

Harry Potter 971

Chapter 971: Love and Despair

“What, a curse?!” Several people looked at Evan in astonishment, making sure that he wasn’t joking.

“There’s no need to do that!”

“It’s just participating in an interest activity group, but it feels like we’re plotting a rebellion.”

“This is a measure to prevent informants; it’s necessary!” said Evan. “If anyone disagrees, you can still back out now, but once you put your name down, the magic will take effect.”

Under Evan’s gaze, several people obviously lowered their heads, not daring to meet his eyes.

“I actually find it quite interesting,” said George.

“It sounds cool, like a secret society,” said Fred with interest. “I definitely won’t snitch.”

With the others watching, he reached for the parchment and cheerfully put down his signature, followed by George.

But several people looked less than happy at the prospect of putting their names on the list.

Simply signing their names was enough to make them hesitate, let alone what terrible curse Evan would use.

That sounded very evil, and many people didn’t have the courage...

“Er ...” said Zacharias slowly, not taking the parchment that George was trying to pass him. “Well... is it really necessary? I won’t snitch either; and I’m sure Ernie will tell me when the meeting is...”

But Ernie was looking rather hesitant about signing too, gazing anxiously at the parchment.

“I — well, we are prefects,” Ernie burst out. “And if this list was found ... well, I mean to say ... you said yourself, if Umbridge finds out...”

“Come on, Evan is still the Head Boy. If anything happens, he’ll handle it.”

“You just said this group was the most important thing you’d do this year.”

“I — yes,” said Ernie, “yes, I do believe that, it’s just...”

“Ernie, do you really think I’d leave that list lying around?” said Hermione testily.

“No, no, of course not!” said Ernie hastily, “but I still, I...”

“I think you all should be cautious. You need to think carefully before putting your names down,” Evan reminded. “I don’t want you to sign out of embarrassment or being coerced, only to regret it later. And we’ll be more selective in recruiting members in the future, with more magical protections, not just this list. If anyone feels uncomfortable, it’s better to withdraw now.”

Evan’s reminder actually made them more apprehensive. In silence, the list was passed through the crowd.

Some added their names, others hesitated. The scene resembled a mysterious ritual.

All the Gryffindors didn’t hesitate and signed their names.

Besides that, there was Luna, who wrote a big name with flying colors.

Finally, the list was passed back to Ernie.

“Well, I still believe in Evan, you know, and this matter is really important, and it’s not a bad thing to learn more magic,” he said, seemingly determined, as he signed his name on the list.

Nobody raised objections after Ernie, and everyone silently signed their names, though Harry saw Cho’s friend give her a rather reproachful look before adding her name.

When the last person — Zacharias — had reluctantly signed, Evan took the list.

He tapped on it with his wand, and a blood-red light flashed across the list, as if it was going to swallow all the light around it, and then it returned to normal, but it seemed that something was different, and everyone gasped.

At this time, their eyes were obviously full of awe and a little worry when they looked at the parchment.

Finally, Hermione took the parchment back and slipped it carefully into her bag.

There was an odd feeling in the group now. It was as though they had just signed some kind of contract.

“Well, time’s ticking on,” said Fred briskly, getting to his feet. “George, Lee, and I have got items of a sensitive nature to purchase; we’ll be seeing you all later!”

In twos and threes the rest of the group took their leave too. Cho made rather a business of fastening the catch on her bag before leaving, her long dark curtain of hair swinging forward to hide her face. She seemed to want to say something to Evan and Harry, but her friend stood beside her, arms folded, clicking her tongue, so that Cho had little choice but to leave with her.

“Well, I think that went quite well,” said Hermione happily, as she, Evan, Harry, Ron, and Colin walked out of the Hog’s Head into the bright sunlight a few moments later. “The next step is to start organizing the activities.”

“That Zacharias bloke’s a wart,” said Ron, who was glowering after the figure of Smith just discernible in the distance. “And, what the hell is his relationship with Ginny?”

“They’re probably dating, or about to start dating. Today was their first date. Ginny just told me; she’s planning to change her partner,” said Hermione. “His behavior really rubbed her the wrong way. If not for both Evan and me thinking that the more people, the better, I’d rather he didn’t join...”

“Wait, what did you just say?” Ron, who had been draining the last few drops from his butterbeer bottle, gagged and sprayed butterbeer down his front. “She’s dating? My sister’s dating?!”

“What’s so strange about it? There are a lot of people chasing Ginny. Otherwise, why do you think those Ravenclaw boys, Michael Corner’s friends, came? They’re clearly more interested in Ginny than just studying Defense Against the Dark Arts,” said Hermione. “I think she’s considering Michael; he’s much better than that Zacharias and has a good reputation at school. Ginny told me that Michael has been pursuing her since the last Yule Ball. Of course, many guys in school are pursuing Ginny. She was hesitant before and didn’t agree, but she’s finally figured it out lately. There’s no need to keep waiting...”

“Goodness, Hermione, do you even know what you’re talking about!” said Ron incredulously.

“I think you guys still don’t understand the current situation, just like the Yule Ball, good girls won’t just wait for you in vain,” said Hermione bluntly. “If you don’t make your move soon, someone else will snatch her away.”

“But... but,” Ron hesitated for a long time before making up his mind to say it, “I thought Ginny fancied Harry!”

“Ginny used to fancy Harry, but she gave up on him months ago. Like I said, you can’t expect someone to wait around without any hope, can you?! Not that she doesn’t like you, of course,” she added kindly to Harry, and turned to look at Evan, “Well, I think I’ll go buy something. Can you accompany me?”

Chapter 972: New Educational Decrees and Punishments

“Wait a moment, make your words clear. Which one was Michael Corner?” Ron demanded furiously, panting heavily.

“The dark one,” said Hermione.

“I didn’t like him,” said Ron at once.

“Big surprise,” said Hermione under her breath. “This is exactly why Ginny hasn’t told you these things. She knew you’d take it badly, harping on about it like you are now.”

“What do you mean? Who’s taking anything badly? I’m not going to harp on about anything!” Ron said, dissatisfied.

“You can think whatever you want, never mind. Just go find Lavender,” Hermione said feebly. “Weren’t you supposed to meet at Madam Puddifoot’s Tea Shop? Don’t keep her waiting for too long.”

“I’m already annoying her, what love!” Ron muttered quietly. “Makes no sense.”

Evan also supported Ginny’s attempt to find a new boyfriend. Although he also wanted to match Harry and Ginny, and helped them become dance partners at the Yule Ball last year, it was obvious that Harry’s mind was not on Ginny at all, and no one else could help with such matters.

Evan couldn’t let Ginny wait for Harry there. Whenever he finally figured out that the girl around him was better than anyone else, it would be unfair to Ginny. After all, it was just dating, not marriage. It was better to let things happen naturally...

If Evan had that much ability, he would also like to match Neville and Luna, Colin and a third-year Hufflepuff girl.

But after a few contacts, the two sides didn’t feel it at all, and no matter how eager others were, it was useless.

Harry was thinking about Cho with all his heart. Because of Cedric, Cho must be very sad now, but he didn’t know what she was thinking. She did seem to have a liking for Evan, but since Evan and Hermione went public with their relationship, she probably felt that she didn’t have much of a chance. In fact, after that, Evan received fewer love letters than before.

But this didn’t mean that Cho would like Harry. Evan thought she might be interested in those tall and big guys.

Listening to Hermione and Ron’s discussion, Harry didn’t join in.

His head was still full of the scene when Cho left, and he did not find this subject quite as interesting as Ron, who was positively quivering with indignation, but it did bring something home to him that until now he had not really registered.

