

"Wonder if Percy knows all that stuff about Crouch?" Ron said as they walked up the drive to the castle. "But maybe he doesn't care . . . It'd probably just make him admire Crouch even more. Yeah, Percy loves rules. He'd just say Crouch was refusing to break them for his own son."

"Percy would never throw any of his family to the dementors," said Hermione severely.

"I don't know," said Ron. "If he thought we were standing in the way of his career . . . Percy's really ambitious, you know. ..."

They walked up the stone steps into the entrance hall, where the delicious smells of dinner wafted toward them from the Great Hall.

"Poor old Snuffles," said Ron, breathing deeply. "He must really like you. Harry. . . . Imagine having to live off rats."

Harry, Ron, and Hermione went up to the Owlery after breakfast on Sunday to send a letter to Percy, asking, as Sirius had suggested, whether he had seen Mr. Crouch lately. They used Hedwig, because it had been so long since she'd had a job. When they had watched her fly out of sight through the Owlery window, they proceeded down to the kitchen to give Dobby his new socks.

The house-elves gave them a very cheery welcome, bowing and curtsying and bustling around making tea again. Dobby was ecstatic about his present.

"Harry Potter is too good to Dobby!" he squeaked, wiping large tears out of his enormous eyes.

"You saved my life with that gillyweed, Dobby, you really did," said Harry.

"No chance of more of those eclairs, is there?" said Ron, who was looking around at the beaming and bowing house-elves.

"You've just had breakfast!" said Hermione irritably, but a great silver platter of eclairs was already zooming toward them, supported by four elves.

"We should get some stuff to send up to Snuffles," Harry muttered.

"Good idea," said Ron. "Give Pig something to do. You couldn't give us a bit of extra food, could you?" he said to the surrounding elves, and they bowed delightedly and hurried off to get some more.

"Dobby, where's Winky?" said Hermione, who was looking around.

"Winky is over there by the fire, miss," said Dobby quietly, his ears drooping slightly.

"Oh dear," said Hermione as she spotted Winky.

Harry looked over at the fireplace too. Winky was sitting on the same stool as last time, but she had allowed herself to become so filthy that she was not immediately distinguishable from the smoke-blackened brick behind her. Her clothes were ragged and unwashed. She was clutching a bottle of butterbeer and swaying slightly on her stool, staring into the fire. As they watched her, she gave an enormous hiccup.

"Winky is getting through six bottles a day now," Dobby whispered to Harry.

"Well, it's not strong, that stuff," Harry said.

But Dobby shook his head. "'Tis strong for a house-elf, sir," he said.

Winky hiccuped again. The elves who had brought the eclairs gave her disapproving looks as they returned to work.

"Winky is pining, Harry Potter," Dobby whispered sadly. "Winky wants to go home. Winky still thinks Mr. Crouch is her master, sir, and nothing Dobby says will persuade her that Professor Dumbledore is her master now."

"Hey, Winky," said Harry, struck by a sudden inspiration, walking over to her, and bending down, "you don't know what Mr. Crouch might be up to, do you? Because he's stopped turning up to judge the Triwizard Tournament."

Winky's eyes flickered. Her enormous pupils focused on Harry. She swayed slightly again and then said, "M - Master is stopped - hic - coming?"

"Yeah," said Harry, "we haven't seen him since the first task. The Daily Prophet's saying he's ill."

Winky swayed some more, staring blurrily at Harry.

"Master- hic- ill?"

Her bottom lip began to tremble.

"But we're not sure if that's true," said Hermione quickly.

"Master is needing his - hie - Winky!" whimpered the elf. "Master cannot - hic - manage - hic - all by himself. . . ."

"Other people manage to do their own housework, you know, Winky," Hermione said severely.

"Winky - hic - is not only - hic - doing housework for Mr. Crouch!" Winky squeaked indignantly, swaying worse than ever and slopping butterbeer down her already heavily stained blouse. "Master is - hic - trusting Winky with - hic - the most important - hic - the most secret..."

"What?" said Harry.

But Winky shook her head very hard, spilling more butterbeer down herself.

"Winky keeps - hic - her master's secrets," she said mutinously, swaying very heavily now, frowning up at Harry with her eyes crossed. "You is - hic - nosing, you is."

"Winky must not talk like that to Harry Potter!" said Dobby angrily. "Harry Potter is brave and noble and Harry Potter is not nosy!"

"He is nosing - hic - into my master's - hic - private and secret - hic - Winky is a good house-elf- hic - Winky keeps her silence - hic - people trying to - hic - pry and poke - hic -" Winky's eyelids drooped and suddenly, without warning, she slid off her stool into the hearth, snoring loudly. The empty bottle of butterbeer rolled away across the stone-flagged floor. Half a dozen house-elves came hurrying forward, looking disgusted. One of them picked up the bottle; the others covered Winky with a large checked tablecloth and tucked the ends in neatly, hiding her from view.

"We is sorry you had to see that, sirs and miss!" squeaked a nearby elf, shaking his head and looking very ashamed. "We is hoping you will not judge us all by Winky, sirs and miss!"

"She's unhappy!" said Hermione, exasperated. "Why don't you try and cheer her up instead of covering her up?"

"Begging your pardon, miss," said the house-elf, bowing deeply again, "but house-elves has no right to be unhappy when there is work to be done and masters to be served."

"Oh for heavens sake!" Hermione cried. "Listen to me, all of you! You've got just as much right as wizards to be unhappy! You've got the right to wages and holidays and proper clothes, you don't have to do everything you're told - look at Dobby!"

"Miss will please keep Dobby out of this," Dobby mumbled, looking scared. The cheery smiles had vanished from the faces of the house-elves around the kitchen. They were suddenly looking at Hermione as though she were mad and dangerous.

"We has your extra food!" squeaked an elf at Harry's elbow, and he shoved a large ham, a dozen cakes, and some fruit into Harry's arms. "Good-bye!"

The house-elves crowded around Harry, Ron, and Hermione and began shunting them out of the kitchen, many little hands pushing in the smalls of their backs.

"Thank you for the socks, Harry Potter!" Dobby called miserably from the hearth, where he was standing next to the lumpy tablecloth that was Winky.

"You couldn't keep your mouth shut, could you, Hermione?" said Ron angrily as the kitchen door slammed shut behind them. "They won't want us visiting them now! We could've tried to get more stuff out of Winky about Crouch!"

"Oh as if you care about that!" scoffed Hermione. "You only like coming down here for the food!"

It was an irritable sort of day after that. Harry got so tired of Ron and Hermione sniping at each other over their homework in the common room that he took Sirius's food up to the Owlery that evening on his own.

Pigwidgeon was much too small to carry an entire ham up to the mountain by himself, so Harry enlisted the help of two school screech owls as well. When they had set off into the dusk, looking extremely odd carrying the large package between them. Harry leaned on the windowsill, looking out at the grounds, at the dark, rustling treetops of the Forbidden Forest, and the rippling sails of the Durmstrang ship. An eagle owl flew through the coil of smoke rising from Hagrids chimney; it soared toward the castle, around the Owlery, and out of sight. Looking down, Harry saw Hagrid digging energetically in front of his cabin. Harry wondered what he was doing; it looked as though he were making a new vegetable patch. As he watched, Madame Maxime emerged from the Beauxbatons carriage and walked over to Hagrid. She appeared to be trying to engage him in conversation. Hagrid leaned upon his spade, but did not seem keen to prolong their talk, because Madame Maxime returned to the carriage shortly afterward.

Unwilling to go back to Gryffindor Tower and listen to Ron and Hermione snarling at each other, Harry watched Hagrid digging until the darkness swallowed him and the owls around Harry began to awake, swooshing past him into the night.

By breakfast the next day Ron's and Hermione's bad moods had burnt out, and to Harrys relief, Ron's dark predictions that the house-elves would send substandard food up to the Gryffindor table because Hermione had insulted them proved false; the bacon, eggs, and kippers were quite as good as usual.

When the post owls arrived, Hermione looked up eagerly; she seemed to be expecting something.

"Percy won't've had time to answer yet," said Ron. "We only sent Hedwig yesterday."

"No, it's not that," said Hermione. "I've taken out a subscription to the Daily Prophet. I'm getting sick of finding everything out from the Slytherins."

"Good thinking!" said Harry, also looking up at the owls. "Hey, Hermione, I think you're in luck -"

A gray owl was soaring down toward Hermione.

"It hasn't got a newspaper, though," she said, looking disappointed. "It's -"

But to her bewilderment, the gray owl landed in front of her plate, closely followed by four barn owls, a brown owl, and a tawny.

"How many subscriptions did you take out?" said Harry, seizing Hermione's goblet before it was knocked over by the cluster of owls, all of whom were jostling close to her, trying to deliver their own letter first.

"What on earth - ?" Hermione said, taking the letter from the gray owl, opening it, and starting to read. "Oh really!" she sputtered, going rather red.

"What's up?" said Ron.

"It's - oh how ridiculous -"

She thrust the letter at Harry, who saw that it was not handwritten, but composed from pasted letters that seemed to have been cut out of the Daily Prophet.

YOU ARE A WICKED GIRL. HARRY POTTER DESERVES

BETTER. GO BACK WHERE YOU CAME FROM MUGGLE.

"They're all like it!" said Hermione desperately, opening one letter after another. "'Harry Potter can do much better than the likes of you. . . .' 'You deserve to be boiled in frog spawn. . . .' Ouch!"

She had opened the last envelope, and yellowish-green liquid smelling strongly of petrol gushed over her hands, which began to erupt in large yellow boils.

"Undiluted bubotuber pus!" said Ron, picking up the envelope gingerly and sniffing it.

"Ow!" said Hermione, tears starting in her eyes as she tried to rub the pus off her hands with a napkin, but her fingers were now so thickly covered in painful sores that it looked as though she were wearing a pair of thick, knobbly gloves.

"You'd better get up to the hospital wing," said Harry as the owls around Hermione took flight. "We'll tell Professor Sprout where you've gone. . . ."

"I warned her!" said Ron as Hermione hurried out of the Great Hall, cradling her hands. "I warned her not to annoy Rita Skeeter! Look at this one ..." He read out one of the letters Hermione had left behind: "I read In Witch Weekly about how you are playing Harry Potter false and that boy has had enough hardship and I will be sending you a curse by next post as soon as I can find a big enough envelope.' Blimey, she'd better watch out for herself." Hermione didn't turn up for Herbology. As Harry and Ron left the greenhouse for their Care of Magical Creatures class, they saw Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle descending the stone steps of the castle. Pansy Parkinson was whispering and giggling behind them with her gang of Slytherin girls. Catching sight of Harry, Pansy called, "Potter, have you split up with your girlfriend? Why was she so upset at breakfast?"

Harry ignored her; he didn't want to give her the satisfaction of knowing how much trouble the Witch Weekly article had caused.

Hagrid, who had told them last lesson that they had finished with unicorns, was waiting for them outside his cabin with a fresh supply of open crates at his feet. Harry's heart sank at the sight of the crates - surely not another skrewt hatching? - but when he got near enough to see inside, he found himself looking at a number of flurry black creatures with long snouts. Their front paws were curiously flat, like spades, and they were blinking up at the class, looking politely puzzled at all the attention.

"These're niffles," said Hagrid, when the class had gathered around. "Yeh find 'em down mines mostly. They like sparkly stuff. . . . There yeh go, look."

One of the niffles had suddenly leapt up and attempted to bite Pansy Parkinson's watch off her wrist. She shrieked and jumped backward.

"Useful little treasure detectors," said Hagrid happily. "Thought we'd have some fun with 'em today. See over there?" He pointed at the large patch of freshly turned earth Harry had watched him digging from the Owlery window. "I've buried some gold coins. I've got a prize fer whoever picks the niffle that digs up most. Jus' take off all yer valuables, an' choose a niffle, an get ready ter set 'em loose."

Harry took off his watch, which he was only wearing out of habit, as it didn't work anymore, and stuffed it into his pocket. Then he picked up a niffle. It put its long snout in Harry's ear and sniffed enthusiastically. It was really quite cuddly.

"Hang on," said Hagrid, looking down into the crate, "there's a spare niffle here . . . who's missin? Where's Hermione?"

"She had to go to the hospital wing," said Ron.

"We'll explain later," Harry muttered; Pansy Parkinson was listening.

It was easily the most fun they had ever had in Care of Magical Creatures. The niffles dived in and out of the patch of earth as though it were water, each scurrying back to the student

who had released it and spitting gold into their hands. Ron's was particularly efficient; it had soon filled his lap with coins.

"Can you buy these as pets, Hagrid?" he asked excitedly as his niffler dived back into the soil, splattering his robes.

"Yer mum wouldn't be happy, Ron," said Hagrid, grinning. "They wreck houses, nifflers. I reckon they've nearly got the lot, now," he added, pacing around the patch of earth while the nifflers continued to dive. "I on'y buried a hundred coins. Oh there y'are, Hermione!"

Hermione was walking toward them across the lawn. Her hands were very heavily bandaged and she looked miserable. Pansy Parkinson was watching her beadily.

"Well, let's check how yeh've done!" said Hagrid. "Count yer coins! An' there's no point tryin' ter steal any, Goyle," he added, his beetle-black eyes narrowed. "It's leprechaun gold.

Vanishes after a few hours."

Goyle emptied his pockets, looking extremely sulky. It turned out that Ron's niffler had been most successful, so Hagrid gave him an enormous slab of Honeydukes chocolate for a prize. The bell rang across the grounds for lunch; the rest of the class set off back to the castle, but Harry, Ron, and Hermione stayed behind to help Hagrid put the nifflers back in their boxes. Harry noticed Madame Maxime watching them out other carriage window.

"What yeh done ter your hands, Hermione?" said Hagrid, looking concerned.

Hermione told him about the hate mail she had received that morning, and the envelope full of bubotuber pus.

"Aaah, don worry," said Hagrid gendy, looking down at her. "I got some o' those letters an all, after Rita Skeeter wrote abou me mum. 'Yeh're a monster an yeh should be put down.' 'Yer mother killed innocent people an if you had any decency you d jump in a lake.'"

"No!" said Hermione, looking shocked.

"Yeah," said Hagrid, heaving the niffler crates over by his cabin wall. "They're jus' nutters, Hermione. Don' open 'em if yeh get any more. Chuck 'em straigh' in the fire."

"You missed a really good lesson," Harry told Hermione as they headed back toward the castle. "They're good, nifflers, aren't they, Ron?"

Ron, however, was frowning at the chocolate Hagrid had given him. He looked thoroughly put out about something.

"What's the matter?" said Harry. "Wrong flavor?"

"No," said Ron shortly. "Why didn't you tell me about the gold?"

"What gold?" said Harry.

"The gold I gave you at the Quidditch World Cup," said Ron. "The leprechaun gold I gave you for my Omnioculars. In the Top Box. Why didn't you tell me it disappeared?"

Harry had to think for a moment before he realized what Ron was talking about.

"Oh . . ." he said, the memory coming back to him at last. "I dunno ... I never noticed it had gone. I was more worried about my wand, wasn't I?"

They climbed the steps into the entrance hall and went into the Great Hall for lunch.

"Must be nice," Ron said abruptly, when they had sat down and started serving themselves roast beef and Yorkshire puddings. "To have so much money you don't notice if a pocketful of Galleons goes missing."

"Listen, I had other stuff on my mind that night!" said Harry impatiently. "We all did, remember?"

"I didn't know leprechaun gold vanishes," Ron muttered. "I thought I was paying you back. You shouldn't've given me that Chudley Cannon hat for Christmas."

"Forget it, all right?" said Harry.

Ron speared a roast potato on the end of his fork, glaring at it. Then he said, "I hate being poor."

Harry and Hermione looked at each other. Neither of them really knew what to say.

"It's rubbish," said Ron, still glaring down at his potato. "I don't blame Fred and George for trying to make some extra money. Wish I could. Wish I had a niffler."

"Well, we know what to get you next Christmas," said Hermione brightly. Then, when Ron continued to look gloomy, she said, "Come on, Ron, it could be worse. At least your fingers aren't full of pus." Hermione was having a lot of difficulty managing her knife and fork, her fingers were so stiff and swollen. "I hate that Skeeter woman!" she burst out savagely. "I'll get her back for this if it's the last thing I do!"

Hate mail continued to arrive for Hermione over the following week, and although she followed Hagrid's advice and stopped opening it, several of her ill-wishers sent Howlers, which exploded at the Gryffindor table and shrieked insults at her for the whole Hall to hear. Even those people who didn't read Witch Weekly knew all about the supposed Harry-Krum-Hermione triangle now. Harry was getting sick of telling people that Hermione wasn't his girlfriend.

"It'll die down, though," he told Hermione, "if we just ignore it. ... People got bored with that stuff she wrote about me last time

"I want to know how she's listening into private conversations when she's supposed to be banned from the grounds!" said Hermione angrily.

Hermione hung back in their next Defense Against the Dark Arts lesson to ask Professor Moody something. The rest of the class was very eager to leave; Moody had given them such a rigorous test of hex-deflection that many of them were nursing small injuries. Harry had such a bad case of Twitchy Ears, he had to hold his hands clamped over them as he walked away from the class.

"Well, Rita's definitely not using an Invisibility Cloak!" Hermione panted five minutes later, catching up with Harry and Ron in the entrance hall and pulling Harry's hand away from one of his wiggling ears so that he could hear her. "Moody says he didn't see her anywhere near the judges' table at the second task, or anywhere near the lake!"

"Hermione, is there any point in telling you to drop this?" said Ron.

"No!" said Hermione stubbornly. "I want to know how she heard me talking to Viktor! And how she found out about Hagrid's mum!"

"Maybe she had you bugged," said Harry.

"Bugged?" said Ron blankly. "What. . . put fleas on her or something?"

Harry started explaining about hidden microphones and recording equipment. Ron was fascinated, but Hermione interrupted them.

"Aren't you two ever going to read Hogwarts, A History?"

"What's the point?" said Ron. "You know it by heart, we can just ask you."

"All those substitutes for magic Muggles use - electricity, computers, and radar, and all those things - they all go haywire around Hogwarts, there's too much magic in the air. No, Rita's using magic to eavesdrop, she must be. ... If I could just find out what it is ... ooh, if it's illegal, I'll have her ..."

"Haven't we got enough to worry about?" Ron asked her. "Do we have to start a vendetta against Rita Skeeter as well?"

"I'm not asking you to help!" Hermione snapped. "I'll do it on my own!"

She marched back up the marble staircase without a backward glance. Harry was quite sure she was going to the library.

"What's the betting she comes back with a box of / Hate Rita Skeeter badges?" said Ron.

Hermione, however, did not ask Harry and Ron to help her pursue vengeance against Rita Skeeter, for which they were both grateful, because their workload was mounting ever higher in the days before the Easter holidays. Harry frankly marveled at the fact that Hermione could research magical methods of eavesdropping as well as everything else they had to do. He was working flat-out just to get through all their homework, though he made a point of sending regular food packages up to the cave in the mountain for Sirius; after last summer, Harry had not forgotten what it felt like to be continually hungry. He enclosed notes to Sirius, telling him that nothing out of the ordinary had happened, and that they were still waiting for an answer from Percy.

Hedwig didn't return until the end of the Easter holidays. Percy's letter was enclosed in a package of Easter eggs that Mrs. Weasley had sent. Both Harrys and Ron's were the size of dragon eggs and full of homemade toffee. Hermiones, however, was smaller than a chicken egg. Her face fell when she saw it.

"Your mum doesn't read Witch Weekly, by any chance, does she, Ron?" she asked quietly.

"Yeah," said Ron, whose mouth was full of toffee. "Gets it for the recipes."

Hermione looked sadly at her tiny egg.

"Don't you want to see what Percy's written?" Harry asked her hastily.

Percys letter was short and irritated.

As I am constantly telling the Daily Prophet, Mr. Crouch is taking a well-deserved break. He is sending in regular owls with instructions. No, I haven't actually seen him, but I think I can be trusted to know my own superior's handwriting. I have quite enough to do at the moment without trying to quash these ridiculous rumors. Please don't bother me again unless it's something important. Happy Easter.

The start of the summer term would normally have meant that Harry was training hard for the last Quidditch match of the season. This year, however, it was the third and final task in the Triwizard Tournament for which he needed to prepare, but he still didn't know what he would have to do. Finally, in the last week of May, Professor McGonagall held him back in Transfiguration.

"You are to go down to the Quidditch field tonight at nine o'clock. Potter," she told him. "Mr. Bagman will be there to tell the champions about the third task."

So at half past eight that night. Harry left Ron and Hermione in Gryffindor Tower and went downstairs. As he crossed the entrance hall, Cedric came up from the Hufflepuff common room.

"What d'you reckon it's going to be?" he asked Harry as they went together down the stone steps, out into the cloudy night. "Fleur keeps going on about underground tunnels; she reckons we've got to find treasure."

"That wouldn't be too bad," said Harry, thinking that he would simply ask Hagrid for a niffler to do the job for him.

They walked down the dark lawn to the Quidditch stadium, turned through a gap in the stands, and walked out onto the field.

"What've they done to it?" Cedric said indignantly, stopping dead.

The Quidditch field was no longer smooth and flat. It looked as though somebody had been building long, low walls all over it that twisted and crisscrossed in every direction.

"They're hedges!" said Harry, bending to examine the nearest one.

"Hello there!" called a cheery voice.

Ludo Bagman was standing in the middle of the field with Krum and Fleur. Harry and Cedric made their way toward them, climbing over the hedges. Fleur beamed at Harry as he came

nearer. Her attitude toward him had changed completely since he had saved her sister from the lake.

"Well, what d'you think?" said Bagman happily as Harry and Cedric climbed over the last hedge. "Growing nicely, aren't they? Give them a month and Hagrid'll have them twenty feet high. Don't worry," he added, grinning, spotting the less-than-happy expressions on Harrys and Cedric's faces, "you'll have your Quidditch field back to normal once the task is over! Now, I imagine you can guess what we're making here?"

No one spoke for a moment. Then -

"Maze," grunted Krum.

"That's right!" said Bagman. "A maze. The third task's really very straightforward. The Triwizard Cup will be placed in the center of the maze. The first champion to touch it will receive full marks."

"We seemly 'ave to get through the maze?" said Fleur.

"There will be obstacles," said Bagman happily, bouncing on the balls of his feet. "Hagrid is providing a number of creatures . . . then there will be spells that must be broken ... all that sort of thing, you know. Now, the champions who are leading on points will get a head start into the maze." Bagman grinned at Harry and Cedric. "Then Mr. Krum will enter . . . then Miss Delacour. But you'll all be in with a fighting chance, depending how well you get past the obstacles. Should be fun, eh?"

Harry, who knew only too well the kind of creatures that Hagrid was likely to provide for an event like this, thought it was unlikely to be any fun at all. However, he nodded politely like the other champions.

"Very well. . . if you haven't got any questions, we'll go back up to the castle, shall we, it's a bit chilly. ..."

Bagman hurried alongside Harry as they began to wend their way out of the growing maze. Harry had the feeling that Bagman was going to start offering to help him again, but just then, Krum tapped Harry on the shoulder.

"Could I haff a vord?"

"Yeah, all right," said Harry, slightly surprised.

"Vill you valk vith me?"

"Okay," said Harry curiously.

Bagman looked slightly perturbed.

"I'll wait for you. Harry, shall I?"

"No, it's okay, Mr. Bagman," said Harry, suppressing a smile, "I think I can find the castle on my own, thanks."

Harry and Krum left the stadium together, but Krum did not set a course for the Durmstrang ship. Instead, he walked toward the forest.

"What're we going this way for?" said Harry as they passed Hagrid's cabin and the illuminated Beauxbatons carriage.

"Don't vont to be overheard," said Krum shortly.

When at last they had reached a quiet stretch of ground a short way from the Beauxbatons horses' paddock, Krum stopped in the shade of the trees and turned to face Harry.

"I vant to know," he said, glowering, "vot there is between you and Hermy-own-ninny."

Harry, who from Krum's secretive manner had expected something much more serious than this, stared up at Krum in amazement.

"Nothing," he said. But Krum glowered at him, and Harry, somehow struck anew by how tall Krum was, elaborated. "We're friends. She's not my girlfriend and she never has been. It's just that Skeeter woman making things up."

"Hermion-ninny talks about you very often," said Krum, looking suspiciously at Harry.

"Yeah," said Harry, "because we were friends."

He couldn't quite believe he was having this conversation with Viktor Krum, the famous International Quidditch player. It was as though the eighteen-year-old Krum thought he,

Harry, was an equal - a real rival -

"You haff never . . . you haff not..."

"No," said Harry very firmly.

Krum looked slightly happier. He stared at Harry for a few seconds, then said, "You fly very well. I was watching at the first task."

"Thanks," said Harry, grinning broadly and suddenly feeling much taller himself. "I saw you at the Quidditch World Cup. The Wronski Feint, you really -"

But something moved behind Krum in the trees, and Harry, who had some experience of the sort of thing that lurked in the forest, instinctively grabbed Krum's arm and pulled him around.

"What is it?"

Harry shook his head, staring at the place where he'd seen movement. He slipped his hand inside his robes, reaching for his wand.

Suddenly a man staggered out from behind a tall oak. For a moment, Harry didn't recognize him . . . then he realized it was Mr. Crouch.

He looked as though he had been traveling for days. The knees of his robes were ripped and bloody, his face scratched; he was unshaven and gray with exhaustion. His neat hair and mustache were both in need of a wash and a trim. His strange appearance, however, was nothing to the way he was behaving. Muttering and gesticulating, Mr. Crouch appeared to be talking to someone that he alone could see. He reminded Harry vividly of an old tramp he had seen once when out shopping with the Dursleys. That man too had been conversing wildly with thin air; Aunt Petunia had seized Dudley's hand and pulled him across the road to avoid him; Uncle Vernon had then treated the family to a long rant about what he would like to do with beggars and vagrants.

"Isn't he a judge?" said Krum, staring at Mr. Crouch. "Isn't he with your Ministry?"

Harry nodded, hesitated for a moment, then walked slowly toward Mr. Crouch, who did not look at him, but continued to talk to a nearby tree.

"... and when you've done that, Weatherby, send an owl to Dumbledore confirming the number of Durmstrang students who will be attending the tournament, Karkaroff has just sent word there will be twelve. . . ."

"Mr. Crouch?" said Harry cautiously.

"... and then send another owl to Madame Maxime, because she might want to up the number of students she's bringing, now Karkaroff's made it a round dozen ... do that, Weatherby, will you? Will you? Will..."

Mr. Crouch's eyes were bulging. He stood staring at the tree, muttering soundlessly at it. Then he staggered sideways and fell to his knees.

"Mr. Crouch?" Harry said loudly. "Are you all right?"

Crouch's eyes were rolling in his head. Harry looked around at Krum, who had followed him into the trees, and was looking down at Crouch in alarm.

"What is wrong with him?"

"No idea," Harry muttered. "Listen, you'd better go and get someone -"

"Dumbledore!" gasped Mr. Crouch. He reached out and seized a handful of Harry's robes, dragging him closer, though his eyes were staring over Harry's head. "I need... see ... Dumbledore. ..."

"Okay," said Harry, "if you get up, Mr. Crouch, we can go up to the-"

"I've done . . . stupid . . . thing . . ." Mr. Crouch breathed. He looked utterly mad. His eyes were rolling and bulging, and a trickle of spittle was sliding down his chin. Every word he spoke seemed to cost him a terrible effort. "Must. . . tell. . . Dumbledore . . ."

"Get up, Mr. Crouch," said Harry loudly and clearly. "Get up, I'll take you to Dumbledore!" Mr. Crouch's eyes rolled forward onto Harry.

"Who ... you?" he whispered.

"I'm a student at the school," said Harry, looking around at Krum for some help, but Krum was hanging back, looking extremely nervous.

"You're not... his?" whispered Crouch, his mouth sagging.

"No," said Harry, without the faintest idea what Crouch was talking about.

"Dumbledore's?"

"That's right," said Harry.

Crouch was pulling him closer; Harry tried to loosen Crouch's grip on his robes, but it was too powerful.

"Warn ... Dumbledore ..."

"I'll get Dumbledore if you let go of me," said Harry. "Just let go, Mr. Crouch, and I'll get him.. . ."

"Thank you, Weatherby, and when you have done that, I would like a cup of tea. My wife and son will be arriving shortly, we are attending a concert tonight with Mr. and Mrs. Fudge." Crouch was now talking fluently to a tree again, and seemed completely unaware that Harry was there, which surprised Harry so much he didn't notice that Crouch had released him.

"Yes, my son has recently gained twelve O.W.L.S, most satisfactory, yes, thank you, yes, very proud indeed. Now, if you could bring me that memo from the Andorran Minister of Magic, I think I will have time to draft a response. ..."

"You stay here with him!" Harry said to Krum. "I'll get Dumbledore, I'll be quicker, I know where his office is -"

"He is mad," said Krum doubtfully, staring down at Crouch, who was still gabbling to the tree, apparently convinced it was Percy.

"Just stay with him," said Harry, starting to get up, but his movement seemed to trigger another abrupt change in Mr. Crouch, who seized him hard around the knees and pulled Harry back to the ground.

"Don't. . . leave . . . me!" he whispered, his eyes bulging again. "I... escaped . . . must warn . . . must tell... see Dumbledore . . . my fault... all my fault. . . Bertha . . . dead ... all my fault. . . my son ... my fault... tell Dumbledore ... Harry Potter ... the Dark Lord . . . stronger . . . Harry Potter ..."

"I'll get Dumbledore if you let me go, Mr. Crouch!" said Harry. He looked furiously around at Krum. "Help me, will you?"

Looking extremely apprehensive, Krum moved forward and squatted down next to Mr. Crouch.

"Just keep him here," said Harry, pulling himself free of Mr. Crouch. "I'll be back with Dumbledore."

"Hurry, von't you?" Krum called after him as Harry sprinted away from the forest and up through the dark grounds. They were deserted; Bagman, Cedric, and Fleur had disappeared. Harry tore up the stone steps, through the oak front doors, and off up the marble staircase, toward the second floor.

Five minutes later he was hurtling toward a stone gargoyle standing halfway along an empty corridor.

"Sher - sherbet lemon!" he panted at it.

