

## *The brewing revolt*

The days following Gryffindor's victory were some of the most pleasant Ginny had experienced that year at Hogwarts. The professors praised her performance during the final match, but none of their compliments compared to what Gwenog Jones had told her.

Despite her good spirits, Neville was determined to bring her back to reality. Whenever he crossed her path, he tried to discuss the D.A. meetings, but Ginny always found an excuse to avoid the topic.

She wasn't the only one. Other students, especially newer recruits, were growing tired of the weekly meetings and refused to participate in what they saw as a borderline military group.

"We're just kids," one of them justified himself when Neville tried to persuade him to attend. "Do you really think we stand a chance against the Death Eaters?"

Neville didn't press the issue, particularly since they were standing in a hallway close to Professor Carrow's classroom.

In the following days, he sought out every D.A. member to invite them to continue the meetings, but very few agreed to maintain the same level of regularity.

"Don't hold it against us, Neville," Hannah said as she found him by the lake in the park. "From what Erine told us, the Carrows are keeping an even closer watch on us."

Neville stared silently at the smooth surface of the lake.

"They've already started interrogating students about a rebellion," she continued. "It's starting to feel like Umbridge's Inquisition all over again."

Neville's eyes widened at the mention of the former Defense Against the Dark Arts professor, who had prohibited them from using magic when their enemies were gaining power. It was her oppressive regime that had motivated Hermione to gather as many students as possible to be trained by Harry.

"But during Umbridge's time, students weren't afraid to stand up to her," he corrected. "Now they're all avoiding me."

Hannah rested her head on his shoulder.

"You're not Harry, Neville," she said gently. "You're not the Chosen One."

Neville recoiled in surprise.

"What are you trying to say?" he asked.

Realizing her words might have been too blunt, Hannah softened her tone.

"I mean, there's no obligation for you to take on this challenge. You don't owe anyone anything."

Neville had had enough. He stood abruptly and began to walk away, but stopped for a moment.

"That's where you're wrong," he said.

Hannah frowned, puzzled.

"I owe it to my parents," he added. "I owe it to their sacrifice for giving no information to the Death Eaters who tortured them. I owe it to ensure their sacrifice wasn't in vain."

With that, he left her by the lake and walked away.

Rather than returning to the castle, he headed toward Hagrid's hut to pay him a visit.

Seeing light emanating from the hut, he approached and heard two voices speaking in hushed tones, as if they were trying not to be overheard.

"You've got to bring more people in," Hagrid was saying. "If we rely solely on the Order, we'll never manage to defeat the Death Eaters."

At the mention of the Death Eaters, Neville knocked on the door. The voices fell silent, and for a moment, he thought they might pretend no one was home. But Hagrid eventually called out.

"Who's there?"

"It's Neville," he replied. "I need to talk to you, Hagrid."

The half-giant cracked the door open, his shaggy head appearing through the gap.

"What do you want, Neville?" he asked. "I can't talk right now. Come back later."

He made to shut the door when Neville mentioned Harry's name.

Hagrid reopened the door, stepping outside to his full towering height.

"You shouldn't say his name so lightly," he scolded. "Especially not right now."

Neville sighed.

"I really need to talk to you. I don't know who you're with, but I need your help to deal with the Carrows."

Hagrid's eyes widened. In a flash, he grabbed Neville by the collar and pulled him inside before slamming the door shut.

"Never say that again!" Hagrid bellowed. "What if they heard you? Do you want to end up under the Cruciatu Curse?"

Neville shook his head, fully aware of the recklessness of his words.

While Hagrid bolted the door behind them, Neville took the opportunity to glance around the hut. It hadn't changed much since the time he'd accompanied Hagrid to track down a unicorn in the Forbidden Forest.

It just seemed smaller.

"Who's your guest, Hagrid?" Neville asked, recognizing the second voice.

He turned to see a man not much taller than himself, with red hair and freckles that left no doubt about his identity.

"You're a Weasley, aren't you?" Neville guessed.

The man pressed a finger to his lips and drew his wand to point it at the door where Hagrid stood.

"Silencio! Ensuring we're not overheard again," the man explained.

Neville saw no visible change but nodded in understanding.

"Considering you overheard us from outside, I'd rather be safe," the man added, stowing his wand under a tattered cloak.

He gestured for Neville to sit at the oversized table with him.

The man's arms and face were covered with so many freckles they almost looked like a tan. A scar ran across his cheek, and a long slash marked his arm.