“So that’s why she talks now?” he asked Hermione. “She never used to talk in front of me.”

“Exactly, because she was shy. But it doesn’t matter now!” said Hermione. “Evan and I have to go. I need to buy a new quill. With all the assignments lately, they’re getting used up too quickly. We’ll see you at school later!”

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Overall, the rest of the weekend was more enjoyable.

Evan and Hermione studied the charter, the name of the group, and the content to be taught in the first class. He was going to start from the basics, and let Harry act as his assistant. Harry was strong in Defense Against the Dark Arts and his skills were recognized by everyone.

If Evan left school one day, with Harry and Hermione around, the organization could continue to operate.

Besides that, he also sought out the younger students who couldn't make it to Hogsmeade and discussed the results of their previous meeting at the Hog's Head Inn. Once he received their agreement, he had them write their names on the list.

In the end, the confirmed total was around forty people, and Evan felt the number was still too small.

But this wasn't something to be rushed. People would gradually join once the activities began. He also wanted to get the prefects involved.

While Evan and Hermione were busy with this, Harry, Ron, and Colin were all working on their assignments.

The last burst of autumn sunshine persisted, so rather than sitting hunched over tables in the common room, they took their work outside and lounged in the shade of a large beech tree on the edge of the lake, as many did.

The pleasant atmosphere lasted until Sunday afternoon when Umbridge returned!

Evan didn't see her in person, and he didn't know what happened to the curse scar on her face, but he saw a new Educational Decree and a large sign affixed to the Gryffindor notice board.

When he and Hermione returned from checking out the grounds in the Room of Requirement, they saw many people gathered in front of the notice board.

It was a huge new notice, so large that it covered everything else on the notice board, including the lists of secondhand spellbooks for sale, the regular reminders of school rules from Argus Filch, the Quidditch team training schedule, the offers to barter certain Chocolate Frog cards for others, the Weasleys' new advertisement for testers, the dates of the Hogsmeade weekends, and the lost-and-found notices.

The new sign was printed in large black letters and there was a highly official-looking seal at the bottom beside a neat and curly signature.

“Educational Decree Number Twenty-four “:

— BY ORDER OF —

THE HIGH INQUISITOR OF HOGWARTS

All Student Organizations, Societies, Teams, Groups, and Clubs are henceforth disbanded.

An Organization, Society, Team, Group, or Club is hereby defined as a regular meeting of three or more students.

Permission to re-form may be sought from the High Inquisitor (Professor Umbridge).

Any student found to have formed, or to belong to, an Organization, Society, Team, Group, or Club that has not been approved by the High Inquisitor will be expelled.

Below was another Educational Decree, Number Twenty-five, it seemed that Umbridge had gone ruthless!

“Educational Decree Number Twenty -five”:

The High Inquisitor will henceforth have supreme authority over all punishments, sanctions, and removal of privileges pertaining to the students of Hogwarts, and the power to alter such punishments, sanctions, and removals of privileges as may have been ordered by other staff members.

The signatures under both Educational Decrees were Cornelius Fudge, Minister of Magic, Order of Merlin First Class, etc., etc...

In addition to that, after the implementation of Educational Decree Number Twenty-five, Umbridge’s first punishment decree came into effect, removing Evan from his position as the Head Boy.

“She revoked your position as Head Boy. How could she do that...”

“If this Educational Decree is in effect, then she has the authority to do so. Even the headmaster can’t stop her. In this aspect, she’s above the headmaster. But I don’t care about the position of Head Boy,” said Evan nonchalantly. “If I’m exempted, so be it.”

Although the High Inquisitor had the power to make the final decision on punishments, Dumbledore’s bottom line was certainly the authority to expel students. That was something Fudge and Umbridge couldn’t take away, at least not before he left Hogwarts. So Evan didn’t need to worry too much.

As long as there was no excuse left, Umbridge would not be able to do much to him. This was probably her limit!

As for finding excuses to put Evan in detention, she probably wouldn’t dare to do so after the last incident!

Anyway, removing him from the Head Boy was a meaningless punishment for Evan. If Dumbledore left Hogwarts, he certainly wouldn’t stay here either...

Chapter 973: Impact of the New Education Decree

Although Evan didn’t care at all, his position as Head Boy being revoked by Umbridge still caused quite a stir at school.

In addition to sympathy and indignation, there were also many people who were gloating about his misfortune, mainly Slytherin students.

In their eyes, this was the consequence of defying the Ministry of Magic, and it wouldn’t be long before Evan would be expelled from school!

Perhaps even Umbridge herself thought the same, but it was better not to provoke Evan before that.

Evan could make others wary not because of his position as Head Boy, but because of his own strength.

When Harry, Ron, Neville, Colin, and a few others came back from the lake and saw the sign, they were all very angry. Many people came to comfort Evan, advised him not to pay attention to it, or suggested that he go to Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall.

But that would not change anything. Professor McGonagall had told Evan about this before, and she said that she would try her best to fight for him, but it was obviously unsuccessful. The Educational Decree Number Twenty-five gave Umbridge the authority to override the Headmaster and Heads of Houses.

In addition, the most discussed topic in the school was the Educational Decree Number Twenty-four.

In the short term, the impact of this decree was beyond imagination. Disbanding all student organizations for re-forming meant that from now on, all organizations were illegal until approved by Umbridge.

Not counting fully recognized groups, Hogwarts currently had thousands of related organizations, clubs, and groups, including those handed down from history, student-initiated ones, and those officially recognized by the school.

If they were all canceled and it was up to Umbridge to decide whether to approve their reformation, the impact would be enormous.

After having the power to inspect professors' teaching standards and the authority to dismiss them, Umbridge also began to take action on students and carry out comprehensive reforms.

In other words, she had already established enough deterrence between professors and ordinary students.

In the future, anyone wanting to cross Umbridge or oppose her would have to consider the consequences, which might not be as simple as a detention!

Of course, Umbridge's dislike for daring to do this also increased sharply.

"This is revenge. She must know that we met at the Hog's Head Inn." Harry said, his hands forming fists.

"You mean someone snitched?"

"It can't be."

"Think about it, there were people listening in that pub, even Mundungus dressed up as a woman and sat there, no one can tell if anyone was Umbridge's eyes and ears. And let's face it, we don't know how many of the people who turned up we can trust. Many of the people who came this time we rarely interact with, or we don't even know their names. Any of them could have run off and told Umbridge!"

“It must be Zacharias Smith, that annoying guy!” Ron punched a fist into his hand. “Or, um, I thought that Michael Corner had a really shifty look too...”

“Please, Ron, you can’t be suspicious of anyone who likes Ginny,” said Hermione.

“The spell I cast on the parchment has not been touched, and it’s impossible for anyone to have informed on us,” said Evan. “Don’t be suspicious. Although those two guys are indeed annoying, we need to maintain the basic trust.”

That evening, during dinner in the Great Hall, there was a peculiar intensity about the chatter and an extra measure of movement as people scurried up and down their tables conferring on what they had read. Evan was dismissed as the Head Boy, and he became the focus again.

Other students who had just joined them kept running over to ask what to do.

“Evan, what do you think?”

“No need to ask, we’re going to do it anyway, of course,” said Evan to Neville, Dean, Fred, George, and Ginny. “And I think this actually has little impact on us. The Defense Against the Dark Arts group we formed was illegal from the start.”

“I knew you’d say that,” said George, beaming. “By the way, we saw the news of your dismissal. Anyway, welcome back. The Head Boy isn’t a big deal.”

