

## Chapter 61

Shortly after Christmas, Harry received a reply from Susan that had him roaring with laughter in the privacy of his bedroom. Apparently, Umbridge had been furious to find Harry and the four Weasleys had fled the school in the middle of the night, but according to the rumour mill — AKA something Parvati heard from one of Ginny's dorm-mates — the High Inquisitor had been told that Harry had ingested some sort of hallucinogenic, and the Weasley children had been called out of bed to check it was not of their doing, accidentally or otherwise. Since the twins were well-known for their prank substances, and Ginny was equally well-known for being happy to accompany them, it was a fairly solid alibi.

That it coincided with Mr Weasley's attack was just a funny happenstance of timing, everyone maintained. And those who suspected otherwise knew better than to ask for details.

But the part of the letter that really had him laughing was Umbridge's newest Educational Decree, implemented on the last day of term. It was now against the rules for any student tutoring to take place without approval of the High Inquisitor. She was clearly looking to catch anyone learning defensive magic unsupervised now that Harry was out of the castle, but according to Susan — whose letter had been sent via the post office in Hogsmeade, to avoid detection — Umbridge had spent the entire Christmas break being constantly hounded by students wanting permission to help their friends with their homework, or teach them a basic household charm, claiming that they weren't sure what the definition of 'student tutoring' entailed and they didn't want to get in trouble.

It seemed to be making Umbridge absolutely regret putting such measures in place, and Harry couldn't *wait* to see how the situation escalated once everyone was back at school.

He'd had a letter from Draco, too, passed through Snape and Remus. He was doing well, if bored, and he missed Harry. Harry spent longer than he would care to admit trailing his fingers over the neat '*Love, Draco*' at the end of the letter.

He hated that he hadn't got to say a proper goodbye to his boyfriend. Or any of his friends, really. Or Salazar; the portrait was probably worried about him, considering what Harry had told him of his life. He would have to apologise for the abrupt departure when he got back.

It was only a week or so away, now. The Christmas holidays had flown by.

It was strange, he thought to himself, reading through the Ancient Runes worksheet Remus had given him — he was simultaneously eager to get back to school, and absolutely dreading having to face Umbridge again. He hadn't realised how suffocating her very presence was until he was free of it.

His door opened, and Sirius snuck in, pressing a finger to his lips. "I need you to come with me," he said. "The twins are covering for us, we've got about three hours."

"Three hours for what?" Harry asked, confused. His godfather grinned at him.