"You're Charlie Weasley," Neville realized.

The man nodded.

"How did you know?"

"I've met most of Ron's brothers," Neville explained. "He's talked about his older brothers Bill and Charlie a lot. He always emphasized your work with dragons in Romania"

Charlie noticed Neville's eyes lingering on the scar along his arm.

"Not exactly subtle, am I?" he joked, pulling his cloak over the injury.

"What are you doing here, Neville?" Hagrid asked as he joined them. "You should be back at the castle by now."

Neville glanced at his watch.

"I've got a bit of time before curfew," he replied. "I needed to talk to you, Hagrid."

"Talk about what?"

"The D.A. is falling apart," Neville admitted.

"The D.A.?" Charlie asked. "What's that?"

Hagrid sighed.

"Dumbledore's Army," he explained. "A group Harry formed when the Ministry sacked Dumbledore as Headmaster. They were preparing for You-Know-Who's return."

Charlie nodded.

"Ah, yeah! Fred and George mentioned it to me once."

Hagrid ignored him.

"It's a good thing you've stopped," he said. "It's too dangerous to oppose the Carrows and Snape now."

Neville frowned.

"Are you kidding, Hagrid?!" he burst out. "After everything that's happened. After all the deaths. Harry's godfather. Professor Dumbledore. How many more casualties are we going to accept before we fight back?"

Hagrid sighed. He grabbed a bottle of Firewhisky the size of a barrel and set it on the table, accompanied by three glasses as tall as buckets.

"We can't keep putting you in danger," he said. "We swore to Dumbledore that none of you would join the Order, and we've already failed by letting Harry, Ron, and Hermione go off on their mission."

Neville flinched.

"What mission?" he asked.

Charlie nudged Hagrid sharply with his elbow.

"You're not supposed to know, Neville," Charlie said. "It's better if you stay in the dark for now."

Neville slammed his fist on the table, startling Hagrid, who choked on his drink.

"Stop treating us like kids!" Neville exclaimed. "I'm seventeen. I'm not a child anymore. Even though I'm still in school, I'm perfectly capable of making my own decisions."

Charlie sighed, a small smile on his lips.

"You're all the same."

Neville glared at him, but Charlie's green eyes, stern and resolute, didn't waver.

"Don't think we don't trust you, Neville," Charlie said. "It's just that we're not in a position to do anything right now. But I can assure you, we're working on it."

"How?" Neville asked.

"By recruiting. Not just here in Britain, but in other places — like Romania, for instance."

Neville nodded slowly.

Charlie placed a friendly hand on his shoulder.

"You're not alone, Neville. You're not the only one who believes there's still hope."

Neville stayed with them a little longer until Hagrid decided it was time to escort him back to the castle, where Professor Flitwick met him.

"Thank you, Hagrid," Flitwick said in his high-pitched voice.

Hagrid nodded and headed back to his cabin.

Neville watched him go and finally understood why he'd seen less and less of him in the castle. Hagrid was no longer welcome since Snape had taken over as headmaster. The Ministry's decrees had finally extended to Hogwarts.

Neville headed to the Great Hall for dinner, though he didn't have much of an appetite. He picked at his food, spearing a few cauliflower florets while Seamus and An looked at him in surprise.

"Something wrong?" Seamus asked.

Neville shrugged.

"Better to ask what's right," he replied. "Everyone's abandoning us. The professors don't even try to stand up to the Carrows' punishments anymore. Our friends would rather hide than prepare to fight. Should I go on?"

Seamus understood how Neville felt but couldn't help smiling.

"I think I've got news that might cheer you up."

Neville stared at him, confused.

Seamus gestured for him to follow, leaving the Great Hall under Ginny Weasley's curious gaze. Neville and An trailed after him as he climbed the stairs to the Gryffindor Tower.

But instead of continuing down the corridor toward the Fat Lady's portrait, Seamus took a different path toward the Astronomy Tower. They eventually reached the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy and his futile attempt to teach trolls ballet.

They passed the tapestry three times, concentrating hard on where they wanted to go, and the Room of Requirement appeared.

Inside, Seamus pulled a letter from his robe pocket. Seeing it, Neville's eyes widened.

"Is that from Dean?!" he exclaimed.

Seamus nodded, grinning like a madman.

"You've already read it?"

Seamus nodded again.

"Good news?"

Seamus handed him the parchment.

"Read it yourself."