“Yeah, think about Percy, he’s the biggest idiot in the world. The stupidest thing he did in his life was to become the Head Boy. He kept telling us what not to do, but he couldn’t even manage himself,” Fred said.

“We can start playing pranks together again in the future without any burden or worry about your position,” George thumped Harry on the arm. “Honestly, we can’t do without you...”

“Are you sure you’re comforting Evan?” Hermione said, looking unhappy.

“You don’t understand, Hermione; this isn’t comforting, it’s welcoming. Evan is very talented at pranks. So let’s create chaos in the school together,” said Fred, looking quizzically at Ron and Hermione. “By the way, do the prefects want to do it too?”

“Of course,” said Hermione coolly.

“Well, it seems that no one has acted suspiciously; it looks like no one informed on us. Here comes Ernie and Hannah Abbott!” said Ron, looking over his shoulder. “And those Ravenclaw blokes and that annoying git, Smith...”

“The idiots can’t come over here now, it’ll look really suspicious — sit down!” Hermione looked alarmed. She mouthed to Ernie and Hannah, gesturing

frantically to them to rejoin the Hufflepuff table. “Later! We’ll — talk — to — you — later!”

“I’ll tell Michael,” said Ginny impatiently, swinging herself off her bench. “The fool, honestly...”

She hurried off toward the Ravenclaw table, and they watched her go, including Harry who also looked in the direction of Cho.

“So, our little sister finally has a new boyfriend?”

“Another dimwit, just like Zacharias,” said Ron, staring at Ginny and Michael.

“Michael is not as bad as you make him out to be, and his grades are much better than yours. If you cared about performance, you’d notice that his grades in Potions are always excellent. Snape rarely gives anyone an ‘Outstanding’,” said Hermione fairly.

“Another nerd!” Ron muttered under his breath.

“Harry! Ron! Fred! George!”

Just then, Angelina hurried toward them.

“It’s okay, Angelina!” said Harry quietly, when she was near enough to hear him. “We’re still going to...”

“You realize she’s including Quidditch in this?” Angelina said over him. “We have to go and ask permission to re-form the Gryffindor team!”

“What?!” said Harry, his eyes widening in shock. He had never considered this possibility.

“No way,” said Ron, appalled.

“You read the sign, it mentions teams too! So listen, you guys, especially you, Harry ... I am saying this for the last time... Please, please don’t lose your temper with Umbridge again or she might not let us play anymore!”

“Okay, okay,” said Harry, for Angelina looked as though she was on the verge of tears. “Don’t worry, I’ll behave myself...”

Chapter 974: Neville's Wrath

In the Defense Against the Dark Arts class on Monday morning, Evan met Umbridge who had returned.

There was a gentle smile on her face, and the scar was gone, leaving only a red patch.

As usual, Umbridge asked everyone to continue reading *Defensive Magical Theory*.

She didn’t trouble Evan; in fact, she acted as if he didn’t exist, just like Snape usually did.

The only difference was that her toad-like eyes kept staring at Evan, and he couldn't figure out what she was up to.

Evan felt very uncomfortable being stared at by her, but he didn't pay attention to Umbridge, and he didn't even read *Defensive Magical Theory*. She didn't seem to care whether he was present or not. Continuing like this, he thought he could skip the next class!

Umbridge was now really like a toad, not biting or responding to people...

Of course, she was a toad with fangs and sharp teeth. Once Evan made a mistake, she would immediately show them and take a bite without hesitation.

But now, she couldn't do much to Evan. Normal point deductions or detentions didn't work on him. Since stepping down as the Head Boy, Evan's social interactions had been minimal, and Umbridge couldn't use anything else to threaten him.

That was not the case with Harry, who was still thinking about his Quidditch...

Beneath the school's calm surface, there were undercurrents. Three consecutive Educational Decrees had put Umbridge in complete opposition to the entire Hogwarts community. Many people were already very unhappy with Umbridge, but a fuse was still missing before the explosion.

Overall, Umbridge's first day back was relatively calm, except for Neville's outburst.

This incident happened before the Potions class in the fifth year, and it had something to do with Umbridge.

"I wonder how Evan's Defense Against the Dark Arts class is going. Did that old toad make things difficult for him?"

"Evan should be fine, he knows what's appropriate, but Harry, you really shouldn't conflict with Professor Umbridge anymore, and don't get into trouble!" Hermione reminded, "Don't forget Angelina's request last night ... think about Quidditch."

"I know, I'll behave myself," said Harry listlessly.

The three of them trudged down the stone steps to the dungeons for Potions with other fifth-year students. All three of them were lost in thought, thinking about how to deal with Umbridge. But as they reached the bottom of the stairs they were recalled to themselves by the voice of Draco Malfoy.

He was standing just outside Snape's classroom door, waving around an official-looking piece of parchment and talking much louder than was necessary so that they could hear every word.

"Yeah, Umbridge gave the Slytherin Quidditch team permission to continue playing straightaway, I went to ask her first thing this morning. Well, it was pretty much automatic, I mean, she knows my father really well, he's always popping in and out of the Ministry... so there's no problem at all. It'll be interesting to see whether Gryffindor are allowed to keep playing, won't it?"

“Well done, Draco! Gryffindor is in trouble now, and that Mason guy, he’s no longer the Head Boy; he’ll probably be expelled from school soon,” said a very thin and tall boy standing next to Malfoy. “Umbridge being at Hogwarts is fantastic; our whole family supports her!”

“Don’t rise,” Hermione whispered imploringly to Harry and Ron, who were both watching Malfoy, faces set and fists clenched.

“Yeah, those people in Gryffindor can’t understand the situation at all,” said Malfoy, raising his voice a little more, his gray eyes glittering malevolently in Harry and Ron’s direction. He usually didn’t talk about Evan and Hermione now, but was still full of malice towards Harry and Ron, and would not let go of any opportunity to provoke them, “if it’s a question of influence with the Ministry, I don’t think they’ve got much chance... From what my father says, they’ve been looking for an excuse to sack Arthur Weasley for years... And as for Potter ... My father says it’s a matter of time before the Ministry has him carted off to St. Mungo’s... apparently they’ve got a special ward for people whose brains have been addled by magic! “

Malfoy made a grotesque face, his mouth sagging open and his eyes rolling. Crabbe and Goyle, and the Slytherin students gathered around him and gave their usual grunts of laughter, looking at the Gryffindors provocatively.

Suddenly, something collided hard with Harry’s shoulder, knocking him sideways.

A split second later, Harry realized that Neville had just charged past him, heading straight for Malfoy.

“Neville, no!” Harry reacted immediately. He leapt forward and seized the back of Neville’s robes.

Neville struggled frantically, his fists flailing, trying desperately to get at Malfoy who looked, for a moment, extremely shocked and took several steps back, unable to realize what was going on.

“Help me!” Harry yelled to the others, managing to get an arm around Neville’s neck and dragging him backward, away from the Slytherins, but Neville seemed to have gone mad, exerting too much force, and his face turned red as he lunged toward Malfoy.

Ron hurried forward and seized Neville’s arms; together, he and Harry succeeded in dragging Neville back into the Gryffindor line.

Crabbe and Goyle were now flexing their arms, closing in front of Malfoy, ready for the fight.

Everyone around was stunned. The Slytherins stopped laughing and looked at Neville in horror.

In their minds, Neville was a very timid student who could be bullied by almost anyone. They had never seen him like this before. At this moment, Neville’s face was scarlet; the pressure Harry was

exerting on his throat rendered him quite incomprehensible, but odd words spluttered from his mouth.