This was the password to the hidden staircase to Dumbledore's office - or at least, it had been two years ago. The password had evidently changed, however, for the stone gargoyle did not spring to life and jump aside, but stood frozen, glaring at Harry malevolently.

"Move!" Harry shouted at it. "C'mon!"

But nothing at Hogwarts had ever moved just because he shouted at it; he knew it was no good. He looked up and down the dark corridor. Perhaps Dumbledore was in the staffroom? He started running as fast as he could toward the staircase -

"POTTER!"

Harry skidded to a halt and looked around. Snape had just emerged from the hidden staircase behind the stone gargoyle. The wall was sliding shut behind him even as he beckoned Harry back toward him.

"What are you doing here, Potter?"

"I need to see Professor Dumbledore!" said Harry, running back up the corridor and skidding to a standstill in front of Snape instead. "It's Mr. Crouch . . . he's just turned up ... he's in the forest... he's asking -"

"What is this rubbish?" said Snape, his black eyes glittering. "What are you talking about?"

"Mr. Crouch!" Harry shouted. "From the Ministry! He's ill or something - he's in the forest, he wants to see Dumbledore! Just give me the password up to -"

"The headmaster is busy. Potter," said Snape, his thin mouth curling into an unpleasant smile.

"I've got to tell Dumbledore!" Harry yelled.

"Didn't you hear me. Potter?"

Harry could tell Snape was thoroughly enjoying himself, denying Harry the thing he wanted when he was so panicky.

"Look," said Harry angrily, "Crouch isn't right - he's - he's out of his mind - he says he wants to warn -"

The stone wall behind Snape slid open. Dumbledore was standing there, wearing long green robes and a mildly curious expression. "Is there a problem?" he said, looking between Harry and Snape.

"Professor!" Harry said, sidestepping Snape before Snape could speak, "Mr. Crouch is here - he's down in the forest, he wants to speak to you!"

Harry expected Dumbledore to ask questions, but to his relief, Dumbledore did nothing of the sort.

"Lead the way," he said promptly, and he swept off along the corridor behind Harry, leaving Snape standing next to the gargoyle and looking twice as ugly.

"What did Mr. Crouch say. Harry?" said Dumbledore as they walked swiftly down the marble staircase.

"Said he wants to warn you . . . said he's done something terrible ... he mentioned his son . . . and Bertha Jorkins .. and - and Voldemort. . . something about Voldemort getting stronger. ..."

"Indeed," said Dumbledore, and he quickened his pace as they hurried out into the pitch-darkness.

"He's not acting normally," Harry said, hurrying along beside Dumbledore. "He doesn't seem to know where he is. He keeps talking like he thinks Percy Weasley's there, and then he changes, and says he needs to see you. ... I left him with Viktor Krum."

"You did?" said Dumbledore sharply, and he began to take longer strides still, so that Harry was running to keep up. "Do you know if anybody else saw Mr. Crouch?"

"No," said Harry. "Krum and I were talking, Mr. Bagman had just finished telling us about the third task, we stayed behind, and then we saw Mr. Crouch coming out of the forest -"

"Where are they?" said Dumbledore as the Beauxbatons carriage emerged from the darkness.

"Over here," said Harry, moving in front of Dumbledore, leading the way through the trees. He couldn't hear Crouch's voice anymore, but he knew where he was going; it hadn't been much past the Beauxbatons carriage . . . somewhere around here. . . .

"Viktor?" Harry shouted.

No one answered.

"They were here," Harry said to Dumbledore. "They were definitely somewhere around here. ..."

"Lumos," Dumbledore said, lighting his wand and holding it up.

Its narrow beam traveled from black trunk to black trunk, illuminating the ground. And then it fell upon a pair of feet.

Harry and Dumbledore hurried forward. Krum was sprawled on the forest floor. He seemed to be unconscious. There was no sign at all of Mr. Crouch. Dumbledore bent over Krum and gently lifted one of his eyelids.

"Stunned," he said softly. His half-moon glasses glittered in the wandlight as he peered around at the surrounding trees.

"Should I go and get someone?" said Harry. "Madam Pomfrey?"

"No," said Dumbledore swiftly. "Stay here."

He raised his wand into the air and pointed it in the direction of Hagrid's cabin. Harry saw something silvery dart out of it and streak away through the trees like a ghostly bird. Then Dumbledore bent over Krum again, pointed his wand at him, and muttered, "Ennervate."

Krum opened his eyes. He looked dazed. When he saw Dumbledore, he tried to sit up, but Dumbledore put a hand on his shoulder and made him lie still.

"He attacked me!" Krum muttered, putting a hand up to his head. "The old madman attacked me! I was looking around to see where Potter had gone and he attacked from behind!"

"Lie still for a moment," Dumbledore said.

The sound of thunderous footfalls reached them, and Hagrid came panting into sight with Fang at his heels. He was carrying his crossbow.

"Professor Dumbledore!" he said, his eyes widening. "Harry - what the - ?"

"Hagrid, I need you to fetch Professor Karkaroff," said Dumbledore. "His student has been attacked. When you've done that, kindly alert Professor Moody -"

"No need, Dumbledore," said a wheezy growl. "I'm here."

Moody was limping toward them, leaning on his staff, his wand lit.

"Damn leg," he said furiously. "Would've been here quicker . . . what's happened? Snape said something about Crouch -"

"Crouch?" said Hagrid blankly.

"Karkaroff, please, Hagrid!" said Dumbledore sharply.

"Oh yeah . . . right y'are, Professor. . . ." said Hagrid, and he turned and disappeared into the dark trees, Fang trotting after him.

"I don't know where Barty Crouch is," Dumbledore told Moody, "but it is essential that we find him."

"I'm onto it," growled Moody, and he pulled out his wand and limped off into the forest.

Neither Dumbledore nor Harry spoke again until they heard the unmistakable sounds of Hagrid and Fang returning. Karkaroff was hurrying along behind them. He was wearing his sleek silver furs, and he looked pale and agitated.

"What is this?" he cried when he saw Krum on the ground and Dumbledore and Harry beside him. "What's going on?"

"I vos attacked!" said Krum, sitting up now and rubbing his head. "Mr. Crouch or votever his name -"

"Crouch attacked you? Crouch attacked you? The Triwizard judge?"

"Igor," Dumbledore began, but Karkaroff had drawn himself up, clutching his furs around him, looking livid.

"Treachery!" he bellowed, pointing at Dumbledore. "It is a plot! You and your Ministry of Magic have lured me here under false pretenses, Dumbledore! This is not an equal competition! First you sneak Potter into the tournament, though he is underage! Now one of your Ministry friends attempts to put my champion out of action! I smell double-dealing and corruption in this whole affair, and you, Dumbledore, you, with your talk of closer international

wizarding links, of rebuilding old ties, of forgetting old differences - here's what I think of you!"

Karkaroff spat onto the ground at Dumbledore's feet. In one swift movement, Hagrid seized the front of Karkaroff's furs, lifted him into the air, and slammed him against a nearby tree.

"Apologize!" Hagrid snarled as Karkaroff gasped for breath, Hagrid's massive fist at his throat, his feet dangling in midair.

"Hagrid, no!" Dumbledore shouted, his eyes flashing.

Hagrid removed the hand pinning Karkaroff to the tree, and Karkaroff slid all the way down the trunk and slumped in a huddle at its roots; a few twigs and leaves showered down upon his head.

"Kindly escort Harry back up to the castle, Hagrid," said Dumbledore sharply.

Breathing heavily, Hagrid gave Karkaroff a glowering look.

"Maybe I'd better stay here. Headmaster. . . ."

"You will take Harry back to school, Hagrid," Dumbledore repeated firmly. "Take him right up to Gryffindor Tower. And Harry - I want you to stay there. Anything you might want to do - any owls you might want to send - they can wait until morning, do you understand me?"

"Er - yes," said Harry, staring at him. How had Dumbledore known that, at that very moment, he had been thinking about sending Pigwidgeon straight to Sirius, to tell him what had happened?

"I'll leave Fang with yeh. Headmaster," Hagrid said, staring menacingly at Karkaroff, who was still sprawled at the foot of the tree, tangled in furs and tree roots. "Stay, Fang. C'mon, Harry."

They marched in silence past the Beauxbatons carriage and up toward the castle.

"How dare he," Hagrid growled as they strode past the lake. "How dare he accuse Dumbledore. Like Dumbledore'd do anythin' like that. Like Dumbledore wanted you in the tournament in the firs' place. Worried! I dunno when I seen Dumbledore more worried than he's bin lately. An' you!" Hagrid suddenly said angrily to Harry, who looked up at him, taken aback. "What were yeh doin', wanderin' off with ruddy Krum? He's from Durmstrang, Harry! Coulda jinxed yeh right there, couldn't he? Hasn't Moody taught yeh nothin'? 'Magine lettin him lure yeh off on yer own -"

"Krum's all right!" said Harry as they climbed the steps into the entrance hall. "He wasn't trying to jinx me, he just wanted to talk about Hermione -"

"I'll be havin' a few words with her, an' all," said Hagrid grimly, stomping up the stairs. "The less you lot 'ave ter do with these foreigners, the happier yeh'll be. Yeh can trust any of 'em." "You were getting on all right with Madame Maxime," Harry said, annoyed.

"Don' you talk ter me abou' her!" said Hagrid, and he looked quite frightening for a moment. "I've got her number now! Tryin' ter get back in me good books, tryin' ter get me ter tell her what's comin in the third task. Ha! You can' trust any of'em!"

Hagrid was in such a bad mood, Harry was quite glad to say good-bye to him in front of the Fat Lady. He clambered through the portrait hole into the common room and hurried straight for the corner where Ron and Hermione were sitting, to tell them what had happened.

It comes down to this," said Hermione, rubbing her forehead. "Either Mr. Crouch attacked Viktor, or somebody else attacked both of them when Viktor wasn't looking."

"It must've been Crouch," said Ron at once. "That's why he was gone when Harry and Dumbledore got there. He'd done a runner."

"I don't think so," said Harry, shaking his head. "He seemed really weak - I don't reckon he was up to Disapparating or anything."

"You cant Disapparate on the Hogwarts grounds, haven't I told you enough times?" said Hermione.

"Okay. . . hows this for a theory," said Ron excitedly. "Krum attacked Crouch - no, wait for it - and then Stunned himself!"

"And Mr. Crouch evaporated, did he?" said Hermione coldly.

"Oh yeah . . ."

It was daybreak. Harry, Ron, and Hermione had crept out of their dormitories very early and hurried up to the Owlery together to send a note to Sirius. Now they were standing looking out at the misty grounds. All three of them were puffy-eyed and pale because they had been talking late into the night about Mr. Crouch.

"Just go through it again, Harry," said Hermione. "What did Mr. Crouch actually say?"

"I've told you, he wasn't making much sense," said Harry. "He said he wanted to warn Dumbledore about something. He definitely mentioned Bertha Jorkins, and he seemed to think she was dead. He kept saying stuff was his fault. . . . He mentioned his son."

"Well, that was his fault," said Hermione testily.

"He was out of his mind," said Harry. "Half the time he seemed to think his wife and son were still alive, and he kept talking to Percy about work and giving him instructions."

"And . . . remind me what he said about You-Know-Who?" said Ron tentatively.

"I've told you," Harry repeated dully. "He said he's getting stronger."

There was a pause. Then Ron said in a falsely confident voice, "But he was out of his mind, like you said, so half of it was probably just raving. ..."

"He was sanest when he was trying to talk about Voldemort," said Harry, and Ron winced at the sound of the name. "He was having real trouble stringing two words together, but that was when he seemed to know where he was, and know what he wanted to do. He just kept saying he had to see Dumbledore."

Harry turned away from the window and stared up into the rafters. The many perches were half-empty; every now and then, another owl would swoop in through one of the windows, returning from its night's hunting with a mouse in its beak.

"If Snape hadn't held me up," Harry said bitterly, "we might've got there in time. 'The headmaster is busy. Potter . . . what's this rubbish, Potter?' Why couldn't he have just got out of the way?"

"Maybe he didn't want you to get there!" said Ron quickly. "Maybe - hang on - how fast d'you reckon he could've gotten down to the forest? D'you reckon he could've beaten you and Dumbledore there?"

"Not unless he can turn himself into a bat or something," said Harry.

"Wouldn't put it past him," Ron muttered.

"We need to see Professor Moody," said Hermione. "We need to find out whether he found Mr. Crouch,"

"If he had the Marauder's Map on him, it would've been easy," said Harry.

"Unless Crouch was already outside the grounds," said Ron, "because it only shows up to the boundaries, doesn't -"

"Shh!" said Hermione suddenly.

Somebody was climbing the steps up to the Owlery. Harry could hear two voices arguing, coming closer and closer.

"- that's blackmail, that is, we could get into a lot of trouble for that-"

"- we've tried being polite; it's time to play dirty, like him. He wouldn't like the Ministry of Magic knowing what he did -"

"I'm telling you, if you put that in writing, it's blackmail!"

"Yeah, and you won't be complaining if we get a nice fat payoff, will you?"

The Owlery door banged open. Fred and George came over the threshold, then froze at the sight of Harry, Ron, and Hermione.

"What're you doing here?" Ron and Fred said at the same time.

"Sending a letter," said Harry and George in unison.

"What, at this time?" said Hermione and Fred.

Fred grinned.

"Fine - we won't ask you what you're doing, if you don't ask us," he said.

He was holding a sealed envelope in his hands. Harry glanced at it, but Fred, whether accidentally or on purpose, shifted his hand so that the name on it was covered.

"Well, don't let us hold you up," Fred said, making a mock bow and pointing at the door.

Ron didn't move. "Who're you blackmailing?" he said.

The grin vanished from Fred's face. Harry saw George half glance at Fred, before smiling at Ron.

"Don't be stupid, I was only joking," he said easily.

"Didn't sound like that," said Ron.

Fred and George looked at each other. Then Fred said abruptly, "I've told you before, Ron, keep your nose out if you like it the shape it is. Can't see why you would, but -"

"It's my business if you're blackmailing someone," said Ron. "George's right, you could end up in serious trouble for that."

"Told you, I was joking," said George. He walked over to Fred, pulled the letter out of his hands, and began attaching it to the leg of the nearest barn owl. "You're starting to sound a bit like our dear older brother, you are, Ron. Carry on like this and you'll be made a prefect."

"No, I won't!" said Ron hotly.

George carried the barn owl over to the window and it took off. George turned around and grinned at Ron.

"Well, stop telling people what to do then. See you later."

He and Fred left the Owlery. Harry, Ron, and Hermione stared at one another.

"You don't think they know something about all this, do you?" Hermione whispered. "About Crouch and everything?"

"No," said Harry. "If it was something that serious, they'd tell someone. They'd tell Dumbledore."

Ron, however, was looking uncomfortable.

"What's the matter?" Hermione asked him.

"Well. . ." said Ron slowly, "I dunno if they would. They're . . . they're obsessed with making money lately, I noticed it when I was hanging around with them - when - you know -"

"We weren't talking." Harry finished the sentence for him. "Yeah, but blackmail..."

"It's this joke shop idea they've got," said Ron. "I thought they were only saying it to annoy Mum, but they really mean it, they want to start one. They've only got a year left at Hogwarts, they keep going on about how it's time to think about their future, and Dad can't help them, and they need gold to get started."

Hermione was looking uncomfortable now.

"Yes, but. . . they wouldn't do anything against the law to get gold."

"Wouldn't they?" said Ron, looking skeptical. "I dunno . . . they don't exactly mind breaking rules, do they?"

"Yes, but this is the law" said Hermione, looking scared. "This isn't some silly school rule. . . . They'll get a lot more than detention for blackmail! Ron. . . maybe you'd better tell Percy. . . ."

"Are you mad?" said Ron. "Tell Percy? He'd probably do a Crouch and turn them in." He stared at the window through which Fred and George's owl had departed, then said, "Come on, let's get some breakfast."

"D'you think it's too early to go and see Professor Moody?" Hermione said as they went down the spiral staircase.

"Yes," said Harry. "He'd probably blast us through the door if we wake him at the crack of dawn; he'll think we're trying to attack him while he's asleep. Let's give it till break."

History of Magic had rarely gone so slowly. Harry kept checking Ron's watch, having finally discarded his own, but Ron's was moving so slowly he could have sworn it had stopped working too. All three of them were so tired they could happily have put their heads down on the desks and slept; even Hermione wasn't taking her usual notes, but was sitting with her head on her hand, gazing at Professor Binns with her eyes out of focus.

When the bell finally rang, they hurried out into the corridors toward the Dark Arts classroom and found Professor Moody leaving it. He looked as tired as they felt. The eyelid of his normal eye was drooping, giving his face an even more lopsided appearance than usual.

"Professor Moody?" Harry called as they made their way toward him through the crowd.

"Hello, Potter," growled Moody. His magical eye followed a couple of passing first years, who sped up, looking nervous; it rolled into the back of Moody's head and watched them around the corner before he spoke again.

"Come in here."

He stood back to let them into his empty classroom, limped in after them, and closed the door.

"Did you find him?" Harry asked without preamble. "Mr. Crouch?"

"No," said Moody. He moved over to his desk, sat down, stretched out his wooden leg with a slight groan, and pulled out his hip flask.

"Did you use the map?" Harry said.

"Of course," said Moody, taking a swig from his flask. "Took a leaf out of your book, Potter. Summoned it from my office into the forest. He wasn't anywhere on there."

"So he did Disapparate?" said Ron.

"You can't Disapparate on the grounds, Ron!" said Hermione. "There are other ways he could have disappeared, aren't there, Professor?"

Moody's magical eye quivered as it rested on Hermione. "You're another one who might think about a career as an Auror," he told her. "Mind works the right way. Granger."

Hermione flushed pink with pleasure.

"Well, he wasn't invisible," said Harry. "The map shows invisible people. He must've left the grounds, then."

"But under his own steam?" said Hermione eagerly, "or because someone made him?"

"Yeah, someone could've - could've pulled him onto a broom and flown off with him, couldn't they?" said Ron quickly, looking hopefully at Moody as if he too wanted to be told he had the makings of an Auror.

"We can't rule out kidnap," growled Moody.

"So," said Ron, "d'you reckon he's somewhere in Hogsmeade?"

"Could be anywhere," said Moody, shaking his head. "Only thing we know for sure is that he's not here."

He yawned widely, so that his scars stretched, and his lopsided mouth revealed a number of missing teeth. Then he said, "Now, Dumbledore's told me you three fancy yourselves as investigators, but there's nothing you can do for Crouch. The Ministry'll be looking for him now, Dumbledore's notified them. Potter, you just keep your mind on the third task."

"What?" said Harry. "Oh yeah . . ."

He hadn't given the maze a single thought since he'd left it with Krum the previous night.

"Should be right up your street, this one," said Moody, looking up at Harry and scratching his scarred and stubbly chin. "From what Dumbledore's said, you've managed to get through stuff like this plenty of times. Broke your way through a series of obstacles guarding the Sorcerers Stone in your first year, didn't you?"

"We helped," Ron said quickly. "Me and Hermione helped."

Moody grinned.

"Well, help him practice for this one, and I'll be very surprised if he doesn't win," said Moody.

"In the meantime . . . constant vigilance, Potter. Constant vigilance." He took another long draw from his hip flask, and his magical eye swiveled onto the window. The topmost sail of the Durmstrang ship was visible through it.

"You two," counseled Moody, his normal eye on Ron and Hermione, "you stick close to Potter, all right? I'm keeping an eye on things, but all the same . . . you can never have too many eyes out."

Sirius sent their owl back the very next morning. It fluttered down beside Harry at the same moment that a tawny owl landed in front of Hermione, clutching a copy of the Daily Prophet in its beak. She took the newspaper, scanned the first few pages, said, "Ha! She hasn't got wind of Crouch!" then joined Ron and Harry in reading what Sirius had to say on the mysterious events of the night before last.

Harry - what do you think you are playing at, walking off into the forest with Viktor Krum? I want you to swear, by return owl, that you are not going to go walking with anyone else at night. There is somebody highly dangerous at Hogwarts. It is clear to me that they wanted to stop Crouch from seeing Dumbledore and you were probably feet away from them in the dark. You could have been killed.

Your name didn't get into the Goblet of Fire by accident. If someone's trying to attack you, they're on their last chance. Stay close to Ron and Hermione, do not leave Gryffindor Tower after hours, and arm yourself for the third task. Practice Stunning and Disarming. A few hexes wouldn't go amiss either. There's nothing you can do about Crouch. Keep your head

down and look after yourself. I'm waiting for your letter giving me your word you won't stray out-of-bounds again.

Sirius

"Who's he, to lecture me about being out-of-bounds?" said Harry in mild indignation as he folded up Sirius's letter and put it inside his robes. "After all the stuff he did at school!"

"He's worried about you!" said Hermione sharply. "Just like Moody and Hagrid! So listen to them!"

"No one's tried to attack me all year," said Harry. "No one's done anything to me at all-"

"Except put your name in the Goblet of Fire," said Hermione. "And they must've done that for a reason. Harry. Snuffles is right. Maybe they've been biding their time. Maybe this is the task they're going to get you."

"Look," said Harry impatiently, "let's say Sirius is right, and someone Stunned Krum to kidnap Crouch. Well, they would've been in the trees near us, wouldn't they? But they waited till I was out of the way until they acted, didn't they? So it doesn't look like I'm their target, does it?"

"They couldn't have made it look like an accident if they'd murdered you in the forest!" said Hermione. "But if you die during a task-"

"They didn't care about attacking Krum, did they?" said Harry. "Why didn't they just polish me off at the same time? They could've made it look like Krum and I had a duel or something."

"Harry, I don't understand it either," said Hermione desperately. "I just know there are a lot of odd things going on, and I don't like it. ... Moody's right - Sirius is right - you've got to get in training for the third task, straight away. And you make sure you write back to Sirius and promise him you're not going to go sneaking off alone again."

The Hogwarts grounds never looked more inviting than when Harry had to stay indoors. For the next few days he spent all of his free time either in the library with Hermione and Ron, looking up hexes, or else in empty classrooms, which they sneaked into to practice. Harry was concentrating on the Stunning Spell, which he had never used before. The trouble was that practicing it involved certain sacrifices on Ron's and Hermione's part.

"Can't we kidnap Mrs. Norris?" Ron suggested on Monday lunchtime as he lay flat on his back in the middle of their Charms classroom, having just been Stunned and reawoken by Harry for the fifth time in a row. "Let's Stun her for a bit. Or you could use Dobby, Harry, I bet he'd do anything to help you. I'm not complaining or anything" - he got gingerly to his feet, rubbing his backside - "but I'm aching all over. ..."

"Well, you keep missing the cushions, don't you!" said Hermione impatiently, rearranging the pile of cushions they had used for the Banishing Spell, which Flitwick had left in a cabinet.

"Just try and fall backward!"

"Once you're Stunned, you can't aim too well, Hermione!" said Ron angrily. "Why don't you take a turn?"

"Well, I think Harry's got it now, anyway," said Hermione hastily. "And we don't have to worry about Disarming, because he's been able to do that for ages. ... I think we ought to start on some of these hexes this evening."

She looked down the list they had made in the library.

"I like the look of this one," she said, "this Impediment Curse. Should slow down anything that's trying to attack you. Harry. We'll start with that one."

The bell rang. They hastily shoved the cushions back into Flitwick's cupboard and slipped out of the classroom.

"See you at dinner!" said Hermione, and she set off for Arithmancy, while Harry and Ron headed toward North Tower, and Divination. Broad strips of dazzling gold sunlight fell across the corridor from the high windows. The sky outside was so brightly blue it looked as though it had been enameled.

"It's going to be boiling in Trelawney's room, she never puts out that fire," said Ron as they started up the staircase toward the silver ladder and the trapdoor.

He was quite right. The dimly lit room was swelteringly hot. The fumes from the perfumed fire were heavier than ever. Harry's head swam as he made his way over to one of the curtained windows. While Professor Trelawney was looking the other way, disentangling her shawl from a lamp, he opened it an inch or so and settled back in his chintz armchair, so that a soft breeze played across his face. It was extremely comfortable.

"My dears," said Professor Trelawney, sitting down in her winged armchair in front of the class and peering around at them all with her strangely enlarged eyes, "we have almost finished our work on planetary divination. Today, however, will be an excellent opportunity to examine the effects of Mars, for he is placed most interestingly at the present time. If you will all look this way, I will dim the lights. . . ."

She waved her wand and the lamps went out. The fire was the only source of light now. Professor Trelawney bent down and lifted, from under her chair, a miniature model of the solar system, contained within a glass dome. It was a beautiful thing; each of the moons glimmered in place around the nine planets and the fiery sun, all of them hanging in thin air beneath the glass. Harry watched lazily as Professor Trelawney began to point out the fascinating angle Mars was making to Neptune. The heavily perfumed fumes washed over him, and the breeze from the window played across his face. He could hear an insect humming gently somewhere behind the curtain. His eyelids began to droop. . . .

He was riding on the back of an eagle owl, soaring through the clear blue sky toward an old, ivy-covered house set high on a hillside. Lower and lower they flew, the wind blowing pleasantly in Harry's face, until they reached a dark and broken window in the upper story of the house and entered. Now they were flying along a gloomy passageway, to a room at the very end . . . through the door they went, into a dark room whose windows were boarded up....

Harry had left the owl's back... he was watching, now, as it fluttered across the room, into a chair with its back to him. . . . There were two dark shapes on the floor beside the chair . . . both of them were stirring. . . .

One was a huge snake . . . the other was a man ... a short, balding man, a man with watery eyes and a pointed nose ... he was wheezing and sobbing on the hearth rug. . . .

"You are in luck, Wormtail," said a cold, high-pitched voice from the depths of the chair in which the owl had landed. "You are very fortunate indeed. Your blunder has not ruined everything. He is dead."

"My Lord!" gasped the man on the floor. "My Lord, I am ... I am so pleased . . . and so sorry. ..."

"Nagini," said the cold voice, "you are out of luck. I will not be feeding Wormtail to you, after all... but never mind, never mind . . . there is still Harry Potter. ..."

The snake hissed. Harry could see its tongue fluttering.

"Now, Wormtail," said the cold voice, "perhaps one more little reminder why I will not tolerate another blunder from you. ..."

"My Lord ... no ... I beg you . . ."

The tip of a wand emerged from around the back of the chair. It was pointing at Wormtail.

"Crucio!" said the cold voice.

Wormtail screamed, screamed as though every nerve in his body were on fire, the screaming filled Harry's ears as the scar on his forehead seared with pain; he was yelling too...Voldemort would hear him, would know he was there. . . .

"Harry! Harry!"

Harry opened his eyes. He was lying on the floor of Professor Trelawney's room with his hands over his face. His scar was still burning so badly that his eyes were watering. The pain had been real. The whole class was standing around him, and Ron was kneeling next to him, looking terrified.

"You all right?" he said.

"Of course he isn't!" said Professor Trelawney, looking thoroughly excited. Her great eyes loomed over Harry, gazing at him. "What was it. Potter? A premonition? An apparition? What did you see?"

"Nothing," Harry lied. He sat up. He could feel himself shaking. He couldn't stop himself from looking around, into the shadows behind him; Voldemort's voice had sounded so close.

. . .

"You were clutching your scar!" said Professor Trelawney. "You were rolling on the floor, clutching your scar! Come now. Potter, I have experience in these matters!"

Harry looked up at her.

"I need to go to the hospital wing, I think," he said. "Bad headache."

"My dear, you were undoubtedly stimulated by the extraordinary clairvoyant vibrations of my room!" said Professor Trelawney. "If you leave now, you may lose the opportunity to see further than you have ever -"

"I don't want to see anything except a headache cure," said Harry.

He stood up. The class backed away. They all looked unnerved.

"See you later," Harry muttered to Ron, and he picked up his bag and headed for the trapdoor, ignoring Professor Trelawney, who was wearing an expression of great frustration, as though she had just been denied a real treat.

When Harry reached the bottom of her stepladder, however, he did not set off for the hospital wing. He had no intention whatsoever of going there. Sirius had told him what to do if his scar hurt him again, and Harry was going to follow his advice: He was going straight to Dumbledore's office. He marched down the corridors, thinking about what he had seen in the dream . . . it had been as vivid as the one that had awoken him on Privet Drive. . . . He ran over the details in his mind, trying to make sure he could remember them. . . . He had heard Voldemort accusing Wormtail of making a blunder . . . but the owl had brought good news, the blunder had been repaired, somebody was dead ... so Wormtail was not going to be fed to the snake . . . he, Harry, was going to be fed to it instead. . . .

Harry had walked right past the stone gargoyle guarding the entrance to Dumbledore's office without noticing. He blinked, looked around, realized what he had done, and retraced his steps, stopping in front of it. Then he remembered that he didn't know the password.

"Sherbet lemon?" he tried tentatively.

The gargoyle did not move.

"Okay," said Harry, staring at it, "Pear Drop. Er - Licorice Wand. Fizzing Whizbee. Drooble's Best Blowing Gum. Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans ... oh no, he doesn't like them, does he?... oh just open, can't you?" he said angrily. "I really need to see him, it's urgent!"

The gargoyle remained immovable.

Harry kicked it, achieving nothing but an excruciating pain in his big toe.

"Chocolate Frog!" he yelled angrily, standing on one leg. "Sugar Quill! Cockroach Cluster!"

The gargoyle sprang to life and jumped aside. Harry blinked.

"Cockroach Cluster?" he said, amazed. "I was only joking. ..."

He hurried through the gap in the walls and stepped onto the foot of a spiral stone staircase, which moved slowly upward as the doors closed behind him, taking him up to a polished oak door with a brass door knocker.

He could hear voices from inside the office. He stepped off the moving staircase and hesitated, listening.

"Dumbledore, I'm afraid I don't see the connection, don't see it at all!" It was the voice of the Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge. "Ludo says Bertha's perfectly capable of getting herself lost. I agree we would have expected to have found her by now, but all the same, we've no evidence of foul play, Dumbledore, none at all. As for her disappearance being linked with Barty Crouch's!"

"And what do you think happened to Barty Crouch, Minister?" said Moody's growling voice.

"I see two possibilities, Alastor," said Fudge. "Either Crouch has finally cracked - more than likely, I'm sure you'll agree, given his personal history - lost his mind, and gone wandering off somewhere -"

"He wandered extremely quickly, if that is the case, Cornelius," said Dumbledore calmly.

