand with a flourish, a needle and thread appearing in thin air.

"Miss Brooke is my Teacher's Assistant," said a voice.

I turned to see that Professor Lupin had emerged from his office and observed the scene. The heat from my blush began to creep up my neck at the sight of his amused smile. The lack of concentration made my needle and thread disappear as the professor walked over to us.

"Mr.... Lyle, was it?" he asked, looking at the fourth-year boy.

"Yes, sir," he replied.

"I would watch my back if I were you," Professor Lupin said, turning to look at me. "I've heard that Miss Brooke has quite a talent with jinxes and curses."

I cocked my head to the side and observed the professor curiously. "I wonder how you came to learn such valuable information, Professor?"

He just smiled and said, "The headmaster was more than happy to oblige in answering certain questions that I had about you."

"And they involved my abilities in defense?" I asked.

"Naturally," he said with a shrug.

I wasn't entirely convinced that those were the only types of questions he had asked Dumbledore. I was unable to put my finger on it, but I was a little suspicious of my new Defense professor.