“Not... funny ... don't ... Mungo's ... show ... him ...”

“You must apologize to Neville!” Hermione said firmly, knowing exactly what had happened.

While visiting Sirius at St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries, they also met Neville's parents.

They had been tortured crazy by the Cruciatus Curse and were still lying in the hospital's special ward. This was the most tragic thing that had ever happened to the Longbottom family.

Hermione felt that this kind of suffering was even more terrifying than their direct death. It tormented Neville all the time, day after day, year after year, and had become the biggest burden and obstacle in his heart...

“You're crazy; we didn't say anything about him just now!” Malfoy said in a panic, taking another step back.

He thought it would be better to avoid provoking these Gryffindors, as they were all lunatics.

And his father's warning to have a good relationship with Evan made Malfoy a little wary of Hermione, and he didn't dare to provoke her like before. Everyone knew the relationship between Hermione and Evan.

Since he couldn't afford to offend him, it was better to keep his distance. He stopped Goyle and Crabbe and didn't let them charge forward.

Just then, the dungeon door opened.

Snape appeared there. His black eyes swept up the Gryffindor line to the point where Harry and Ron were wrestling with Neville.

“Fighting, Potter, Weasley, Longbottom?” Snape said in his cold, sneering voice. “Twenty points from Gryffindor. Release Longbottom, Potter, or it will be detention. Now, keep quiet, and inside, all of you.”

Chapter 975: Deductions and Bonus Points

Harry let go of Neville, who stood panting and glaring at him.

“Why did you stop me?” he asked angrily.

“I had to stop you,” Harry gasped, picking up his bag. “Crabbe and Goyle would've torn you apart.”

“Neville, we...” Hermione paused, not knowing what to say.

She shouldn't be talking about Neville's parents here; it was supposed to be a secret, something they had sworn not to tell anyone.

Hermione wanted to say that she understood Neville, but could they really understand Neville's pain? The answer was obviously no.

Neville said nothing; he merely snatched up his own bag and stalked off into the dungeon.

Harry, Hermione, and Ron looked at each other, feeling uneasy about Neville's state, and followed him into the classroom.

They took their usual seats at the back of the class and pulled out parchment, quills, and their copies of *One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi*. The class around them was whispering about what Neville had just done.

But when Snape closed the dungeon door with an echoing bang everybody fell silent immediately.

"You will notice," said Snape in his low, sneering voice, "that we have a guest with us today."

He gestured toward the dim corner of the dungeon, and Harry saw Professor Umbridge sitting there, clipboard on her knee.

"It's Umbridge!" He glanced at Ron and Hermione and raised his eyebrows.

Snape and Umbridge, the two teachers he hated most ... it was hard to decide which he wanted to triumph over the other.

Umbridge seemed to have recovered, there was no trace of being manipulated by Evan, and she was still as annoying as before.

"We are continuing with our Strengthening Solutions today, you will find your mixtures as you left them last lesson, if correctly made they should have matured well over the weekend — instructions" — he waved his wand again — "on the board. Carry on."

Umbridge had not given up on evaluating the professors and started the work again on the first day after she came back.

She included Snape in the assessment this time, knowing that she had never attended his Potions class before.

Snape's classes were like this — no one was allowed to speak or ask questions. They didn't even need to open their potions textbooks. All the steps were written on the board. They only needed a copy of *One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi* for assistance to know the specific uses of herbs.

Most of the brewing recipes given by Snape were slightly different from those in the books. Evan said he had improved them to make the potions more effective. He had even specially asked Percy for his Potions class notes to study.

But Harry remained skeptical because he had never been able to brew them properly and found it more effective to follow the textbook when making potions back at home.

Professor Umbridge spent the first half hour of the lesson making notes in her corner and did not say a word.

Harry was very interested in hearing her question Snape, so interested, that he was becoming careless with his potion again.

“Salamander blood, Harry!” Hermione moaned, grabbing his wrist to prevent him adding the wrong ingredient for the third time. “You’ve got it wrong, it’s not pomegranate juice!”

“Right,” said Harry vaguely, putting down the bottle and continuing to watch the corner, where Umbridge had just gotten to her feet.

She strode between two lines of desks toward Snape, who was bending over Dean Thomas’s cauldron.

“Well, the class seems fairly advanced for their level,” she said briskly to Snape’s back. “Though I would question whether it is advisable to teach them a potion like the Strengthening Solution. I think the Ministry would prefer it if that was removed from the syllabus!”

Snape straightened up slowly and turned to look at her.

“Potions of this difficulty should be taught in the N.E.W.T level classes for advanced wizards. In my opinion, I think what they should be learning now is how to brew an antidote correctly.” Umbridge continued.

“That’s a first year lesson, and as the Potions Master, it’s up to me to decide what my students should learn.”

“I’m sorry, but I can’t agree with your viewpoint on this!” Umbridge said, starting to scribble on her clipboard. “Now is not the time to discuss this matter, but I can reveal one thing: you will soon find out that the Ministry of Magic is going to reform the Hogwarts curriculum thoroughly. We will have experts examine what each year should be taught, rather than leaving it up to the professors. Now, please answer me, how long have you been teaching at Hogwarts? “

“Fourteen years.” Snape’s expression was unfathomable.

His eyes on Snape, Harry added a few drops to his potion; it hissed menacingly and turned from turquoise to orange.

“You applied first for the Defense Against the Dark Arts post, I believe?” Professor Umbridge asked Snape.

“Yes,” said Snape quietly.

“But you were unsuccessful?”

“Obviously.” Snape’s lip curled.

“But why? This is really strange. The position of professor of this course is very vacant.” Professor Umbridge scribbled on her clipboard. “And you have applied

regularly for the Defense Against the Dark Arts post since you first joined the school, I believe?”

“Yes,” said Snape quietly, barely moving his lips. He looked very angry.

“Do you have any idea why Dumbledore has consistently refused to appoint you?” asked Umbridge.

“I suggest you ask him,” said Snape jerkily.

“Oh I shall,” said Professor Umbridge with a sweet smile, “Well, I heard that you are also a Potions Master? As far as I know, there are very few wizards with this title nowadays. Can you show me your skills? Brew a high-level potion?”

“No!” Snape said coldly, his black eyes narrowed, “Is it relevant?”

“Oh yes,” said Professor Umbridge. “Yes, the Ministry wants a thorough understanding of teachers’ backgrounds and abilities. If you can’t prove yourself, it’s a demerit. I must remind you that I will be looking into the research you submitted to earn that title, and I hope it stands up to expert scrutiny.”

She turned away, walked over to Pansy Parkinson and began questioning her about the lessons.

Snape looked around at Harry and their eyes met for a second. Harry hastily dropped his gaze to his potion, which was now congealing foully and giving off a strong smell of burned rubber.

“No marks again, then, Potter,” said Snape maliciously, emptying Harry’s cauldron with a wave of his wand. “You will write me an essay on the correct composition of this potion, indicating how and why you went wrong, to be handed in next lesson, do you understand?”

“Yes,” said Harry furiously.

With a smile on her face, Umbridge looked at Snape’s attitude towards Harry without stopping him.

She was just writing something down quickly on her clipboard. It was unsure if it was a deduction or a bonus...

Chapter 976: Hagrid’s letter and request

Umbridge was now probably ready to implement her education reform steadily. The last failures of Evan and Harry and the research of many think tanks in the Ministry of Magic had made her realize that she could not rush or use magic methods. Magic was not her strong suit, and there were far too many people at Hogwarts who were better at it than she was!

