

front of the class was only a single blackboard. And Umbridge, in that fluffy pink cardigan, smiling like a spider might at a fly caught in its web.

A shiver of trepidation ran down Harry's spine. He pushed past it, heading for a free desk in the middle row, behind Fay and Sophie. Hermione, of course, went straight for the front row, dragging Ron with her.

Everyone was silent as they sat. Umbridge just smiled wider.

The chorused-greeting she insisted on like they were at muggle primary school was bad enough, and when she instructed them to put away their wands Harry knew it was going to be awful.

Her 'Ministry-approved' course aims made him want to gag. Of course Fudge didn't want students actually learning anything remotely useful in this class. If he admitted there was need for defensive spells, he might actually have to admit there was something out there worth defending against.

He hadn't actually had the chance to read his copy of *Defensive Magical Theory* yet, as it had only arrived that morning, but as he skimmed through the introductory chapter he could tell it was going to be just as dry and useless as every other Slinkhard book he'd ever read. Which, admittedly, was only one — Remus had caught him reading it and gone on a very long-winded rant about how Wilbert Slinkhard wouldn't know so much as a Disarming charm if it stripped him bare and slapped him on the arse.

He glanced up to see how the rest of the class was handling it, and was surprised to see Hermione in front of him with her book closed and her hand in the air. He looked across at the Slytherin side of the room — they all had one eye on the curly-haired Gryffindor, waiting for the show to begin.

Umbridge, who was sat at the desk and blithely ignoring her student's imploring gaze, lasted a whole lot longer than Harry anticipated. Eventually, when she could no longer pretend Hermione wasn't there, she smiled at the girl as if she'd only just noticed her. "Did you have a question about the chapter, dear?" she asked sweetly.

Harry was marginally surprised at Hermione's blatant disrespect. The Hermione Granger he'd met in first year would never *dare* question authority. Perhaps three years of friendship with Harry Potter had done more to her than he'd thought.

Or perhaps she just rejected any authority that wasn't Dumbledore's.

"We're not going to use magic?" Ron blurted incredulously, drawing Umbridge's ire to himself.

"Are you a Ministry-trained educational expert, Miss Granger?" Umbridge asked when Hermione continued to argue.

"Are you, Professor?" Harry cut in, unable to help himself. He might have shed his compulsions, but he was still a Gryffindor — and Umbridge couldn't be allowed to just