

Harry arrived before a familiar-looking door that led to the office of Professor McGonagall with Colin Creevey in tow. He was not naïve enough to assume that he would be leaving this office with even one per cent satisfaction. The reason he was taking Colin to McGonagall's office was that he was following the rules and procedures that were expected of him as a Prefect of Hogwarts. There was also his need to see the incompetence and wimping of the Dumbledore brigade that was infesting the higher echelons of the school. Just seeing it up close should be enough fuel for him for what he was planning for them all in the future.

Taking a deep breath, he reached out and knocked twice on McGonagall's office door.

"Come in."

Harry pushed the door open and let himself in closely followed by Colin Creevey.

"Potter! Creevey! What seems to be the problem?" McGonagall looked between the two students searchingly.

"It is my understanding that Hogwarts faculty are legally not allowed to punish students with physical harm. Isn't that right professor?" Harry asked, adopting a calm and placid face as he looked into the grey eyes of his head of the house.

"Yes, that's correct Potter." McGonagall nodded and sat up straight her eyes shining with his alert.

"I also understand the Headmaster has the power to dismiss such a member of the staff who uses cruel, unusual and invasive abuse that causes physical harm to students. Isn't that so Professor?"

McGonagall took a moment to think it through and slowly nodded looking between Colin and Harry showing a ton of hesitation.

"Then I want you and Headmaster Dumbledore to act against Dolores Umbridge for using a Blood Quill on Colin Creevey. He'll provide memory evidence if that's what you need and the scarring is quite visible as he had just come out of his assigned detention with Umbridge." Harry said all that with a straight face carefully keeping out any shred of emotion from bleeding into his tone or mannerism.

McGonagall looked stunned and just stared at them open-mouthed for a while doing a perfect imitation of a gaping fish.

Harry cleared his throat snapping McGonagall back to reality.

"You...wha?... Potter! What did you just say?" McGonagall looked at him with wide eyes.

"I said Dolores Umbridge used a Blood Quill on Colin. Here...look at this." Harry showed the bleeding and scarred back of Colin's hand to McGonagall.

"I must obey my betters. This is what Umbridge made Colin write with her Blood Quill. Will you take action or not?" Harry asked coldly.

McGonagall took off her glasses and rubbed her eyes.

“Potter, you don’t understand. Professor Umbridge is...”

“Will you take action against Umbridge or not? I need a straightforward answer Deputy Headmistress Minerva McGonagall.”

McGonagall took a deep breath and just let out a sigh. “I can’t. Professor Umbridge is backed by the Ministry of Magic. She is...”

“I don’t care about any of her connections. I want to know whether you’ll move to act according to the law and principles that govern Hogwarts?”

“As I said, Potter. My hands are tied.” McGonagall said with a straight face.

“I see.” Harry whispered.

He slowly took to his feet and led Colin out of the door. But before he closed the door, he let himself in and looked at the spineless woman who was sitting behind her desk.

“Do you remember the conversation that we had in this room last year not too long after the Yule Ball? You accused me of not acting rationally or raising my concerns in a well-defined manner.” Harry reminded the woman of that conversation where he pretended to be chastised for the sake of saving himself the headache.

The resounding silence and the flinching eyes of McGonagall let him know that she remembered that conversation all too well.

“I didn’t argue with you that day and just nodded along like a properly chastised child not because I found great wisdom in your words. I didn’t say anything then because I knew a day would come when I could just show you a mirror and see the incompetence, apathy, and all-around nonsense that I see when I look at you.” Harry said coldly before he flicked his wand and conjured a giant mirror in McGonagall’s room that was facing her.

“Now, you see what I see Professor. Enjoy!”

With that parting shot, he slammed the door behind his back and walked away taking Colin with him. He was not done, not by a long shot. He had one more place he got to visit before taking Colin to the infirmary.

The Gargoyle that guarded the stairway to Dumbledore’s office refused to budge but a Patronus message he sent to Dumbledore made it stand aside.

“Wow, Harry. That was just cool.” said Colin, his brown eyes sparkling like stars after witnessing the Patronus charm.

“I’m awesome like that. Now, come on. We’ll submit a written complaint to the Headmaster.”