"Or else - well..." Fudge sounded embarrassed. "Well, I'll reserve judgment until after I've seen the place where he was found, but you say it was just past the Beauxbatons carriage? Dumbledore, you know what that woman is?"

"I consider her to be a very able headmistress - and an excellent dancer," said Dumbledore quietly.

"Dumbledore, come!" said Fudge angrily. "Don't you think you might be prejudiced in her favor because of Hagrid? They don't all turn out harmless - if, indeed, you can call Hagrid harmless, with that monster fixation he's got -"

"I no more suspect Madame Maxime than Hagrid," said Dumbledore, just as calmly. "I think it possible that it is you who are prejudiced, Cornelius."

"Can we wrap up this discussion?" growled Moody.

"Yes, yes, let's go down to the grounds, then," said Fudge impatiently.

"No, it's not that," said Moody, "it's just that Potter wants a word with you, Dumbledore. He's just outside the door."

The door of the office opened.

"Hello, Potter," said Moody. "Come in, then."

Harry walked inside. He had been inside Dumbledore's office once before; it was a very beautiful, circular room, lined with pictures of previous headmasters and headmistresses of Hogwarts, all of whom were fast asleep, their chests rising and falling gently.

Cornelius Fudge was standing beside Dumbledore's desk, wearing his usual pinstriped cloak and holding his lime-green bowler hat.

"Harry!" said Fudge jovially, moving forward. "How are you?"

"Fine," Harry lied.

"We were just talking about the night when Mr. Crouch turned up on the grounds," said Fudge. "It was you who found him, was it not?"

"Yes," said Harry. Then, feeling it was pointless to pretend that he hadn't overheard what they had been saying, he added, "I didn't see Madame Maxime anywhere, though, and she'd have a job hiding, wouldn't she?"

Dumbledore smiled at Harry behind Fudge's back, his eyes twinkling.

"Yes, well," said Fudge, looking embarrassed, "we're about to go for a short walk on the grounds, Harry, if you'll excuse us ... perhaps if you just go back to your class -"

"I wanted to talk to you. Professor," Harry said quickly, looking at Dumbledore, who gave him a swift, searching look.

"Wait here for me, Harry," he said. "Our examination of the grounds will not take long."

They trooped out in silence past him and closed the door. After a minute or so, Harry heard the clunks of Moody's wooden leg growing fainter in the corridor below. He looked around.

"Hello, Fawkes," he said.

Fawkes, Professor Dumbledore's phoenix, was standing on his golden perch beside the door. The size of a swan, with magnificent scarlet-and-gold plumage, he swished his long tail and blinked benignly at Harry.

Harry sat down in a chair in front of Dumbledore's desk. For several minutes, he sat and watched the old headmasters and headmistresses snoozing in their frames, thinking about what he had just heard, and running his fingers over his scar. It had stopped hurting now. He felt much calmer, somehow, now that he was in Dumbledore's office, knowing he would shortly be telling him about the dream. Harry looked up at the walls behind the desk. The patched and ragged Sorting Hat was standing on a shelf. A glass case next to it held a magnificent silver sword with large rubies set into the hilt, which Harry recognized as the one he himself had pulled out of the Sorting Hat in his second year. The sword had once belonged to Godric Gryffindor, founder of Harry's House. He was gazing at it, remembering how it had come to his aid when he had thought all hope was lost, when he noticed a patch of silvery light, dancing and shimmering on the glass case. He looked around for the source of the light and saw a sliver of silver-white shining brightly from within a black cabinet behind him, whose door had not been closed properly. Harry hesitated, glanced at Fawkes, then got up, walked across the office, and pulled open the cabinet door.

A shallow stone basin lay there, with odd carvings around the edge: runes and symbols that Harry did not recognize. The silvery light was coming from the basin's contents, which were like nothing Harry had ever seen before. He could not tell whether the substance was liquid or gas. It was a bright, whitish silver, and it was moving ceaselessly; the surface of it became ruffled like water beneath wind, and then, like clouds, separated and swirled smoothly. It looked like light made liquid - or like wind made solid - Harry couldn't make up his mind.

He wanted to touch it, to find out what it felt like, but nearly four years' experience of the magical world told him that sticking his hand into a bowl full of some unknown substance was a very stupid thing to do. He therefore pulled his wand out of the inside of his robes, cast a nervous look around the office, looked back at the contents of the basin, and prodded them.

The surface of the silvery stuff inside the basin began to swirl very fast.

Harry bent closer, his head right inside the cabinet. The silvery substance had become transparent; it looked like glass. He looked down into it expecting to see the stone bottom of the basin - and saw instead an enormous room below the surface of the mysterious substance, a room into which he seemed to be looking through a circular window in the ceiling.

The room was dimly lit; he thought it might even be underground, for there were no windows, merely torches in brackets such as the ones that illuminated the walls of Hogwarts. Lowering his face so that his nose was a mere inch away from the glassy substance, Harry saw that rows and rows of witches and wizards were seated around every wall on what seemed to be benches rising in levels. An empty chair stood in the very center of the room. There was something about the chair that gave Harry an ominous feeling. Chains encircled the arms of it, as though its occupants were usually tied to it.

Where was this place? It surely wasn't Hogwarts; he had never seen a room like that here in the castle. Moreover, the crowd in the mysterious room at the bottom of the basin was comprised of adults, and Harry knew there were not nearly that many teachers at Hogwarts. They seemed, he thought, to be waiting for something; even though he could only see the tops of their hats, all of their faces seemed to be pointing in one direction, and none of them were talking to one another.

The basin being circular, and the room he was observing square, Harry could not make out what was going on in the corners of it. He leaned even closer, tilting his head, trying to see... The tip of his nose touched the strange substance into which he was staring.

Dumbledore's office gave an almighty lurch - Harry was thrown forward and pitched headfirst into the substance inside the basin -

But his head did not hit the stone bottom. He was falling through something icy-cold and black; it was like being sucked into a dark whirlpool -

And suddenly, Harry found himself sitting on a bench at the end of the room inside the basin, a bench raised high above the others. He looked up at the high stone ceiling, expecting to see the circular window through which he had just been staring, but there was nothing there but dark, solid stone.

Breathing hard and fast. Harry looked around him. Not one of the witches and wizards in the room (and there were at least two hundred of them) was looking at him. Not one of them seemed to have noticed that a fourteen-year-old boy had just dropped from the ceiling into their midst. Harry turned to the wizard next to him on the bench and uttered a loud cry of surprise that reverberated around the silent room.

He was sitting right next to Albus Dumbledore.

"Professor!" Harry said in a kind of strangled whisper. "I'm sorry - I didn't mean to - I was just looking at that basin in your cabinet - I - where are we?"

But Dumbledore didn't move or speak. He ignored Harry completely. Like every other wizard on the benches, he was staring into the far corner of the room, where there was a door.

Harry gazed, nonplussed, at Dumbledore, then around at the silently watchful crowd, then back at Dumbledore. And then it dawned on him. . . .

Once before. Harry had found himself somewhere that nobody could see or hear him. That time, he had fallen through a page in an enchanted diary, right into somebody else's memory . . . and unless he was very much mistaken, something of the sort had happened again...

Harry raised his right hand, hesitated, and then waved it energetically in front of Dumbledore's face. Dumbledore did not blink, look around at Harry, or indeed move at all. And that, in Harry's opinion, settled the matter. Dumbledore wouldn't ignore him like that. He was inside a memory, and this was not the present-day Dumbledore. Yet it couldn't be that long ago . . . the Dumbledore sitting next to him now was silver-haired, just like the present-day Dumbledore. But what was this place? What were all these wizards waiting for?

Harry looked around more carefully. The room, as he had suspected when observing it from above, was almost certainly underground - more of a dungeon than a room, he thought.

There was a bleak and forbidding air about the place; there were no pictures on the walls, no decorations at all; just these tiered rows of benches, rising in levels all around the room, all positioned so that they had a clear view of that chair with the chains on its arms.

Before Harry could reach any conclusions about the place in which they were, he heard footsteps. The door in the corner of the dungeon opened and three people entered - or at least one man, flanked by two dementors.

Harry's insides went cold. The dementors - tall, hooded creatures whose faces were concealed - were gliding slowly toward the chair in the center of the room, each grasping one of the man's arms with their dead and rotten-looking hands. The man between them looked as though he was about to faint, and Harry couldn't blame him ... he knew the dementors could not touch him inside a memory, but he remembered their power only too well. The watching crowd recoiled slightly as the dementors placed the man in the chained chair and glided back out of the room. The door swung shut behind them.

Harry looked down at the man now sitting in the chair and saw that it was Karkaroff.

Unlike Dumbledore, Karkaroff looked much younger; his hair and goatee were black. He was not dressed in sleek furs, but in thin and ragged robes. He was shaking. Even as Harry watched, the chains on the arms of the chair glowed suddenly gold and snaked their way up Karkaroff's arms, binding him there.

"Igor Karkaroff," said a curt voice to Harry's left. Harry looked around and saw Mr. Crouch standing up in the middle of the bench beside him. Crouch's hair was dark, his face was much less lined, he looked fit and alert. "You have been brought from Azkaban to present evidence to the Ministry of Magic. You have given us to understand that you have important information for us."

Karkaroff straightened himself as best he could, tightly bound to the chair.

"I have, sir," he said, and although his voice was very scared, Harry could still hear the familiar unctuous note in it. "I wish to be of use to the Ministry. I wish to help. I - I know that the Ministry is trying to - to round up the last of the Dark Lords supporters. I am eager to assist in any way I can. ..."

There was a murmur around the benches. Some of the wizards and witches were surveying Karkaroff with interest, others with pronounced mistrust. Then Harry heard, quite distinctly, from Dumbledores other side, a familiar, growling voice saying, "Filth."

Harry leaned forward so that he could see past Dumbledore. Mad-Eye Moody was sitting there - except that there was a very noticeable difference in his appearance. He did not have his magical eye, but two normal ones. Both were looking down upon Karkaroff, and both were narrowed in intense dislike.

"Crouch is going to let him out," Moody breathed quietly to Dumbledore. "He's done a deal with him. Took me six months to track him down, and Crouch is going to let him go if he's got enough new names. Let's hear his information, I say, and throw him straight back to the dementors."

Dumbledore made a small noise of dissent through his long, crooked nose.

"Ah, I was forgetting . . . you don't like the dementors, do you, Albus?" said Moody with a sardonic smile.

"No," said Dumbledore calmly, "I'm afraid I don't. I have long felt the Ministry is wrong to ally itself with such creatures."

"But for filth like this . . ." Moody said softly.

"You say you have names for us, Karkaroff," said Mr. Crouch. "Let us hear them, please."

"You must understand," said Karkaroff hurriedly, "that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named operated always in the greatest secrecy. . . . He preferred that we - I mean to say, his supporters - and I regret now, very deeply, that I ever counted myself among them -"

"Get on with it," sneered Moody.

"- we never knew the names of every one of our fellows - He alone knew exactly who we all were -"

"Which was a wise move, wasn't it, as it prevented someone like you, Karkaroff, from turning all of them in," muttered Moody.

"Yet you say you have some names for us?" said Mr. Crouch.

"I - I do," said Karkaroff breathlessly. "And these were important supporters, mark you. People I saw with my own eyes doing his bidding. I give this information as a sign that I fully and totally renounce him, and am filled with a remorse so deep I can barely -"

"These names are?" said Mr. Crouch sharply.

Karkaroff drew a deep breath.

"There was Antonin Dolohov," he said. "I - I saw him torture countless Muggles and - and non-supporters of the Dark Lord."

"And helped him do it," murmured Moody.

"We have already apprehended Dolohov," said Crouch. "He was caught shortly after yourself."

"Indeed?" said Karkaroff, his eyes widening. "I - I am delighted to hear it!"

But he didn't look it. Harry could tell that this news had come as a real blow to him. One of his names was worthless.

"Any others?" said Crouch coldly.

"Why, yes ... there was Rosier," said Karkaroff hurriedly. "Evan Rosier."

"Rosier is dead," said Crouch. "He was caught shortly after you were too. He preferred to fight rather than come quietly and was killed in the struggle."

"Took a bit of me with him, though," whispered Moody to Harry's right. Harry looked around at him once more, and saw him indicating the large chunk out of his nose to Dumbledore.

"No - no more than Rosier deserved!" said Karkaroff, a real note of panic in his voice now. Harry could see that he was starting to worry that none of his information would be of any use to the Ministry. Karkaroff's eyes darted toward the door in the corner, behind which the dementors undoubtedly still stood, waiting.

"Any more?" said Crouch.

"Yes!" said Karkaroff. "There was Travers - he helped murder the McKinnons! Mulciber - he specialized in the Imperius Curse, forced countless people to do horrific things! Rookwood, who was a spy, and passed He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named useful information from inside the Ministry itself!"

Harry could tell that, this time, Karkaroff had struck gold. The watching crowd was all murmuring together.

"Rookwood?" said Mr. Crouch, nodding to a witch sitting in front of him, who began scribbling upon her piece of parchment. "Augustus Rookwood of the Department of Mysteries?"

"The very same," said Karkaroff eagerly. "I believe he used a network of well-placed wizards, both inside the Ministry and out, to collect information -"

"But Travers and Mulciber we have," said Mr. Crouch. "Very well, Karkaroff, if that is all, you will be returned to Azkaban while we decide -"

"Not yet!" cried Karkaroff, looking quite desperate. "Wait, I have more!"

Harry could see him sweating in the torchlight, his white skin contrasting strongly with the black of his hair and beard.

"Snape!" he shouted. "Severus Snape!"

"Snape has been cleared by this council," said Crouch disdainfully. "He has been vouched for by Albus Dumbledore."

"No!" shouted Karkaroff, straining at the chains that bound him to the chair. "I assure you! Severus Snape is a Death Eater!"

Dumbledore had gotten to his feet.

"I have given evidence already on this matter," he said calmly. "Severus Snape was indeed a Death Eater. However, he rejoined our side before Lord Voldemort's downfall and turned spy for us, at great personal risk. He is now no more a Death Eater than I am."

Harry turned to look at Mad-Eye Moody. He was wearing a look of deep skepticism behind Dumbledore's back.

"Very well, Karkaroff," Crouch said coldly, "you have been of assistance. I shall review your case. You will return to Azkaban in the meantime. ..."

Mr. Crouch's voice faded. Harry looked around; the dungeon was dissolving as though it were made of smoke; everything was fading; he could see only his own body - all else was swirling darkness. . . .

And then, the dungeon returned. Harry was sitting in a different seat, still on the highest bench, but now to the left side of Mr. Crouch. The atmosphere seemed quite different: relaxed, even cheerful. The witches and wizards all around the walls were talking to one another, almost as though they were at some sort of sporting event. Harry noticed a witch halfway up the rows of benches opposite. She had short blonde hair, was wearing magenta robes, and was sucking the end of an acid-green quill. It was, unmistakably, a younger Rita Skeeter. Harry looked around; Dumbledore was sitting beside him again, wearing different robes. Mr. Crouch looked more tired and somehow fiercer, gaunter. . . . Harry understood. It was a different memory, a different day ... a different trial.

The door in the corner opened, and Ludo Bagman walked into the room.

This was not, however, a Ludo Bagman gone to seed, but a Ludo Bagman who was clearly at the height of his Quidditch-playing fitness. His nose wasn't broken now; he was tall and lean and muscular. Bagman looked nervous as he sat down in the chained chair, but it did not bind him there as it had bound Karkaroff, and Bagman, perhaps taking heart from this, glanced around at the watching crowd, waved at a couple of them, and managed a small smile.

"Ludo Bagman, you have been brought here in front of the Council of Magical Law to answer charges relating to the activities of the Death Eaters," said Mr. Crouch. "We have heard the evidence against you, and are about to reach our verdict. Do you have anything to add to your testimony before we pronounce judgment?"

Harry couldn't believe his ears. Ludo Bagman, a Death Eater?

"Only," said Bagman, smiling awkwardly, "well - I know I've been a bit of an idiot -"

One or two wizards and witches in the surrounding seats smiled indulgently. Mr. Crouch did not appear to share their feelings. He was staring down at Ludo Bagman with an expression of the utmost severity and dislike.

"You never spoke a truer word, boy," someone muttered dryly to Dumbledore behind Harry. He looked around and saw Moody sitting there again. "If I didn't know he'd always been dim, I'd have said some of those Bludgers had permanently affected his brain. ..."

"Ludovic Bagman, you were caught passing information to Lord Voldemort's supporters," said Mr. Crouch. "For this, I suggest a term of imprisonment in Azkaban lasting no less than _"

But there was an angry outcry from the surrounding benches. Several of the witches and wizards around the walls stood up, shaking their heads, and even their fists, at Mr. Crouch.

"But I've told you, I had no idea!" Bagman called earnestly over the crowd's babble, his round blue eyes widening. "None at all! Old Rookwood was a friend of my dad's . . . never crossed my mind he was in with You-Know-Who! I thought I was collecting information for our side! And Rookwood kept talking about getting me a job in the Ministry later on ... once

my Quidditch days are over, you know ... I mean, I can't keep getting hit by Bludgers for the rest of my life, can I?"

There were titters from the crowd.

"It will be put to the vote," said Mr. Crouch coldly. He turned to the right-hand side of the dungeon. "The jury will please raise their hands . . . those in favor of imprisonment..."

Harry looked toward the right-hand side of the dungeon. Not one person raised their hand. Many of the witches and wizards around the walls began to clap. One of the witches on the jury stood up.

"Yes?" barked Crouch.

"We'd just like to congratulate Mr. Bagman on his splendid performance for England in the Quidditch match against Turkey last Saturday," the witch said breathlessly.

Mr. Crouch looked furious. The dungeon was ringing with applause now. Bagman got to his feet and bowed, beaming.

"Despicable," Mr. Crouch spat at Dumbledore, sitting down as Bagman walked out of the dungeon. "Rookwood get him a job indeed. . . . The day Ludo Bagman joins us will be a sad day indeed for the Ministry. . . ."

And the dungeon dissolved again. When it had returned, Harry looked around. He and Dumbledore were still sitting beside Mr. Crouch, but the atmosphere could not have been more different. There was total silence, broken only by the dry sobs of a frail, wispy-looking witch in the seat next to Mr. Crouch. She was clutching a handkerchief to her mouth with trembling hands.

Harry looked up at Crouch and saw that he looked gaunter and grayer than ever before. A nerve was twitching in his temple.

"Bring them in," he said, and his voice echoed through the silent dungeon.

The door in the corner opened yet again. Six dementors entered this time, flanking a group of four people. Harry saw the people in the crowd turn to look up at Mr. Crouch. A few of them whispered to one another.

The dementors placed each of the four people in the four chairs with chained arms that now stood on the dungeon floor. There was a thickset man who stared blankly up at Crouch; a thinner and more nervous-looking man, whose eyes were darting around the crowd; a woman with thick, shining dark hair and heavily hooded eyes, who was sitting in the chained chair as though it were a throne; and a boy in his late teens, who looked nothing short of petrified. He was shivering, his straw-colored hair all over his face, his freckled skin milk-white. The wispy little witch beside Crouch began to rock backward and forward in her seat, whimpering into her handkerchief.

Crouch stood up. He looked down upon the four in front of him, and there was pure hatred in his face.

"You have been brought here before the Council of Magical Law," he said clearly, "so that we may pass judgment on you, for a crime so heinous -"

"Father," said the boy with the straw-colored hair. "Father. . . please . . ."

"- that we have rarely heard the like of it within this court," said Crouch, speaking more loudly, drowning out his son's voice.

"We have heard the evidence against you. The four of you stand accused of capturing an Auror - Frank Longbottom - and subjecting him to the Cruciatus Curse, believing him to have knowledge of the present whereabouts of your exiled master, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named -"

"Father, I didn't!" shrieked the boy in chains below. "I didn't, I swear it. Father, don't send me back to the dementors -"

"You are further accused," bellowed Mr. Crouch, "of using the Cruciatus Curse on Frank Longbottom's wife, when he would not give you information. You planned to restore He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named to power, and to resume the lives of violence you presumably led while he was strong. I now ask the jury -"

"Mother!" screamed the boy below, and the wispy little witch beside Crouch began to sob, rocking backward and forward. "Mother, stop him. Mother, I didn't do it, it wasn't me!"

"I now ask the jury," shouted Mr. Crouch, "to raise their hands if they believe, as I do, that these crimes deserve a life sentence in Azkaban!"

In unison, the witches and wizards along the right-hand side of the dungeon raised their hands. The crowd around the walls began to clap as it had for Bagman, their faces full of savage triumph. The boy began to scream.

"No! Mother, no! I didn't do it, I didn't do it, I didn't know! Don't send me there, don't let him!"

The dementors were gliding back into the room. The boys' three companions rose quietly from their seats; the woman with the heavy-lidded eyes looked up at Crouch and called, "The Dark Lord will rise again, Crouch! Throw us into Azkaban; we will wait! He will rise again and will come for us, he will reward us beyond any of his other supporters! We alone were faithful! We alone tried to find him!"

But the boy was trying to fight off the dementors, even though Harry could see their cold, draining power starting to affect him. The crowd was jeering, some of them on their feet, as the woman swept out of the dungeon, and the boy continued to struggle.

"I'm your son!" he screamed up at Crouch. "I'm your son!"

"You are no son of mine!" bellowed Mr. Crouch, his eyes bulging suddenly. "I have no son!" The wispy witch beside him gave a great gasp and slumped in her seat. She had fainted. Crouch appeared not to have noticed.

"Take them away!" Crouch roared at the dementors, spit flying from his mouth. "Take them away, and may they rot there!"

"Father! Father, I wasn't involved! No! No! Father, please!"

"I think. Harry, it is time to return to my office," said a quiet voice in Harry's ear.

Harry started. He looked around. Then he looked on his other side.

There was an Albus Dumbledore sitting on his right, watching Crouch's son being dragged away by the dementors - and there was an Albus Dumbledore on his left, looking right at him.

"Come," said the Dumbledore on his left, and he put his hand under Harry's elbow. Harry felt himself rising into the air; the dungeon dissolved around him; for a moment, all was blackness, and then he felt as though he had done a slow-motion somersault, suddenly landing flat on his feet, in what seemed like the dazzling light of Dumbledore's sunlit office. The stone basin was shimmering in the cabinet in front of him, and Albus Dumbledore was standing beside him.

"Professor," Harry gasped, "I know I shouldn't've - I didn't mean - the cabinet door was sort of open and -"

"I quite understand," said Dumbledore. He lifted the basin, carried it over to his desk, placed it upon the polished top, and sat down in the chair behind it. He motioned for Harry to sit down opposite him.

Harry did so, staring at the stone basin. The contents had returned to their original, silvery-white state, swirling and rippling beneath his gaze.

"What is it?" Harry asked shakily.

"This? It is called a Pensieve," said Dumbledore. "I sometimes find, and I am sure you know the feeling, that I simply have too many thoughts and memories crammed into my mind."

"Er," said Harry, who couldn't truthfully say that he had ever felt anything of the sort.

"At these times," said Dumbledore, indicating the stone basin, "I use the Pensieve. One simply siphons the excess thoughts from one's mind, pours them into the basin, and examines them at one's leisure. It becomes easier to spot patterns and links, you understand, when they are in this form."

"You mean . . . that stuff's your thoughts?" Harry said, staring at the swirling white substance in the basin.

"Certainly," said Dumbledore. "Let me show you."

Dumbledore drew his wand out of the inside of his robes and placed the tip into his own silvery hair, near his temple. When he took the wand away, hair seemed to be clinging to it - but then Harry saw that it was in fact a glistening strand of the same strange silvery-white substance that filled the Pensieve. Dumbledore added this fresh thought to the basin, and Harry, astonished, saw his own face swimming around the surface of the bowl. Dumbledore placed his long hands on either side of the Pensieve and swirled it, rather as a gold prospector would pan for fragments of gold.... and Harry saw his own face change smoothly into Snape's, who opened his mouth and spoke to the ceiling, his voice echoing slightly.

"It's coming back . . . Karkaroff's too . . . stronger and clearer than ever..."

"A connection I could have made without assistance," Dumbledore sighed, "but never mind." He peered over the top of his half-moon spectacles at Harry, who was gaping at Snape's face, which was continuing to swirl around the bowl. "I was using the Pensieve when Mr. Fudge arrived for our meeting and put it away rather hastily. Undoubtedly I did not fasten the cabinet door properly. Naturally, it would have attracted your attention."

"I'm sorry," Harry mumbled.

Dumbledore shook his head. "Curiosity is not a sin," he said. "But we should exercise caution with our curiosity. . . yes, indeed ..."

Frowning slightly, he prodded the thoughts within the basin with the tip of his wand. Instantly, a figure rose out of it, a plump, scowling girl of about sixteen, who began to revolve slowly, with her feet still in the basin. She took no notice whatsoever of Harry or Professor Dumbledore. When she spoke, her voice echoed as Snape's had done, as though it were coming from the depths of the stone basin. "He put a hex on me, Professor Dumbledore, and I

was only teasing him, sir, I only said I'd seen him kissing Florence behind the greenhouses last Thursday. . . ."

"But why, Bertha," said Dumbledore sadly, looking up at the now silently revolving girl, "why did you have to follow him in the first place?"

"Bertha?" Harry whispered, looking up at her. "Is that - was that Bertha Jorkins?"

"Yes," said Dumbledore, prodding the thoughts in the basin again; Bertha sank back into them, and they became silvery and opaque once more. "That was Bertha as I remember her at school."

The silvery light from the Pensieve illuminated Dumbledore's face, and it struck Harry suddenly how very old he was looking. He knew, of course, that Dumbledore was getting on in years, but somehow he never really thought of Dumbledore as an old man.

"So, Harry," said Dumbledore quietly. "Before you got lost in my thoughts, you wanted to tell me something."

"Yes," said Harry. "Professor - I was in Divination just now, and - er - I fell asleep."

He hesitated here, wondering if a reprimand was coming, but Dumbledore merely said, "Quite understandable. Continue."

"Well, I had a dream," said Harry. "A dream about Lord Voldemort. He was torturing Wormtail . . . you know who Wormtail-"

"I do know," said Dumbledore promptly. "Please continue."

"Voldemort got a letter from an owl. He said something like, Wormtail's blunder had been repaired. He said someone was dead. Then he said, Wormtail wouldn't be fed to the snake - there was a snake beside his chair. He said - he said he'd be feeding me to it, instead. Then he did the Cruciatus Curse on Wormtail - and my scar hurt," Harry said. "It woke me up, it hurt so badly."

Dumbledore merely looked at him.

"Er - that's all," said Harry.

"I see," said Dumbledore quietly. "I see. Now, has your scar hurt at any other time this year, excepting the time it woke you up over the summer?"

"No, I - how did you know it woke me up over the summer?" said Harry, astonished.

"You are not Sirius's only correspondent," said Dumbledore. "I have also been in contact with him ever since he left Hogwarts last year. It was I who suggested the mountainside cave as the safest place for him to stay."

Dumbledore got up and began walking up and down behind his desk. Every now and then, he placed his wand tip to his temple, removed another shining silver thought, and added it to the Pensieve. The thoughts inside began to swirl so fast that Harry couldn't make out anything clearly: It was merely a blur of color.

"Professor?" he said quietly, after a couple of minutes.

Dumbledore stopped pacing and looked at Harry.

"My apologies," he said quietly. He sat back down at his desk.

"D'you - d'you know why my scar's hurting me?"

Dumbledore looked very intently at Harry for a moment, and then said, "I have a theory, no more than that. ... It is my belief that your scar hurts both when Lord Voldemort is near you, and when he is feeling a particularly strong surge of hatred."

"But. . . why?"

"Because you and he are connected by the curse that failed," said Dumbledore. "That is no ordinary scar."

"So you think . . . that dream . . . did it really happen?"

"It is possible," said Dumbledore. "I would say - probable. Harry - did you see Voldemort?"

"No," said Harry. "Just the back of his chair. But - there wouldn't have been anything to see, would there? I mean, he hasn't got a body, has he? But. . . but then how could he have held the wand?" Harry said slowly.

"How indeed?" muttered Dumbledore. "How indeed . . ."

Neither Dumbledore nor Harry spoke for a while. Dumbledore was gazing across the room, and, every now and then, placing his wand tip to his temple and adding another shining silver thought to the seething mass within the Pensieve.

"Professor," Harry said at last, "do you think he's getting stronger?"

"Voldemort?" said Dumbledore, looking at Harry over the Pensieve. It was the characteristic, piercing look Dumbledore had given him on other occasions, and always made Harry feel as though Dumbledore were seeing right through him in a way that even Moody's magical eye could not. "Once again. Harry, I can only give you my suspicions."

Dumbledore sighed again, and he looked older, and wearier, than ever.

"The years of Voldemort's ascent to power," he said, "were marked with disappearances. Bertha Jorkins has vanished without a trace in the place where Voldemort was certainly known to be last. Mr. Crouch too has disappeared . . . within these very grounds. And there was a third disappearance, one which the Ministry, I regret to say, do not consider of any importance, for it concerns a Muggle. His name was Frank Bryce, he lived in the village where Voldemort's father grew up, and he has not been seen since last August. You see, I read the Muggle newspapers, unlike most of my Ministry friends."

Dumbledore looked very seriously at Harry.

"These disappearances seem to me to be linked. The Ministry disagrees - as you may have heard, while waiting outside my office."

Harry nodded. Silence fell between them again, Dumbledore extracting thoughts every now and then. Harry felt as though he ought to go, but his curiosity held him in his chair.

"Professor?" he said again.

"Yes, Harry?" said Dumbledore.

"Er . . . could I ask you about. . . that court thing I was in ... in the Pensieve?"

"You could," said Dumbledore heavily. "I attended it many times, but some trials come back to me more clearly than others ... particularly now. ..."

"You know - you know the trial you found me in? The one with Crouch's son? Well....were they talking about Neville's parents?"

Dumbledore gave Harry a very sharp look. "Has Neville never told you why he has been brought up by his grandmother?" he said.

Harry shook his head, wondering, as he did so, how he could have failed to ask Neville this, in almost four years of knowing him.

