

It was the first day of the new term, and uncharacteristically, the entire fifth-year Gryffindor students were happy all because they were starting off the term with two free periods. Very few knew the two free periods were Harry's doing. And those who knew were giving him a thumbs up for his effort, except for Hermione.

"I can't believe you'd do something like this, Harry. Isn't this going too far?" Hermione looked at him with a disappointed stare.

"All I did was send Umbridge some dolls made by the twins as a gift." Harry raised his hands in surrender.

"A big box full of dolls." Neville helpfully reminded him.

"Yes. A big box full of dolls. Umbridge must've been overwhelmed by the fact that she got a gift for the Yule holidays. That's why she is not taking the classes today. She must be so happy and playing with the dolls in her quarters." said Harry, sharing a grin with Neville.

Harry was mostly happy with his action because it helped to put a smile on Neville's face. The poor boy had been wroth and gloomy ever since the Lestranges escaped Azkaban. So, putting a smile on Neville's face was an added bonus as far as he was concerned.

"Still..." Hermione frowned at the happily grinning boys and sighed. "I suppose it is funny."

Harry and Neville chuckled, seeing Hermione struggling to accept that it was a good prank and perfectly harmless to boot. The only thing that got harmed was Umbridge's ego. Even Hermione, who was a stickler for rules, was chuckling in amusement at the plight of Umbridge.

"Do you think the Ministry will recall her?" Neville asked once their laughter subsided.

"They should've, but I don't think so. I mean, if they were going to replace her, they would've done so by now." Hermione reasoned.

Harry nodded, seeing the soundness in her argument.

"If Dumbledore really wanted to get rid of her, he could've done so. She is no longer the High Inquisitor, nor is she going to get that much support from the Ministry, with the Death eaters getting out of Azkaban and the aurors finding a whole bunch of them near a muggle town." said Harry.

"That's true. Maybe it's time to expand the Knights to include members from other houses." Hermione suggested.

"Is that really necessary?" Neville asked, frowning at the bushy-haired girl.

"We created the Knights not just to oppose Umbridge but also to learn Defense Against the Dark Arts." said Hermione.

"Hermione is right." said Harry, nodding at his friend. "The Knights are not just for Gryffindors to fight against the tyranny of Umbridge. When the time comes, I believe the time we share in the sessions for the Knights' meeting would come in handy. With all those Death Eaters joining Voldemort, it won't be long before the war starts again."

"We all will need to learn to defend ourselves against the Death Eaters." said Hermione.

“She’s right.” Neville said after taking a moment to think. “We’ll need to know to defend ourselves and fight against the Death Eaters. The Ministry is not going to be of much use going by what’s happening.”

“Hmm.” Harry grunted, discreetly looking at Neville from the corner of his eyes.

Harry got the feeling that the increased confidence Neville gained with his magic being properly attuned with a functioning wand was pointing the boy towards a revenge mindset. Not that Harry disapproved. Unlike the bullshit some goody two shoes would profess, he saw no problem in emotions like revenge, greed or even the pursuit of power. All three were powerful motivators in his view, and he got the feeling Neville was nearly at the precipice of pursuing a higher path. All Neville needed was a small push.

“You know what. I think I’m going to invite some new members after the senate approves, of course. And maybe, I think it’s time to conduct more proactive sessions that focus not just on defending but also fighting to win against a foe like a seasoned Death Eater.” said Harry.

“Fighting against Death Eaters? Isn’t that a little too much...? I’m sure it won’t come to that.” Hermione said, looking troubled by the prospect of conflict of a different scale, Harry laid out.

“On the contrary, Hermione. I don’t intend to let the chance of destroying those responsible for the destruction of my family. Whether we like it or not, there is going to be a war. And just like Voldemort destroyed everything I loved, I’ll destroy everything he ever loved. I’ll destroy his Death Eaters, and I’ll turn his stupid ideology on its head and only then will I destroy him.” Harry said, his eyes gaining a cold edge.

While Hermione looked a tad uncomfortable, Neville was positively beaming.

“Let’s discuss something else.” Hermione hurriedly said, changing the conversation. “Tell us more about the date you went with Daphne in London. Did you enjoy the skating rink I suggested?”

“I don’t get it. Did Harry take Greengrass on a sledge?” Neville asked confusedly.