“Harry, you don’t have to trouble yourself for my sake.” Colin said meekly, looking away shyly.

“On the contrary, I shall. Now, come on.” said Harry, dragging the fourth-year Gryffindor up with him.

The Headmaster's office did not undergo any notable change since the last time he visited the place. Fawkes was perched on his stand but the Phoenix looked to be sleeping going by the way it was dozing off. There was a light rain outside so Harry gathered the Phoenix was just taking a nap enjoying the moderate chill in the air.

"Please take a seat you two. What seems to be the problem, Harry?" Dumbledore asked, looking anywhere but Harry's eyes.

He could not help but roll his eyes at the wimpiness on display. Nonetheless, he fished out the folded parchment from his coat and placed it on Dumbledore's table.

"What's this?"

"It's a written complaint by Colin Creevey with I as witness demanding disciplinary action against Dolores Umbridge for using a cruel and unusual punishment on Colin by the use of a Blood Quill making him write this..." said Harry, taking Colin's hand showing the words etched on the skin.

The scarring remained bright red and the words were quite easily visible.

Dumbledore looked from the tear-stained eyes of Colin Creevey to the cold calculating eyes of Harry. Then uncharacteristically Dumbledore accepted the parchment but sagged in on himself.

"I'll take up this issue with Dolores and then the Board. But I'm afraid she'll remain in her post no matter what I do. The Ministry was the one to appoint her and she won't go away without the Ministry recalling her from the post." said Dumbledore.

"Then convince the Ministry to pull her back." Harry said imploringly.

"Trust me Harry, Mr Creevey. I'll do my best to make them see reason."

Harry was a little bit surprised at how easily Dumbledore caved in and put up no considerable resistance. It was only five days later that he saw just how useless Dumbledore was in the grand scheme of things. Even after giving a complaint with a written testimony by his own hand and the evidence to corroborate it Umbridge was not only strutting around Hogwarts as if she owned it but she got a promotion.

The giant headline on the front page of the Daily Prophet was quite a shock for Harry. Whatever reaction he expected from the Ministry or the Board of Governors this was not the one.

#### EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN MINISTRY AGENDA: DOLORES UMBRIDGE APPOINTED HIGH INQUISITOR

Harry felt like he just wanted to burn the whole thing down and set Umbridge on fire for good measure. He managed to set the paper down and grip the sides of the Gryffindor table with his fingers straining against the wood. The urge to unleash a fire with the intensity of a thousand burning suns on Umbridge and the other Hogwarts staff was quite tempting. He knew why he was feeling heightened emotions like rage right now. He had the unfortunate timing of testing out some dark curses and venturing out into lightning spells in the last couple of days. He had to vent out some of the anger in the Room of Requirement considering DADA was a dull

affair and Charms and Transfiguration classes were not exactly giving him enough to work with as far as practical spells were concerned.

“Harry. You need to calm down.” Neville quietly whispered.

It was then he realized he was being noticed.

“Sorry.”

“Don’t be. I think everyone in the hall is rather angry at Umbridge and the Ministry.” Neville muttered.

Harry was not exactly sure how that little news travelled around in Hogwarts. Sure, he had shared the details of his appeal to Dumbledore among the Prefects and his friends. He was obligated to share the details with the Prefects as Cedric had called an emergency meeting once he was notified by the Deputy Headmistress. The Prefects had a chain of command as all complaints or appeals are generally passed through the Head Boy or the Head Girl. The meeting was to determine whether his breaking of the usual protocol was warranted and that was when he recounted the details of Colin’s situation. It was safe to say the rest of the prefects were quite horrified to find out Umbridge used a Blood Quill.

There were some notable exceptions like Malfoy and Parkinson.

So, the prefects might have leaked the whole affair or the portraits in McGonagall’s or Dumbledore’s office tattled to other portraits which spread the word in the Hogwarts rumour mill. Whatever the case, almost all students now knew what awaited them in Umbridge’s detention. All Harry could see were fearful faces and hushed whispers among the students and he couldn’t really blame them. They just witnessed the Ministry reward the walking pink toad with a promotion even after being accused of torturing a fellow student. If he was in their shoes, he’d have also been scared witless at their age.