"Yes, they were talking about Nevilles parents," said Dumbledore. "His father, Frank, was an Auror just like Professor Moody. He and his wife were tortured for information about Voldemort's whereabouts after he lost his powers, as you heard."

"So they're dead?" said Harry quietly.

"No," said Dumbledore, his voice full of a bitterness Harry had never heard there before.

"They are insane. They are both in St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries. I believe Neville visits them, with his grandmother, during the holidays. They do not recognize him."

Harry sat there, horror-struck. He had never known . . . never, in four years, bothered to find out. . .

"The Longbottoms were very popular," said Dumbledore. "The attacks on them came after Voldemort's fall from power, just when everyone thought they were safe. Those attacks caused a wave of fury such as I have never known. The Ministry was under great pressure to catch those who had done it. Unfortunately, the Longbottoms' evidence was - given their condition - none too reliable."

"Then Mr. Crouch's son might not have been involved?" said Harry slowly.

Dumbledore shook his head.

"As to that, I have no idea."

Harry sat in silence once more, watching the contents of the Pensieve swirl. There were two more questions he was burning to ask . . . but they concerned the guilt of living people. . . .

"Er," he said, "Mr. Bagman . . ."

"... has never been accused of any Dark activity since," said Dumbledore calmly.

"Right," said Harry hastily, staring at the contents of the Pensieve again, which were swirling more slowly now that Dumbledore had stopped adding thoughts. "And ... er ..."

But the Pensieve seemed to be asking his question for him.

Snape's face was swimming on the surface again. Dumbledore glanced down into it, and then up at Harry.

"No more has Professor Snape," he said.

Harry looked into Dumbledore's light blue eyes, and the thing he really wanted to know spilled out of his mouth before he could stop it.

"What made you think he'd really stopped supporting Voldemort, Professor?"

Dumbledore held Harry's gaze for a few seconds, and then said, "That, Harry, is a matter between Professor Snape and myself."

Harry knew that the interview was over; Dumbledore did not look angry, yet there was a finality in his tone that told Harry it was time to go. He stood up, and so did Dumbledore.

"Harry," he said as Harry reached the door. "Please do not speak about Neville's parents to anybody else. He has the right to let people know, when he is ready."

"Yes, Professor," said Harry, turning to go.

"And-"

Harry looked back. Dumbledore was standing over the Pensieve, his face lit from beneath by its silvery spots of light, looking older than ever. He stared at Harry for a moment, and then said, "Good luck with the third task."

Dumbledore reckons You-Know-Who's getting stronger again as well?" Ron whispered.

Everything Harry had seen in the Pensieve, nearly everything Dumbledore had told and shown him afterward, he had now shared with Ron and Hermione - and, of course, with Sirius, to whom Harry had sent an owl the moment he had left Dumbledore's office. Harry, Ron, and Hermione sat up late in the common room once again that night, talking it all over until Harry's mind was reeling, until he understood what Dumbledore had meant about a head becoming so full of thoughts that it would have been a relief to siphon them off.

Ron stared into the common room fire. Harry thought he saw Ron shiver slightly, even though the evening was warm.

"And he trusts Snape?" Ron said. "He really trusts Snape, even though he knows he was a Death Eater?"

"Yes," said Harry.

Hermione had not spoken for ten minutes. She was sitting with her forehead in her hands, staring at her knees. Harry thought she too looked as though she could have done with a Pensieve.

"Rita Skeeter," she muttered finally.

"How can you be worrying about her now?" said Ron, in utter disbelief.

"I'm not worrying about her," Hermione said to her knees. "I'm just thinking. . . remember what she said to me in the Three Broomsticks? 'I know things about Ludo Bagman that would make your hair curl.' This is what she meant, isn't it? She reported his trial, she knew he'd passed information to the Death Eaters. And Winky too, remember . . . 'Ludo Bagman's a bad wizard.' Mr. Crouch would have been furious he got off, he would have talked about it at home."

"Yeah, but Bagman didn't pass information on purpose, did he?"

Hermione shrugged.

"And Fudge reckons Madame Maxime attacked Crouch?" Ron said, turning back to Harry.

"Yeah," said Harry, "but he's only saying that because Crouch disappeared near the Beauxbatons carriage."

"We never thought of her, did we?" said Ron slowly. "Mind you, she's definitely got giant blood, and she doesn't want to admit it-"

"Of course she doesn't," said Hermione sharply, looking up. "Look what happened to Hagrid when Rita found out about his mother. Look at Fudge, jumping to conclusions about her, just because she's part giant. Who needs that sort of prejudice? I'd probably say I had big bones if I knew that's what I'd get for telling the truth."

Hermione looked at her watch. "We haven't done any practicing!" she said, looking shocked. "We were going to do the Impediment Curse! We'll have to really get down to it tomorrow! Come on. Harry, you need to get some sleep."

Harry and Ron went slowly upstairs to their dormitory. As Harry pulled on his pajamas, he looked over at Neville's bed. True to his word to Dumbledore, he had not told Ron and Hermione about Neville's parents. As Harry took off his glasses and climbed into his four-poster, he imagined how it must feel to have parents still living but unable to recognize you. He often got sympathy from strangers for being an orphan, but as he listened to Neville's snores, he thought that Neville deserved it more than he did. Lying in the darkness, Harry felt a rush of anger and hate toward the people who had tortured Mr. and Mrs. Longbottom. ... He remembered the jeers of the crowd as Crouch's son and his companions had been dragged from the court by the dementors. ... He understood how they had felt. ... Then he remembered the milk-white face of the screaming boy and realized with a jolt that he had died a year later. ...

It was Voldemort, Harry thought, staring up at the canopy of his bed in the darkness, it all came back to Voldemort. ... He was the one who had torn these families apart, who had ruined all these lives. ...

Ron and Hermione were supposed to be studying for their exams, which would finish on the day of the third task, but they were putting most of their efforts into helping Harry prepare.

"Don't worry about it," Hermione said shortly when Harry pointed this out to them and said he didn't mind practicing on his own for a while, "at least we'll get top marks in Defense Against the Dark Arts. We'd never have found out about all these hexes in class."

"Good training for when we're all Aurors," said Ron excitedly, attempting the Impediment Curse on a wasp that had buzzed into the room and making it stop dead in midair.

The mood in the castle as they entered June became excited and tense again. Everyone was looking forward to the third task, which would take place a week before the end of term. Harry was practicing hexes at every available moment. He felt more confident about this task than either of the others. Difficult and dangerous though it would undoubtedly be, Moody was right: Harry had managed to find his way past monstrous creatures and enchanted barriers before now, and this time he had some notice, some chance to prepare himself for what lay ahead.

Tired of walking in on Harry, Hermione, and Ron all over the school. Professor McGonagall had given them permission to use the empty Transfiguration classroom at lunchtimes. Harry had soon mastered the Impediment Curse, a spell to slow down and obstruct attackers; the Reductor Curse, which would enable him to blast solid objects out of his way; and the Four-Point Spell, a useful discovery of Hermione's that would make his wand point due north, therefore enabling him to check whether he was going in the right direction within the maze. He was still having trouble with the Shield Charm, though. This was supposed to cast a temporary, invisible wall around himself that deflected minor curses; Hermione managed to shatter it with a well-placed Jelly-Legs Jinx, and Harry wobbled around the room for ten minutes afterward before she had looked up the counter-jinx.

"You're still doing really well, though," Hermione said encouragingly, looking down her list and crossing off those spells they had already learned. "Some of these are bound to come in handy."

"Come and look at this," said Ron, who was standing by the window. He was staring down onto the grounds. "What's Malfoy doing?"

Harry and Hermione went to see. Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle were standing in the shadow of a tree below. Crabbe and Goyle seemed to be keeping a lookout; both were smirking.

Malfoy was holding his hand up to his mouth and speaking into it.

"He looks like he's using a walkie-talkie," said Harry curiously.

"He can't be," said Hermione, "I've told you, those sorts of things don't work around Hogwarts. Come on, Harry," she added briskly, turning away from the window and moving back into the middle of the room, "let's try that Shield Charm again."

Sirius was sending daily owls now. Like Hermione, he seemed to want to concentrate on getting Harry through the last task before they concerned themselves with anything else. He reminded Harry in every letter that whatever might be going on outside the walls of Hogwarts was not Harry's responsibility, nor was it within his power to influence it.

If Voldemort is really getting stronger again, he wrote, my priority is to ensure your safety. He cannot hope to lay hands on you while you are under Dumbledore's protection, but all the same, take no risks: Concentrate on getting through that maze safely, and then we can turn our attention to other matters.

Harry's nerves mounted as June the twenty-fourth drew closer, but they were not as bad as those he had felt before the first and second tasks. For one thing, he was confident that, this time, he had done everything in his power to prepare for the task. For another, this was the final hurdle, and however well or badly he did, the tournament would at last be over, which would be an enormous relief.

Breakfast was a very noisy affair at the Gryffindor table on the morning of the third task. The post owls appeared, bringing Harry a good-luck card from Sirius. It was only a piece of parchment, folded over and bearing a muddy paw print on its front, but Harry appreciated it all the same. A screech owl arrived for Hermione, carrying her morning copy of the Daily Prophet as usual. She unfolded the paper, glanced at the front page, and spat out a mouthful of pumpkin juice all over it.

"What?" said Harry and Ron together, staring at her. "Nothing," said Hermione quickly, trying to shove the paper out of sight, but Ron grabbed it. He stared at the headline and said, "No way. Not today. That old cow."

"What?" said Harry. "Rita Skeeter again?"

"No," said Ron, and just like Hermione, he attempted to push the paper out of sight.

"It's about me, isn't it?" said Harry.

"No," said Ron, in an entirely unconvincing tone. But before Harry could demand to see the paper. Draco Malfoy shouted across the Great Hall from the Slytherin table.

"Hey, Potter! Potter! How's your head? You feeling all right? Sure you're not going to go berserk on us?"

Malfoy was holding a copy of the Daily Prophet too. Slytherins up and down the table were sniggering, twisting in their seats to see Harry's reaction.

"Let me see it," Harry said to Ron. "Give it here."

Very reluctantly, Ron handed over the newspaper. Harry turned it over and found himself staring at his own picture, beneath the banner headline:

"HARRY POTTER "DISTURBED AND DANGEROUS"

The boy who defeated He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named is unstable and possibly dangerous, writes Rita Skeeter, Special Correspondent. Alarming evidence has recently come to light about Harry Potter's strange behavior, which casts doubts upon his suitability to compete in a demanding competition like the Triwizard Tournament, or even to attend Hogwarts School.

Potter, the Daily Prophet can exclusively reveal, regularly collapses at school, and is often heard to complain of pain in the scar on his forehead (relic of the curse with which You-Know-Who attempted to kill him). On Monday last, midway through a Divination lesson, your Daily Prophet reporter witnessed Potter storming from the class, claiming that his scar was hurting too badly to continue studying.

It is possible, say top experts at St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries, that Potters brain was affected by the attack inflicted upon him by You-Know-Who, and that his insistence that the scar is still hurting is an expression of his deep-seated confusion.

"He might even be pretending," said one specialist. "This could be a plea for attention."

The Daily Prophet, however, has unearthed worrying facts about Harry Potter that Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts, has carefully concealed from the wizarding public.

"Potter can speak Parseltongue," reveals Draco Malfoy, a Hogwarts fourth year. "There were a lot of attacks on students a couple of years ago, and most people thought Potter was behind them after they saw him lose his temper at a dueling club and set a snake on another boy. It was all hushed up, though. But he's made friends with werewolves and giants too.

We think he'd do anything for a bit of power."

Parseltongue, the ability to converse with snakes, has long been considered a Dark Art.

Indeed, the most famous Parselmouth of our times is none other than You-Know-Who himself. A member of the Dark Force Defense League, who wished to remain unnamed, stated that he would regard any wizard who could speak Parseltongue "as worthy of investigation. Personally, I would be highly suspicious of anybody who could converse with snakes, as serpents are often used in the worst kinds of Dark Magic, and are historically associated with evildoers." Similarly, "anyone who seeks out the company of such vicious creatures as werewolves and giants would appear to have a fondness for violence."

Albus Dumbledore should surely consider whether a boy such as this should be allowed to compete in the Triwizard Tournament. Some fear that Potter might resort to the Dark Arts in his desperation to win the tournament, the third task of which takes place this evening.

"Gone off me a bit, hasn't she?" said Harry lightly, folding up the paper.

Over at the Slytherin table, Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle were laughing at him, tapping their heads with their fingers, pulling grotesquely mad faces, and wagging their tongues like snakes.

"How did she know your scar hurt in Divination?" Ron said. "There's no way she was there, there's no way she could've heard -"

"The window was open," said Harry. "I opened it to breathe."

"You were at the top of North Tower!" Hermione said. "Your voice couldn't have carried all the way down to the grounds!"

"Well, you're the one who's supposed to be researching magical methods of bugging!" said Harry. "You tell me how she did it!"

"I've been trying!" said Hermione. "But I... but. . ."

An odd, dreamy expression suddenly came over Hermione's face. She slowly raised a hand and ran her fingers through her hair.

"Are you all right?" said Ron, frowning at her.

"Yes," said Hermione breathlessly. She ran her fingers through her hair again, and then held her hand up to her mouth, as though speaking into an invisible walkie-talkie. Harry and Ron stared at each other.

"I've had an idea," Hermione said, gazing into space. "I think I know. . . because then no one would be able to see ... even Moody. . . and she'd have been able to get onto the

window ledge . . . but she's not allowed . . . she's definitely not allowed ... I think we've got her! Just give me two seconds in the library - just to make sure!"

With that, Hermione seized her school bag and dashed out of the Great Hall.

"Oi!" Ron called after her. "We've got our History of Magic exam in ten minutes! Blimey," he said, turning back to Harry, "she must really hate that Skeeter woman to risk missing the start of an exam. What're you going to do in Binns's class - read again?"

Exempt from the end-of-term tests as a Triwizard champion, Harry had been sitting in the back of every exam class so far, looking up fresh hexes for the third task.

"S'pose so," Harry said to Ron; but just then. Professor McGonagall came walking alongside the Gryffindor table toward him.

"Potter, the champions are congregating in the chamber off the Hall after breakfast," she said.

"But the task's not till tonight!" said Harry, accidentally spilling scrambled eggs down his front, afraid he had mistaken the time.

"I'm aware of that, Potter," she said. "The champions' families are invited to watch the final task, you know. This is simply a chance for you to greet them."

She moved away. Harry gaped after her.

"She doesn't expect the Dursleys to turn up, does she?" he asked Ron blankly.

"Dunno," said Ron. "Harry, I'd better hurry, I'm going to be late for Binns. See you later."

Harry finished his breakfast in the emptying Great Hall. He saw Fleur Delacour get up from the Ravenclaw table and join Cedric as he crossed to the side chamber and entered. Krum slouched off to join them shortly afterward. Harry stayed where he was. He really didn't want to go into the chamber. He had no family - no family who would turn up to see him risk his life, anyway. But just as he was getting up, thinking that he might as well go up to the library and do a spot more hex research, the door of the side chamber opened, and Cedric stuck his head out.

"Harry, come on, they're waiting for you!"

Utterly perplexed. Harry got up. The Dursleys couldn't possibly be here, could they? He walked across the Hall and opened the door into the chamber.

Cedric and his parents were just inside the door. Viktor Krum was over in a corner, conversing with his dark-haired mother and father in rapid Bulgarian. He had inherited his father's hooked nose. On the other side of the room, Fleur was jabbering away in French to her mother. Fleur's little sister, Gabrielle, was holding her mother's hand. She waved at Harry, who waved back, grinning. Then he saw Mrs. Weasley and Bill standing in front of the fireplace, beaming at him.

"Surprise!" Mrs. Weasley said excitedly as he smiled broadly and walked over to them.

"Thought we'd come and watch you. Harry!" She bent down and kissed him on the cheek.

"You all right?" said Bill, grinning at Harry and shaking his hand. "Charlie wanted to come, but he couldn't get time off. He said you were incredible against the Horntail."

Fleur Delacour, Harry noticed, was eyeing Bill with great interest over her mother's shoulder. Harry could tell she had no objection whatsoever to long hair or earrings with fangs on them.

"This is really nice of you," Harry muttered to Mrs. Weasley. "I thought for a moment - the Dursleys -"

"Hmm," said Mrs. Weasley, pursing her lips. She had always refrained from criticizing the Dursleys in front of Harry, but her eyes flashed every time they were mentioned.

"It's great being back here," said Bill, looking around the chamber (Violet, the Fat Lady's friend, winked at him from her frame). "Haven't seen this place for five years. Is that picture of the mad knight still around? Sir Cadogan?"

"Oh yeah," said Harry, who had met Sir Cadogan the previous year.

"And the Fat Lady?" said Bill.

"She was here in my time," said Mrs. Weasley. "She gave me such a telling off one night when I got back to the dormitory at four in the morning -"

"What were you doing out of your dormitory at four in the morning?" said Bill, surveying his mother with amazement.

Mrs. Weasley grinned, her eyes twinkling.

"Your father and I had been for a nighttime stroll," she said. "He got caught by Apollyon Pringle - he was the caretaker in those days - your father's still got the marks."

"Fancy giving us a tour, Harry?" said Bill.

"Yeah, okay," said Harry, and they made their way back toward the door into the Great Hall. As they passed Amos Diggory, he looked around.

"There you are, are you?" he said, looking Harry up and down.

"Bet you're not feeling quite as full of yourself now Cedrics caught you up on points, are you?"

"What?" said Harry.

"Ignore him," said Cedric in a low voice to Harry, frowning after his father. "He's been angry ever since Rita Skeeter's article about the Triwizard Tournament - you know, when she made out you were the only Hogwarts champion."

"Didn't bother to correct her, though, did he?" said Amos Diggory, loudly enough for Harry to hear as he started to walk out of the door with Mrs. Weasley and Bill. "Still, . . . you'll show him, Ced. Beaten him once before, haven't you?"

"Rita Skeeter goes out of her way to cause trouble, Amos!" Mrs. Weasley said angrily. "I would have thought you'd know that, working at the Ministry!"

Mr. Diggory looked as though he was going to say something angry, but his wife laid a hand on his arm, and he merely shrugged and turned away.

Harry had a very enjoyable morning walking over the sunny grounds with Bill and Mrs. Weasley, showing them the Beauxbatons carriage and the Durmstrang ship. Mrs. Weasley was intrigued by the Whomping Willow, which had been planted after she had left school, and reminisced at length about the gamekeeper before Hagrid, a man called Ogg.

"How's Percy?" Harry asked as they walked around the greenhouses.

"Not good," said Bill.

"He's very upset," said Mrs. Weasley, lowering her voice and glancing around. "The Ministry wants to keep Mr. Crouch's disappearance quiet, but Percy's been hauled in for questioning about the instructions Mr. Crouch has been sending in. They seem to think there's a chance they weren't genuinely written by him. Percy's been under a lot of strain. They're not letting him fill in for Mr. Crouch as the fifth judge tonight. Cornelius Fudge is going to be doing it." They returned to the castle for lunch.

"Mum - Bill!" said Ron, looking stunned, as he joined the Gryffindor table. "What're you doing here?"

"Come to watch Harry in the last task!" said Mrs. Weasley brightly. "I must say, it makes a lovely change, not having to cook. How was your exam?"

"Oh . . . okay," said Ron. "Couldn't remember all the goblin rebels' names, so I invented a few. It's all right," he said, helping himself to a Cornish pasty, while Mrs. Weasley looked stern, "they're all called stuff like Bodrod the Bearded and Urg the Unclean; it wasn't hard." Fred, George, and Ginny came to sit next to them too, and Harry was having such a good time he felt almost as though he were back at the Burrow; he had forgotten to worry about

that evening's task, and not until Hermione turned up, halfway through lunch, did he remember that she had had a brainwave about Rita Skeeter.

"Are you going to tell us - ?"

Hermione shook her head warningly and glanced at Mrs. Weasley.

"Hello, Hermione," said Mrs. Weasley, much more stiffly than usual.

"Hello," said Hermione, her smile faltering at the cold expression on Mrs. Weasley's face. Harry looked between them, then said, "Mrs. Weasley, you didn't believe that rubbish Rita Skeeter wrote in Witch Weekly, did you? Because Hermione's not my girlfriend."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Weasley "No - of course I didn't!"

But she became considerably warmer toward Hermione after that.

Harry, Bill, and Mrs. Weasley whiled away the afternoon with a long walk around the castle, and then returned to the Great Hall for the evening feast. Ludo Bagman and Cornelius Fudge had joined the staff table now. Bagman looked quite cheerful, but Cornelius Fudge, who was sitting next to Madame Maxime, looked stern and was not talking. Madame Maxime was concentrating on her plate, and Harry thought her eyes looked red. Hagrid kept glancing along the table at her,

There were more courses than usual, but Harry, who was starting to feel really nervous now, didn't eat much. As the enchanted ceiling overhead began to fade from blue to a dusky purple, Dumbledore rose to his feet at the staff table, and silence fell.

"Ladies and gentlemen, in five minutes' time, I will be asking you to make your way down to the Quidditch field for the third and final task of the Triwizard Tournament. Will the champions please follow Mr. Bagman down to the stadium now."

Harry got up. The Gryffindors all along the table were applauding him; the Weasleys and Hermione all wished him good luck, and he headed off out of the Great Hall with Cedric, Fleur, and Viktor.

"Feeling all right, Harry?" Bagman asked as they went down the stone steps onto the grounds. "Confident?"

"I'm okay," said Harry. It was sort of true; he was nervous, but he kept running over all the hexes and spells he had been practicing in his mind as they walked, and the knowledge that he could remember them all made him feel better.

They walked onto the Quidditch field, which was now completely unrecognizable. A twenty-foot-high hedge ran all the way around the edge of it. There was a gap right in front of them: the entrance to the vast maze. The passage beyond it looked dark and creepy. Five minutes later, the stands had begun to fill; the air was full of excited voices and the rumbling of feet as the hundreds of students filed into their seats. The sky was a deep, clear blue now, and the first stars were starting to appear. Hagrid, Professor Moody, Professor McGonagall, and Professor Flitwick came walking into the stadium and approached Bagman and the champions. They were wearing large, red, luminous stars on their hats, all except Hagrid, who had his on the back of his moleskin vest.

"We are going to be patrolling the outside of the maze," said Professor McGonagall to the champions. "If you get into difficulty, and wish to be rescued, send red sparks into the air, and one of us will come and get you, do you understand?"

The champions nodded.

"Off you go, then!" said Bagman brightly to the four patrollers.

"Good luck, Harry," Hagrid whispered, and the four of them walked away in different directions, to station themselves around the maze. Bagman now pointed his wand at his throat, muttered, "Sonus," and his magically magnified voice echoed into the stands.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the third and final task of the Triwizard Tournament is about to begin! Let me remind you how the points currently stand! Tied in first place, with eighty-five points each - Mr. Cedric Diggory and Mr. Harry Potter, both of Hogwarts School!" The cheers and applause sent birds from the Forbidden Forest fluttering into the darkening sky.

"In second place, with eighty points - Mr. Viktor Krum, of Durmstrang Institute!" More applause. "And in third place - Miss Fleur Delacour, of Beauxbatons Academy!"

Harry could just make out Mrs. Weasley, Bill, Ron, and Hermione applauding Fleur politely, halfway up the stands. He waved up at them, and they waved back, beaming at him.

"So ... on my whistle, Harry and Cedric!" said Bagman. "Three - two - one -"

He gave a short blast on his whistle, and Harry and Cedric hurried forward into the maze.

The towering hedges cast black shadows across the path, and, whether because they were so tall and thick or because they had been enchanted, the sound of the surrounding crowd was silenced the moment they entered the maze. Harry felt almost as though he were underwater again. He pulled out his wand, muttered, "Lumos," and heard Cedric do the same just behind him.

After about fifty yards, they reached a fork. They looked at each other.

"See you," Harry said, and he took the left one, while Cedric took the right.

Harry heard Bagman's whistle for the second time. Krum had entered the maze. Harry sped up. His chosen path seemed completely deserted. He turned right, and hurried on, holding his wand high over his head, trying to see as far ahead as possible. Still, there was nothing in sight.

Bagman's whistle blew in the distance for the third time. All of the champions were now inside.

Harry kept looking behind him. The old feeling that he was being watched was upon him.

The maze was growing darker with every passing minute as the sky overhead deepened to navy. He reached a second fork.

"Point Me," he whispered to his wand, holding it flat in his palm.

The wand spun around once and pointed toward his right, into solid hedge. That way was north, and he knew that he needed to go northwest for the center of the maze. The best he could do was to take the left fork and go right again as soon as possible.

The path ahead was empty too, and when Harry reached a right turn and took it, he again found his way unblocked. Harry didn't know why, but the lack of obstacles was unnerving him. Surely he should have met something by now? It felt as though the maze were luring him into a false sense of security. Then he heard movement right behind him. He held out his wand, ready to attack, but its beam fell only upon Cedric, who had just hurried out of a path on the right-hand side. Cedric looked severely shaken. The sleeve of his robe was smoking.

"Hagrid's Blast-Ended Skrewts!" he hissed. "They're enormous - I only just got away!"

He shook his head and dived out of sight, along another path. Keen to put plenty of distance between himself and the skrewts, Harry hurried off again. Then, as he turned a corner, he saw ... a dementor gliding toward him. Twelve feet tall, its face hidden by its hood, its rotting, scabbed hands outstretched, it advanced, sensing its way blindly toward him. Harry could hear its rattling breath; he felt clammy coldness stealing over him, but knew what he had to do....

He summoned the happiest thought he could, concentrated with all his might on the thought of getting out of the maze and celebrating with Ron and Hermione, raised his wand, and cried, "Expecto Patronum!"

A silver stag erupted from the end of Harry's wand and galloped toward the dementor, which fell back and tripped over the hem of its robes. . . . Harry had never seen a dementor stumble.

"Hang on!" he shouted, advancing in the wake of his silver Patronus, "You're a boggart! Riddikulus!"

There was a loud crack, and the shape-shifter exploded in a wisp of smoke. The silver stag faded from sight. Harry wished it could have stayed, he could have used some company...but he moved on, quickly and quietly as possible, listening hard, his wand held high once more.

Left ... right... left again . . . Twice he found himself facing dead ends. He did the Four-Point Spell again and found that he was going too far east. He turned back, took a right turn, and saw an odd golden mist floating ahead of him.

Harry approached it cautiously, pointing the wand's beam at it. This looked like some kind of enchantment. He wondered whether he might be able to blast it out of the way.

"Reducio!" he said.

The spell shot straight through the mist, leaving it intact. He supposed he should have known better; the Reductor Curse was for solid objects. What would happen if he walked through the mist? Was it worth chancing it, or should he double back?

He was still hesitating when a scream shattered the silence.

"Fleur?" Harry yelled.

There was silence. He stared all around him. What had happened to her? Her scream seemed to have come from somewhere ahead. He took a deep breath and ran through the enchanted mist.

The world turned upside down. Harry was hanging from the ground, with his hair on end, his glasses dangling off his nose, threatening to fall into the bottomless sky. He clutched them to the end of his nose and hung there, terrified. It felt as though his feet were glued to the grass, which had now become the ceiling. Below him the dark, star-spangled heavens stretched endlessly. He felt as though if he tried to move one of his feet, he would fall away from the earth completely.

Think, he told himself, as all the blood rushed to his head, think. . .

But not one of the spells he had practiced had been designed to combat a sudden reversal of ground and sky. Did he dare move his foot? He could hear the blood pounding in his ears. He had two choices - try and move, or send up red sparks, and get rescued and disqualified from the task.

He shut his eyes, so he wouldn't be able to see the view of endless space below him, and pulled his right foot as hard as he could away from the grassy ceiling.

Immediately, the world righted itself. Harry fell forward onto his knees onto the wonderfully solid ground. He felt temporarily limp with shock. He took a deep, steadying breath, then got up again and hurried forward, looking back over his shoulder as he ran away from the golden mist, which twinkled innocently at him in the moonlight.

He paused at a junction of two paths and looked around for some sign of Fleur. He was sure it had been she who had screamed. What had she met? Was she all right? There was no sign of red sparks - did that mean she had got herself out of trouble, or was she in such trouble that she couldn't reach her wand? Harry took the right fork with a feeling of increasing unease . . . but at the same time, he couldn't help thinking. One champion down.

. .

The cup was somewhere close by, and it sounded as though Fleur was no longer in the running. He'd got this far, hadn't he? What if he actually managed to win? Fleeting, and

for the first time since he'd found himself champion, he saw again that image of himself, raising the Triwizard Cup in front of the rest of the school. . . .

He met nothing for ten minutes, but kept running into dead ends. Twice he took the same wrong turning. Finally, he found a new route and started to jog along it, his wandlight waving, making his shadow flicker and distort on the hedge walls. Then he rounded another corner and found himself facing a Blast-Ended Skrewt.

Cedric was right - it was enormous. Ten feet long, it looked more like a giant scorpion than anything. Its long sting was curled over its back. Its thick armor glinted in the light from Harry's wand, which he pointed at it.

"Stupefy!"

The spell hit the skrewt's armor and rebounded; Harry ducked just in time, but could smell burning hair; it had singed the top of his head. The skrewt issued a blast of fire from its end and flew forward toward him.

"Impedimenta!" Harry yelled. The spell hit the skrewt's armor again and ricocheted off; Harry staggered back a few paces and fell over. "IMPEDIMENTA!"

The skrewt was inches from him when it froze - he had managed to hit it on its fleshy, shell-less underside. Panting, Harry pushed himself away from it and ran, hard, in the opposite direction - the Impediment Curse was not permanent; the skrewt would be regaining the use of its legs at any moment.

He took a left path and hit a dead end, a right, and hit another; forcing himself to stop, heart hammering, he performed the Four-Point Spell again, backtracked, and chose a path that would take him northwest.

He had been hurrying along the new path for a few minutes, when he heard something in the path running parallel to his own that made him stop dead.

"What are you doing?" yelled Cedric's voice. "What the hell d'you think you're doing?"

And then Harry heard Krum's voice.

"Crucio!"

The air was suddenly full of Cedric's yells. Horrified, Harry began sprinting up his path, trying to find a way into Cedric's. When none appeared, he tried the Reductor Curse again. It wasn't very effective, but it burned a small hole in the hedge through which Harry forced his leg, kicking at the thick brambles and branches until they broke and made an opening; he struggled through it, tearing his robes, and looking to his right, saw Cedric jerking and twitching on the ground, Krum standing over him.