If she continued to rely on her magic power, she might not even know how she was killed.

Her advantage was the authority given to her by the Ministry of Magic over Hogwarts, so she was prepared to take full advantage of it.

First, she issued two Educational Decrees after her return, canceling all student organizations and taking over the highest penalties and adjudication powers.

Second, she removed Evan from his position as the Head boy.

Finally, she continued her previous inspections and planned to expel a professor as soon as possible, forcing Dumbledore to make a mistake.

Even if that failed, she would make them feel the power of the Ministry of Magic.

Professor McGonagall and Snape were okay here. Although Umbridge didn't like them and knew that they were Dumbledore's right-hand people, she couldn't say anything. They taught very well and had real abilities.

But Professor Trelawney was completely different here. Before entering the true prophetic state, she was just an old fraud.

It was unknown what Umbridge said to her, but she was teaching her classes just fine, and then suddenly had a breakdown!

"Well, carry on, what are you doing standing there?!" said Professor Trelawney loudly, her voice high pitched and somewhat hysterical. "You know what to do! Or am I such a substandard teacher that you have never learned how to open a book?"

The class stared perplexedly at her and then at each other.

Professor Trelawney flounced back to the high-backed teacher's chair, her magnified eyes full of angry tears.

"I think she's got the results of her inspection back!" Ginny whispered.

"Umbridge sent back the results of the recent inspections yesterday. I heard from Michael that Professor McGonagall tore up the result of her inspection into pieces and threw it away in front of the whole class."

That was very much in line with Professor McGonagall's style, but things weren't so easy for Professor Trelawney!

"Professor, is there anything wrong?" a student asked.

"Wrong!" cried Professor Trelawney in a voice throbbing with emotion. "Certainly not! I have been insulted, certainly... Insinuations have been made against me... Unfounded accusations levelled ... but no, there is nothing wrong, certainly not..."

She took a great shuddering breath and looked away from the student, angry tears spilling from under her glasses.

"I say nothing," she choked. "I don't want to say it, of sixteen years' devoted service... It has passed, apparently, unnoticed... But I shall not be insulted, no, I shall not! If there ever comes a day like that, I'll leave by myself, rather than stay here and be insulted."

It was clear that Professor Trelawney had nowhere to go, and if she had, she would probably leave immediately.

For a prodigy who had dedicated her life to Divination, her ability to survive outside of Hogwarts was next to nil.

Some people might come to her for Divination, but apart from vague and death omens, they wouldn't get anything helpful from her.

As far as Evan knew, wizards with real Divination abilities were very, very rare! Similar to the situation of pure-blood wizard families, the bloodline of ancient Seers and prophets was getting thinner and thinner, and this ability was also lost, just like no pure-blood wizard could still activate the blood magic of his family.

“But Professor, who's insulting you?”

“The establishment!” said Professor Trelawney in a deep, dramatic, wavering voice. “Yes, those with eyes too clouded by the Mundane to See as I See, to Know as I Know ... Of course, we Seers have always been feared, always persecuted, since ancient times, they are afraid, afraid of the fate we See... It is — alas — our fate!”

She gulped, dabbed at her wet cheeks with the end of her shawl, and then pulled a small, embroidered handkerchief from her sleeve, into which she blew her nose very hard with a sound like Peeves blowing a raspberry.

“If you mean Umbridge...”

“Do not speak to me about that woman!” cried Professor Trelawney with all her might, leaping to her feet, her beads rattling and her spectacles flashing, “Now, Kindly continue with your work, quickly, start immediately!”

And she spent the rest of the lesson striding among them, tears still leaking from behind her glasses, muttering what sounded like threats under her breath.

“... may well choose to leave ... the indignity of it ... on probation ... we shall see ... how she dares...”

As expected, Professor Trelawney would definitely be dismissed by Umbridge, with the only exception probably being Hagrid.

If he came back, the two of them could compete to see whose class was worse, and then let Umbridge choose one.

That night in the Gryffindor common room, Evan and Colin relayed Professor Trelawney's performance to Harry, Hermione, and Ron, when a snow-white figure suddenly slammed into the window of the common room, with a thud.

“Oh my god, it's Hedwig, what's going on with her?”

At this moment, Hedwig was perched on the narrow window ledge, gazing through the thick glass at them, a letter tied to her leg.

“I don’t know. I haven’t seen her all day. She didn’t appear this morning. I thought she went to the Forbidden Forest to hunt for food.” Harry said, walking over and opening the window to let Hedwig in. “That’s weird. Who could be writing to me?”

He expected Hedwig to hold out her leg so that he could remove the letter and then fly off to the Owlery.

But the moment the window was open wide enough she hopped inside, hooting dolefully.

Harry quickly closed the window and Hedwig perched on his shoulder.

“Who wrote you the letter? Is it Snuffles?”

“Well, it seems not. He has his own means of communication and wouldn’t use Hedwig.”

“Wait a minute, look, she’s hurt!” Hermione said. “There’s something wrong with her wing!”

Everyone noticed that Hedwig’s feathers were oddly ruffled; some were bent the wrong way, and she was quivering.

When Harry made to touch the wing she gave a little jump, all her feathers on end as though she was inflating herself, and gazed at him reproachfully.

They all looked at each other, something was not right.

“She must have been attacked, maybe there’s some wild beast around?” Ron hesitated.

“No way, Hogwarts creatures are all trained not to touch owls.”

“The injuries on her body seem to be man-made,” said Evan, looking at Hedwig’s bent feathers, “Someone must have intercepted her. We know that channels of communication in and out of Hogwarts are being watched. Someone recognized Hedwig and knew she was Harry’s owl, wanting to get the letter on her leg.”

“We all know who it is, that despicable old toad!”

“If only Hagrid were here!” Harry opened the note that Hedwig brought. “Hey, it’s a letter from Hagrid, addressed to Evan.”

“What does the letter say?”

“With the help of Madame Maxime, he is about to cross the English Channel. They cannot use magic because the whole of Britain is now closely watched by the Ministry of Magic. He’ll probably arrive at Hogwarts later this week...” Evan

took the note handed over by Harry, “Hmm, apart from reporting that he’s safe, he wants me to negotiate with the Centaurs in the Forbidden Forest to see if they can clear out an area for Grawp to live in ...”

Chapter 977: No Practice

Since Evan got the Philosopher’s Stone left by Gryffindor in the Centaurs’ tribe three years ago, he also gained their friendship.

That piece of magical stone had been stored in the Centaurs’ tribe for centuries, long enough for it to be endowed with countless additional meanings by the Centaurs. It was simply a sacred existence that could be compared with the stars and the beliefs of the ancestors.

As the current owner of the Philosopher’s Stone, Evan naturally had a high status in the Centaurs’ tribe, even surpassing Dumbledore.

Especially after he had merged the two halves of the stone, the fallen Centaurs and the events involving Dark creatures remained a source of shame for this Centaurs’ tribe.

However, Evan was skeptical that even with his intervention, the Centaurs might not agree to Hagrid’s request.

Hagrid had a good relationship with the Centaurs, but keeping a highly destructive giant within the Forbidden Forest was, in reality, a very crazy move. Moreover, the Centaurs regarded the entire forest as their private land and were extremely stubborn, insisting that tradition should not be altered.

Thinking about the temperamental Magorian and the other Centaurs, Evan sighed deeply.

“It’s unimaginable that he really wants to bring that giant back. I was expecting Hagrid to give up!”

