

cub, and she's wrong. He and his friends will knock her down before she even realises what they've done. All you have to do," he leaned in for a slow, chaste kiss, "is protect Harry while he puts that ridiculous Potter luck to good use. Which you had already planned to do this year. Anything you can do to infuriate that bitch is just a bonus."

Severus' lips twitched in a reluctant smile. "Sounds like you've got it all figured out," he drawled lightly. Remus smirked at him.

"She's a hideous excuse for a human, and she's going to get *exactly* what she deserves, one way or another." The satisfaction in his tone while talking about the downfall of that odious Ministry hag, the delight he was taking in the idea of her comeuppance — *that* was the man Severus knew and loved, innocent on the surface but devious underneath. And it was doing things to Severus' libido, heat gathering low in his gut.

"I don't want to talk about Dolores Umbridge anymore," he said intently, reaching out to take Remus' hand. He should be getting back to the school — first night back often ended with some homesick first year at his door — but he wasn't sure when he could get away again, and it would take a stronger man than him to walk away from Remus Lupin with that look in his eyes.

"Good." The werewolf's fingers tightened around his, tugging him towards the staircase. "Neither do I."

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When Harry first got down to breakfast, he was momentarily disappointed at the sight of four solid blocks of same-colour robes; had all their progress last year been for nothing?

Then his drowsy brain noticed the four heads of house handing out schedules, and he blinked — oh, that made sense. No need to send the teachers all over the hall. With any luck, they'd be back to their mingling by lunch.

Ignoring the feeling of eyes on him, Harry and Neville went to sit with their three favourite Weasleys. "Morning, lads," George greeted chirpily. "Ready for your first day of OWL lessons?"

"You ready for your first day of NEWTs?" Harry retorted dryly, making the redhead laugh.

"Oh, I think we'll manage just fine."

Harry and Neville looked up as McGonagall floated a pair of schedules towards them, and Harry shot her a quick grin in thanks. "Let's see what we've got, then." Harry looked at his schedule, and sucked in a sharp breath.

"Blimey; not giving you an easy start, are they?" George remarked, peering over Harry's shoulder, his own schedule ignored in his hand. "Binns, Snape, Trelawney and Umbridge all in one day. What a *winning* combination."