Harry pulled himself up and pointed his wand at Krum just as Krum looked up. Krum turned and began to run.

"Stupefy!" Harry yelled.

The spell hit Krum in the back; he stopped dead in his tracks, fell forward, and lay motionless, facedown in the grass. Harry-dashed over to Cedric, who had stopped twitching and was lying there panting, his hands over his face.

"Are you all right?" Harry said roughly, grabbing Cedric's arm.

"Yeah," panted Cedric. "Yeah ... I don't believe it... he crept up behind me. ... I heard him, I turned around, and he had his wand on me. . . ."

Cedric got up. He was still shaking. He and Harry looked down at Krum.

"I can't believe this ... I thought he was all right," Harry said, staring at Krum.

"So did I," said Cedric.

"Did you hear Fleur scream earlier?" said Harry.

"Yeah," said Cedric. "You don't think Krum got her too?"

"I don't know," said Harry slowly.

"Should we leave him here?" Cedric muttered.

"No," said Harry. "I reckon we should send up red sparks. Someone'll come and collect him . . . otherwise he'll probably be eaten by a skrewt."

"He'd deserve it," Cedric muttered, but all the same, he raised his wand and shot a shower of red sparks into the air, which hovered high above Krum, marking the spot where he lay. Harry and Cedric stood there in the darkness for a moment, looking around them. Then Cedric said, "Well... I s'pose we'd better go on. . . ."

"What?" said Harry. "Oh . . . yeah . . . right. . ."

It was an odd moment. He and Cedric had been briefly united against Krum - now the fact that they were opponents came back to Harry. The two of them proceeded up the dark path without speaking, then Harry turned left, and Cedric right. Cedric's footsteps soon died away.

Harry moved on, continuing to use the Four-Point Spell, making sure he was moving in the right direction. It was between him and Cedric now. His desire to reach the cup first was now burning stronger than ever, but he could hardly believe what he'd just seen Krum do. The use of an Unforgivable Curse on a fellow human being meant a life term in Azkaban, that was what Moody had told them. Krum surely couldn't have wanted the Triwizard Cup that badly....Harry sped up.

Every so often he hit more dead ends, but the increasing darkness made him feel sure he was getting near the heart of the maze. Then, as he strode down a long, straight path, he saw movement once again, and his beam of wandlight hit an extraordinary creature, one which he had only seen in picture form, in his Monster Book of Monsters.

It was a sphinx. It had the body of an over-large lion: great clawed paws and a long yellowish tail ending in a brown tuft. Its head, however, was that of a woman. She turned her long, almond-shaped eyes upon Harry as he approached. He raised his wand, hesitating. She was not crouching as if to spring, but pacing from side to side of the path, blocking his progress. Then she spoke, in a deep, hoarse voice.

"You are very near your goal. The quickest way is past me."

"So ... so will you move, please?" said Harry, knowing what the answer was going to be.

"No," she said, continuing to pace. "Not unless you can answer my riddle. Answer on your first guess - I let you pass. Answer wrongly - I attack. Remain silent - I will let you walk away from me unscathed."

Harry's stomach slipped several notches. It was Hermione who was good at this sort of thing, not him. He weighed his chances. If the riddle was too hard, he could keep silent, get away from the sphinx unharmed, and try and find an alternative route to the center.

"Okay," he said. "Can I hear the riddle?"

The sphinx sat down upon her hind legs, in the very middle of the path, and recited:

"First think of the person who lives in disguise,

Who deals in secrets and tells naught but lies.

Next, tell me what's always the last thing to mend,

The middle of middle and end of the end?

And finally give me the sound often heard

During the search for a hard-to-find word.

Now string them together, and answer me this,

Which creature would you be unwilling to kiss?"

Harry gaped at her.

"Could I have it again . . . more slowly?" he asked tentatively. She blinked at him, smiled, and repeated the poem. "All the clues add up to a creature I wouldn't want to kiss?" Harry asked.

She merely smiled her mysterious smile. Harry took that for a "yes." Harry cast his mind around. There were plenty of animals he wouldn't want to kiss; his immediate thought was a Blast-Ended Skrewt, but something told him that wasn't the answer. He'd have to try and work out the clues. . . .

"A person in disguise," Harry muttered, staring at her, "who lies ... er ... that'd be a - an impostor. No, that's not my guess! A - a spy? I'll come back to that. . . could you give me the next clue again, please?"

She repeated the next lines of the poem.

"The last thing to mend," Harry repeated. "Er ... no idea . . . 'middle of middle' . . . could I have the last bit again?"

She gave him the last four lines.

"The sound often heard during the search for a hard-to-find word," said Harry. "Er . . . that'd be ... er ... hang on - 'er!' Er's a sound!"

The sphinx smiled at him.

"Spy ... er ... spy ... er ..." said Harry, pacing up and down. "A creature I wouldn't want to kiss . . . a spider!"

The sphinx smiled more broadly. She got up, stretched her front legs, and then moved aside for him to pass.

"Thanks!" said Harry, and, amazed at his own brilliance, he dashed forward.

He had to be close now, he had to be. ... His wand was telling him he was bang on course; as long as he didn't meet anything too horrible, he might have a chance. . . .

Harry broke into a run. He had a choice of paths up ahead. "Point Me!" he whispered again to his wand, and it spun around and pointed him to the right-hand one. He dashed up this one and saw light ahead.

The Triwizard Cup was gleaming on a plinth a hundred yards away. Suddenly a dark figure hurtled out onto the path in front of him.

Cedric was going to get there first. Cedric was sprinting as fast as he could toward the cup, and Harry knew he would never catch up, Cedric was much taller, had much longer legs - Then Harry saw something immense over a hedge to his left, moving quickly along a path that intersected with his own; it was moving so fast Cedric was about to run into it, and Cedric, his eyes on the cup, had not seen it -

"Cedric!" Harry bellowed. "On your left!"

Cedric looked around just in time to hurl himself past the thing and avoid colliding with it, but in his haste, he tripped. Harry saw Cedric's wand fly out of his hand as a gigantic spider stepped into the path and began to bear down upon Cedric.

"Stupefy!" Harry yelled; the spell hit the spider's gigantic, hairy black body, but for all the good it did, he might as well have thrown a stone at it; the spider jerked, scuttled around, and ran at Harry instead.

"Stupefy! Impedimenta! Stupefy!"

But it was no use - the spider was either so large, or so magical, that the spells were doing no more than aggravating it. Harry had one horrifying glimpse of eight shining black eyes and razor-sharp pincers before it was upon him.

He was lifted into the air in its front legs; struggling madly, he tried to kick it; his leg connected with the pincers and next moment he was in excruciating pain. He could hear

Cedric yelling "Stupefy!" too, but his spell had no more effect than Harry's - Harry raised his wand as the spider opened its pincers once more and shouted "Expelliarmus!"

It worked - the Disarming Spell made the spider drop him, but that meant that Harry fell twelve feet onto his already injured leg, which crumpled beneath him. Without pausing to think, he aimed high at the spider's underbelly, as he had done with the skrewt, and shouted "Stupefy!" just as Cedric yelled the same thing.

The two spells combined did what one alone had not: The spider keeled over sideways, flattening a nearby hedge, and strewing the path with a tangle of hairy legs.

"Harry!" he heard Cedric shouting. "You all right? Did it fall on you?"

"No," Harry called back, panting. He looked down at his leg. It was bleeding freely. He could see some sort of thick, gluey secretion from the spider's pincers on his torn robes. He tried to get up, but his leg was shaking badly and did not want to support his weight. He leaned against the hedge, gasping for breath, and looked around.

Cedric was standing feet from the Triwizard Cup, which was gleaming behind him.

"Take it, then," Harry panted to Cedric. "Go on, take it. You're there."

But Cedric didn't move. He merely stood there, looking at Harry. Then he turned to stare at the cup. Harry saw the longing expression on his face in its golden light. Cedric looked around at Harry again, who was now holding onto the hedge to support himself. Cedric took a deep breath.

"You take it. You should win. That's twice you've saved my neck in here."

"That's not how it's supposed to work," Harry said. He felt angry; his leg was very painful, he was aching all over from trying to throw off the spider, and after all his efforts, Cedric had beaten him to it, just as he'd beaten Harry to ask Cho to the ball. "The one who reaches the cup first gets the points. That's you. I'm telling you, I'm not going to win any races on this leg."

Cedric took a few paces nearer to the Stunned spider, away from the cup, shaking his head.

"No," he said.

"Stop being noble," said Harry irritably. "Just take it, then we can get out of here."

Cedric watched Harry steadying himself, holding tight to the hedge.

"You told me about the dragons," Cedric said. "I would've gone down in the first task if you hadn't told me what was coming."

"I had help on that too," Harry snapped, trying to mop up his bloody leg with his robes. "You helped me with the egg - we're square."

"I had help on the egg in the first place," said Cedric.

"We're still square," said Harry, testing his leg gingerly; it shook violently as he put weight on it; he had sprained his ankle when the spider had dropped him.

"You should've got more points on the second task," said Cedric mulishly. "You stayed behind to get all the hostages. I should've done that."

"I was the only one who was thick enough to take that song seriously!" said Harry bitterly.

"Just take the cup!"

"No," said Cedric.

He stepped over the spider's tangled legs to join Harry, who stared at him. Cedric was serious. He was walking away from the sort of glory Hufflepuff House hadn't had in centuries.

"Go on," Cedric said. He looked as though this was costing him every ounce of resolution he had, but his face was set, his arms were folded, he seemed decided.

Harry looked from Cedric to the cup. For one shining moment, he saw himself emerging from the maze, holding it. He saw himself holding the Triwizard Cup aloft, heard the roar of

the crowd, saw Cho's face shining with admiration, more clearly than he had ever seen it before . . . and then the picture faded, and he found himself staring at Cedric's shadowy, stubborn face.

"Both of us," Harry said.

"What?"

"We'll take it at the same time. It's still a Hogwarts victory. We'll tie for it."

Cedric stared at Harry. He unfolded his arms.

"You - you sure?"

"Yeah," said Harry. "Yeah . . . we've helped each other out, haven't we? We both got here. Let's just take it together."

For a moment, Cedric looked as though he couldn't believe his ears; then his face split in a grin.

"You're on," he said. "Come here."

He grabbed Harry's arm below the shoulder and helped Harry limp toward the plinth where the cup stood. When they had reached it, they both held a hand out over one of the cup's gleaming handles.

"On three, right?" said Harry. "One - two - three -"

He and Cedric both grasped a handle.

Instantly, Harry felt a jerk somewhere behind his navel. His feet had left the ground. He could not unclench the hand holding the Triwizard Cup; it was pulling him onward in a howl of wind and swirling color, Cedric at his side.

Harry felt his feet slam into the ground; his injured leg gave way, and he fell forward; his hand let go of the Triwizard Cup at last. He raised his head.

"Where are we?" he said.

Cedric shook his head. He got up, pulled Harry to his feet, and they looked around.

They had left the Hogwarts grounds completely; they had obviously traveled miles - perhaps hundreds of miles - for even the mountains surrounding the castle were gone. They were standing instead in a dark and overgrown graveyard; the black outline of a small church was visible beyond a large yew tree to their right. A hill rose above them to their left. Harry could just make out the outline of a fine old house on the hillside.

Cedric looked down at the Triwizard Cup and then up at Harry.

"Did anyone tell you the cup was a Portkey?" he asked.

"Nope," said Harry. He was looking around the graveyard. It was completely silent and slightly eerie. "Is this supposed to be part of the task?"

"I dunno," said Cedric. He sounded slightly nervous. "Wands out, d'you reckon?"

"Yeah," said Harry, glad that Cedric had made the suggestion rather than him.

They pulled out their wands. Harry kept looking around him. He had, yet again, the strange feeling that they were being watched.

"Someone's coming," he said suddenly.

Squinting tensely through the darkness, they watched the figure drawing nearer, walking steadily toward them between the graves. Harry couldn't make out a face, but from the way it was walking and holding its arms, he could tell that it was carrying something. Whoever it was, he was short, and wearing a hooded cloak pulled up over his head to obscure his face. And - several paces nearer, the gap between them closing all the time - Harry saw that the thing in the person's arms looked like a baby ... or was it merely a bundle of robes?

Harry lowered his wand slightly and glanced sideways at Cedric. Cedric shot him a quizzical look. They both turned back to watch the approaching figure.

It stopped beside a towering marble headstone, only six feet from them. For a second. Harry and Cedric and the short figure simply looked at one another.

And then, without warning, Harry's scar exploded with pain. It was agony such as he had never felt in all his life; his wand slipped from his fingers as he put his hands over his face; his knees buckled; he was on the ground and he could see nothing at all; his head was about to split open.

From far away, above his head, he heard a high, cold voice say, "Kill the spare."

A swishing noise and a second voice, which screeched the words to the night: "Avada Kedavra!"

A blast of green light blazed through Harry's eyelids, and he heard something heavy fall to the ground beside him; the pain in his scar reached such a pitch that he retched, and then it diminished; terrified of what he was about to see, he opened his stinging eyes.

Cedric was lying spread-eagled on the ground beside him. He was dead.

For a second that contained an eternity, Harry stared into Cedric's face, at his open gray eyes, blank and expressionless as the windows of a deserted house, at his half-open mouth, which looked slightly surprised. And then, before Harry's mind had accepted what he was seeing, before he could feel anything but numb disbelief, he felt himself being pulled to his feet.

The short man in the cloak had put down his bundle, lit his wand, and was dragging Harry toward the marble headstone. Harry saw the name upon it flickering in the wandlight before he was forced around and slammed against it.

TOM RIDDLE

The cloaked man was now conjuring tight cords around Harry, tying him from neck to ankles to the headstone. Harry could hear shallow, fast breathing from the depths of the hood; he struggled, and the man hit him - hit him with a hand that had a finger missing. And Harry realized who was under the hood. It was Wormtail.

"You!" he gasped.

But Wormtail, who had finished conjuring the ropes, did not reply; he was busy checking the tightness of the cords, his fingers trembling uncontrollably, rumbling over the knots. Once sure that Harry was bound so tightly to the headstone that he couldn't move an inch, Wormtail drew a length of some black material from the inside of his cloak and stuffed it roughly into Harry's mouth; then, without a word, he turned from Harry and hurried away. Harry couldn't make a sound, nor could he see where Wormtail had gone; he couldn't turn his head to see beyond the headstone; he could see only what was right in front of him. Cedric's body was lying some twenty feet away. Some way beyond him, glinting in the starlight, lay the Triwizard Cup. Harry's wand was on the ground at Cedric's feet. The bundle of robes that Harry had thought was a baby was close by, at the foot of the grave. It seemed to be stirring fretfully. Harry watched it, and his scar seared with pain again . . . and he suddenly knew that he didn't want to see what was in those robes ... he didn't want that bundle opened....

He could hear noises at his feet. He looked down and saw a gigantic snake slithering through the grass, circling the headstone where he was tied. Wormtail's fast, wheezy breathing was growing louder again. It sounded as though he was forcing something heavy across the ground. Then he came back within Harry's range of vision, and Harry saw him pushing a stone cauldron to the foot of the grave. It was full of what seemed to be water - Harry could hear it slopping around - and it was larger than any cauldron Harry had ever used; a great stone belly large enough for a full-grown man to sit in.

The thing inside the bundle of robes on the ground was stirring more persistently, as though it was trying to free itself. Now Wormtail was busying himself at the bottom of the cauldron with a wand. Suddenly there were crackling noises beneath it. The large snake slithered away into the darkness.

The liquid in the cauldron seemed to heat very fast. The surface began not only to bubble, but to send out fiery sparks, as though it were on fire. Steam was thickening, blurring the outline of Wormtail tending the fire. The movements beneath the robes became more agitated. And Harry heard the high, cold voice again.

"Hurry!"

The whole surface of the water was alight with sparks now. It might have been encrusted with diamonds.

"It is ready, Master."

"Now ..." said the cold voice.

Wormtail pulled open the robes on the ground, revealing what was inside them, and Harry let out a yell that was strangled in the wad of material blocking his mouth.

It was as though Wormtail had flipped over a stone and revealed something ugly, slimy, and blind - but worse, a hundred times worse. The thing Wormtail had been carrying had the shape of a crouched human child, except that Harry had never seen anything less like a child. It was hairless and scaly-looking, a dark, raw, reddish black. Its arms and legs were thin and feeble, and its face - no child alive ever had a face like that - flat and snakelike, with gleaming red eyes.

The thing seemed almost helpless; it raised its thin arms, put them around Wormtail's neck, and Wormtail lifted it. As he did so, his hood fell back, and Harry saw the look of revulsion on Wormtail's weak, pale face in the firelight as he carried the creature to the rim of the cauldron. For one moment, Harry saw the evil, flat face illuminated in the sparks dancing on the surface of the potion. And then Wormtail lowered the creature into the cauldron; there was a hiss, and it vanished below the surface; Harry heard its frail body hit the bottom with a soft thud.

Let it drown, Harry thought, his scar burning almost past endurance, please. . . let it drown. .

. .

Wormtail was speaking. His voice shook; he seemed frightened beyond his wits. He raised his wand, closed his eyes, and spoke to the night.

"Bone of the father, unknowingly given, you will renew your son!"

The surface of the water at Harry's feet cracked. Horrified, Harry watched as a fine trickle of dust rose into the air at Wormtail's command and fell softly into the cauldron. The diamond surface of the water broke and hissed; it sent sparks in all directions and turned a vivid, poisonous-looking blue.

And now Wormtail was whimpering. He pulled a long, thin, shining silver dagger from inside his cloak. His voice broke into petrified sobs.

"Flesh - of the servant - w-willingly given - you will - revive - your master. "

He stretched his right hand out in front of him - the hand with the missing finger. He gripped the dagger very tightly in his left hand and swung it upward.

Harry realized what Wormtail was about to do a second before it happened - he closed his eyes as tightly as he could, but he could not block the scream that pierced the night, that went through Harry as though he had been stabbed with the dagger too. He heard something fall to the ground, heard Wormtail's anguished panting, then a sickening splash, as something was dropped into the cauldron. Harry couldn't stand to look . . . but the potion had turned a burning red; the light of it shone through Harry's closed eyelids. . . .

Wormtail was gasping and moaning with agony. Not until Harry felt Wormtail's anguished breath on his face did he realize that Wormtail was right in front of him.

"B-blood of the enemy . . . forcibly taken . . . you will . . . resurrect your foe."

Harry could do nothing to prevent it, he was tied too tightly. . . . Squinting down, struggling hopelessly at the ropes binding him, he saw the shining silver dagger shaking in Wormtail's remaining hand. He felt its point penetrate the crook of his right arm and blood seeping down the sleeve of his torn robes. Wormtail, still panting with pain, rummaged in his pocket for a glass vial and held it to Harry's cut, so that a dribble of blood fell into it.

He staggered back to the cauldron with Harry's blood. He poured it inside. The liquid within turned, instantly, a blinding white. Wormtail, his job done, dropped to his knees beside the cauldron, then slumped sideways and lay on the ground, cradling the bleeding stump of his arm, gasping and sobbing.

The cauldron was simmering, sending its diamond sparks in all directions, so blindingly bright that it turned all else to velvety blackness. Nothing happened. . . .

Let it have drowned. Harry thought, let it have gone wrong. . . . ♦

And then, suddenly, the sparks emanating from the cauldron were extinguished. A surge of white steam billowed thickly from the cauldron instead, obliterating everything in front of Harry, so that he couldn't see Wormtail or Cedric or anything but vapor hanging in the air. ...

It's gone wrong, he thought. . . . it's drowned. . . . please . . . please let it be dead. ...

But then, through the mist in front of him, he saw, with an icy surge of terror, the dark outline of a man, tall and skeletally thin, rising slowly from inside the cauldron.

"Robe me," said the high, cold voice from behind the steam, and Wormtail, sobbing and moaning, still cradling his mutilated arm, scrambled to pick up the black robes from the ground, got to his feet, reached up, and pulled them one-handed over his master's head.

The thin man stepped out of the cauldron, staring at Harry . . . and Harry stared back into the face that had haunted his nightmares for three years. Whiter than a skull, with wide, livid scarlet eyes and a nose that was flat as a snake's with slits for nostrils . . .

Lord Voldemort had risen again.

Voldemort looked away from Harry and began examining his own body. His hands were like large, pale spiders; his long white fingers caressed his own chest, his arms, his face; the red eyes, whose pupils were slits, like a cat's, gleamed still more brightly through the darkness. He held up his hands and flexed the fingers, his expression rapt and exultant. He took not the slightest notice of Wormtail, who lay twitching and bleeding on the ground, nor of the great snake, which had slithered back into sight and was circling Harry again, hissing.

Voldemort slipped one of those unnaturally long-fingered hands into a deep pocket and drew out a wand. He caressed it gently too; and then he raised it, and pointed it at Wormtail, who was lifted off the ground and thrown against the headstone where Harry was tied; he fell to the foot of it and lay there, crumpled up and crying. Voldemort turned his scarlet eyes upon Harry, laughing a high, cold, mirthless laugh.

Wormtail's robes were shining with blood now; he had wrapped the stump of his arm in them.

"My Lord . . ." he choked, "my Lord . . . you promised . . . you did promise ..."

"Hold out your arm," said Voldemort lazily.

"Oh Master . . . thank you, Master ..."

He extended the bleeding stump, but Voldemort laughed again.

"The other arm, Wormtail."

"Master, please . . . please ..."

Voldemort bent down and pulled out Wormtail's left arm; he forced the sleeve of Wormtail's robes up past his elbow, and Harry saw something upon the skin there, something like a vivid red tattoo - a skull with a snake protruding from its mouth - the image that had appeared in the sky at the Quidditch World Cup: the Dark Mark. Voldemort examined it carefully, ignoring Wormtail's uncontrollable weeping.

"It is back," he said softly, "they will all have noticed it... and now, we shall see ... now we shall know ..."

He pressed his long white forefinger to the brand on Wormtail's arm.

The scar on Harry's forehead seared with a sharp pain again, and Wormtail let out a fresh howl; Voldemort removed his fingers from Wormtail's mark, and Harry saw that it had turned jet black.

A look of cruel satisfaction on his face, Voldemort straightened up, threw back his head, and stared around at the dark graveyard.

"How many will be brave enough to return when they feel it?" he whispered, his gleaming red eyes fixed upon the stars. "And how many will be foolish enough to stay away?"

He began to pace up and down before Harry and Wormtail, eyes sweeping the graveyard all the while. After a minute or so, he looked down at Harry again, a cruel smile twisting his snakelike face.

The house-elves gave them a very cheery welcome, bowing and curtsying and bustling around making tea again. Dobby was ecstatic about his present.

"Harry Potter is too good to Dobby!" he squeaked, wiping large tears out of his enormous eyes.

"You saved my life with that gillyweed, Dobby, you really did," said Harry.

"No chance of more of those eclairs, is there?" said Ron, who was looking around at the beaming and bowing house-elves.

"You've just had breakfast!" said Hermione irritably, but a great silver platter of eclairs was already zooming toward them, supported by four elves.

"We should get some stuff to send up to Snuffles," Harry muttered.

"Good idea," said Ron. "Give Pig something to do. You couldn't give us a bit of extra food, could you?" he said to the surrounding elves, and they bowed delightedly and hurried off to get some more.

"Dobby, where's Winky?" said Hermione, who was looking around.

"Winky is over there by the fire, miss," said Dobby quietly, his ears drooping slightly.

"Oh dear," said Hermione as she spotted Winky.

Harry looked over at the fireplace too. Winky was sitting on the same stool as last time, but she had allowed herself to become so filthy that she was not immediately distinguishable from the smoke-blackened brick behind her. Her clothes were ragged and unwashed. She was clutching a bottle of butterbeer and swaying slightly on her stool, staring into the fire. As they watched her, she gave an enormous hiccup.

"Winky is getting through six bottles a day now," Dobby whispered to Harry.

"Well, it's not strong, that stuff," Harry said.

But Dobby shook his head. "'Tis strong for a house-elf, sir," he said.

Winky hiccuped again. The elves who had brought the eclairs gave her disapproving looks as they returned to work.

"Winky is pining, Harry Potter," Dobby whispered sadly. "Winky wants to go home. Winky still thinks Mr. Crouch is her master, sir, and nothing Dobby says will persuade her that Professor Dumbledore is her master now."

"Hey, Winky," said Harry, struck by a sudden inspiration, walking over to her, and bending down, "you don't know what Mr. Crouch might be up to, do you? Because he's stopped turning up to judge the Triwizard Tournament."

Winky's eyes flickered. Her enormous pupils focused on Harry. She swayed slightly again and then said, "M - Master is stopped - hic - coming?"

"Yeah," said Harry, "we haven't seen him since the first task. The Daily Prophet's saying he's ill."

Winky swayed some more, staring blurrily at Harry.

"Master- hic- ill?"

Her bottom lip began to tremble.

"But we're not sure if that's true," said Hermione quickly.

"Master is needing his - hie - Winky!" whimpered the elf. "Master cannot - hic - manage - hic - all by himself. . . ."

"Other people manage to do their own housework, you know, Winky," Hermione said severely.

"Winky - hic - is not only - hic - doing housework for Mr. Crouch!" Winky squeaked indignantly, swaying worse than ever and slopping butterbeer down her already heavily stained blouse. "Master is - hic - trusting Winky with - hic - the most important - hic - the most secret..."

"What?" said Harry.

But Winky shook her head very hard, spilling more butterbeer down herself.

"Winky keeps - hic - her master's secrets," she said mutinously, swaying very heavily now, frowning up at Harry with her eyes crossed. "You is - hic - nosing, you is."

"Winky must not talk like that to Harry Potter!" said Dobby angrily. "Harry Potter is brave and noble and Harry Potter is not nosy!"

"He is nosing - hic - into my master's - hic - private and secret - hic - Winky is a good house-elf- hic - Winky keeps her silence - hic - people trying to - hic - pry and poke - hic -" Winky's eyelids drooped and suddenly, without warning, she slid off her stool into the hearth, snoring loudly. The empty bottle of butterbeer rolled away across the stone-flagged floor. Half a dozen house-elves came hurrying forward, looking disgusted. One of them picked up the bottle; the others covered Winky with a large checked tablecloth and tucked the ends in neatly, hiding her from view.

"We is sorry you had to see that, sirs and miss!" squeaked a nearby elf, shaking his head and looking very ashamed. "We is hoping you will not judge us all by Winky, sirs and miss!"

"She's unhappy!" said Hermione, exasperated. "Why don't you try and cheer her up instead of covering her up?"

"Begging your pardon, miss," said the house-elf, bowing deeply again, "but house-elves has no right to be unhappy when there is work to be done and masters to be served."

"Oh for heavens sake!" Hermione cried. "Listen to me, all of you! You've got just as much right as wizards to be unhappy! You've got the right to wages and holidays and proper clothes, you don't have to do everything you're told - look at Dobby!"

"Miss will please keep Dobby out of this," Dobby mumbled, looking scared. The cheery smiles had vanished from the faces of the house-elves around the kitchen. They were suddenly looking at Hermione as though she were mad and dangerous.

"We has your extra food!" squeaked an elf at Harry's elbow, and he shoved a large ham, a dozen cakes, and some fruit into Harry's arms. "Good-bye!"

The house-elves crowded around Harry, Ron, and Hermione and began shunting them out of the kitchen, many little hands pushing in the smalls of their backs.

"Thank you for the socks, Harry Potter!" Dobby called miserably from the hearth, where he was standing next to the lumpy tablecloth that was Winky.

"You couldn't keep your mouth shut, could you, Hermione?" said Ron angrily as the kitchen door slammed shut behind them. "They won't want us visiting them now! We could've tried to get more stuff out of Winky about Crouch!"

"Oh as if you care about that!" scoffed Hermione. "You only like coming down here for the food!"

It was an irritable sort of day after that. Harry got so tired of Ron and Hermione sniping at each other over their homework in the common room that he took Sirius's food up to the Owlery that evening on his own.

Pigwidgeon was much too small to carry an entire ham up to the mountain by himself, so Harry enlisted the help of two school screech owls as well. When they had set off into the dusk, looking extremely odd carrying the large package between them. Harry leaned on the windowsill, looking out at the grounds, at the dark, rustling treetops of the Forbidden Forest, and the rippling sails of the Durmstrang ship. An eagle owl flew through the coil of smoke rising from Hagrids chimney; it soared toward the castle, around the Owlery, and out of sight. Looking down, Harry saw Hagrid digging energetically in front of his cabin. Harry wondered what he was doing; it looked as though he were making a new vegetable patch. As he watched, Madame Maxime emerged from the Beauxbatons carriage and walked over to Hagrid. She appeared to be trying to engage him in conversation. Hagrid leaned upon his spade, but did not seem keen to prolong their talk, because Madame Maxime returned to the carriage shortly afterward.

Unwilling to go back to Gryffindor Tower and listen to Ron and Hermione snarling at each other, Harry watched Hagrid digging until the darkness swallowed him and the owls around Harry began to awake, swooshing past him into the night.

By breakfast the next day Ron's and Hermione's bad moods had burnt out, and to Harry's relief, Ron's dark predictions that the house-elves would send substandard food up to the Gryffindor table because Hermione had insulted them proved false; the bacon, eggs, and kippers were quite as good as usual.

When the post owls arrived, Hermione looked up eagerly; she seemed to be expecting something.

"Percy won't've had time to answer yet," said Ron. "We only sent Hedwig yesterday."

"No, it's not that," said Hermione. "I've taken out a subscription to the Daily Prophet. I'm getting sick of finding everything out from the Slytherins."

"Good thinking!" said Harry, also looking up at the owls. "Hey, Hermione, I think you're in luck -"

A gray owl was soaring down toward Hermione.

"It hasn't got a newspaper, though," she said, looking disappointed. "It's -"

But to her bewilderment, the gray owl landed in front of her plate, closely followed by four barn owls, a brown owl, and a tawny.

"How many subscriptions did you take out?" said Harry, seizing Hermione's goblet before it was knocked over by the cluster of owls, all of whom were jostling close to her, trying to deliver their own letter first.

