

“Morning, Scarhead,” Draco greeted, voice just edging into fondness. His knee bumped Harry’s under the table, and Harry felt a piece of parchment brush his fingertips. He grabbed it quickly, stuffing it in his pocket.

Susan herself was the last to arrive, though she looked pleased to see them all there. “Good. This won’t take long, I know we’ve all got a shit-ton of homework.”

“You all have *no idea*,” Cassius muttered ominously, in all his seventh year wisdom. Susan ignored him, taking her seat.

“So, we’re all agreed that Umbridge is a Ministry spy, yes?” she declared, making Harry snort.

“Got that bit, yeah. Can’t tell if she’s here to keep an eye on me or Dumbledore most, though.”

“Why can’t it be both?” Daphne pointed out. “Fudge has always hated how Dumbledore runs this school like it’s entirely separate from the Ministry. He’ll want to get this place to *conform*, and you along with it.”

The very idea made all of them grimace. A Ministry-approved Hogwarts would be a very dull thing indeed.

“Do we need to worry that much?” Ernie remarked, leaning back in his chair. “Every other Defence professor that’s had it out for Harry has ended up dead — no offence, of course,” he added sheepishly. “But why don’t we just let nature take its course?”

Harry wasn’t sure how to feel about his previous years being described as *nature taking its course*.

“The professors don’t end up dead until the last few weeks of the year,” Padma pointed out. “There’s a lot of damage she can do before then.”

“Are you asking me to hurry it up?” Harry asked, entirely deadpan. Draco snorted quietly at his side.

“If you wouldn’t mind,” he drawled, eyes flashing. “As long as she’s here, we’re at an impasse. Now that Fudge is interim Chief Warlock, he’s going to be even more worried about losing control of the Wizengamot. Not that we can do much until we’re of age, but if he gets even a *hint* that we’re all planning on taking our seats this early, well — he can’t even be happy about Dumbledore losing his proxy seats, because they’ll be going to you.”

“I agree with you. But that doesn’t mean I’m going to kill Umbridge,” Harry said mildly.

“Shame,” Draco replied in a similar tone.

“Sometimes I wonder what the rest of the school would think if they saw you two like this,” Parvati said, shaking her head. “But I don’t think any of them are ready for it.”