That question launched a long-winded explanation from Hermione about skating and how muggles have perfected it as a sport and even for dancing. It was a poor attempt at shifting the topic of discussion, but Harry went along with it because his job was done. A seed was planted in Neville, and he got the feeling that Neville might be open to more of his plans going forward. As powerful as he was, he recognised the need for more allies in this battle.

After all, Harry’s fight did not just lie with Voldemort, but an entrenched system steeped in Pureblood supremacy. While he recognised the advantages of having a political system of entrenched nobility that held onto traditions, he also saw the need to bring change. The Wizengamot needed change to reflect the diverse realities of magical Britain. And with that change, the approach of wizards and witches towards Muggles and Muggleborns also needed to change. He felt like these changes were necessary if the wizarding world was to survive and thrive in the 21st century.

Muggle technological advancements were already at a dangerous level. Once smartphones, social media and artificial intelligence take over, the pace of technological outreach and capabilities of the muggles was going to expand to a whole new level. The Statute of secrecy for the first time would be threatened by the muggles rather than the occasional accidental magic and Dark Lords from the Wizarding world. The need for change, therefore, was necessary for the wizarding world’s survival.

It was almost amusing to note that Harry found himself fearing the wizarding world's exposure to the muggles more than the war with Voldemort.

'I suppose Voldemort is predictable most of the time, but the muggles...' Harry mused before shaking his head, dismissing the thought.

It was not yet time to think about the issues that were so far in the future when he had enough to worry about on his plate in the present.

Harry and Daphne stared at Professor Babbling, who scrutinised their work with an intensity that worried them. They were waiting in their seat for nearly half an hour, and Professor Babbling had yet to say a word or even look up from the preliminary report they submitted about their project.

Daphne tapped him on his leg, making Harry look at her.

'It'll be all right.' Harry mouthed at her.

"All right." Professor Babbling said, gaining their attention. "I see no defect in the schematics in your report, but it's lengthy. However, I doubt an average runestone can hold this many inscriptions and function as you envision."

Harry exchanged a look with Daphne as he heard the opinion of Professor Babbling.

"What do you mean, professor?" Daphne asked, looking a tad worried.

"It's nothing to worry about." Professor Babbling smiled at them. "You can just cut out the multiple locator inscriptions in your draft and focus on merely projecting the image in a singular direction."

Seeing the dissatisfied look on Harry's and Daphne's faces, Bathsheda Babbling sighed.

"You two have done brilliant work with the script. The usual runestones won't be enough to bind all the magical properties and features you intend to imbue. You'll need enchanted crystals for your current project to come to fruition."

"Then we can..." Harry excitedly began but was cut off by Professor Babbling.

"And that you'll do in your NEWT level project." Professor Babbling said, cutting off Harry. "Your natural affinity for Ancient Runes is impressive, Mr. Potter. But keep in mind that Miss Greengrass is also a part of this project."

Harry opened his mouth to argue, but Daphne stomped on his foot, making him yelp.

"What was that?" Professor Babbling asked, looking up from the sheets of parchment.

"Nothing, Professor." Daphne said, smiling politely.

"Well, you two can go. I'll give you some detailed instructions on how to proceed further towards the weekend."

They said their thanks, and Daphne practically dragged Harry out of Professor Babbling's office.

"You didn't have to do that," Harry complained, wincing as he stretched his foot.

“On the contrary, I had to. You were going to make my assignments a lot more difficult than it already was.” Daphne deadpanned as they walked hand in hand along the warm corridors of Hogwarts.

“Well, I have something more serious to discuss with you.” said Harry, pulling Daphne into an abandoned classroom before she could protest.

“Don’t tell me this is one of your other attempts to get me out of my robes?” Daphne huffed, staring at him unimpressed.

“Why? Do you want to get out of your robes?” Harry asked playfully.

When he saw Daphne’s hand going for her wand, he knew it was time to drop the teasing and get serious.

“Have you heard about a group called the Knights of Avalon?” Harry asked immediately, staying Daphne’s hand.

“I don’t think I’ve ever heard anything about a group with that name. Why?” Daphne said, frowning at Harry curiously.

“Good. You’ve been formally invited to attend a meeting of the Knights of Avalon.” said Harry, brandishing a leaf of parchment from his jacket and handing it over to Daphne.

“What’s going on?” she asked, looking at Harry and then at the parchment with a healthy amount of scepticism.