"What on earth - ?" Hermione said, taking the letter from the gray owl, opening it, and starting to read. "Oh really!" she sputtered, going rather red.

"What's up?" said Ron.

"It's - oh how ridiculous -"

She thrust the letter at Harry, who saw that it was not handwritten, but composed from pasted letters that seemed to have been cut out of the Daily Prophet.

YOU ARE A WICKED GIRL. HARRY POTTER DESERVES BETTER. GO BACK WHERE YOU CAME FROM MUGGLE.

"They're all like it!" said Hermione desperately, opening one letter after another. "'Harry Potter can do much better than the likes of you. . . .' 'You deserve to be boiled in frog spawn. . . .' Ouch!"

She had opened the last envelope, and yellowish-green liquid smelling strongly of petrol gushed over her hands, which began to erupt in large yellow boils.

"Undiluted bubotuber pus!" said Ron, picking up the envelope gingerly and sniffing it.

"Ow!" said Hermione, tears starting in her eyes as she tried to rub the pus off her hands with a napkin, but her fingers were now so thickly covered in painful sores that it looked as though she were wearing a pair of thick, knobbly gloves.

"You'd better get up to the hospital wing," said Harry as the owls around Hermione took flight. "We'll tell Professor Sprout where you've gone. . . ."

"I warned her!" said Ron as Hermione hurried out of the Great Hall, cradling her hands. "I warned her not to annoy Rita Skeeter! Look at this one ..." He read out one of the letters Hermione had left behind: "I read In Witch Weekly about how you are playing Harry Potter false and that boy has had enough hardship and I will be sending you a curse by next post as soon as I can find a big enough envelope.' Blimey, she'd better watch out for herself."

Hermione didn't turn up for Herbology. As Harry and Ron left the greenhouse for their Care of Magical Creatures class, they saw Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle descending the stone steps of the castle. Pansy Parkinson was whispering and giggling behind them with her gang of Slytherin girls. Catching sight of Harry, Pansy called, "Potter, have you split up with your girlfriend? Why was she so upset at breakfast?"

Harry ignored her; he didn't want to give her the satisfaction of knowing how much trouble the Witch Weekly article had caused.

Hagrid, who had told them last lesson that they had finished with unicorns, was waiting for them outside his cabin with a fresh supply of open crates at his feet. Harry's heart sank at the sight of the crates - surely not another skrewt hatching? - but when he got near enough to see inside, he found himself looking at a number of flurry black creatures with long snouts. Their front paws were curiously flat, like spades, and they were blinking up at the class, looking politely puzzled at all the attention.

"These're niffers," said Hagrid, when the class had gathered around. "Yeh find 'em down mines mostly. They like sparkly stuff. . . . There yeh go, look."

One of the niffers had suddenly leapt up and attempted to bite Pansy Parkinson's watch off her wrist. She shrieked and jumped backward.

"Useful little treasure detectors," said Hagrid happily. "Thought we'd have some fun with 'em today. See over there?" He pointed at the large patch of freshly turned earth Harry had watched him digging from the Owlery window. "I've buried some gold coins. I've got a prize fer whoever picks the niffler that digs up most. Jus' take off all yer valuables, an' choose a niffler, an get ready ter set 'em loose."

Harry took off his watch, which he was only wearing out of habit, as it didn't work anymore, and stuffed it into his pocket. Then he picked up a niffler. It put its long snout in Harry's ear and sniffed enthusiastically. It was really quite cuddly.

"Hang on," said Hagrid, looking down into the crate, "there's a spare niffler here . . . who's missin? Where's Hermione?"

"She had to go to the hospital wing," said Ron.

"We'll explain later," Harry muttered; Pansy Parkinson was listening.

It was easily the most fun they had ever had in Care of Magical Creatures. The nifflers dived in and out of the patch of earth as though it were water, each scurrying back to the student who had released it and spitting gold into their hands. Ron's was particularly efficient; it had soon filled his lap with coins.

"Can you buy these as pets, Hagrid?" he asked excitedly as his niffler dived back into the soil, splattering his robes.

"Yer mum wouldn't be happy, Ron," said Hagrid, grinning. "They wreck houses, nifflers. I reckon they've nearly got the lot, now," he added, pacing around the patch of earth while the nifflers continued to dive. "I on'y buried a hundred coins. Oh there y'are, Hermione!"

Hermione was walking toward them across the lawn. Her hands were very heavily bandaged and she looked miserable. Pansy Parkinson was watching her beadily.

"Well, let's check how yeh've done!" said Hagrid. "Count yer coins! An' there's no point tryin' ter steal any, Goyle," he added, his beetle-black eyes narrowed. "It's leprechaun gold. Vanishes after a few hours."

Goyle emptied his pockets, looking extremely sulky. It turned out that Ron's niffler had been most successful, so Hagrid gave him an enormous slab of Honeydukes chocolate for a prize. The bell rang across the grounds for lunch; the rest of the class set off back to the castle, but Harry, Ron, and Hermione stayed behind to help Hagrid put the nifflers back in their boxes. Harry noticed Madame Maxime watching them out other carriage window.

"What yeh done ter your hands, Hermione?" said Hagrid, looking concerned.

Hermione told him about the hate mail she had received that morning, and the envelope full of bubotuber pus.

"Aaah, don worry," said Hagrid gendy, looking down at her. "I got some o' those letters an all, after Rita Skeeter wrote abou me mum. 'Yeh're a monster an yeh should be put down.' 'Yer mother killed innocent people an if you had any decency you d jump in a lake.'"

"No!" said Hermione, looking shocked.

"Yeah," said Hagrid, heaving the niffler crates over by his cabin wall. "They're jus' nutters, Hermione. Don' open 'em if yeh get any more. Chuck 'em straigh' in the fire."

"You missed a really good lesson," Harry told Hermione as they headed back toward the castle. "They're good, nifflers, aren't they, Ron?"

Ron, however, was frowning at the chocolate Hagrid had given him. He looked thoroughly put out about something.

"What's the matter?" said Harry. "Wrong flavor?"

"No," said Ron shortly. "Why didn't you tell me about the gold?"

"What gold?" said Harry.

"The gold I gave you at the Quidditch World Cup," said Ron. "The leprechaun gold I gave you for my Omnioculars. In the Top Box. Why didn't you tell me it disappeared?"

Harry had to think for a moment before he realized what Ron was talking about.

"Oh . . ." he said, the memory coming back to him at last. "I dunno ... I never noticed it had gone. I was more worried about my wand, wasn't I?"

They climbed the steps into the entrance hall and went into the Great Hall for lunch.

"Must be nice," Ron said abruptly, when they had sat down and started serving themselves roast beef and Yorkshire puddings. "To have so much money you don't notice if a pocketful of Galleons goes missing."

"Listen, I had other stuff on my mind that night!" said Harry impatiently. "We all did, remember?"

"I didn't know leprechaun gold vanishes," Ron muttered. "I thought I was paying you back. You shouldn't've given me that Chudley Cannon hat for Christmas."

"Forget it, all right?" said Harry.

Ron speared a roast potato on the end of his fork, glaring at it. Then he said, "I hate being poor."

Harry and Hermione looked at each other. Neither of them really knew what to say.

"It's rubbish," said Ron, still glaring down at his potato. "I don't blame Fred and George for trying to make some extra money. Wish I could. Wish I had a niffler."

"Well, we know what to get you next Christmas," said Hermione brightly. Then, when Ron continued to look gloomy, she said, "Come on, Ron, it could be worse. At least your fingers aren't full of pus." Hermione was having a lot of difficulty managing her knife and fork, her fingers were so stiff and swollen. "I hate that Skeeter woman!" she burst out savagely. "I'll get her back for this if it's the last thing I do!"

Hate mail continued to arrive for Hermione over the following week, and although she followed Hagrid's advice and stopped opening it, several of her ill-wishers sent Howlers, which exploded at the Gryffindor table and shrieked insults at her for the whole Hall to hear. Even those people who didn't read Witch Weekly knew all about the supposed Harry-Krum-Hermione triangle now. Harry was getting sick of telling people that Hermione wasn't his girlfriend.

"It'll die down, though," he told Hermione, "if we just ignore it. ... People got bored with that stuff she wrote about me last time

"I want to know how she's listening into private conversations when she's supposed to be banned from the grounds!" said Hermione angrily.

Hermione hung back in their next Defense Against the Dark Arts lesson to ask Professor Moody something. The rest of the class was very eager to leave; Moody had given them such a rigorous test of hex-deflection that many of them were nursing small injuries. Harry had such a bad case of Twitchy Ears, he had to hold his hands clamped over them as he walked away from the class.

"Well, Rita's definitely not using an Invisibility Cloak!" Hermione panted five minutes later, catching up with Harry and Ron in the entrance hall and pulling Harry's hand away from one of his wiggling ears so that he could hear her. "Moody says he didn't see her anywhere near the judges' table at the second task, or anywhere near the lake!"

"Hermione, is there any point in telling you to drop this?" said Ron.

"No!" said Hermione stubbornly. "I want to know how she heard me talking to Viktor! And how she found out about Hagrid's mum!"

"Maybe she had you bugged," said Harry.

"Bugged?" said Ron blankly. "What. . . put fleas on her or something?"

Harry started explaining about hidden microphones and recording equipment. Ron was fascinated, but Hermione interrupted them.

"Aren't you two ever going to read Hogwarts, A History?"

"What's the point?" said Ron. "You know it by heart, we can just ask you."

"All those substitutes for magic Muggles use - electricity, computers, and radar, and all those things - they all go haywire around Hogwarts, there's too much magic in the air. No, Rita's using magic to eavesdrop, she must be. ... If I could just find out what it is ... ooh, if it's illegal, I'll have her ..."

"Haven't we got enough to worry about?" Ron asked her. "Do we have to start a vendetta against Rita Skeeter as well?"

"I'm not asking you to help!" Hermione snapped. "I'll do it on my own!"

She marched back up the marble staircase without a backward glance. Harry was quite sure she was going to the library.

"What's the betting she comes back with a box of / Hate Rita Skeeter badges?" said Ron. Hermione, however, did not ask Harry and Ron to help her pursue vengeance against Rita Skeeter, for which they were both grateful, because their workload was mounting ever higher in the days before the Easter holidays. Harry frankly marveled at the fact that Hermione could research magical methods of eavesdropping as well as everything else they had to do. He was working flat-out just to get through all their homework, though he made a point of sending regular food packages up to the cave in the mountain for Sirius; after last summer, Harry had not forgotten what it felt like to be continually hungry. He enclosed notes to Sirius, telling him that nothing out of the ordinary had happened, and that they were still waiting for an answer from Percy.

Hedwig didn't return until the end of the Easter holidays. Percy's letter was enclosed in a package of Easter eggs that Mrs. Weasley had sent. Both Harrys and Ron's were the size of dragon eggs and full of homemade toffee. Hermiones, however, was smaller than a chicken egg. Her face fell when she saw it.

"Your mum doesn't read Witch Weekly, by any chance, does she, Ron?" she asked quietly.

"Yeah," said Ron, whose mouth was full of toffee. "Gets it for the recipes."

Hermione looked sadly at her tiny egg.

"Don't you want to see what Percy's written?" Harry asked her hastily.

Percys letter was short and irritated.

As I am constantly telling the Daily Prophet, Mr. Crouch is taking a well-deserved break. He is sending in regular owls with instructions. No, I haven't actually seen him, but I think I can be trusted to know my own superior's handwriting. I have quite enough to do at the moment without trying to quash these ridiculous rumors. Please don't bother me again unless it's something important. Happy Easter.

The start of the summer term would normally have meant that Harry was training hard for the last Quidditch match of the season. This year, however, it was the third and final task in the Triwizard Tournament for which he needed to prepare, but he still didn't know what he would have to do. Finally, in the last week of May, Professor McGonagall held him back in Transfiguration.

"You are to go down to the Quidditch field tonight at nine o'clock. Potter," she told him. "Mr. Bagman will be there to tell the champions about the third task."

So at half past eight that night. Harry left Ron and Hermione in Gryffindor Tower and went downstairs. As he crossed the entrance hall, Cedric came up from the Hufflepuff common room.

"What d'you reckon it's going to be?" he asked Harry as they went together down the stone steps, out into the cloudy night. "Fleur keeps going on about underground tunnels; she reckons we've got to find treasure."

"That wouldn't be too bad," said Harry, thinking that he would simply ask Hagrid for a niffler to do the job for him.

They walked down the dark lawn to the Quidditch stadium, turned through a gap in the stands, and walked out onto the field.

"What've they done to it?" Cedric said indignantly, stopping dead.

The Quidditch field was no longer smooth and flat. It looked as though somebody had been building long, low walls all over it that twisted and crisscrossed in every direction.

"They're hedges!" said Harry, bending to examine the nearest one.

"Hello there!" called a cheery voice.

Ludo Bagman was standing in the middle of the field with Krum and Fleur. Harry and Cedric made their way toward them, climbing over the hedges. Fleur beamed at Harry as he came nearer. Her attitude toward him had changed completely since he had saved her sister from the lake.

"Well, what d'you think?" said Bagman happily as Harry and Cedric climbed over the last hedge. "Growing nicely, aren't they? Give them a month and Hagrid'll have them twenty feet high. Don't worry," he added, grinning, spotting the less-than-happy expressions on Harrys and Cedric's faces, "you'll have your Quidditch field back to normal once the task is over! Now, I imagine you can guess what we're making here?"

No one spoke for a moment. Then -

"Maze," grunted Krum.

"That's right!" said Bagman. "A maze. The third task's really very straightforward. The Triwizard Cup will be placed in the center of the maze. The first champion to touch it will receive full marks."

"We seemly 'ave to get through the maze?" said Fleur.

"There will be obstacles," said Bagman happily, bouncing on the balls of his feet. "Hagrid is providing a number of creatures . . . then there will be spells that must be broken ... all that sort of thing, you know. Now, the champions who are leading on points will get a head start into the maze." Bagman grinned at Harry and Cedric. "Then Mr. Krum will enter . . . then Miss Delacour. But you'll all be in with a fighting chance, depending how well you get past the obstacles. Should be fun, eh?"

Harry, who knew only too well the kind of creatures that Hagrid was likely to provide for an event like this, thought it was unlikely to be any fun at all. However, he nodded politely like the other champions.

"Very well. . . if you haven't got any questions, we'll go back up to the castle, shall we, it's a bit chilly. ..."

Bagman hurried alongside Harry as they began to wend their way out of the growing maze. Harry had the feeling that Bagman was going to start offering to help him again, but just then, Krum tapped Harry on the shoulder.

"Could I haff a vord?"

"Yeah, all right," said Harry, slightly surprised.

"Vill you valk vith me?"

"Okay," said Harry curiously.

Bagman looked slightly perturbed.

"I'll wait for you. Harry, shall I?"

"No, it's okay, Mr. Bagman," said Harry, suppressing a smile, "I think I can find the castle on my own, thanks."

Harry and Krum left the stadium together, but Krum did not set a course for the Durmstrang ship. Instead, he walked toward the forest.

"What're we going this way for?" said Harry as they passed Hagrid's cabin and the illuminated Beauxbatons carriage.

"Don't vont to be overheard," said Krum shortly.

When at last they had reached a quiet stretch of ground a short way from the Beauxbatons horses' paddock, Krum stopped in the shade of the trees and turned to face Harry.

"I vant to know," he said, glowering, "vot there is between you and Hermy-own-ninny."

Harry, who from Krum's secretive manner had expected something much more serious than this, stared up at Krum in amazement.

"Nothing," he said. But Krum glowered at him, and Harry, somehow struck anew by how tall Krum was, elaborated. "We're friends. She's not my girlfriend and she never has been. It's just that Skeeter woman making things up."

"Hermy-own-ninny talks about you very often," said Krum, looking suspiciously at Harry.

"Yeah," said Harry, "because were friends."

He couldn't quite believe he was having this conversation with Viktor Krum, the famous International Quidditch player. It was as though the eighteen-year-old Krum thought he.

Harry, was an equal - a real rival -

"You haff never . . . you haff not..."

"No," said Harry very firmly.

Krum looked slightly happier. He stared at Harry for a few seconds, then said, "You fly very veil. I vos votching at the first task."

"Thanks," said Harry, grinning broadly and suddenly feeling much taller himself. "I saw you at the Quidditch World Cup. The Wronski Feint, you really -"

But something moved behind Krum in the trees, and Harry, who had some experience of the sort of thing that lurked in the forest, instinctively grabbed Krum's arm and pulled him around.

"Vot is it?"

Harry shook his head, staring at the place where he'd seen movement. He slipped his hand inside his robes, reaching for his wand.

Suddenly a man staggered out from behind a tall oak. For a moment, Harry didn't recognize him . . . then he realized it was Mr. Crouch.

He looked as though he had been traveling for days. The knees of his robes were ripped and bloody, his face scratched; he was unshaven and gray with exhaustion. His neat hair and mustache were both in need of a wash and a trim. His strange appearance, however, was nothing to the way he was behaving. Muttering and gesticulating, Mr. Crouch appeared to be talking to someone that he alone could see. He reminded Harry vividly of an old tramp he had seen once when out shopping with the Dursleys. That man too had been conversing wildly with thin air; Aunt Petunia had seized Dudley's hand and pulled him across the road to avoid him; Uncle Vernon had then treated the family to a long rant about what he would like to do with beggars and vagrants.

"Vosn't he a judge?" said Krum, staring at Mr. Crouch. "Isn't he vith your Ministry?"

Harry nodded, hesitated for a moment, then walked slowly toward Mr. Crouch, who did not look at him, but continued to talk to a nearby tree.

"... and when you've done that, Weatherby, send an owl to Dumbledore confirming the number of Durmstrang students who will be attending the tournament, Karkaroff has just sent word there will be twelve. . . ."

"Mr. Crouch?" said Harry cautiously.

"... and then send another owl to Madame Maxime, because she might want to up the number of students she's bringing, now Karkaroff's made it a round dozen ... do that, Weatherby, will you? Will you? Will..."

Mr. Crouch's eyes were bulging. He stood staring at the tree, muttering soundlessly at it. Then he staggered sideways and fell to his knees.

"Mr. Crouch?" Harry said loudly. "Are you all right?"

Crouch's eyes were rolling in his head. Harry looked around at Krum, who had followed him into the trees, and was looking down at Crouch in alarm.

"Vot is wrong with him?"

"No idea," Harry muttered. "Listen, you'd better go and get someone -"

"Dumbledore!" gasped Mr. Crouch. He reached out and seized a handful of Harry's robes, dragging him closer, though his eyes were staring over Harry's head. "I need... see ... Dumbledore. ..."

"Okay," said Harry, "if you get up, Mr. Crouch, we can go up to the-"

"I've done . . . stupid . . . thing . . ." Mr. Crouch breathed. He looked utterly mad. His eyes were rolling and bulging, and a trickle of spittle was sliding down his chin. Every word he spoke seemed to cost him a terrible effort. "Must. . . tell. . . Dumbledore . . ."

"Get up, Mr. Crouch," said Harry loudly and clearly. "Get up, I'll take you to Dumbledore!" Mr. Crouch's eyes rolled forward onto Harry.

"Who ... you?" he whispered.

"I'm a student at the school," said Harry, looking around at Krum for some help, but Krum was hanging back, looking extremely nervous.

"You're not... his?" whispered Crouch, his mouth sagging.

"No," said Harry, without the faintest idea what Crouch was talking about.

"Dumbledore's?"

"That's right," said Harry.

Crouch was pulling him closer; Harry tried to loosen Crouch's grip on his robes, but it was too powerful.

"Warn ... Dumbledore ..."

"I'll get Dumbledore if you let go of me," said Harry. "Just let go, Mr. Crouch, and I'll get him.. . ."

"Thank you, Weatherby, and when you have done that, I would like a cup of tea. My wife and son will be arriving shortly, we are attending a concert tonight with Mr. and Mrs. Fudge." Crouch was now talking fluently to a tree again, and seemed completely unaware that Harry was there, which surprised Harry so much he didn't notice that Crouch had released him.

"Yes, my son has recently gained twelve O.W.L.S, most satisfactory, yes, thank you, yes, very proud indeed. Now, if you could bring me that memo from the Andorran Minister of Magic, I think I will have time to draft a response. ..."

"You stay here with him!" Harry said to Krum. "I'll get Dumbledore, I'll be quicker, I know where his office is -"

"He is mad," said Krum doubtfully, staring down at Crouch, who was still gabbling to the tree, apparently convinced it was Percy.

"Just stay with him," said Harry, starting to get up, but his movement seemed to trigger another abrupt change in Mr. Crouch, who seized him hard around the knees and pulled Harry back to the ground.

"Don't. . . leave . . . me!" he whispered, his eyes bulging again. "I... escaped . . . must warn . . . must tell... see Dumbledore . . . my fault... all my fault. . . Bertha . . . dead ... all my fault. .. my son ... my fault... tell Dumbledore ... Harry Potter ... the Dark Lord . . . stronger . . . Harry Potter ..."

"I'll get Dumbledore if you let me go, Mr. Crouch!" said Harry. He looked furiously around at Krum. "Help me, will you?"

Looking extremely apprehensive, Krum moved forward and squatted down next to Mr. Crouch.

"Just keep him here," said Harry, pulling himself free of Mr. Crouch. "I'll be back with Dumbledore."

"Hurry, von't you?" Krum called after him as Harry sprinted away from the forest and up through the dark grounds. They were deserted; Bagman, Cedric, and Fleur had

disappeared. Harry tore up the stone steps, through the oak front doors, and off up the marble staircase, toward the second floor.

Five minutes later he was hurtling toward a stone gargoyle standing halfway along an empty corridor.

"Sher - sherbet lemon!" he panted at it.

This was the password to the hidden staircase to Dumbledore's office - or at least, it had been two years ago. The password had evidently changed, however, for the stone gargoyle did not spring to life and jump aside, but stood frozen, glaring at Harry malevolently.

"Move!" Harry shouted at it. "C'mon!"

But nothing at Hogwarts had ever moved just because he shouted at it; he knew it was no good. He looked up and down the dark corridor. Perhaps Dumbledore was in the staffroom? He started running as fast as he could toward the staircase -

"POTTER!"

Harry skidded to a halt and looked around. Snape had just emerged from the hidden staircase behind the stone gargoyle. The wall was sliding shut behind him even as he beckoned Harry back toward him.

"What are you doing here, Potter?"

"I need to see Professor Dumbledore!" said Harry, running back up the corridor and skidding to a standstill in front of Snape instead. "It's Mr. Crouch . . . he's just turned up ... he's in the forest... he's asking -"

"What is this rubbish?" said Snape, his black eyes glittering. "What are you talking about?"

"Mr. Crouch!" Harry shouted. "From the Ministry! He's ill or something - he's in the forest, he wants to see Dumbledore! Just give me the password up to -"

"The headmaster is busy. Potter," said Snape, his thin mouth curling into an unpleasant smile.

"I've got to tell Dumbledore!" Harry yelled.

"Didn't you hear me. Potter?"

Harry could tell Snape was thoroughly enjoying himself, denying Harry the thing he wanted when he was so panicky.

"Look," said Harry angrily, "Crouch isn't right - he's - he's out of his mind - he says he wants to warn -"

The stone wall behind Snape slid open. Dumbledore was standing there, wearing long green robes and a mildly curious expression. "Is there a problem?" he said, looking between Harry and Snape.

"Professor!" Harry said, sidestepping Snape before Snape could speak, "Mr. Crouch is here - he's down in the forest, he wants to speak to you!"

Harry expected Dumbledore to ask questions, but to his relief, Dumbledore did nothing of the sort.

"Lead the way," he said promptly, and he swept off along the corridor behind Harry, leaving Snape standing next to the gargoyle and looking twice as ugly.

"What did Mr. Crouch say. Harry?" said Dumbledore as they walked swiftly down the marble staircase.

"Said he wants to warn you . . . said he's done something terrible ... he mentioned his son . . . and Bertha Jorkins . . . and - and Voldemort. . . something about Voldemort getting stronger. ..."

"Indeed," said Dumbledore, and he quickened his pace as they hurried out into the pitch-darkness.

"He's not acting normally," Harry said, hurrying along beside Dumbledore. "He doesn't seem to know where he is. He keeps talking like he thinks Percy Weasley's there, and then he changes, and says he needs to see you. ... I left him with Viktor Krum."

"You did?" said Dumbledore sharply, and he began to take longer strides still, so that Harry was running to keep up. "Do you know if anybody else saw Mr. Crouch?"

"No," said Harry. "Krum and I were talking, Mr. Bagman had just finished telling us about the third task, we stayed behind, and then we saw Mr. Crouch coming out of the forest -"

"Where are they?" said Dumbledore as the Beauxbatons carriage emerged from the darkness.

"Over here," said Harry, moving in front of Dumbledore, leading the way through the trees. He couldn't hear Crouch's voice anymore, but he knew where he was going; it hadn't been much past the Beauxbatons carriage . . . somewhere around here. . . .

"Viktor?" Harry shouted.

No one answered.

"They were here," Harry said to Dumbledore. "They were definitely somewhere around here. ..."

"Lumos," Dumbledore said, lighting his wand and holding it up.

Its narrow beam traveled from black trunk to black trunk, illuminating the ground. And then it fell upon a pair of feet.

Harry and Dumbledore hurried forward. Krum was sprawled on the forest floor. He seemed to be unconscious. There was no sign at all of Mr. Crouch. Dumbledore bent over Krum and gently lifted one of his eyelids.

"Stunned," he said softly. His half-moon glasses glittered in the wandlight as he peered around at the surrounding trees.

"Should I go and get someone?" said Harry. "Madam Pomfrey?"

"No," said Dumbledore swiftly. "Stay here."

He raised his wand into the air and pointed it in the direction of Hagrid's cabin. Harry saw something silvery dart out of it and streak away through the trees like a ghostly bird. Then Dumbledore bent over Krum again, pointed his wand at him, and muttered, "Ennervate." Krum opened his eyes. He looked dazed. When he saw Dumbledore, he tried to sit up, but Dumbledore put a hand on his shoulder and made him lie still.

"He attacked me!" Krum muttered, putting a hand up to his head. "The old madman attacked me! I was looking around to see where Potter had gone and he attacked from behind!"

"Lie still for a moment," Dumbledore said.

The sound of thunderous footfalls reached them, and Hagrid came panting into sight with Fang at his heels. He was carrying his crossbow.

"Professor Dumbledore!" he said, his eyes widening. "Harry - what the - ?"

"Hagrid, I need you to fetch Professor Karkaroff," said Dumbledore. "His student has been attacked. When you've done that, kindly alert Professor Moody -"

"No need, Dumbledore," said a wheezy growl. "I'm here."

Moody was limping toward them, leaning on his staff, his wand lit.

"Damn leg," he said furiously. "Would've been here quicker . . . what's happened? Snape said something about Crouch -"

"Crouch?" said Hagrid blankly.

"Karkaroff, please, Hagrid!" said Dumbledore sharply.

"Oh yeah . . . right y'are, Professor. . ." said Hagrid, and he turned and disappeared into the dark trees, Fang trotting after him.

"I don't know where Barty Crouch is," Dumbledore told Moody, "but it is essential that we find him."

"I'm onto it," growled Moody, and he pulled out his wand and limped off into the forest. Neither Dumbledore nor Harry spoke again until they heard the unmistakable sounds of Hagrid and Fang returning. Karkaroff was hurrying along behind them. He was wearing his sleek silver furs, and he looked pale and agitated.

"What is this?" he cried when he saw Krum on the ground and Dumbledore and Harry beside him. "What's going on?"

"I vos attacked!" said Krum, sitting up now and rubbing his head. "Mr. Crouch or votever his name -"

"Crouch attacked you? Crouch attacked you? The Triwizard judge?"

"Igor," Dumbledore began, but Karkaroff had drawn himself up, clutching his furs around him, looking livid.

"Treachery!" he bellowed, pointing at Dumbledore. "It is a plot! You and your Ministry of Magic have lured me here under false pretenses, Dumbledore! This is not an equal competition! First you sneak Potter into the tournament, though he is underage! Now one of your Ministry friends attempts to put my champion out of action! I smell double-dealing and corruption in this whole affair, and you, Dumbledore, you, with your talk of closer international

wizarding links, of rebuilding old ties, of forgetting old differences - here's what I think of you!"

Karkaroff spat onto the ground at Dumbledore's feet. In one swift movement, Hagrid seized the front of Karkaroff's furs, lifted him into the air, and slammed him against a nearby tree.

"Apologize!" Hagrid snarled as Karkaroff gasped for breath, Hagrid's massive fist at his throat, his feet dangling in midair.

"Hagrid, no!" Dumbledore shouted, his eyes flashing.

Hagrid removed the hand pinning Karkaroff to the tree, and Karkaroff slid all the way down the trunk and slumped in a huddle at its roots; a few twigs and leaves showered down upon his head.

"Kindly escort Harry back up to the castle, Hagrid," said Dumbledore sharply.

Breathing heavily, Hagrid gave Karkaroff a glowering look.

"Maybe I'd better stay here. Headmaster. . . ."

"You will take Harry back to school, Hagrid," Dumbledore repeated firmly. "Take him right up to Gryffindor Tower. And Harry - I want you to stay there. Anything you might want to do - any owls you might want to send - they can wait until morning, do you understand me?"

"Er - yes," said Harry, staring at him. How had Dumbledore known that, at that very moment, he had been thinking about sending Pigwidgeon straight to Sirius, to tell him what had happened?

"I'll leave Fang with yeh. Headmaster," Hagrid said, staring menacingly at Karkaroff, who was still sprawled at the foot of the tree, tangled in furs and tree roots. "Stay, Fang. C'mon, Harry."

They marched in silence past the Beauxbatons carriage and up toward the castle.

"How dare he," Hagrid growled as they strode past the lake. "How dare he accuse Dumbledore. Like Dumbledore'd do anythin' like that. Like Dumbledore wanted you in the tournament in the firs' place. Worried! I dunno when I seen Dumbledore more worried than he's bin lately. An' you!" Hagrid suddenly said angrily to Harry, who looked up at him, taken aback. "What were yeh doin', wanderin' off with ruddy Krum? He's from Durmstrang, Harry!

