

The Sorting Hat's Defence

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: This is a sequel to Phoenix's 'The Sorting Hat' (with her kind permission) based on an old SND prompt: "The Sorting Hat defends its fairness and accuracy to the Governors. Everyone is astonished." All lines in italics are Phoenix's.

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'Bee in your bonnets, esteemed Governors?'

Representative Governors from the four Houses looked up at the high shelf on which the Headmaster kept the Sorting Hat. 'We want a word with you about the wisdom of your Sortings,' said Lucius Malfoy smoothly.

The Sorting Hat sounded impassive. 'Pray voice your concerns.'

'You are staining the fine old Gryffindor escutcheon!' burst out that House's representative. 'Sullyng our good name!'

'How so, Mr McLaggan?'

'Where do I start? Sirius Black! The whole family has been in Slytherin, and quite rightly so, in my opinion.' He cast a nasty look at Lucius Malfoy.

If a hat could have shrugged, the Sorting Hat would have done so. 'I told him, *"To have one from such a pure-blood family not in Slytherin would be scandalous.* But the boy pleaded with me. Offered to go into any other house. I decided to give him the benefit of the doubt.'

'The man's a Death Eater!'

'Technically not.'

'He's serving a life sentence in Azkaban!'

'Then only consider how much worse things could have been had I put him in Slytherin.'

Lucius Malfoy's usually pale face developed two pink spots on his cheeks, but he preserved a dignified silence.

'Then there's Neville Longbottom,' continued McLaggan loudly. 'Do you... er...' He faltered, glancing at the formidable grey-haired woman beside him. 'Do you really believe he is Gryffindor material? Surely Hufflepuff would be more suitable?'

At this, both Augusta Longbottom and Amelia Bones interrupted vociferously.

'My grandson has just as much right as the rest of his family to be in Gryffindor!'

'I resent this implication that Hufflepuff is a dumping ground! We would be proud to house any member of the Longbottom family!'

'Ladies and gentlemen, please. I offered Mr Longbottom Hufflepuff, but he wished to follow his relatives into Gryffindor. The boy has gumption. I stand by my decision. I believe we have not seen the best of your grandson yet, Mrs Longbottom. He will grow into his Sorting.'

McLaggan snorted. There were mutinous faces all around the Headmaster's office.

'I am surprised at your disgruntled air, Mr McLaggan. I would have thought Gryffindor would be satisfied with Harry Potter and Albus Dumbledore.'

McLaggan had the grace to look sheepish; it was Malfoy who snorted now.

'Oh, now, Lucius, your House had its chance. I offered Dumbledore Slytherin; he had the ambition for it,' commented the Hat, managing to smirk at the stunned look on Malfoy's face. 'I considered in the end however that Gryffindor would be of more assistance to him. He *hadn't had many friends, and I thought that was something he would come to value*. Of course, he found his own friends, irrespective of my choice for him,' it added cryptically.

The Governors were looking distinctly confused now. Having successfully taken the wind out of their sails, the Hat delivered its *coup de grace*. 'I did make one mistake. Only ever one, mind you. Severus Snape should have been a Gryffindor. Much could have been avoided. I hold my hands up, or I would if I had any; I did not even consider it. Ravenclaw I offered him, but not Gryffindor.'

McLaggan was looking apoplectic again, and at this, Simon Davies, father of Ravenclaw Quidditch Captain, Roger, joined him.

But the Sorting Hat seemed to have fallen into a reverie. 'I warned him *totake care not to fall to darkness*,' it muttered to itself, then snapped its attention back to the stunned Governors. 'So, ladies and gentlemen, for that mistake alone, I accept your admonition. I will take more care in the future.'