

“We’ll only ask those we can trust. Half the school thinks I’m a lying madman anyway, they won’t be interested. But... it’s a thought.” He looked at his watch, then cursed. “I need to go. Think it over, get back to me. I’ll brainstorm some ways to keep it all secret.”

He threw a hasty wave over his shoulder to cut off any protests, sprinting from the room. That would give them something other than Umbridge to talk about, at least.

There was barely time for him to throw together a hasty roast beef sandwich when he reached the Great Hall, scoffing it down while speed-walking to Umbridge’s office and trying his best not to choke. He arrived just in time, took half a minute to compose himself, and walked into the office. As before, the desk with its lace doily had the Blood Quill and some parchment lying on it, and Umbridge sat at her own desk, smiling with daggers in her eyes. “You know what to do,” she told him, gesturing to the empty seat.

Harry sat down, and began to write. The second he felt the pain on the back of his hand, he let the glamour drop; it wouldn’t do if the fake scar didn’t re-open like Umbridge anticipated. It hadn’t healed entirely — Snape had warned him it would take weeks, even with the dittany — and the pain was worse than ever as the skin split open, blood welling up and dripping down his hand.

He didn’t flinch, didn’t falter, didn’t make a sound. Satisfaction burned within him — it had to be so *galling* for Umbridge, to watch him be entirely unbothered by the torture she was putting him through.

She didn’t know he’d spent his entire childhood being trained to do all sorts of tasks without showing pain. If he hadn’t so much as sniffled when Vernon had sent him to school with three broken fingers at the age of eight, a little cut on the back of his hand wasn’t going to do it.

Hours passed. At around ten, Umbridge beckoned him over, inspecting his hand. A frown crossed her lips. “Not quite as much of a *permanent reminder* as I’d hoped,” she muttered. “No matter. By the end of this week, I’m sure we’ll get there.”

She dismissed him with a saccharine smile, and Harry strolled away breezily. Only when he was alone did he use the spells Snape had taught him, cleaning off the blood dried to his skin.

Really, she was losing her touch already, letting him go just an hour after curfew. The loss of homework time was more of a punishment than the pain could ever be.

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Angelina caught up to him at breakfast the next morning, a foreboding look on her face. “George told me you got *another* week’s detention.”

“I’m sorry,” he told her, grimacing. “I just—“

“Couldn’t help yourself, could you?” she snapped, then faltered. “Harry, I know it’s hard. I know she’s got it out for you. But, *please*, for my sake, can you try and keep a hold of your temper? We’ll never win the Quidditch cup if my star player is always in detention!”