Neville took the letter and began to read.

*Dear Seamus,*

*I hope you're doing well. Sorry I couldn't write sooner, but I had a bit of trouble with our friend, the Little Prince, and his family. Thanks to some allies, we managed to deal with him and find refuge with your bunkmate's eldest brother.*

*I'm fine, don't worry. But I think our wand-maker friend will need a bit of a rest.*

*Also, greetings from our eccentric Ravenclaw friend, who's here with me right now.*

*The most important news is that our scarred friend said he has to go to Gringotts to retrieve something that could help us take down the snake.*

*Don't worry about us or try to send more letters. Things are about to move, so stay on your guard and do what you do best — start fires when the time comes.*

*See you soon for another adventure.*

*Your friend.*

When Neville finished reading, he looked up at Seamus, whose eyes were bright with tears.

"He's alive," Neville noted.

"Alive and well," Seamus added.

An grabbed the letter to read it but gave up after three tries.

"I can't make sense of this," he joked. "Your friend sure knows how to cover his tracks."

Seamus and Neville ignored him.

"Do you think he's with one of Ron's brothers?" Neville guessed.

"Seems like it," Seamus confirmed, rereading the letter.

"And he's found Luna," Neville added, pointing to the mention of their eccentric Ravenclaw friend.

The two boys embraced, leaving An baffled as he watched the emotional scene.

"So, what's the plan?" An asked, reminding them he was still there.

Neville started to think. Charlie Weasley and Hagrid had warned him not to act against the Carrows, fearing they'd take it out on the other students.

"The other professors won't let that happen," Neville thought aloud. "They'll fight back and drive them out of the school."

"It's time to take up arms," he declared.

"Their reign has gone on long enough."

Seamus and An exchanged amused glances and nodded.

"Got a plan?" they asked in unison.

Neville opened his mouth to respond but stopped short. He wanted to rally the entire DA, but no one was willing to risk it anymore. The danger was too great.

Since Luna's disappearance over Christmas break, the resistance had grown quieter. Despite their participation in the older students' lessons, no one dared openly oppose the Carrows' rule.

Neville's eyes lit up.

"I've got it," he said, clenching Dean's letter in his fist. "We need to act fast."

He dashed out of the room, his friends on his heels.

"Where are you going?" Seamus called after him.

"The library," Neville replied.

He dashed up the stairs, leaving his two friends behind, and rushed to the second floor. Upon entering the library, he was immediately spotted by Madam Pince, who silenced him with a finger pressed to her lips.

Neville apologized with a quick nod and tiptoed through the aisles. He wandered among the shelves until he spotted Erine seated across from another student.

As he moved closer, he recognized the pale hair of Attilius. It couldn't be. Erine couldn't have betrayed them. She had been instrumental in creating the new enchanted Galleons. She had conducted most of the training sessions because of her advanced magical knowledge.

He turned to retreat, but she noticed him and motioned for him to come over. With no other option, Neville approached and greeted them both.

"What are you doing here?" she asked. "I don't see you in the library often."

Neville glanced nervously at Attilius, who caught on quickly.



“I think he wants to talk to you alone,” Attilius said, closing his book and stepping away to sit at another table further off. Neville nodded his thanks and took the vacant seat.

“Why don’t you want him to hear this?” she asked, visibly hurt by his abruptness.

“I need to talk to you about the DA,” Neville whispered.

Erine’s eyes widened at the mention of their little group of rebels.

“I thought I told you we needed to ease off our meetings to avoid getting caught,” she said, her voice low but firm.

Neville nodded, fully aware that they had narrowly avoided detection by the Carrows.

“I’ve learned that Harry, Ron, and Hermione managed to escape Malfoy Manor where they were being held. They also freed Luna and one of our Muggle-born friends.”

Erine’s eyes narrowed with suspicion.

“Who told you that?”

Neville pulled the letter from his pocket and handed it to her.

“The Muggle-born friend himself,” he said.

Erine read the letter quickly and immediately sensed something was off. While she knew it was dangerous for a Muggle-born to sign their name or send clear details in a letter, this one seemed too obvious for someone exercising caution.

“Even if this letter is genuine,” she began, “I don’t think we should take its contents at face value.”

Neville flinched at her skepticism. He understood doubting the author’s identity if one didn’t know them, but he was sure it was Dean.

“Let’s assume it is your friend,” she continued. “What do you expect us to do with this information?”

