

“Slytherins,” Harry said with a nod, as if that explained everything. “Brilliant.” That young, homework help would soon turn into casual conversation; they’d be genuine friends before they knew what hit them.

Neville gave an enormous yawn, blushing. “Sorry. I just— it’s been a long week.”

“Tell me about it,” Harry agreed vehemently. “You should go to bed. I’m gonna be up another hour or two finishing this, but at least one of us should get some sleep.” He was determined to catch up on *all* his homework, not just the stuff that was due the next day — if he could get up to date now, he wouldn’t have an even bigger load over the weekend. He could catch up on sleep then — and, hopefully, see his boyfriend.

With a little more convincing, Neville agreed to leave Harry to it, and stumbled drowsily off to the dormitory stairs. Harry turned back to his homework, drawing on all his focus. He wouldn’t let Umbridge and her foul detentions mess up the start of his fifth year.

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Harry was no stranger to exhaustion, and hardly let it affect him as Friday dragged on, as grey and rainy as the rest of the week had been. The end was in sight, and he focused on that.

Luckily for the Gryffindors, the rain had passed by five o’clock. Harry could sort-of see the quidditch pitch from his seat at the desk in Umbridge’s office — not well enough to make out individuals, but he could see each hopeful keeper fly. He kept an absent eye on the proceedings when he was sure Umbridge wasn’t looking his way. By this point he hardly even noticed the pain in his hand, settling into the same headspace that had served him so well at the Dursleys when he’d been given an endless chore list right after a painful beating.

At last, it was over, and Umbridge surveyed her work, taking great satisfaction in eyeing the deep-cut words on his hand.

As she looked it over, Harry’s scar burned — he couldn’t help but flinch at the abrupt pain, but it was enough for Umbridge’s smile to widen. “Yes, I think I’ve made my point. You may go, Mr Potter.”

Harry didn’t need telling twice. As promised, he headed down to Snape’s, his mind still on the ache in his scar. What was Voldemort up to? His emotions didn’t usually creep through to Harry like that, not while Harry maintained his Occlumency shields.

He pushed it from his mind; whatever it was, there was little he could do.

Snape was waiting for him, and he directed Harry into a chair while he gathered the dittany and the gauze, carefully tending to the cursed wound. “I would quite like to kill that woman,” the Slytherin said evenly, making Harry look up in surprise.

“That makes two of us,” he agreed after a beat. “But also I would quite like to see her face when Susan and her aunt make Fudge regret even *thinking* about entering the world of politics. And when she’s given undeniable proof that Voldemort’s back.”