Coulda jinxed yeh right there, couldn't he? Hasn't Moody taught yeh nothin'? 'Magine lettin him lure yeh off on yer own -"

"Krum's all right!" said Harry as they climbed the steps into the entrance hall. "He wasn't trying to jinx me, he just wanted to talk about Hermione -"

"I'll be havin' a few words with her, an' all," said Hagrid grimly, stomping up the stairs. "The less you lot 'ave ter do with these foreigners, the happier yeh'll be. Yeh can trust any of 'em."

"You were getting on all right with Madame Maxime," Harry said, annoyed.

"Don' you talk ter me abou' her!" said Hagrid, and he looked quite frightening for a moment.

"I've got her number now! Tryin' ter get back in me good books, tryin' ter get me ter tell her what's comin in the third task. Ha! You can't trust any of 'em!"

Hagrid was in such a bad mood, Harry was quite glad to say good-bye to him in front of the Fat Lady. He clambered through the portrait hole into the common room and hurried straight for the corner where Ron and Hermione were sitting, to tell them what had happened.

It comes down to this," said Hermione, rubbing her forehead. "Either Mr. Crouch attacked Viktor, or somebody else attacked both of them when Viktor wasn't looking."

"It must've been Crouch," said Ron at once. "That's why he was gone when Harry and Dumbledore got there. He'd done a runner."

"I don't think so," said Harry, shaking his head. "He seemed really weak - I don't reckon he was up to Disapparating or anything."

"You can't Disapparate on the Hogwarts grounds, haven't I told you enough times?" said Hermione.

"Okay. . . how's this for a theory," said Ron excitedly. "Krum attacked Crouch - no, wait for it - and then Stunned himself!"

"And Mr. Crouch evaporated, did he?" said Hermione coldly.

"Oh yeah . . ."

It was daybreak. Harry, Ron, and Hermione had crept out of their dormitories very early and hurried up to the Owlery together to send a note to Sirius. Now they were standing looking out at the misty grounds. All three of them were puffy-eyed and pale because they had been talking late into the night about Mr. Crouch.

"Just go through it again, Harry," said Hermione. "What did Mr. Crouch actually say?"

"I've told you, he wasn't making much sense," said Harry. "He said he wanted to warn Dumbledore about something. He definitely mentioned Bertha Jorkins, and he seemed to think she was dead. He kept saying stuff was his fault. . . . He mentioned his son."

"Well, that was his fault," said Hermione testily.

"He was out of his mind," said Harry. "Half the time he seemed to think his wife and son were still alive, and he kept talking to Percy about work and giving him instructions."

"And . . . remind me what he said about You-Know-Who?" said Ron tentatively.

"I've told you," Harry repeated dully. "He said he's getting stronger."

There was a pause. Then Ron said in a falsely confident voice, "But he was out of his mind, like you said, so half of it was probably just raving. . . ."

"He was sanest when he was trying to talk about Voldemort," said Harry, and Ron winced at the sound of the name. "He was having real trouble stringing two words together, but that was when he seemed to know where he was, and know what he wanted to do. He just kept saying he had to see Dumbledore."

Harry turned away from the window and stared up into the rafters. The many perches were half-empty; every now and then, another owl would swoop in through one of the windows, returning from its night's hunting with a mouse in its beak.

"If Snape hadn't held me up," Harry said bitterly, "we might've got there in time. 'The headmaster is busy. Potter . . . what's this rubbish, Potter?' Why couldn't he have just got out of the way?"

"Maybe he didn't want you to get there!" said Ron quickly. "Maybe - hang on - how fast d'you reckon he could've gotten down to the forest? D'you reckon he could've beaten you and Dumbledore there?"

"Not unless he can turn himself into a bat or something," said Harry.

"Wouldn't put it past him," Ron muttered.

"We need to see Professor Moody," said Hermione. "We need to find out whether he found Mr. Crouch,"

"If he had the Marauder's Map on him, it would've been easy," said Harry.

"Unless Crouch was already outside the grounds," said Ron, "because it only shows up to the boundaries, doesn't -"

"Shh!" said Hermione suddenly.

Somebody was climbing the steps up to the Owlery. Harry could hear two voices arguing, coming closer and closer.

"- that's blackmail, that is, we could get into a lot of trouble for that-"

"- we've tried being polite; it's time to play dirty, like him. He wouldn't like the Ministry of Magic knowing what he did -"

"I'm telling you, if you put that in writing, it's blackmail!"

"Yeah, and you won't be complaining if we get a nice fat payoff, will you?"

The Owlery door banged open. Fred and George came over the threshold, then froze at the sight of Harry, Ron, and Hermione.

"What're you doing here?" Ron and Fred said at the same time.

"Sending a letter," said Harry and George in unison.

"What, at this time?" said Hermione and Fred.

Fred grinned.

"Fine - we won't ask you what you're doing, if you don't ask us," he said.

He was holding a sealed envelope in his hands. Harry glanced at it, but Fred, whether accidentally or on purpose, shifted his hand so that the name on it was covered.

"Well, don't let us hold you up," Fred said, making a mock bow and pointing at the door.

Ron didn't move. "Who're you blackmailing?" he said.

The grin vanished from Fred's face. Harry saw George half glance at Fred, before smiling at Ron.

"Don't be stupid, I was only joking," he said easily.

"Didn't sound like that," said Ron.

Fred and George looked at each other. Then Fred said abruptly, "I've told you before, Ron, keep your nose out if you like it the shape it is. Can't see why you would, but -"

"It's my business if you're blackmailing someone," said Ron. "George's right, you could end up in serious trouble for that."

"Told you, I was joking," said George. He walked over to Fred, pulled the letter out of his hands, and began attaching it to the leg of the nearest barn owl. "You're starting to sound a bit like our dear older brother, you are, Ron. Carry on like this and you'll be made a prefect."

"No, I won't!" said Ron hotly.

George carried the barn owl over to the window and it took off. George turned around and grinned at Ron.

"Well, stop telling people what to do then. See you later."

He and Fred left the Owlery. Harry, Ron, and Hermione stared at one another.

"You don't think they know something about all this, do you?" Hermione whispered. "About Crouch and everything?"

"No," said Harry. "If it was something that serious, they'd tell someone. They'd tell Dumbledore."

Ron, however, was looking uncomfortable.

"What's the matter?" Hermione asked him.

"Well. . ." said Ron slowly, "I dunno if they would. They're . . . they're obsessed with making money lately, I noticed it when I was hanging around with them - when - you know -"

"We weren't talking." Harry finished the sentence for him. "Yeah, but blackmail..."

"It's this joke shop idea they've got," said Ron. "I thought they were only saying it to annoy Mum, but they really mean it, they want to start one. They've only got a year left at Hogwarts, they keep going on about how it's time to think about their future, and Dad can't help them, and they need gold to get started."

Hermione was looking uncomfortable now.

"Yes, but. . . they wouldn't do anything against the law to get gold."

"Wouldn't they?" said Ron, looking skeptical. "I dunno . . . they don't exactly mind breaking rules, do they?"

"Yes, but this is the law" said Hermione, looking scared. "This isn't some silly school rule. . . . They'll get a lot more than detention for blackmail! Ron. . . maybe you'd better tell Percy. . . ."

"Are you mad?" said Ron. "Tell Percy? He'd probably do a Crouch and turn them in." He stared at the window through which Fred and George's owl had departed, then said, "Come on, let's get some breakfast."

"D'you think it's too early to go and see Professor Moody?" Hermione said as they went down the spiral staircase.

"Yes," said Harry. "He'd probably blast us through the door if we wake him at the crack of dawn; he'll think we're trying to attack him while he's asleep. Let's give it till break."

History of Magic had rarely gone so slowly. Harry kept checking Ron's watch, having finally discarded his own, but Ron's was moving so slowly he could have sworn it had stopped working too. All three of them were so tired they could happily have put their heads down on the desks and slept; even Hermione wasn't taking her usual notes, but was sitting with her head on her hand, gazing at Professor Binns with her eyes out of focus.

When the bell finally rang, they hurried out into the corridors toward the Dark Arts classroom and found Professor Moody leaving it. He looked as tired as they felt. The eyelid of his normal eye was drooping, giving his face an even more lopsided appearance than usual.

"Professor Moody?" Harry called as they made their way toward him through the crowd.

"Hello, Potter," growled Moody. His magical eye followed a couple of passing first years, who sped up, looking nervous; it rolled into the back of Moody's head and watched them around the corner before he spoke again.

"Come in here."

He stood back to let them into his empty classroom, limped in after them, and closed the door.

"Did you find him?" Harry asked without preamble. "Mr. Crouch?"

"No," said Moody. He moved over to his desk, sat down, stretched out his wooden leg with a slight groan, and pulled out his hip flask.

"Did you use the map?" Harry said.

"Of course," said Moody, taking a swig from his flask. "Took a leaf out of your book, Potter. Summoned it from my office into the forest. He wasn't anywhere on there."

"So he did Disapparate?" said Ron.

"You can't Disapparate on the grounds, Ron!" said Hermione. "There are other ways he could have disappeared, aren't there, Professor?"

Moody's magical eye quivered as it rested on Hermione. "You're another one who might think about a career as an Auror," he told her. "Mind works the right way. Granger."

Hermione flushed pink with pleasure.

"Well, he wasn't invisible," said Harry. "The map shows invisible people. He must've left the grounds, then."

"But under his own steam?" said Hermione eagerly, "or because someone made him?"

"Yeah, someone could've - could've pulled him onto a broom and flown off with him, couldn't they?" said Ron quickly, looking hopefully at Moody as if he too wanted to be told he had the makings of an Auror.

"We can't rule out kidnap," growled Moody.

"So," said Ron, "d'you reckon he's somewhere in Hogsmeade?"

"Could be anywhere," said Moody, shaking his head. "Only thing we know for sure is that he's not here."

He yawned widely, so that his scars stretched, and his lopsided mouth revealed a number of missing teeth. Then he said, "Now, Dumbledore's told me you three fancy yourselves as investigators, but there's nothing you can do for Crouch. The Ministry'll be looking for him now, Dumbledore's notified them. Potter, you just keep your mind on the third task."

"What?" said Harry. "Oh yeah . . ."

He hadn't given the maze a single thought since he'd left it with Krum the previous night.

"Should be right up your street, this one," said Moody, looking up at Harry and scratching his scarred and stubbly chin. "From what Dumbledore's said, you've managed to get through stuff like this plenty of times. Broke your way through a series of obstacles guarding the Sorcerer's Stone in your first year, didn't you?"

"We helped," Ron said quickly. "Me and Hermione helped."

Moody grinned.

"Well, help him practice for this one, and I'll be very surprised if he doesn't win," said Moody.

"In the meantime . . . constant vigilance, Potter. Constant vigilance." He took another long draw from his hip flask, and his magical eye swiveled onto the window. The topmost sail of the Durmstrang ship was visible through it.

"You two," counseled Moody, his normal eye on Ron and Hermione, "you stick close to Potter, all right? I'm keeping an eye on things, but all the same . . . you can never have too many eyes out."

Sirius sent their owl back the very next morning. It fluttered down beside Harry at the same moment that a tawny owl landed in front of Hermione, clutching a copy of the Daily Prophet in its beak. She took the newspaper, scanned the first few pages, said, "Ha! She hasn't got wind of Crouch!" then joined Ron and Harry in reading what Sirius had to say on the mysterious events of the night before last.

Harry - what do you think you are playing at, walking off into the forest with Viktor Krum? I want you to swear, by return owl, that you are not going to go walking with anyone else at night. There is somebody highly dangerous at Hogwarts. It is clear to me that they wanted to stop Crouch from seeing Dumbledore and you were probably feet away from them in the dark. You could have been killed.

Your name didn't get into the Goblet of Fire by accident. If someone's trying to attack you, they're on their last chance. Stay close to Ron and Hermione, do not leave Gryffindor Tower after hours, and arm yourself for the third task. Practice Stunning and Disarming. A few

hexes wouldn't go amiss either. There's nothing you can do about Crouch. Keep your head down and look after yourself. I'm waiting for your letter giving me your word you won't stray out-of-bounds again.

Sirius

"Who's he, to lecture me about being out-of-bounds?" said Harry in mild indignation as he folded up Sirius's letter and put it inside his robes. "After all the stuff he did at school!"

"He's worried about you!" said Hermione sharply. "Just like Moody and Hagrid! So listen to them!"

"No one's tried to attack me all year," said Harry. "No one's done anything to me at all-"

"Except put your name in the Goblet of Fire," said Hermione. "And they must've done that for a reason. Harry. Snuffles is right. Maybe they've been biding their time. Maybe this is the task they're going to get you."

"Look," said Harry impatiently, "let's say Sirius is right, and someone Stunned Krum to kidnap Crouch. Well, they would've been in the trees near us, wouldn't they? But they waited till I was out of the way until they acted, didn't they? So it doesn't look like I'm their target, does it?"

"They couldn't have made it look like an accident if they'd murdered you in the forest!" said Hermione. "But if you die during a task-"

"They didn't care about attacking Krum, did they?" said Harry. "Why didn't they just polish me off at the same time? They could've made it look like Krum and I had a duel or something."

"Harry, I don't understand it either," said Hermione desperately. "I just know there are a lot of odd things going on, and I don't like it. ... Moody's right - Sirius is right - you've got to get in training for the third task, straight away. And you make sure you write back to Sirius and promise him you're not going to go sneaking off alone again."

The Hogwarts grounds never looked more inviting than when Harry had to stay indoors. For the next few days he spent all of his free time either in the library with Hermione and Ron, looking up hexes, or else in empty classrooms, which they sneaked into to practice. Harry was concentrating on the Stunning Spell, which he had never used before. The trouble was that practicing it involved certain sacrifices on Ron's and Hermione's part.

"Can't we kidnap Mrs. Norris?" Ron suggested on Monday lunchtime as he lay flat on his back in the middle of their Charms classroom, having just been Stunned and reawoken by Harry for the fifth time in a row. "Let's Stun her for a bit. Or you could use Dobby, Harry, I bet he'd do anything to help you. I'm not complaining or anything" - he got gingerly to his feet, rubbing his backside - "but I'm aching all over. ..."

"Well, you keep missing the cushions, don't you!" said Hermione impatiently, rearranging the pile of cushions they had used for the Banishing Spell, which Flitwick had left in a cabinet.

"Just try and fall backward!"

"Once you're Stunned, you can't aim too well, Hermione!" said Ron angrily. "Why don't you take a turn?"

"Well, I think Harry's got it now, anyway," said Hermione hastily. "And we don't have to worry about Disarming, because he's been able to do that for ages. ... I think we ought to start on some of these hexes this evening."

She looked down the list they had made in the library.

"I like the look of this one," she said, "this Impediment Curse. Should slow down anything that's trying to attack you. Harry. We'll start with that one."

The bell rang. They hastily shoved the cushions back into Flitwicks cupboard and slipped out of the classroom.

"See you at dinner!" said Hermione, and she set off for Arithmancy, while Harry and Ron headed toward North Tower, and Divination. Broad strips of dazzling gold sunlight tell across the corridor from the high windows. The sky outside was so brightly blue it looked as though it had been enameled.

"It's going to be boiling in Trelawney's room, she never puts out that fire," said Ron as they started up the staircase toward the silver ladder and the trapdoor.

He was quite right. The dimly lit room was swelteringly hot. The fumes from the perfumed fire were heavier than ever. Harry's head swam as he made his way over to one of the curtained windows. While Professor Trelawney was looking the other way, disentangling her shawl from a lamp, he opened it an inch or so and settled back in his chintz armchair, so that a soft breeze played across his face. It was extremely comfortable.

"My dears," said Professor Trelawney, sitting down in her winged armchair in front of the class and peering around at them all with her strangely enlarged eyes, "we have almost finished our work on planetary divination. Today, however, will be an excellent opportunity to examine the effects of Mars, for he is placed most interestingly at the present time. If you will all look this way, I will dim the lights. . . ."

She waved her wand and the lamps went out. The fire was the only source of light now. Professor Trelawney bent down and lifted, from under her chair, a miniature model of the solar system, contained within a glass dome. It was a beautiful thing; each of the moons glimmered in place around the nine planets and the fiery sun, all of them hanging in thin air beneath the glass. Harry watched lazily as Professor Trelawney began to point out the fascinating angle Mars was making to Neptune. The heavily perfumed fumes washed over him, and the breeze from the window played across his face. He could hear an insect humming gently somewhere behind the curtain. His eyelids began to droop. . . .

He was riding on the back of an eagle owl, soaring through the clear blue sky toward an old, ivy-covered house set high on a hillside. Lower and lower they flew, the wind blowing pleasantly in Harry's face, until they reached a dark and broken window in the upper story of the house and entered. Now they were flying along a gloomy passageway, to a room at the very end . . . through the door they went, into a dark room whose windows were boarded up....

Harry had left the owl's back... he was watching, now, as it fluttered across the room, into a chair with its back to him. . . . There were two dark shapes on the floor beside the chair . . . both of them were stirring. . . .

One was a huge snake . . . the other was a man ... a short, balding man, a man with watery eyes and a pointed nose ... he was wheezing and sobbing on the hearth rug. . . .

"You are in luck, Wormtail," said a cold, high-pitched voice from the depths of the chair in which the owl had landed. "You are very fortunate indeed. Your blunder has not ruined everything. He is dead."

"My Lord!" gasped the man on the floor. "My Lord, I am ... I am so pleased . . . and so sorry. ..."

"Nagini," said the cold voice, "you are out of luck. I will not be feeding Wormtail to you, after all... but never mind, never mind . . . there is still Harry Potter. ..."

The snake hissed. Harry could see its tongue fluttering.

"Now, Wormtail," said the cold voice, "perhaps one more little reminder why I will not tolerate another blunder from you. ..."

"My Lord ... no ... I beg you . . ."

The tip of a wand emerged from around the back of the chair. It was pointing at Wormtail. "Crucio!" said the cold voice.

Wormtail screamed, screamed as though every nerve in his body were on fire, the screaming filled Harry's ears as the scar on his forehead seared with pain; he was yelling too...Voldemort would hear him, would know he was there. . . .

"Harry! Harry!"

Harry opened his eyes. He was lying on the floor of Professor Trelawney's room with his hands over his face. His scar was still burning so badly that his eyes were watering. The pain had been real. The whole class was standing around him, and Ron was kneeling next to him, looking terrified.

"You all right?" he said.

"Of course he isn't!" said Professor Trelawney, looking thoroughly excited. Her great eyes loomed over Harry, gazing at him. "What was it. Potter? A premonition? An apparition? What did you see?"

"Nothing," Harry lied. He sat up. He could feel himself shaking. He couldn't stop himself from looking around, into the shadows behind him; Voldemort's voice had sounded so close.

. . .

"You were clutching your scar!" said Professor Trelawney. "You were rolling on the floor, clutching your scar! Come now. Potter, I have experience in these matters!"

Harry looked up at her.

"I need to go to the hospital wing, I think," he said. "Bad headache."

"My dear, you were undoubtedly stimulated by the extraordinary clairvoyant vibrations of my room!" said Professor Trelawney. "If you leave now, you may lose the opportunity to see further than you have ever -"

"I don't want to see anything except a headache cure," said Harry.

He stood up. The class backed away. They all looked unnerved.

"See you later," Harry muttered to Ron, and he picked up his bag and headed for the trapdoor, ignoring Professor Trelawney, who was wearing an expression of great frustration, as though she had just been denied a real treat.

When Harry reached the bottom of her stepladder, however, he did not set off for the hospital wing. He had no intention whatsoever of going there. Sirius had told him what to do if his scar hurt him again, and Harry was going to follow his advice: He was going straight to Dumbledore's office. He marched down the corridors, thinking about what he had seen in the dream . . . it had been as vivid as the one that had awoken him on Privet Drive. . . . He ran over the details in his mind, trying to make sure he could remember them. . . . He had heard Voldemort accusing Wormtail of making a blunder . . . but the owl had brought good news, the blunder had been repaired, somebody was dead ... so Wormtail was not going to be fed to the snake . . . he, Harry, was going to be fed to it instead. . . .

Harry had walked right past the stone gargoyle guarding the entrance to Dumbledore's office without noticing. He blinked, looked around, realized what he had done, and retraced his steps, stopping in front of it. Then he remembered that he didn't know the password.

"Sherbet lemon?" he tried tentatively.

The gargoyle did not move.

"Okay," said Harry, staring at it, "Pear Drop. Er - Licorice Wand. Fizzing Whizbee. Drooble's Best Blowing Gum. Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans ... oh no, he doesn't like them, does he?... oh just open, can't you?" he said angrily. "I really need to see him, it's urgent!"

The gargoyle remained immovable.

Harry kicked it, achieving nothing but an excruciating pain in his big toe.

"Chocolate Frog!" he yelled angrily, standing on one leg. "Sugar Quill! Cockroach Cluster!" The gargoyle sprang to life and jumped aside. Harry blinked.

"Cockroach Cluster?" he said, amazed. "I was only joking. ..."

He hurried through the gap in the walls and stepped onto the foot of a spiral stone staircase, which moved slowly upward as the doors closed behind him, taking him up to a polished oak door with a brass door knocker.

He could hear voices from inside the office. He stepped off the moving staircase and hesitated, listening.

"Dumbledore, I'm afraid I don't see the connection, don't see it at all!" It was the voice of the Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge. "Ludo says Bertha's perfectly capable of getting herself lost. I agree we would have expected to have found her by now, but all the same, we've no evidence of foul play, Dumbledore, none at all. As for her disappearance being linked with Barty Crouch's!"

"And what do you think happened to Barty Crouch, Minister?" said Moody's growling voice. "I see two possibilities, Alastor," said Fudge. "Either Crouch has finally cracked - more than likely, I'm sure you'll agree, given his personal history - lost his mind, and gone wandering off somewhere -"

"He wandered extremely quickly, if that is the case, Cornelius," said Dumbledore calmly.

"Or else - well..." Fudge sounded embarrassed. "Well, I'll reserve judgment until after I've seen the place where he was found, but you say it was just past the Beauxbatons carriage? Dumbledore, you know what that woman is?"

"I consider her to be a very able headmistress - and an excellent dancer," said Dumbledore quietly.

"Dumbledore, come!" said Fudge angrily. "Don't you think you might be prejudiced in her favor because of Hagrid? They don't all turn out harmless - if, indeed, you can call Hagrid harmless, with that monster fixation he's got -"

"I no more suspect Madame Maxime than Hagrid," said Dumbledore, just as calmly. "I think it possible that it is you who are prejudiced, Cornelius."

"Can we wrap up this discussion?" growled Moody.

"Yes, yes, let's go down to the grounds, then," said Fudge impatiently.

"No, it's not that," said Moody, "it's just that Potter wants a word with you, Dumbledore. He's just outside the door."

The door of the office opened.

"Hello, Potter," said Moody. "Come in, then."

Harry walked inside. He had been inside Dumbledore's office once before; it was a very beautiful, circular room, lined with pictures of previous headmasters and headmistresses of Hogwarts, all of whom were fast asleep, their chests rising and falling gently.

Cornelius Fudge was standing beside Dumbledore's desk, wearing his usual pinstriped cloak and holding his lime-green bowler hat.

"Harry!" said Fudge jovially, moving forward. "How are you?"

"Fine," Harry lied.

"We were just talking about the night when Mr. Crouch turned up on the grounds," said Fudge. "It was you who found him, was it not?"

"Yes," said Harry. Then, feeling it was pointless to pretend that he hadn't overheard what they had been saying, he added, "I didn't see Madame Maxime anywhere, though, and she'd have a job hiding, wouldn't she?"

Dumbledore smiled at Harry behind Fudge's back, his eyes twinkling.

"Yes, well," said Fudge, looking embarrassed, "we're about to go for a short walk on the grounds, Harry, if you'll excuse us ... perhaps if you just go back to your class -"

"I wanted to talk to you. Professor," Harry said quickly, looking at Dumbledore, who gave him a swift, searching look.

"Wait here for me, Harry," he said. "Our examination of the grounds will not take long."

They trooped out in silence past him and closed the door. After a minute or so, Harry heard the clunks of Moody's wooden leg growing fainter in the corridor below. He looked around.

"Hello, Fawkes," he said.

Fawkes, Professor Dumbledore's phoenix, was standing on his golden perch beside the door. The size of a swan, with magnificent scarlet-and-gold plumage, he swished his long tail and blinked benignly at Harry.

Harry sat down in a chair in front of Dumbledore's desk. For several minutes, he sat and watched the old headmasters and headmistresses snoozing in their frames, thinking about what he had just heard, and running his fingers over his scar. It had stopped hurting now. He felt much calmer, somehow, now that he was in Dumbledore's office, knowing he would shortly be telling him about the dream. Harry looked up at the walls behind the desk. The patched and ragged Sorting Hat was standing on a shelf. A glass case next to it held a magnificent silver sword with large rubies set into the hilt, which Harry recognized as the one he himself had pulled out of the Sorting Hat in his second year. The sword had once belonged to Godric Gryffindor, founder of Harry's House. He was gazing at it, remembering how it had come to his aid when he had thought all hope was lost, when he noticed a patch of silvery light, dancing and shimmering on the glass case. He looked around for the source of the light and saw a sliver of silver-white shining brightly from within a black cabinet behind him, whose door had not been closed properly. Harry hesitated, glanced at Fawkes, then got up, walked across the office, and pulled open the cabinet door.

A shallow stone basin lay there, with odd carvings around the edge: runes and symbols that Harry did not recognize. The silvery light was coming from the basin's contents, which were like nothing Harry had ever seen before. He could not tell whether the substance was liquid or gas. It was a bright, whitish silver, and it was moving ceaselessly; the surface of it became ruffled like water beneath wind, and then, like clouds, separated and swirled smoothly. It looked like light made liquid - or like wind made solid - Harry couldn't make up his mind.

He wanted to touch it, to find out what it felt like, but nearly four years' experience of the magical world told him that sticking his hand into a bowl full of some unknown substance was a very stupid thing to do. He therefore pulled his wand out of the inside of his robes, cast a nervous look around the office, looked back at the contents of the basin, and prodded them.

The surface of the silvery stuff inside the basin began to swirl very fast.

Harry bent closer, his head right inside the cabinet. The silvery substance had become transparent; it looked like glass. He looked down into it expecting to see the stone bottom of the basin - and saw instead an enormous room below the surface of the mysterious substance, a room into which he seemed to be looking through a circular window in the ceiling.

The room was dimly lit; he thought it might even be underground, for there were no windows, merely torches in brackets such as the ones that illuminated the walls of Hogwarts. Lowering his face so that his nose was a mere inch away from the glassy substance, Harry saw that rows and rows of witches and wizards were seated around every wall on what seemed to be benches rising in levels. An empty chair stood in the very center of the room. There was

something about the chair that gave Harry an ominous feeling. Chains encircled the arms of it, as though its occupants were usually tied to it.

Where was this place? It surely wasn't Hogwarts; he had never seen a room like that here in the castle. Moreover, the crowd in the mysterious room at the bottom of the basin was comprised of adults, and Harry knew there were not nearly that many teachers at Hogwarts. They seemed, he thought, to be waiting for something; even though he could only see the tops of their hats, all of their faces seemed to be pointing in one direction, and none of them were talking to one another.

The basin being circular, and the room he was observing square, Harry could not make out what was going on in the corners of it. He leaned even closer, tilting his head, trying to see... The tip of his nose touched the strange substance into which he was staring.

Dumbledore's office gave an almighty lurch - Harry was thrown forward and pitched headfirst into the substance inside the basin -

But his head did not hit the stone bottom. He was falling through something icy-cold and black; it was like being sucked into a dark whirlpool -

And suddenly, Harry found himself sitting on a bench at the end of the room inside the basin, a bench raised high above the others. He looked up at the high stone ceiling, expecting to see the circular window through which he had just been staring, but there was nothing there but dark, solid stone.

Breathing hard and fast. Harry looked around him. Not one of the witches and wizards in the room (and there were at least two hundred of them) was looking at him. Not one of them seemed to have noticed that a fourteen-year-old boy had just dropped from the ceiling into their midst. Harry turned to the wizard next to him on the bench and uttered a loud cry of surprise that reverberated around the silent room.

He was sitting right next to Albus Dumbledore.

"Professor!" Harry said in a kind of strangled whisper. "I'm sorry - I didn't mean to - I was just looking at that basin in your cabinet - I - where are we?"

But Dumbledore didn't move or speak. He ignored Harry completely. Like every other wizard on the benches, he was staring into the far corner of the room, where there was a door.

Harry gazed, nonplussed, at Dumbledore, then around at the silently watchful crowd, then back at Dumbledore. And then it dawned on him. . . .

Once before. Harry had found himself somewhere that nobody could see or hear him. That time, he had fallen through a page in an enchanted diary, right into somebody else's memory . . . and unless he was very much mistaken, something of the sort had happened again...

Harry raised his right hand, hesitated, and then waved it energetically in front of Dumbledore's face. Dumbledore did not blink, look around at Harry, or indeed move at all. And that, in Harry's opinion, settled the matter. Dumbledore wouldn't ignore him like that. He was inside a memory, and this was not the present-day Dumbledore. Yet it couldn't be that long ago . . . the Dumbledore sitting next to him now was silver-haired, just like the present-day Dumbledore. But what was this place? What were all these wizards waiting for?

Harry looked around more carefully. The room, as he had suspected when observing it from above, was almost certainly underground - more of a dungeon than a room, he thought. There was a bleak and forbidding air about the place; there were no pictures on the walls, no decorations at all; just these tiered rows of benches, rising in levels all around the room, all positioned so that they had a clear view of that chair with the chains on its arms.

Before Harry could reach any conclusions about the place in which they were, he heard footsteps. The door in the corner of the dungeon opened and three people entered - or at least one man, flanked by two dementors.

Harry's insides went cold. The dementors - tall, hooded creatures whose faces were concealed - were gliding slowly toward the chair in the center of the room, each grasping one of the man's arms with their dead and rotten-looking hands. The man between them looked as though he was about to faint, and Harry couldn't blame him ... he knew the dementors could not touch him inside a memory, but he remembered their power only too well. The watching crowd recoiled slightly as the dementors placed the man in the chained chair and glided back out of the room. The door swung shut behind them.

Harry looked down at the man now sitting in the chair and saw that it was Karkaroff.

