

Through some stroke of luck, the dormitory was empty after lunch — the perfect chance for Harry to get in a little animagus practice. He spelled and warded the drapes around his bed, made sure his meditation stone was under his pillow, and closed his eyes.

It was getting easier and easier every time, to reach for that place within him where the fox slept. The animal's body was so familiar now, as familiar as his own — he felt *so close*.

He would get it before Christmas, he was sure of it. His wandless magic had come on in leaps and bounds over the past year; this was just like that.

Harry felt a strange sensation over the backs of his hands and arms, and opened his eyes. Immediately, he was hit with a wave of astonishment — where he had once had regular human hands, he was now staring at two front paws, the dark red fur trailing all the way up almost to his elbows. He stared at his new paws, flexing the sharp claws and the short toes, feeling the way the pads of his feet felt on his bedsheets. A laugh bubbled up from his chest.

“I hope I can undo that before dinner,” he said to himself, closing his eyes to concentrate once more.

It would be really awkward to explain away if he couldn't.

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Ever since the High Inquisitor announcement, the students of Hogwarts had wondered what Umbridge's first move would be to bring the school to *order*.

On Monday morning, they got their answer.

There was a crowd outside the Great Hall at breakfast, and Harry frowned — one of the huge double doors was closed, and it had a large piece of parchment pinned to the front. He squeezed his way past some chattering second year Ravenclaws, trying to get a good look. When he drew close enough to read it, his heart sank like a stone to his gut.

### *EDUCATIONAL DECREE NUMBER TWENTY-THREE*

*By Order of the Hogwarts High Inquisitor,*

*All students are to remain seated at their assigned house tables during every meal.*

*Failure to comply with this rule will result in loss of house points, detentions, and/or other necessary punishments as decided by the High Inquisitor, Dolores Jane Umbridge.*

At the bottom was an enormous Ministry seal, with two signatures below it; Umbridge, and Fudge.

“That's ridiculous!” Ginny complained loudly beside him. “Why can't we sit where we want?”

Harry wondered how much of this rule was down to him. Still, the joke was on Umbridge — if she was implementing this new decree to try and get at Dumbledore, she clearly hadn't