“Do you think Umbridge will come after you now?” Neville asked worriedly.

It was a relevant question. Harry was almost sure Fudge must’ve expended some political capital to keep a lid on Umbridge’s folly. Considering the student in question was a muggleborn it’d have been a bit easier for Fudge to keep it hushed up in the Ministry and the Board.

“She’ll turn her sights on me eventually but not today or tomorrow. She’ll find some way to strike back.”

“What’ll you do? Maybe you need to talk to Sirius before anything untoward happens.” Neville advised.

Harry scoffed eyeing the head table where Hogwarts staff were having their breakfast. Just looking at the toad-faced woman brought a fresh surge of rage. Harry realised if he stayed any longer, he might just end up doing something he’d later regret.

“Hey, Neville. I forgot something in the dorms. I’ll be right back.” Harry whispered against Neville’s ear and made his escape from the Great Hall.

He made a beeline for the Room of Requirement. When he entered the room a training dummy that suspiciously looked like Umbridge was facing him. He launched two elemental spells in quick succession.

*"Expugno. Torrens Incendio."*

A stormy vortex blew back the dummy and had it pressed against the back wall before a large wave of fire consumed the dummy and the floor. The fire burned bright orange as it ate away at the dummy. The fire was suddenly sucked away and, in its place, the pink dummy stood without a single blemish on its body.

"Okay. Now, you're just pissing me off." Harry growled his ire only rising and a strange weight settling just above his eyes.

Harry began using cutting curses, gouging curses and even the bloody organ liquifying curse which only knocked the dummy back a few feet as it had no organs to liquefy. The use of darker spells didn't relieve him of the anger that was being built up inside him as he had assumed. It only made his emotional condition worse.

It was that exact lack of self-control that led him to think it'd be a good idea to try out a lightning spell.

*"Fulminis."*

Harry jabbed his wand and from its tip, a purple bolt of lightning struck the dummy. The dummy was shattered into pieces and a charred smell also permeated the room. The tip of his wand was smoking after the spell but strangely enough, Harry was no longer feeling the headache. He was feeling a lot better and comparatively calm than a few minutes ago. He was also feeling like he could bring down a mountain as he was charged up as far as magical energy was concerned. He took several deep breaths to calm down as he didn't want to lose himself to the addictive power that was influencing his mind.

"I need to cut down on dark magic for a few days." Harry muttered, seeing the need for disciplining himself aware that his proclivity to megalomania.

He was just a mile or two away from reaching Tom Riddle levels of megalomania and that was not good. Not good at all.

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Harry went through a strict regimen of sorts that cut off all practice of dark spells and even elemental magic. It left him with a good amount of free time and so he took up swimming and running to keep his body in top shape. He was no longer compromising his sleep by staying awake till midnight. Instead, he went early to bed and awoke early in the morning for a run. There was a marked difference in his temperament after keeping up with the new schedule for two days.

The biggest advantage in disciplining himself was that he managed to regain a semblance of control over his Occlumency practices. He just wished the practice of Occlumency would allow him easy control over his mind and body but that was not how the mind arts work. The mind arts require constant practice and self-discipline. Breathing exercises and meditation can help but occluding the mind from the

emotional baggage of life was no easy task. It was a cumulative process that demands versatility in a wizard and constant engagement. His mistake was that his engagement with Occlumency slips up from time to time especially when he takes up practising darker spells.

He knew what the problem was but the solution happens to be a difficult one. Either he'd have to completely give up on dark magic or he'd have to be highly orderly when it comes to employing countermeasures against the influence of dark magic. His old plan to counter dark spells with more 'light' spells ended up being a complete failure. He found himself reverting to a mild addiction to magical power and an unhealthy dose of megalomania assisted by uncontrollable rage.

There was also the distinct possibility that he was overthinking and overanalysing everything. It could be that the ire and mild dose of the 'I could do better if I was in charge.' attitude was not correlated to his use of dark spells or his 'alleged' failing Occlumency standards. Occlumency was not primarily a defence against the addictive nature of dark spells. Occlumency had always been an art that was specifically developed to combat mind magics. It had the added effect of gaining an organized mind for a practitioner of Occlumency.