“Yeah, a giant; I bet if you stand on the castle’s tower, you can see him,” said Ron, suddenly laughing. “Actually, that’s not bad, is it? Just imagine, Umbridge opens her window, and she’s greeted by the giant’s ugly face and a terrifying roar. I bet she’d cry for sure.”

“This is no joke!” Hermione said sternly, “If anyone else discovers the giant, Hagrid will be expelled, and it might even affect the Headmaster and others. We must keep the giant’s secret. Evan, are you ready to help him?”

“I’ll give it a try, but those Centaurs are the most stubborn creatures I’ve ever met. It might not work,” Evan replied.

“Well, I’m going out for a while!” Harry said. “Hedwig needs treatment, and I’m going to see Professor Grubbly-Plank.”

“Wait a minute, let Dobby the house-elf go,” said Evan, stopping Harry. “You will easily be suspected if you go out with Hedwig now. I also want Dobby to deliver a message to the Centaurs, tell them about it and hear what they have to say.”

House-elves were more discreet than owls in delivering letters, and they were very convenient. Dobby was also happy to take on this task.

He even talked to everyone about the situation in the kitchen. Although Hermione had made a lot of efforts, everything was the same as before. The only change was probably that Winky's condition became worse. Since Mr. Crouch was killed, and after Barty Jr. had his soul sucked away, Winky completely collapsed!

She did nothing now, drank alcohol every day, and had become a scum among the house-elves, which was even more unacceptable to the elves than Dobby.

Now, Dobby was the only one taking care of her, even hiding her in the Room of Requirement several times.

“We have to do something for Winky,” Hermione said, watching Dobby disappear in front of her with Hedwig. “I think with a little more care, she'll get better. Look at Kreacher, he is a good example.”

“Kreacher didn't get better because of love,” Ron said. “And he is only friendly to you three now.”

“Well, maybe we can take Winky to Mr. Crouch's tombstone to take a look. It might make her feel better.” Hermione said thoughtfully, thinking about the matter carefully, “Does anyone know where he was buried?”

Just then, Angelina walked in dejectedly, with Fred and George following her.

“No Quidditch practice,” she said in hollow tones. “Not this week, and probably not next week.”

“But I kept my temper!” said Harry, horrified. “I didn't say anything to her, Angelina, I swear, I... “

“I know, I know,” said Angelina miserably, “the other three Houses teams have been approved to reorganize. We just went to see her, and she only said that she needed a bit of time to consider.”

“Consider what?” said Ron angrily. “She's given the Slytherins permission, why not us?”

There was a moment of silence, and everyone could imagine how much Umbridge was enjoying holding the threat of no Gryffindor Quidditch team over their heads.

Of course she would not want to relinquish that weapon over them too soon. It was much more useful than detentions!

“Well,” said Hermione, “look on the bright side — at least now you'll have time to do Snape's essay!”

“That’s a bright side, is it?” snapped Harry, while Ron stared incredulously at Hermione. “It sounds as bad as helping Winky find Mr. Crouch’s burial place, no Quidditch practice and extra Potions!”

Harry slumped down into a chair, dragged his Potions essay reluctantly from his bag, and set to work.

“Hermione is right, and it’s not entirely a bad thing. I think this will give us time for combat training. At least all Gryffindors will have free time!” Evan said. “We can start as soon as possible. How about tomorrow evening?”

“I’m okay with that!” Harry immediately agreed, feeling somewhat better with the prospect.

At least they were actively resisting Umbridge and the Ministry, which seemed to be his only refuge at the moment.

“We don’t mind either. If we don’t start soon, I’ll forget everything I’ve learned!” Fred said.

“Yeah, you know, there are so many things waiting for us to do every day,” George added.

“Okay, then. Let’s inform the others tomorrow. If they have time, ask them to come to the Room of Requirement on the seventh floor after dinner,” Evan said. “Hermione and I are ready with a proper training area and everything we need.”

For the rest of the evening, Evan and the others discussed Hagrid and Grawp.

Harry was making little progress with his Potions essay. He had trouble concentrating, as there was an incredible amount of noise in the room: after countless attempts, Fred and George appeared finally to have perfected one type of Skiving Snackbox, which they were taking turns to demonstrate to a cheering and whooping crowd.

George was shouting and holding a clipboard to record the orders. Fred would take a bite out of the orange end of a chew, at which he would vomit spectacularly into a bucket they had placed in front of them. Then he would force down the purple end of the chew, at which the vomiting would immediately cease.

Every once in a while, Lee Jordan lazily emptied the vomit with a Vanishing Charm.

There were vomiting, cheers, and orders from Fred and George, and Harry could hardly concentrate on writing the correct recipe for the enhancer.

Like him, Hermione kept sneering dissatisfiedly and stopped talking about giants!

“Aren’t you going to stop them?” Evan asked. Hermione was very dissatisfied with Fred and George’s experiments.

She had threatened to tell Mrs. Weasley about it, but it was just talk.

Chapter 978: Successful Research and Reorganization

“I can’t, they’re not technically doing anything wrong,” said Hermione through gritted teeth. “They’re quite within their rights to eat the foul things themselves, and I can’t find a rule that says the other idiots aren’t entitled to buy them, not unless they’re proven to be dangerous in some way, and it doesn’t look as though they are. As a partner in their business, don’t you have something to say?”

“Well, I told them not to conduct dangerous experiments,” said Evan. “But as you can see, this isn’t dangerous.”

He didn’t want to bother with Fred and George’s prank research, let alone the fact that he was no longer the Head Boy. If Hogwarts hadn’t been in chaos, Evan would have even considered actively disrupting the order!

But with Umbridge causing trouble, that day was probably not too far away...

So, the few of them watched Fred and George projectile-vomit into the bucket, gulp down the rest of the chew, and straighten up, beaming with their arms wide to protracted applause and a large number of orders.

“Evan, have you helped them with this Skiving Snackbox?” Harry asked, “Providing the formula or something.”

“No!”

“Seriously, I don’t get why Fred and George only got three O.W.L.s each,” said Harry, watching as Fred, George, and Lee collected gold from the eager crowd. “How difficult is this exam? No matter how you look at it, they really know their stuff. At least they’re very good at Potions. They’re able to develop this kind of vomiting potion and antidote. However, they did not get their O.W.L. in Potions. Alas, But I can’t even get this Strengthening Solution right.”

He flipped through his Potions textbook, hoping to find something useful.

“I’ve suggested that you should pay more attention to the formulas provided by Snape in class. More effective than the ones in the textbook,” said Evan, thinking that Harry was doing useless work. “Study his modifications, and you’ll gain more.”

“No use. I think the reason why I fail every time is because Snape is watching. It would be better if he wasn’t here.” Harry said, “I don’t even know as much as Fred and George. They.....”

“They only know flashy stuff,” said Hermione disparagingly, “that’s no real use to anyone.”

“Hermione, do you know!” Ron yelled strangely, “They’ve made a lot of money, and the orders are beyond imagination.”

“That doesn’t mean it’s useful!” Hermione scowled, looking dissatisfied at Fred rattling his box of Galleons ostentatiously. She stood up directly. “Okay, I’m going back to sleep. You guys should sleep too.”

It was a long while before the crowd around the Weasleys dispersed, and then Fred and George came over to settle accounts with Evan.

They took out a long order form and calculated the money with Evan, and the profits after deducting the costs were already considerable.

This was their habit. Although Evan said he trusted them, they still insisted on keeping the accounts clear.

‘Business is business’, just like they never gave Ron a discount.

Since it was a partnership, the accounts must be clear.

