

Life at Hogwarts began to settle into some sort of a routine, as time went on. Harry got used to his classes, learned which of his free periods needed to be devoted to homework and which could be used to get half an hour with Draco; he worked out a schedule for quidditch practice and HA and training with Snape; and at least twice a week, he chatted to Sirius on the mirror, getting caught up on everything that was going on outside the school. Which, honestly, was very little outside the expected — the Ministry was essentially off-limits and utterly useless, with floo being monitored and the aurors under Voldemort's thumb. The Order were currently trying to get all muggle parents of magical children to somewhere safe, now that the Death Eaters had access to the student registry and the Muggleborn Identification Department. It made Harry's stomach squirm every time he thought about the visions he'd had in the summer of Death Eaters destroying muggle houses — how many of those young children had been future Hogwarts students? How many more were being attacked now they had the Ministry, that Harry was no longer aware of?

The Order could only do so much with the Hogwarts Book of Students, after all.

But Harry tried his best not to let it keep him up at night, even as the ball of guilt in the pit of his stomach grew harder and more painful with each passing day. He certainly had plenty of distractions from it, throwing himself into his classes and extra-curriculars the best he could.

"Mr Potter, a word, if you please." McGonagall's voice lifting over the chatter of students leaving the Transfiguration classroom was a surprise. Harry glanced over at her — as he did, his gaze caught on Hermione's smug expression as the girl gathered her books. Had she reported him to their Housemistress for some perceived slight or another?

Harry stood in front of the desk, waiting patiently until the classroom had otherwise emptied. McGonagall shut the door with a wave of her wand, and Harry tried not to fidget too overtly. "Don't worry, Potter, you're not in trouble," the Scottish woman assured him, lips curling when his shoulders visibly relaxed. "I merely wanted to talk to you. I did a lot of thinking, over the summer, about the things we discussed at the end of last year."

Harry raised an eyebrow at her, heart leaping to his throat. Did he dare hope? "Can I assume you've come to some sort of conclusion, then, Professor?"

She huffed, lips pursing. "Only more questions," she admitted, frustrated. "I... looking back, the way Albus has treated you throughout your school years. I should have seen earlier that things didn't add up. The way he spoke about your home life, versus the way you've acted. The things I've heard from other... acquaintances, these past couple of years."

Harry winced. That wasn't the part of Dumbledore's machinations he'd hoped to discuss.

"I feel I owe you more than a few apologies," McGonagall continued. Harry tried to wave her off, but she narrowed her gaze. "No, Potter — you have been failed by many members of staff, but I am the one who is supposed to be responsible for you, and I have not lived up to that responsibility."

"Professor, you did what you could," Harry insisted. "You didn't have all the information." His smile tightened. "Dumbledore made sure of that."