What he needed right now was some sound advice not just in the matter of dark magic but also in the matter of Umbridge. Initially, he wanted to ask for Hermione's advice but he already knew some of the answers she'd give him. There was also the fear that she'd immediately go tattle to McGonagall about his dalliances with dark magic. He all too well remembered what happened with his Firebolt in the third year. So, he didn't want a repeat of that ever again.

"So, what did you want to talk about Harry?" asked Daphne.

Harry was still mulling over whether he should take advice from Daphne. Considering he was already in hot water after tattling to Fleur about his actions in the graveyard. Nonetheless, he was in a vulnerable position and Daphne was the only one who could give him a different perspective.

"I have a problem. Or more like two problems. I don't know whether it is as dangerous as I think but I need your advice on the matter."

"Okay." Daphne sat up straight in full alert instead of relaxing against the tree. "I'll try to be as helpful as I can."

Harry looked at the Black Lake and enjoyed the quiet the place offered. Taking a deep breath, he squared up his shoulders to expose his vulnerability.

"I think I'm suffering from an addiction to dark magic." Harry managed to bite out.

Daphne's eyes widened as she heard that. She looked at him curiously for a long moment.

"Okay. Why do you think you are addicted to dark magic?" she asked, taking his hands into hers.

Harry started to relax a bit seeing that she was not immediately jumping to conclusions.

"I think I'm having bouts of rage from time to time." said Harry, leaning against Daphne as he too joined her in sitting against the tree on the ground.

"So, when exactly did you notice that you were becoming rageful?"

"The morning when Umbridge was declared High Inquisitor of Hogwarts."

"Could it be that you were just angry more than usual on behalf of Creevey?" Daphne asked.

He took a moment to think it through before slowly nodding.

"Yes, it's possible. I was angry on behalf of Creevey but it's also true that I felt my rage dissipate when I trained with dark spells and elemental magic. The rage would resurface again at some random time and then I'd require to practice again perpetuating the cycle of addiction." said Harry.

"But you admit that you started feeling the effects of this addiction after Creevey's issue became a core issue, right?" Daphne looked imploringly at him with her blue eyes.

"Yes." Harry admitted after giving it some thought.

"Then I'll give you a simple suggestion. If you cannot follow it, we can approach Professor Babbling. Did you know Professor Babbling once served as a Mediwitch in St. Mungo's Hospital?"

"I did not know that." Harry admitted giving some thought to the matter.

"All right. I'll hear out your suggestion before approaching Professor Babbling." Harry came to a decision.

"Okay. So, in mind arts, there is a theory about fissures that form over time inside the mind of a witch or wizard who practices Legilimency and Occlumency. Certain strong emotional connections with an issue or a person could adversely change the mind on a dime. I think this is what is happening with you, Harry." Daphne took a deep breath. "I suggest that you look at Creevey's issue not as something to be fought but as an opportunity."

Harry frowned as he heard Daphne's assessment. "I don't follow."

"Instead of trying to fight for Creevey why don't you take a step back and allow Umbridge to make more mistakes? In short, I'm asking you to do nothing and allow Umbridge free reign in Hogwarts."

Harry was horrified at Daphne's suggestion to step back and allow that pink toad to do as she pleases in Hogwarts.

"Your reaction speaks volumes, Harry. You need to let it go and make this into an opportunity that benefits you." said Daphne.

Harry was just about ready to reject whatever Daphne was suggesting as it involved turning a blind eye to Umbridge torturing children. He was quite aware that he was not an all-encompassing moral person but he drew a line when it comes to torturing innocent children. And kids like Colin Creevey were defenceless because of their

status of being muggleborn. Nonetheless, he was intrigued by what Daphne cooked up in her little head within this short timeframe because he knew she was also a practitioner of Occlumency. Anything she had to say on the subject was intriguing as she had been practising the art far longer than him.

Besides, he could still go for the second option by approaching Professor Babbling. He'd just have to cook up a magical contract to protect his privacy.

"All right. Explain how am I supposed to make an opportunity out of this situation. I'm all ears." said Harry.

Daphne smiled at him before leaning forward and began explaining her idea.