Harry, Ron, and Colin watched for a while, expressing surprise that the twins had already earned one hundred and eighty-two gold Galleons. It was hard to imagine that the business of a few copper nuts could earn so much money. Afterward, they went back to sleep one by one.

After settling accounts, only Evan, Fred and George were left in the common room.

Evan suggested that they speed up the research on the Skiving Snackboxes and produce more of the types that had been researched. If necessary, he could find someone to mass-produce them outside the school and sell them to students at low prices.

He had a hunch that after Umbridge made a big commotion; these Skiving Snackboxes would come in handy!

After Fred and George left, Evan studied magic alone for a while.

He fell into a bottleneck in demonic magic and summoning methods.

Without proper reference materials, continuing to study on paper was meaningless.

He was considering whether to summon the demon deep in the kitchen. As for the summoning conditions, Evan had already studied and understood that he needed the corpse of a house-elf, and the power of the demon altar would bring it back to the world.

There was no shortage of materials; he could easily find one among the house-elf heads hanging all over the wall.

The problem was whether the summoned house-elf would become an entirely new demon or retain the original owner of the house-elf corpse. Additionally, understanding its strength and whether it had malicious intent were all things that needed to be studied before the summoning.

Evan had a hunch that no matter what he summoned, he would not feel pleasant.

This magic itself was very weird and evil, and using a demon altar with a house-elf corpse as a sacrifice could easily lead people to associate it with bad things...

Especially with Umbridge still at Hogwarts, it wasn't appropriate to summon any demon. Evan still had a lot of troubles to solve at hand, so he planned to carefully research and summon something only when it wasn't urgent, perhaps in the next semester.

After midnight Dobby returned from the Centaurs with their reply.

They originally did not agree to let a giant enter their woods, but for the sake of Dumbledore and Evan, they agreed to observe for a while first, confirming whether Grawp would cause any disturbance to the beings in the Forbidden Forest.

Evan was certain that Grawp would definitely cause trouble, but that was something Hagrid needed to worry about.

The Centaurs had made a concession, and Evan couldn't do anything about the remaining issues. He just hoped Hagrid wouldn't make him teach Grawp English.

The next morning, it started to rain lightly again.

Evan and Hermione informed each member one by one, asking them to gather on the seventh floor at seven o'clock tonight to start the first training.

When breakfast was almost over, Angelina rushed into the Great Hall.

"I've got permission!" she said. "To re-form the Quidditch team!"

"Excellent!"

"Yeah," said Angelina, beaming. "I went to McGonagall and I think she might have appealed to Dumbledore or maybe had another argument with Umbridge — anyway, Umbridge had to give in. So let's start training!"

"But I have to learn magic with Evan tonight!" Harry said hesitantly, "And the weather outside..."

"The team activity is at seven o'clock. We can start practicing from four thirty; there's plenty of time," Angelina said. "Starting today, we'll practice every day. After your afternoon classes, I want you down at the pitch, all right? We've got to make up time. Haven't you realized we're only three weeks away from our first match?"

Facing Angelina's determination, it was hard for everyone to say no. Harry and Ron could only nod reluctantly.

Chapter 979: Scars and Anger

"Hope this clears up!" Ron's smile slipped slightly as he looked out of the window, which was now opaque with hammering rain.

His wish did not come true, and it rained even harder in the afternoon!

At 4:30 in the afternoon, Evan, Hermione, and Colin originally planned to go to the first training session after the reorganization of the Gryffindor Quidditch team, but they did not go out after seeing the weather. Harry, Ron, and Ginny left the castle with their broomsticks, looking worried.

By the time they arrived at the Quidditch pitch for practice, they were soaked through within minutes, their feet slipping and sliding on the sodden grass.

The sky was a deep, thundery gray and it was a relief to gain the warmth and light of the changing rooms, even if they knew the respite was only temporary.

Harry found Fred and George debating whether to use one of their own Skiving Snackboxes to get out of flying.

“Well, I bet she’d know what we’d done,” Fred said out of the corner of his mouth. “If only I hadn’t offered to sell her some Puking Pastilles yesterday.”

“We could try the Fever Fudge,” George muttered, “no one’s seen that yet except Evan...”

“Does it work?” inquired Ron hopefully, as the hammering of rain on the roof intensified and wind howled around the building.

“Well, yeah,” said Fred, “your temperature will go right up, like boiling water, scarily hot...”

“But you get these massive pus-filled boils too,” said George, “and we haven’t worked out how to get rid of them yet.”

“I can’t see any boils,” said Ron, staring at the twins.

“No, well, you wouldn’t,” said Fred darkly, “they’re not in a place we generally display to the public.”

“— but they make sitting on a broom a right pain in the —”

“You know, not every broomstick has an invisible seat like the Starcatcher.”

“All right, everyone, listen up,” said Angelina loudly, emerging from the Captain’s office. “I know it’s not ideal weather, but there’s a good chance we’ll be playing Slytherin in conditions like this so it’s a good idea to work out how we’re going to cope with them. Harry, didn’t you do something to your glasses to stop the rain fogging them up when we played Hufflepuff in that storm?”

“Hermione did it,” said Harry. He pulled out his wand, tapped his glasses and said, “*Impervius!*”

“I think we all ought to try that,” said Angelina. “If we could just keep the rain off our faces it would really help visibility — all together, come on — *Impervius!* Okay. Let’s go!”

“You know, Evan knows an enhanced version of the Impervius Charm, which can make the rain bounce away from the body, as if there is an extra magic barrier, and you will not get wet at all,” said Fred. “I’ve only seen him use it once.”

“I’ll definitely ask him how he does it tonight,” George said.

A few minutes later, everyone was ready.

They all stowed their wands back in the inside pockets of their robes, shouldered their brooms, and followed Angelina out of the changing rooms.

They squelched through the deepening mud to the middle of the pitch; visibility was still very poor even with the Impervius Charm; light was fading fast and curtains of rain were sweeping the grounds.

“All right, on my whistle,” shouted Angelina.

Harry kicked off from the ground, spraying mud in all directions, and shot upward, the wind pulling him slightly off course.

He had no idea how he was going to see the Snitch in this weather; he was having enough difficulty seeing the one Bludger with which they were practicing; a minute into the practice it almost unseated him and he had to use the Sloth Grip Roll to avoid it.

Unfortunately Angelina did not see this; in fact, she did not appear to be able to see anything; none of them had a clue what the others were doing.

The wind was getting stronger and stronger, and Harry could even hear the patter of rain hitting the lake in the distance.

Angelina let them practice for nearly two hours before giving up. If it weren’t for Evan’s group activity tonight, she might have let everyone continue training until nine o’clock in the evening.

She led her sodden and disgruntled team back into the changing rooms, insisting that the practice had not been a waste of time, though without any real conviction in her voice.

Fred and George were looking particularly annoyed; both were bandy-legged and winced with every movement. Harry could hear them complaining in low voices as he toweled his hair dry.

“Hey, I think a few of mine have ruptured,” said Fred in a hollow voice.

“Mine haven’t,” said George, wincing. “They’re throbbing like mad ... feel bigger if anything...”

“OUCH!” said Harry.

He pressed the towel to his face, his eyes screwed tight with pain. The scar on his forehead had seared again, more painfully than in months.

“What’s up?” said several voices.

Harry emerged from behind his towel; the changing room was blurred because he was not wearing his glasses; but he could still tell that everyone's face was turned toward him.

"Nothing," he muttered, "I — poked myself in the eye, that's all..."

But he gave Ron a significant look, covering his scar with the towel.

"Alright, let's quickly go to the Great Hall and see what's left."

