

The other Gryffindor boy let out a moan of dismay, and Harry just chuckled. Across the hall he saw Luna enter the room, and he waved her over, gesturing to the empty seat at his side. To his surprise, she brought Sullivan Fawley with her.

“Hello, Harry,” Luna greeted airily. “I hear you’ve had a rather exciting first day back.”

“Don’t encourage him,” Neville groaned, and Sully snorted.

“Did she *really* say you weren’t going to use magic the entire year? In your OWL year?” He sounded offended by the very concept. Harry nodded.

“Apparently if we know the theory well enough we’ll be able to do the spells perfectly on our first try — in our exams, while being graded on our performance.” He rolled his eyes, and the Ravenclaw boy grimaced.

“What a load of nonsense. Merlin — we’ve had some truly interesting Defence professors over the years, but you know, I think this might be the first to cause an entire year group to fail both their OWLs and NEWTs.”

Harry rather thought that was exactly what Fudge was aiming for. Sometimes he wondered if the Minister wasn’t in league with Voldemort himself; surely he couldn’t just be *that* incompetent?

“Wait, people passed their exams when Lockhart was teacher?” Neville asked incredulously. Harry echoed his surprise.

“Professor Umbridge never said we couldn’t use the spells outside of class,” Luna remarked, absently spooning soup into a hollowed-out bread roll. “Only that they weren’t permitted inside the classroom.”

“Looks like we know what most study groups will be focusing on, then,” Harry agreed, wondering how many people were about to get kicked out of the library for using magic near the books. Not everyone was willing to sneak into abandoned classrooms after curfew.

“That’ll keep Madam Pomfrey busy,” said Neville, shaking his head.

As Sully asked Neville a question about Herbology, Harry tuned out of the conversation, trying instead to make out the whispers of conversation including his name happening all over the Great Hall.

It felt ambitious to be trying to convince everyone that Voldemort was back, when the Ministry and the *Prophet* were doing their best to shut down even the vaguest insinuation that such a thing could be possible — and when Voldemort himself was being so frustratingly silent.

They would find out eventually, when the Dark Lord made his first move.

The more immediate problem was discrediting the Ministry without sending everyone straight into Dumbledore’s arms. Harry didn’t want people to see it as supporting one or the