

you are fighting for. What you are *truly* fighting for. The same cause your parents sacrificed themselves for.”

And with that cryptic statement, he raised an arm, grabbing onto Fawkes’ tail feathers as the phoenix swooped low over him. In a flash of fire, the pair were gone.

The rest of the room awoke, seemingly with no idea they’d been out for any longer than a split second, and Fudge immediately sent the aurors to the stairs. Harry and the bewildered Marietta were almost forgotten about in the chaos — eventually, Umbridge dismissed both of them, though not before giving Harry another week’s detention.

Harry didn’t waste time on his way back to Gryffindor Tower, practically skipping with glee. He wasn’t expelled, and Dumbledore was gone from the school — and clearly under the impression that with enough belief in *love* and practice in Occlumency, Harry could be redeemed from his supposed Dark leanings.

His day had turned out much better than anticipated, all things considered.

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In the morning, the *Prophet* ran a full story about how Albus Dumbledore had been training Hogwarts students as his own private militia to one day overthrow Fudge’s power, and there was *outrage* in the Hogwarts Great Hall.

No one knew the full story, but naturally word had spread that it was Harry Potter’s fault that Dumbledore was gone. Suddenly, his popularity — which had been slowly rising since the *Quibbler* article — was at an all time low; he was the reason they now had Umbridge as a headmistress.

Harry would forever be amazed at the accuracy and speed of the Hogwarts rumour mill; within hours half the school seemed to have their own version of Dumbledore’s daring escape, and not all of them were entirely off the mark. Perhaps Marietta had said something, but Harry doubted it — when he arrived at breakfast, the curly-haired girl was sat alone at the end of the Ravenclaw table, with her head bowed so low she was practically face-first in her porridge.

“I’m so sorry, Harry,” Cho hissed in the corridor on the way to their respective classes, clearly devastated. “I never thought she’d— her mum works at the Ministry, but I didn’t think —”

“It’s fine, Cho,” Harry insisted. “The contract worked as expected. I can handle the detentions.” He and Neville were alternating days, since Umbridge only seemed to have the one Blood Quill.

“Still, I’m really sorry.” Cho was saved further apologies when they had to part ways. Harry hoped she didn’t feel guilty for too long; it wasn’t her fault her friend was a snitch.

By lunch, things were worse — the Inquisitorial Squad had been born. Harry watched silently as Draco, flanked by Crabbe and Goyle, made a show of taking points from both Ron and