“We need to spread the rumor across the school,” Neville explained. “The Carrows rule through fear. We can outsmart them by refusing to be intimidated.”

“And do you have any specific actions in mind?”

Neville nodded.

“Each house needs to spread the word that they’ve received news from Harry. Just the mention of his name will give the students hope. It’ll remind them that it’s not too late, and that rebellion is still possible.”

Erine fell silent for a moment, lost in thought.

Meanwhile, Neville’s gaze wandered until he spotted Attilius sitting alone in a distant corner of the room.

“You’re probably right,” Erine admitted. “We need to act. If we keep going like this, they’ll end up controlling the entire school.”

Neville beamed at her. He shared the details of what he needed her to do, then left the library.

Erine watched him leave before walking over to Attilius in his secluded spot.

“Mind if I join you?” she asked.

The Slytherin glanced around before replying.

“Are you sure you want to be seen with me?”

She rolled her eyes.

“Don’t be dramatic,” she replied. “You don’t have dragon pox or anything.”

He shrugged.

“Sometimes, I think that would actually help my reputation.”

She chuckled and plopped down beside him. They sat in silence for a few minutes before she spoke again.

“Neville wants to restart the DA,” she said.

Attilius held up a hand to stop her.

“Don’t tell me more,” he said. “The less I know, the less he knows.”

He tapped his forearm, and Erine immediately understood whom he meant. She often forgot that Attilius was marked as a Death Eater and that it was safer for him to stay uninformed.

She decided to leave him alone and headed toward the Ravenclaw Tower to pass on the information to others. On her way out, she detoured to greet Rolf, who was working amidst a group of Hufflepuffs. She whispered something in his ear and gestured subtly toward Attilius.

Attilius pretended not to notice and focused intently on his Poisons and Antidotes textbook. He didn't look up until a loud throat-clearing caught his attention.

He raised his gaze to find his tall friend standing over him.

"Mind if I join you?" Rolf asked.

Attilius nodded.

Rolf sat across from him, and for a long moment, neither of them spoke.

"Interesting read?" Rolf finally asked, nodding toward the book in Attilius's hands.

Attilius shrugged.

"I've read better."

"Studying for your NEWTs?"

"Yes," Attilius confirmed. "The exams are coming up soon, so I need to catch up."

Rolf nodded thoughtfully.

"You haven't been very attentive in class lately," he remarked.

Attilius rolled his eyes before replying.

"Let's just say I had other priorities. Now I'm trying to refocus."

Rolf sighed.

"Well, your priorities have certainly shifted quickly."

Attilius shot him a sharp look, slamming his book shut so loudly that the sound echoed across the library, drawing stares from nearby students.

"What's that supposed to mean?" he demanded.

Rolf, unfazed, met his glare. "I mean that ever since your little secret discovery, you've set aside everything we shared and completely forgotten about me."

Attilius felt the full weight of his friend's frustration. He understood why Rolf was upset — his attention had indeed been elsewhere since he discovered the Pensieve's cave. He had neglected not only his friendship with Rolf but also the mission assigned to him by the Dark Lord.

When tasked with dismantling Neville Longbottom's fledgling resistance, Attilius had seen it as an opportunity to undermine his master and seize power for

himself. Like Voldemort, he believed in empowering the strongest witches and wizards, though he wasn't as extreme. He had once thought this vision served the greater good.

But everything had changed after delving into Salazar Slytherin's memories in the Pensieve. While many considered Slytherin a monster, few knew the depths of his true motivations.

"I understand," Attilius confessed. "I haven't been as honest with you as you deserved. I should have confided in you more."

Rolf wanted to respond, but he didn't have the strength. His friend was admitting his mistakes, and Rolf knew perfectly well that, despite his flaws, Attilius deserved a second chance. That's what he'd always been taught.

As he was about to reply, a sound like an explosion echoed through the library walls, shaking them. Everyone froze, ears straining.

A second explosion, louder than the first, rattled the room. Books tumbled from the shelves, students were thrown back from their tables, and dust began to rain down from the ceiling.

Rolf and Attilius exchanged a glance before rushing outside, closely followed by Madam Pince and the other students.

They followed the tremors, which led them to a classroom on the third floor: the Dark Magic Arts room.

Usually impeccably tidy, the room now looked like a battlefield. Tables were overturned, a thick layer of sawdust covered the floor, and graffiti sprawled across the walls.