"I need to go back and change into dry clothes."

"I need to find Evan to learn the enhanced version of the Impervius Charm, I'll go now, I heard this rain will last for a week."

The two of them hung back as the rest of the team filed back outside, muffled in their cloaks, their hats pulled low over their ears.

"What happened?" said Ron, the moment that Alicia had disappeared through the door. "Was it your scar?"

Harry nodded, his breathing gradually calming down.

"But ..." Looking scared, Ron strode across to the window and stared out into the rain to make sure no one was around. He lowered his voice and said, "He — he can't be near us now, can he? You didn't touch anything, and Umbridge isn't here. Did you and Evan check last time?"

"He's probably not her, it's just a coincidence." Harry muttered, sinking onto a bench and rubbing his forehead, "He's probably miles away, in that place Sirius mentioned ... Norway, with those vampires. It hurt because ... he's ... angry."

Harry had not meant to say that at all, and heard the words as though a stranger had spoken them.

Yet he knew at once that they were true. He did not know how he knew it, but he did; Voldemort, wherever he was, whatever he was doing, was in a towering temper.

Along with the gloomy weather, the atmosphere in the changing room suddenly became gloomy with Harry's words.

"Angry?! Did you see him?!" said Ron, looking horrified. "Did you ... get a vision, or something?"

Harry sat quite still, staring at his feet, allowing his mind and his memory to relax in the aftermath of the pain.

A confused tangle of shapes, a howling rush of voices flashed in front of him so fast that he had no time to see clearly.

"It's those vampires. Something went wrong there. Something Dumbledore did to ruin his plan?"

Again, he felt surprised to hear the words coming out of his mouth, and yet quite certain that they were true.

“What did Dumbledore do?” Ron asked in a hushed voice.

“I don’t know, but Voldemort was furious. I’m sure it had something to do with those vampires, and his plan was thwarted!” Harry said, carefully recalling the scene he saw in his head, and something vaguely appeared, but it was unclear.

“How do you know then?” Ron asked nervously. “About him being angry, I mean.”

Harry shook his head and covered his eyes with his hands, pressing down upon them with his palms. Little stars erupted in them.

He felt Ron sit down on the bench beside him and knew Ron was staring at him.

“We should tell Evan and Hermione about this. By the way, is this what it was about last time?” said Ron breathlessly. “When your scar hurt in Umbridge’s office? You-Know-Who was angry?”

“No!” Harry shook his head.

“What is it, then?”

Harry was thinking himself back. He had been looking into Umbridge’s face... His scar had hurt ... and he had had that odd feeling in his stomach ... a strange, leaping feeling ... a happy feeling... But, of course, he had not recognized it for what it was, as he had been feeling so miserable himself...

“Last time, it was because he was pleased, really pleased. He thought ... something good was going to happen. And the night before we came back to Hogwarts ...” He thought back to the moment when his scar had hurt so badly in his, Evan’s and Ron’s bedroom in Grimmauld Place. “He was furious because his plans were being delayed and his Death Eaters couldn’t get what he needed.”

He looked around at Ron, who was gaping at him.

“There was also the time when I was at the Dursleys’ house just after the summer started, and he was also angry,” Harry recalled. “He wanted to see someone who seemed to have been killed, and he couldn’t get some support from a person or an organization”

“Blimey, mate, you could take over from Trelawney,” Ron said in an awed voice.

“I’m not making prophecies,” said Harry. “These are things that really happened.”

“No, you know what you’re doing?” Ron said, sounding both scared and impressed. “Harry, you’re reading You-Know-Who’s mind, which is even more

powerful than prophecy. Evan said there's some kind of connection between you and You-Know-Who, but I never thought you could make it this far."

"It's not reading You-Know-Who's mind. It's more like ... his mood, I suppose." Harry shook his head, "Just like Evan said; when his emotions change drastically, the connection between me and him will be strengthened. I'm just getting flashes of what mood he's in; whenever Voldemort was near me or when he was feeling hatred, I could tell. Well, now I'm feeling it when he's pleased too!"

There was a pause. The wind and rain lashed at the building.

"Okay, you've got to tell someone," said Ron, a little panicked. "Let's go back quickly. In fact, I think you should talk to Dumbledore. This sounds really scary. ..."

"Just tell Evan and Hermione."

"Evan knows a lot, but he can't help you in this regard. You should go to Dumbledore," said Ron.

"He knows, I told him before!" Harry said stubbornly, "There's no point telling him again, especially since he might not even be at school right now but hundreds of miles away in Norway. I have no idea how he managed to deceive Umbridge."

"I think Dumbledore would want to know." Ron looked at Harry thoughtfully.

"Maybe," said Harry shortly, getting to his feet, taking his cloak off his peg, and swinging it around himself.

In fact, he didn't even want to tell Evan and Hermione about it.

Anyway, those were the answers he got after over and over again, Hermione would ask him to find Dumbledore.

Evan would definitely ask him to practice Occlumency and might even suggest seeking Snape's help...

As far as Harry could see, this was insane. He hadn't managed to avoid Snape yet, let alone willingly go to him. Probably the same would be with Dumbledore. He couldn't master this spell, and he definitely didn't want Snape to teach him,

Maybe it was better that way.

Apart from the pain, Harry felt it wasn't that bad.

Again and again, he felt that the images he saw through this connection were becoming clearer. Perhaps the next time, he would know what Voldemort was up to. If he saw something crucial, he could warn the Order of the Phoenix, provided someone was willing to believe him.

This idea was undoubtedly dangerous. Voldemort would surely sense this connection before Harry, and he could be certain that he would deliberately create illusions to lure Harry. Evan had warned about this, but Harry hadn't taken it to heart.

“Seriously, mate!” Ron sighed as he tied his cloak. “You’re not the only one getting frustrated by the return of You-Know-Who. I’ve been having dreams lately, scary dreams. You-Know-Who appears in them, and I always see strange things, get some scary thoughts, or do some random things. Well, it must be that annoying woman. Even now, she’s causing trouble at school. Sooner or later, she’ll drive everyone crazy.”

Harry shook his head. He didn't know what dreams Ron had, but it was evidently due to excessive worry and stress, unlike his own.

But thinking about it carefully, it was true. The pressure of the upcoming exams, the pressure of Voldemort's return, and the pressure from Umbridge and the Ministry of Magic were too much. Continuing like this, they would surely collapse. ...

They hurried back through the dark grounds, sliding and stumbling up the muddy lawns, not talking.

Harry was thinking hard, drifting from Ron's words back to Voldemort's recent anger.

‘What did Dumbledore and the others do to make him so angry? And what’s the connection with those vampires?!’

‘Sirius probably knows, but after contacting me once in September, he never showed up again.’

Then, Harry thought about the previous pain again. *‘What plan is Voldemort scheming this time?’*

‘In addition to wanting something from the vampires, he also seems to want to get something from the Ministry of Magic, that door...’

‘Could it be related to the black door I kept coming to in my dreams?’

‘Also, Mundungus said before that Sturgis Podmore was caught trying to break into a door. Is there any connection?’

‘What’s inside the door? Stuff he can only get by stealth... like a weapon. Something he didn’t have last time.’

These words rang in his ears again.

He had not thought about those words in weeks; he had been too absorbed in what was going on at Hogwarts, too busy dwelling on the ongoing battles with Umbridge, the injustice of all the Ministry interference... But now they came back to him and made him wonder... Should they be doing something else now?

Compared to the more terrifying disasters Voldemort and Evan spoke of, Umbridge was nothing.