“I formed a secret group that trains in DADA after school hours. We started as a Gryffindor-exclusive group to oppose Umbridge. But now that the pink toad is written off, we thought it was time to expand the scope of membership.”

“You created a secret club of Gryffindor students and trained them in DADA under Umbridge’s nose? How long has this been going on?” Daphne asked, looking impressed.

“It’s been a few months.” Harry shrugged, grinning like a Cheshire cat. “So, are you interested in attending the meeting?”

“Who else got invited?” Daphne asked.

“You’ll find out when you attend the meeting.” Harry smirked.

“Master. How may I be of service?” Rookwood knelt on the floor with his head bowed.

Voldemort stared at his former spy within the Department of Mysteries.

“I assume the potions have restored your former strength Rookwood?” Voldemort silkily asked, keeping his hands hidden inside the sleeves of his dress robes while looking down at his faithful Death Eater from his throne.

“Thanks to you, my lord.”

“Hmm.” Voldemort stood up from his throne and circled the kneeling former Unspeakable.

“Tell me, Rookwood. What sort of protections are placed on the prophecy orbs placed inside the Department of Mysteries?” asked Voldemort.

“There are no charms placed on the orbs, my lord. But the shelves holding the orbs are enchanted and protected by runes. Once the prophecy orbs are placed on the shelves, only those who are mentioned in the prophecy could take it away.” Rookwood rasped out.

“I see. Is there some way to remove the enchantment?”

“Unfortunately, no, master. Any attempt to remove the enchantments would trigger the runes on the shelves that’ll destroy the orbs.”

“Are you sure, Rookwood?” Voldemort asked coldly.

“Yes, my lord. Yes... I used to work in the Department charged with the security of several chambers.” Rookwood whispered.

“And yet, Lucius told me Bode would be able to remove it. Lucius had the man under the Imperius Curse, but it did not work.” Voldemort hissed, his red eyes ablaze.

“Bode could not have taken it, my master. Bode would have known he could not... Anyone who worked long enough in the Department of Mysteries could have known it was impossible.” said Rookwood.

Voldemort could feel the urge to summon Lucius and have the man endure the Cruciatus Curse for sheer incompetence. He was starting to see why his Death Eaters were unable to execute his plans as

“You have done well in telling me this. On your feet, Rookwood.” Voldemort hissed.

Voldemort watched as the grey-haired man with pale blue eyes stood unsteadily on his feet with his head bowed.

“I have wasted so much time all because I did not have good counsel by my side. A decade of peace seems to have made incompetence and foolishness pervade even among my inner circle.” Voldemort said, shaking his head in disappointment.

“But not any more... Isn’t that right, Rookwood?” Voldemort asked softly.

“Yes, my lord...yes. I shall endeavour to always serve you and give you sound counsel.” Rookwood breathed out, his shoulders sagging in relief when the Dark Lord nodded.

“Very well. You may go. Send Lucius to me...” Voldemort hissed, turning his back to Rookwood and sitting back on his throne, becoming thoughtful.

Voldemort could not help but get frustrated at the fact that he had meticulously planned a break-in on the Department of Mysteries using his Death Eaters to retrieve the prophecy orb. Knowing what he knew, he was forced to discard all those plans and focus on manipulating Potter to take it for him. Failing that, he’d be forced to take the orb by breaking into the Ministry of Magic personally.

He got the feeling he’d have to do the latter as his plan of manipulating Potter was not getting anywhere. Severus Snape had undoubtedly given him the most valuable information about his enemy regarding the strange connection between his mind with Potter. However, he had so far been unable to use it against his arch-nemesis properly. Potter was employing Occlumency against him, and he had to admit the boy was somewhat skilled in the mind arts.

'Just like I was at his age.' Voldemort thought with some worry.

As days went by, he could feel himself growing weaker. His physical body was falling apart, unable to sustain his full might. The botched ritual Pettigrew conducted continued to haunt him to this day. Despite his fervent efforts to reverse the effects, he had ultimately failed to restore his health. While he was weakening, Voldemort realised Potter was growing in power. His desperation to learn the entire prophecy stemmed from his hope to find a clue to reverse his fortunes. He was hoping there was a clue in the prophecy to defeat Harry Potter for good and increase his power to new heights.

"My lord?" Lucius called from the entrance of the chambers, looking chalk white.