"Dumbledore's Army, recruitment ongoing,"

Rolf read aloud. He turned to the blackboard, where the words were scrawled: "The Chosen One will triumph! Voldemort will fall!"

A gruff voice reached them from the corridor. They turned and saw the tall, broad silhouette of Amycus Carrow. With bloodshot eyes, the professor stormed into his classroom, shards of broken glass crunching under his massive feet.

"Who did this?" he bellowed, pointing at Harry Potter's nickname. "Who dared to write that?"

The two boys shrugged simultaneously.

"Don't lie!" he roared. "I'm certain it was one of you two."

He strode over to Rolf and grabbed him by the collar.

"I think a good session of punishment will loosen your tongues."

Attilius stepped between them.

"We had nothing to do with this," he intervened. "We were in the library when we heard the commotion, just like you must have."

Amycus Carrow raised his hand in fury but was stopped by Professor McGonagall, who appeared in the doorway.

"What's going on, Professor?" she asked, her gaze fixed on his raised hand.

"I caught these students trashing my classroom," he declared. "I was about to discipline them."

McGonagall took a step forward, revealing the other Heads of House standing behind her in the hallway.

"Do you have any proof that these students were responsible?" she pressed.

"Proof?" he sneered. "They were at the scene of the crime. That's proof enough to warrant punishment."

McGonagall spun around to examine the graffiti on the walls. From the hallway, Neville, who had just joined the crowd, thought he saw a fleeting smile on the Gryffindor Head's lips.

"So, according to you, these two boys — among our most talented students — are foolish enough to vandalize your classroom by referencing the Undesirable No. 1 and then linger here until you arrive?"

Amycus, whose reasoning skills were not his strongest suit, froze for a moment as he processed her statement.

"Are you suggesting I shouldn't punish them?" he asked finally.

"I believe you should punish whoever is truly responsible for this chaos," McGonagall replied.

"Fine," Carrow agreed.

He turned to the crowd, his wand pointed at them.

"So, who's going to confess?" he demanded.

The students glanced at one another, waiting for someone to step forward. No one did.

"No one?" he repeated. "Are you sure?"

He waited another moment, but silence reigned.

"In that case, I'll have to pick someone at random."

He took a step toward the hallway, but McGonagall blocked his path.

"You can't seriously intend to punish a random student," she protested.

Amycus smirked.

"I have no choice. Someone has to pay for this."

Before she could argue further, new explosions resounded throughout the castle. Without hesitation, everyone rushed toward the noise, which led them to Moaning Myrtle's bathroom on the second floor.

From the corridor, a crowd of students and professors had gathered outside the flooded restroom.

"Move aside!" Alecto Carrow shouted. "Let me through!"

She pushed her way through the crowd and found doors torn from their hinges, pipes spewing torrents of water, and shards of porcelain littering the floor.

"Who did this?!" she yelled.

No one answered.

Amycus elbowed his way through the crowd to join his sister. Together, they inspected the restroom, searching for any clue to the culprit's identity.

"An accident, I presume," Amycus said mockingly, directing his comment to Professor McGonagall.

She shrugged, feigning helplessness.

"I have no idea what could have happened," she replied.

"Oh, I'll tell you what happened," a voice declared from behind them.

The crowd turned to see the dark figure of the headmaster, his greasy hair hanging over his piercing black eyes.

The students parted to let him through. He joined the Carrows, running his hand over the name of Dumbledore's Army, a cruel smile playing on his lips.

"It seems some of our students have decided to revive that little defense group organized by our dearly esteemed Mr. Potter," he said.

At the mention of Harry Potter's name, the Carrows clutched their left forearms. Out of the corner of his eye, Rolf noticed Attilius doing the same. His friend winced, clearly in agony from some indescribable pain. Rolf said nothing, merely watching the headmaster's next move.

The headmaster's gaze locked onto Neville in the crowd. His dark eyes bore into Neville's, searching for answers.

"It appears," the headmaster began, "that I must grant our two esteemed colleagues more freedom to administer... stricter punishments."

He offered the Carrows a wicked grin.

"I have just received a directive from the Minister of Magic himself," he announced, holding up a parchment. "He has decreed that any mention of affiliation with the Undesirable No. 1 will result in immediate expulsion from our school."

His gaze swept across the crowd, lingering on the professors.

"To ensure our students have the opportunity to pursue their studies without disruption, I have no choice but to grant full authority to our staff to impose whatever punishments they deem necessary."

He paused dramatically before adding:

"All is fair in war."