"Ah, yes. Lucius, come. We have much to discuss...you and I. Much to answer for..." Voldemort hissed coldly.

"My lord. I've been your most faithful ser..."

"Crucio!"

Lucius Malfoy fell on the floor, screaming his heart out, thrashing about as the torture curse took effect.

"You snivelling worm! You dare to lie to Lord Voldemort!" Voldemort thundered, his red eyes glowing with rage.

More screaming followed, making even the Death Eaters standing guard outside the Dark Lord's chambers flinch and quiver in their boots.

"Thank you all for attending the first meeting of the Knights of Avalon after the Yule holidays. I hope you've all had an enjoyable vacation." Harry smiled at his audience.

"Now..." he clapped his hands, gaining everyone's attention. "There are some new faces amongst ourselves from Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw and Slytherin. For their benefit, I shall explain the reason why this secret club was formed. "

"If this is a secret club, isn't this meeting illegal?"

Harry searched for the owner of the voice and found it to be Zacharias Smith.

"Very astute of you, Smith. For all intents and purposes, this meeting is illegal. That's why I made you all sign a secrecy contract before the meeting commenced." said Harry.

"Now, as I was saying, the Knights were formed as a resistance against Umbridge when she harmed Colin Creevey. And we have dealt a blow that made her tyrannical power over Hogwarts slip away."

After his comment, there were whistles and enthusiastic shouts of victory inside the room.

"Yes... yes. We've achieved our primary goal of keeping Hogwarts safe for us despite our inability to have Umbridge fired from her post. But there is another threat that's coming our way, and I'm here to show this to you before explaining to our newcomers what the Knights is all about."

Harry turned his back on his fellow students and removed the veil hiding a special Pensieve the Room of Requirement had helpfully provided him for the occasion. Harry carefully extracted the memory from his mind before dumping it into the basin.

“Visio projectum.”

Harry muttered under his breath while tapping a rune on the side of the Pensieve with his wand. The rune lit up with magical power, and the liquid inside the fluid shone with a brilliant white light. The memory strand he left in the pensieve glowed a bright blue, and in the next moment, the Pensieve projected the memory into the air for everyone to see. It was his memory from the graveyard last year, and everyone saw the horrible baby homunculi form of Voldemort.

“Harry Potter. We meet again.” Voldemort rasped, his red eyes staring from the bundle of cotton held by Peter Pettigrew.

Harry looked at the audience he had gathered in the room. They were looking at the project memory with fear and disgust, and a few looked like they were ready to bolt out of the room. As the memory ran its course, showing his admittedly provocative conversation with the Dark Lord, he could feel a few incredulous stares coming his way. Harry greeted them with a smile and a shrug. When Voldemort finally regained his physical form, he could hear a slew of sharp intake of breaths from the crowd. The casual way Voldemort aired out his muggle origins was a real blow to the purebloods and the muggleborns in the audience. At the pace it was going, Harry feared some of the students would be leaving with permanent bulging eyes if this kept up.

He saw the Creevey brothers hugging each other as Voldemort subjected Avery to the torture curse. Harry even heard someone let out a choked sob at the pitiful pained screams Avery let out as the torture curse took its toll. In Harry’s observation, the Slytherins invited for the meeting were the most affected by the treatment of Death Eaters at the hands of the Dark Lord and the Dark Lord’s own admission that he was far from a pureblood or blood purist he painted himself before the public. Most of the upperclassmen Slytherins were openly scowling at the memory as the Death Eaters behaved like House Elves before the Dark Lord.

The memory finally came to an end with his attack on the Dark Lord.

“Here is my welcoming gift. Battio Inflammata.”

The memory projection cut off after showing Voldemort getting blasted away by his spell. The light in the pensieve dimmed when Harry vanished from the memory inside the Pensieve.

“Dear friends. It’s not just our school that’s in danger. It’s our whole world. The Dark Lord Voldemort...” Harry rolled his eyes when almost everyone flinched at the name. “...is back. And with him, the second wizarding war will start. In fact, the war has already begun.”

The flabbergasted and fearful looks in the eyes of the Hogwarts students were quite the natural reaction he was expecting.

“Now, you know what exactly happened last year during the Third Task. Any questions?” s

Stunned silence was what greeted Harry.

‘I think I just broke a few of them.’ Harry thought.