Unlike Dumbledore, Karkaroff looked much younger; his hair and goatee were black. He was not dressed in sleek furs, but in thin and ragged robes. He was shaking. Even as Harry watched, the chains on the arms of the chair glowed suddenly gold and snaked their way up Karkaroff's arms, binding him there.

"Igor Karkaroff," said a curt voice to Harry's left. Harry looked around and saw Mr. Crouch standing up in the middle of the bench beside him. Crouch's hair was dark, his face was much less lined, he looked fit and alert. "You have been brought from Azkaban to present evidence to the Ministry of Magic. You have given us to understand that you have important information for us."

Karkaroff straightened himself as best he could, tightly bound to the chair.

"I have, sir," he said, and although his voice was very scared, Harry could still hear the familiar unctuous note in it. "I wish to be of use to the Ministry. I wish to help. I - I know that the Ministry is trying to - to round up the last of the Dark Lords supporters. I am eager to assist in any way I can. ..."

There was a murmur around the benches. Some of the wizards and witches were surveying Karkaroff with interest, others with pronounced mistrust. Then Harry heard, quite distinctly, from Dumbledores other side, a familiar, growling voice saying, "Filth."

Harry leaned forward so that he could see past Dumbledore. Mad-Eye Moody was sitting there - except that there was a very noticeable difference in his appearance. He did not have his magical eye, but two normal ones. Both were looking down upon Karkaroff, and both were narrowed in intense dislike.

"Crouch is going to let him out," Moody breathed quietly to Dumbledore. "He's done a deal with him. Took me six months to track him down, and Crouch is going to let him go if he's got enough new names. Let's hear his information, I say, and throw him straight back to the dementors."

Dumbledore made a small noise of dissent through his long, crooked nose.

"Ah, I was forgetting . . . you don't like the dementors, do you, Albus?" said Moody with a sardonic smile.

"No," said Dumbledore calmly, "I'm afraid I don't. I have long felt the Ministry is wrong to ally itself with such creatures."

"But for filth like this . . ." Moody said softly.

"You say you have names for us, Karkaroff," said Mr. Crouch. "Let us hear them, please."

"You must understand," said Karkaroff hurriedly, "that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named operated always in the greatest secrecy. . . . He preferred that we - I mean to say, his supporters - and I regret now, very deeply, that I ever counted myself among them -"

"Get on with it," sneered Moody.

"- we never knew the names of every one of our fellows - He alone knew exactly who we all were -"

"Which was a wise move, wasn't it, as it prevented someone like you, Karkaroff, from turning all of them in," muttered Moody.

"Yet you say you have some names for us?" said Mr. Crouch.

"I - I do," said Karkaroff breathlessly. "And these were important supporters, mark you. People I saw with my own eyes doing his bidding. I give this information as a sign that I fully and totally renounce him, and am filled with a remorse so deep I can barely -"

"These names are?" said Mr. Crouch sharply.

Karkaroff drew a deep breath.

"There was Antonin Dolohov," he said. "I - I saw him torture countless Muggles and - and non-supporters of the Dark Lord."

"And helped him do it," murmured Moody.

"We have already apprehended Dolohov," said Crouch. "He was caught shortly after yourself."

"Indeed?" said Karkaroff, his eyes widening. "I - I am delighted to hear it!"

But he didn't look it. Harry could tell that this news had come as a real blow to him. One of his names was worthless.

"Any others?" said Crouch coldly.

"Why, yes ... there was Rosier," said Karkaroff hurriedly. "Evan Rosier."

"Rosier is dead," said Crouch. "He was caught shortly after you were too. He preferred to fight rather than come quietly and was killed in the struggle."

"Took a bit of me with him, though," whispered Moody to Harry's right. Harry looked around at him once more, and saw him indicating the large chunk out of his nose to Dumbledore.

"No - no more than Rosier deserved!" said Karkaroff, a real note of panic in his voice now. Harry could see that he was starting to worry that none of his information would be of any use to the Ministry. Karkaroff's eyes darted toward the door in the corner, behind which the dementors undoubtedly still stood, waiting.

"Any more?" said Crouch.

"Yes!" said Karkaroff. "There was Travers - he helped murder the McKinnons! Mulciber - he specialized in the Imperius Curse, forced countless people to do horrific things! Rookwood, who was a spy, and passed He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named useful information from inside the Ministry itself!"

Harry could tell that, this time, Karkaroff had struck gold. The watching crowd was all murmuring together.

"Rookwood?" said Mr. Crouch, nodding to a witch sitting in front of him, who began scribbling upon her piece of parchment. "Augustus Rookwood of the Department of Mysteries?"

"The very same," said Karkaroff eagerly. "I believe he used a network of well-placed wizards, both inside the Ministry and out, to collect information -"

"But Travers and Mulciber we have," said Mr. Crouch. "Very well, Karkaroff, if that is all, you will be returned to Azkaban while we decide -"

"Not yet!" cried Karkaroff, looking quite desperate. "Wait, I have more!"

Harry could see him sweating in the torchlight, his white skin contrasting strongly with the black of his hair and beard.

"Snape!" he shouted. "Severus Snape!"

"Snape has been cleared by this council," said Crouch disdainfully. "He has been vouched for by Albus Dumbledore."

"No!" shouted Karkaroff, straining at the chains that bound him to the chair. "I assure you! Severus Snape is a Death Eater!"

Dumbledore had gotten to his feet.

"I have given evidence already on this matter," he said calmly. "Severus Snape was indeed a Death Eater. However, he rejoined our side before Lord Voldemort's downfall and turned spy for us, at great personal risk. He is now no more a Death Eater than I am."

Harry turned to look at Mad-Eye Moody. He was wearing a look of deep skepticism behind Dumbledore's back.

"Very well, Karkaroff," Crouch said coldly, "you have been of assistance. I shall review your case. You will return to Azkaban in the meantime. ..."

Mr. Crouch's voice faded. Harry looked around; the dungeon was dissolving as though it were made of smoke; everything was fading; he could see only his own body - all else was swirling darkness. . . .

And then, the dungeon returned. Harry was sitting in a different seat, still on the highest bench, but now to the left side of Mr. Crouch. The atmosphere seemed quite different: relaxed, even cheerful. The witches and wizards all around the walls were talking to one another, almost as though they were at some sort of sporting event. Harry noticed a witch halfway up the rows of benches opposite. She had short blonde hair, was wearing magenta robes, and was sucking the end of an acid-green quill. It was, unmistakably, a younger Rita Skeeter. Harry looked around; Dumbledore was sitting beside him again, wearing different robes. Mr. Crouch looked more tired and somehow fiercer, gaunter. . . . Harry understood. It was a different memory, a different day ... a different trial.

The door in the corner opened, and Ludo Bagman walked into the room.

This was not, however, a Ludo Bagman gone to seed, but a Ludo Bagman who was clearly at the height of his Quidditch-playing fitness. His nose wasn't broken now; he was tall and lean and muscular. Bagman looked nervous as he sat down in the chained chair, but it did not bind him there as it had bound Karkaroff, and Bagman, perhaps taking heart from this, glanced around at the watching crowd, waved at a couple of them, and managed a small smile.

"Ludo Bagman, you have been brought here in front of the Council of Magical Law to answer charges relating to the activities of the Death Eaters," said Mr. Crouch. "We have heard the evidence against you, and are about to reach our verdict. Do you have anything to add to your testimony before we pronounce judgment?"

Harry couldn't believe his ears. Ludo Bagman, a Death Eater?

"Only," said Bagman, smiling awkwardly, "well - I know I've been a bit of an idiot -"

One or two wizards and witches in the surrounding seats smiled indulgently. Mr. Crouch did not appear to share their feelings. He was staring down at Ludo Bagman with an expression of the utmost severity and dislike.

"You never spoke a truer word, boy," someone muttered dryly to Dumbledore behind Harry. He looked around and saw Moody sitting there again. "If I didn't know he'd always been dim, I'd have said some of those Bludgers had permanently affected his brain. ..."

"Ludovic Bagman, you were caught passing information to Lord Voldemort's supporters," said Mr. Crouch. "For this, I suggest a term of imprisonment in Azkaban lasting no less than _"

But there was an angry outcry from the surrounding benches. Several of the witches and wizards around the walls stood up, shaking their heads, and even their fists, at Mr. Crouch. "But I've told you, I had no idea!" Bagman called earnestly over the crowd's babble, his round blue eyes widening. "None at all! Old Rookwood was a friend of my dad's . . . never

crossed my mind he was in with You-Know-Who! I thought I was collecting information for our side! And Rookwood kept talking about getting me a job in the Ministry later on ... once my Quidditch days are over, you know ... I mean, I can't keep getting hit by Bludgers for the rest of my life, can I?"

There were titters from the crowd.

"It will be put to the vote," said Mr. Crouch coldly. He turned to the right-hand side of the dungeon. "The jury will please raise their hands . . . those in favor of imprisonment..."

Harry looked toward the right-hand side of the dungeon. Not one person raised their hand. Many of the witches and wizards around the walls began to clap. One of the witches on the jury stood up.

"Yes?" barked Crouch.

"We'd just like to congratulate Mr. Bagman on his splendid performance for England in the Quidditch match against Turkey last Saturday," the witch said breathlessly.

Mr. Crouch looked furious. The dungeon was ringing with applause now. Bagman got to his feet and bowed, beaming.

"Despicable," Mr. Crouch spat at Dumbledore, sitting down as Bagman walked out of the dungeon. "Rookwood get him a job indeed. . . . The day Ludo Bagman joins us will be a sad day indeed for the Ministry. . . ."

And the dungeon dissolved again. When it had returned, Harry looked around. He and Dumbledore were still sitting beside Mr. Crouch, but the atmosphere could not have been more different. There was total silence, broken only by the dry sobs of a frail, wispy-looking witch in the seat next to Mr. Crouch. She was clutching a handkerchief to her mouth with trembling hands.

Harry looked up at Crouch and saw that he looked gaunter and grayer than ever before. A nerve was twitching in his temple.

"Bring them in," he said, and his voice echoed through the silent dungeon.

The door in the corner opened yet again. Six dementors entered this time, flanking a group of four people. Harry saw the people in the crowd turn to look up at Mr. Crouch. A few of them whispered to one another.

The dementors placed each of the four people in the four chairs with chained arms that now stood on the dungeon floor. There was a thickset man who stared blankly up at Crouch; a thinner and more nervous-looking man, whose eyes were darting around the crowd; a woman with thick, shining dark hair and heavily hooded eyes, who was sitting in the chained chair as though it were a throne; and a boy in his late teens, who looked nothing short of petrified. He was shivering, his straw-colored hair all over his face, his freckled skin milk-white. The wispy little witch beside Crouch began to rock backward and forward in her seat, whimpering into her handkerchief.

Crouch stood up. He looked down upon the four in front of him, and there was pure hatred in his face.

"You have been brought here before the Council of Magical Law," he said clearly, "so that we may pass judgment on you, for a crime so heinous -"

"Father," said the boy with the straw-colored hair. "Father. . . please . . ."

"- that we have rarely heard the like of it within this court," said Crouch, speaking more loudly, drowning out his son's voice.

"We have heard the evidence against you. The four of you stand accused of capturing an Auror - Frank Longbottom - and subjecting him to the Cruciatus Curse, believing him to have knowledge of the present whereabouts of your exiled master, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named -"

"Father, I didn't!" shrieked the boy in chains below. "I didn't, I swear it. Father, don't send me back to the dementors -"

"You are further accused," bellowed Mr. Crouch, "of using the Cruciatus Curse on Frank Longbottom's wife, when he would not give you information. You planned to restore He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named to power, and to resume the lives of violence you presumably led while he was strong. I now ask the jury -"

"Mother!" screamed the boy below, and the wispy little witch beside Crouch began to sob, rocking backward and forward. "Mother, stop him. Mother, I didn't do it, it wasn't me!"

"I now ask the jury," shouted Mr. Crouch, "to raise their hands if they believe, as I do, that these crimes deserve a life sentence in Azkaban!"

In unison, the witches and wizards along the right-hand side of the dungeon raised their hands. The crowd around the walls began to clap as it had for Bagman, their faces full of savage triumph. The boy began to scream.

"No! Mother, no! I didn't do it, I didn't do it, I didn't know! Don't send me there, don't let him!"

The dementors were gliding back into the room. The boys' three companions rose quietly from their seats; the woman with the heavy-lidded eyes looked up at Crouch and called, "The Dark Lord will rise again, Crouch! Throw us into Azkaban; we will wait! He will rise again and will come for us, he will reward us beyond any of his other supporters! We alone were faithful! We alone tried to find him!"

But the boy was trying to fight off the dementors, even though Harry could see their cold, draining power starting to affect him. The crowd was jeering, some of them on their feet, as the woman swept out of the dungeon, and the boy continued to struggle.

"I'm your son!" he screamed up at Crouch. "I'm your son!"

"You are no son of mine!" bellowed Mr. Crouch, his eyes bulging suddenly. "I have no son!" The wispy witch beside him gave a great gasp and slumped in her seat. She had fainted. Crouch appeared not to have noticed.

"Take them away!" Crouch roared at the dementors, spit flying from his mouth. "Take them away, and may they rot there!"

"Father! Father, I wasn't involved! No! No! Father, please!"

"I think. Harry, it is time to return to my office," said a quiet voice in Harry's ear.

Harry started. He looked around. Then he looked on his other side.

There was an Albus Dumbledore sitting on his right, watching Crouch's son being dragged away by the dementors - and there was an Albus Dumbledore on his left, looking right at him.

"Come," said the Dumbledore on his left, and he put his hand under Harry's elbow. Harry felt himself rising into the air; the dungeon dissolved around him; for a moment, all was blackness, and then he felt as though he had done a slow-motion somersault, suddenly landing flat on his feet, in what seemed like the dazzling light of Dumbledore's sunlit office. The stone basin was shimmering in the cabinet in front of him, and Albus Dumbledore was standing beside him.

"Professor," Harry gasped, "I know I shouldn't've - I didn't mean - the cabinet door was sort of open and -"

"I quite understand," said Dumbledore. He lifted the basin, carried it over to his desk, placed it upon the polished top, and sat down in the chair behind it. He motioned for Harry to sit down opposite him.

Harry did so, staring at the stone basin. The contents had returned to their original, silvery-white state, swirling and rippling beneath his gaze.

"What is it?" Harry asked shakily.

"This? It is called a Pensieve," said Dumbledore. "I sometimes find, and I am sure you know the feeling, that I simply have too many thoughts and memories crammed into my mind."

"Er," said Harry, who couldn't truthfully say that he had ever felt anything of the sort.

"At these times," said Dumbledore, indicating the stone basin, "I use the Pensieve. One simply siphons the excess thoughts from one's mind, pours them into the basin, and examines them at one's leisure. It becomes easier to spot patterns and links, you understand, when they are in this form."

"You mean . . . that stuff's your thoughts?" Harry said, staring at the swirling white substance in the basin.

"Certainly," said Dumbledore. "Let me show you."

Dumbledore drew his wand out of the inside of his robes and placed the tip into his own silvery hair, near his temple. When he took the wand away, hair seemed to be clinging to it - but then Harry saw that it was in fact a glistening strand of the same strange silvery-white substance that filled the Pensieve. Dumbledore added this fresh thought to the basin, and Harry, astonished, saw his own face swimming around the surface of the bowl. Dumbledore placed his long hands on either side of the Pensieve and swirled it, rather as a gold prospector would pan for fragments of gold.... and Harry saw his own face change smoothly into Snape's, who opened his mouth and spoke to the ceiling, his voice echoing slightly.

"It's coming back . . . Karkaroff's too . . . stronger and clearer than ever..."

"A connection I could have made without assistance," Dumbledore sighed, "but never mind." He peered over the top of his half-moon spectacles at Harry, who was gaping at Snape's face, which was continuing to swirl around the bowl. "I was using the Pensieve when Mr. Fudge arrived for our meeting and put it away rather hastily. Undoubtedly I did not fasten the cabinet door properly. Naturally, it would have attracted your attention."

"I'm sorry," Harry mumbled.

Dumbledore shook his head. "Curiosity is not a sin," he said. "But we should exercise caution with our curiosity. . . yes, indeed ..."

Frowning slightly, he prodded the thoughts within the basin with the tip of his wand. Instantly, a figure rose out of it, a plump, scowling girl of about sixteen, who began to revolve slowly, with her feet still in the basin. She took no notice whatsoever of Harry or Professor Dumbledore. When she spoke, her voice echoed as Snape's had done, as though it were coming from the depths of the stone basin. "He put a hex on me, Professor Dumbledore, and I

was only teasing him, sir, I only said I'd seen him kissing Florence behind the greenhouses last Thursday. . . ."

"But why, Bertha," said Dumbledore sadly, looking up at the now silently revolving girl, "why did you have to follow him in the first place?"

"Bertha?" Harry whispered, looking up at her. "Is that - was that Bertha Jorkins?"

"Yes," said Dumbledore, prodding the thoughts in the basin again; Bertha sank back into them, and they became silvery and opaque once more. "That was Bertha as I remember her at school."

The silvery light from the Pensieve illuminated Dumbledore's face, and it struck Harry suddenly how very old he was looking. He knew, of course, that Dumbledore was getting on in years, but somehow he never really thought of Dumbledore as an old man.

"So, Harry," said Dumbledore quietly. "Before you got lost in my thoughts, you wanted to tell me something."

"Yes," said Harry. "Professor - I was in Divination just now, and - er - I fell asleep." He hesitated here, wondering if a reprimand was coming, but Dumbledore merely said, "Quite understandable. Continue."

"Well, I had a dream," said Harry. "A dream about Lord Voldemort. He was torturing Wormtail . . . you know who Wormtail-"

"I do know," said Dumbledore promptly. "Please continue."

"Voldemort got a letter from an owl. He said something like, Wormtail's blunder had been repaired. He said someone was dead. Then he said, Wormtail wouldn't be fed to the snake - there was a snake beside his chair. He said - he said he'd be feeding me to it, instead. Then he did the Cruciatus Curse on Wormtail - and my scar hurt," Harry said. "It woke me up, it hurt so badly."

Dumbledore merely looked at him.

"Er - that's all," said Harry.

"I see," said Dumbledore quietly. "I see. Now, has your scar hurt at any other time this year, excepting the time it woke you up over the summer?"

"No, I - how did you know it woke me up over the summer?" said Harry, astonished.

"You are not Sirius's only correspondent," said Dumbledore. "I have also been in contact with him ever since he left Hogwarts last year. It was I who suggested the mountainside cave as the safest place for him to stay."

Dumbledore got up and began walking up and down behind his desk. Every now and then, he placed his wand tip to his temple, removed another shining silver thought, and added it to the Pensieve. The thoughts inside began to swirl so fast that Harry couldn't make out anything clearly: It was merely a blur of color.

"Professor?" he said quietly, after a couple of minutes.

Dumbledore stopped pacing and looked at Harry.

"My apologies," he said quietly. He sat back down at his desk.

"D'you - d'you know why my scar's hurting me?"

Dumbledore looked very intently at Harry for a moment, and then said, "I have a theory, no more than that. ... It is my belief that your scar hurts both when Lord Voldemort is near you, and when he is feeling a particularly strong surge of hatred."

"But. . . why?"

"Because you and he are connected by the curse that failed," said Dumbledore. "That is no ordinary scar."

"So you think . . . that dream . . . did it really happen?"

"It is possible," said Dumbledore. "I would say - probable. Harry - did you see Voldemort?"

"No," said Harry. "Just the back of his chair. But - there wouldn't have been anything to see, would there? I mean, he hasn't got a body, has he? But. . . but then how could he have held the wand?" Harry said slowly.

"How indeed?" muttered Dumbledore. "How indeed . . ."

Neither Dumbledore nor Harry spoke for a while. Dumbledore was gazing across the room, and, every now and then, placing his wand tip to his temple and adding another shining silver thought to the seething mass within the Pensieve.

"Professor," Harry said at last, "do you think he's getting stronger?"

"Voldemort?" said Dumbledore, looking at Harry over the Pensieve. It was the characteristic, piercing look Dumbledore had given him on other occasions, and always made Harry feel as though Dumbledore were seeing right through him in a way that even Moody's magical eye could not. "Once again. Harry, I can only give you my suspicions."

Dumbledore sighed again, and he looked older, and wearier, than ever.

"The years of Voldemort's ascent to power," he said, "were marked with disappearances. Bertha Jorkins has vanished without a trace in the place where Voldemort was certainly known to be last. Mr. Crouch too has disappeared . . . within these very grounds. And there was a third disappearance, one which the Ministry, I regret to say, do not consider of any importance, for it concerns a Muggle. His name was Frank Bryce, he lived in the village where Voldemort's father grew up, and he has not been seen since last August. You see, I read the Muggle newspapers, unlike most of my Ministry friends."

Dumbledore looked very seriously at Harry.

"These disappearances seem to me to be linked. The Ministry disagrees - as you may have heard, while waiting outside my office."

Harry nodded. Silence fell between them again, Dumbledore extracting thoughts every now and then. Harry felt as though he ought to go, but his curiosity held him in his chair.

"Professor?" he said again.

"Yes, Harry?" said Dumbledore.

"Er . . . could I ask you about. . . that court thing I was in ... in the Pensieve?"

"You could," said Dumbledore heavily. "I attended it many times, but some trials come back to me more clearly than others ... particularly now. ..."

"You know - you know the trial you found me in? The one with Crouch's son? Well....were they talking about Neville's parents?"

Dumbledore gave Harry a very sharp look. "Has Neville never told you why he has been brought up by his grandmother?" he said.

Harry shook his head, wondering, as he did so, how he could have failed to ask Neville this, in almost four years of knowing him.

"Yes, they were talking about Nevilles parents," said Dumbledore. "His father, Frank, was an Auror just like Professor Moody. He and his wife were tortured for information about Voldemort's whereabouts after he lost his powers, as you heard."

"So they're dead?" said Harry quietly.

"No," said Dumbledore, his voice full of a bitterness Harry had never heard there before.

"They are insane. They are both in St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries. I believe Neville visits them, with his grandmother, during the holidays. They do not recognize him."

Harry sat there, horror-struck. He had never known . . . never, in four years, bothered to find out. . .

"The Longbottoms were very popular," said Dumbledore. "The attacks on them came after Voldemort's fall from power, just when everyone thought they were safe. Those attacks caused a wave of fury such as I have never known. The Ministry was under great pressure to catch those who had done it. Unfortunately, the Longbottoms' evidence was - given their condition - none too reliable."

"Then Mr. Crouch's son might not have been involved?" said Harry slowly.

Dumbledore shook his head.

"As to that, I have no idea."

Harry sat in silence once more, watching the contents of the Pensieve swirl. There were two more questions he was burning to ask . . . but they concerned the guilt of living people. . . .

"Er," he said, "Mr. Bagman . . ."

"... has never been accused of any Dark activity since," said Dumbledore calmly.

"Right," said Harry hastily, staring at the contents of the Pensieve again, which were swirling more slowly now that Dumbledore had stopped adding thoughts. "And ... er ..."

But the Pensieve seemed to be asking his question for him.

Snape's face was swimming on the surface again. Dumbledore glanced down into it, and then up at Harry.

"No more has Professor Snape," he said.

Harry looked into Dumbledore's light blue eyes, and the thing he really wanted to know spilled out of his mouth before he could stop it.

"What made you think he'd really stopped supporting Voldemort, Professor?"

Dumbledore held Harry's gaze for a few seconds, and then said, "That, Harry, is a matter between Professor Snape and myself."

Harry knew that the interview was over; Dumbledore did not look angry, yet there was a finality in his tone that told Harry it was time to go. He stood up, and so did Dumbledore.

"Harry," he said as Harry reached the door. "Please do not speak about Neville's parents to anybody else. He has the right to let people know, when he is ready."

"Yes, Professor," said Harry, turning to go.

"And-"

Harry looked back. Dumbledore was standing over the Pensieve, his face lit from beneath by its silvery spots of light, looking older than ever. He stared at Harry for a moment, and then said, "Good luck with the third task."

Dumbledore reckons You-Know-Who's getting stronger again as well?" Ron whispered.

Everything Harry had seen in the Pensieve, nearly everything Dumbledore had told and shown him afterward, he had now shared with Ron and Hermione - and, of course, with Sirius, to whom Harry had sent an owl the moment he had left Dumbledore's office. Harry, Ron, and Hermione sat up late in the common room once again that night, talking it all over until Harry's mind was reeling, until he understood what Dumbledore had meant about a head becoming so full of thoughts that it would have been a relief to siphon them off.

Ron stared into the common room fire. Harry thought he saw Ron shiver slightly, even though the evening was warm.

"And he trusts Snape?" Ron said. "He really trusts Snape, even though he knows he was a Death Eater?"

"Yes," said Harry.

Hermione had not spoken for ten minutes. She was sitting with her forehead in her hands, staring at her knees. Harry thought she too looked as though she could have done with a Pensieve.

"Rita Skeeter," she muttered finally.

"How can you be worrying about her now?" said Ron, in utter disbelief.

"I'm not worrying about her," Hermione said to her knees. "I'm just thinking. . . remember what she said to me in the Three Broomsticks? 'I know things about Ludo Bagman that would make your hair curl.' This is what she meant, isn't it? She reported his trial, she knew he'd passed information to the Death Eaters. And Winky too, remember . . . 'Ludo Bagman's a bad wizard.' Mr. Crouch would have been furious he got off, he would have talked about it at home."

"Yeah, but Bagman didn't pass information on purpose, did he?"

Hermione shrugged.

"And Fudge reckons Madame Maxime attacked Crouch?" Ron said, turning back to Harry.

"Yeah," said Harry, "but he's only saying that because Crouch disappeared near the Beauxbatons carriage."

"We never thought of her, did we?" said Ron slowly. "Mind you, she's definitely got giant blood, and she doesn't want to admit it-"

"Of course she doesn't," said Hermione sharply, looking up. "Look what happened to Hagrid when Rita found out about his mother. Look at Fudge, jumping to conclusions about her, just because she's part giant. Who needs that sort of prejudice? I'd probably say I had big bones if I knew that's what I'd get for telling the truth."

Hermione looked at her watch. "We haven't done any practicing!" she said, looking shocked. "We were going to do the Impediment Curse! We'll have to really get down to it tomorrow! Come on. Harry, you need to get some sleep."

Harry and Ron went slowly upstairs to their dormitory. As Harry pulled on his pajamas, he looked over at Neville's bed. True to his word to Dumbledore, he had not told Ron and Hermione about Neville's parents. As Harry took off his glasses and climbed into his four-poster, he imagined how it must feel to have parents still living but unable to recognize you. He often got sympathy from strangers for being an orphan, but as he listened to Neville's snores, he thought that Neville deserved it more than he did. Lying in the darkness, Harry felt a rush of anger and hate toward the people who had tortured Mr. and Mrs. Longbottom. ... He remembered the jeers of the crowd as Crouch's son and his companions had been dragged from the court by the dementors. ... He understood how they had felt. ... Then he remembered the milk-white face of the screaming boy and realized with a jolt that he had died a year later. ...

It was Voldemort, Harry thought, staring up at the canopy of his bed in the darkness, it all came back to Voldemort. ... He was the one who had torn these families apart, who had ruined all these lives. ...

Ron and Hermione were supposed to be studying for their exams, which would finish on the day of the third task, but they were putting most of their efforts into helping Harry prepare.

"Don't worry about it," Hermione said shortly when Harry pointed this out to them and said he didn't mind practicing on his own for a while, "at least we'll get top marks in Defense Against the Dark Arts. We'd never have found out about all these hexes in class."

"Good training for when we're all Aurors," said Ron excitedly, attempting the Impediment Curse on a wasp that had buzzed into the room and making it stop dead in midair.

The mood in the castle as they entered June became excited and tense again. Everyone was looking forward to the third task, which would take place a week before the end of term. Harry was practicing hexes at every available moment. He felt more confident about this task than either of the others. Difficult and dangerous though it would undoubtedly be, Moody was right: Harry had managed to find his way past monstrous creatures and enchanted barriers before now, and this time he had some notice, some chance to prepare himself for what lay ahead.

Tired of walking in on Harry, Hermione, and Ron all over the school. Professor McGonagall had given them permission to use the empty Transfiguration classroom at lunchtimes. Harry had soon mastered the Impediment Curse, a spell to slow down and obstruct attackers; the Reductor Curse, which would enable him to blast solid objects out of his way; and the Four-Point Spell, a useful discovery of Hermione's that would make his wand point due north, therefore enabling him to check whether he was going in the right direction within the maze. He was still having trouble with the Shield Charm, though. This was supposed to cast a temporary, invisible wall around himself that deflected minor curses; Hermione managed to shatter it with a well-placed Jelly-Legs Jinx, and Harry wobbled around the room for ten minutes afterward before she had looked up the counter-jinx.

"You're still doing really well, though," Hermione said encouragingly, looking down her list and crossing off those spells they had already learned. "Some of these are bound to come in handy."

"Come and look at this," said Ron, who was standing by the window. He was staring down onto the grounds. "What's Malfoy doing?"

Harry and Hermione went to see. Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle were standing in the shadow of a tree below. Crabbe and Goyle seemed to be keeping a lookout; both were smirking.

Malfoy was holding his hand up to his mouth and speaking into it.

"He looks like he's using a walkie-talkie," said Harry curiously.

"He can't be," said Hermione, "I've told you, those sorts of things don't work around Hogwarts. Come on, Harry," she added briskly, turning away from the window and moving back into the middle of the room, "let's try that Shield Charm again."

Sirius was sending daily owls now. Like Hermione, he seemed to want to concentrate on getting Harry through the last task before they concerned themselves with anything else. He reminded Harry in every letter that whatever might be going on outside the walls of Hogwarts was not Harry's responsibility, nor was it within his power to influence it.

If Voldemort is really getting stronger again, he wrote, my priority is to ensure your safety. He cannot hope to lay hands on you while you are under Dumbledore's protection, but all the same, take no risks: Concentrate on getting through that maze safely, and then we can turn our attention to other matters.

Harry's nerves mounted as June the twenty-fourth drew closer, but they were not as bad as those he had felt before the first and second tasks. For one thing, he was confident that, this time, he had done everything in his power to prepare for the task. For another, this was the final hurdle, and however well or badly he did, the tournament would at last be over, which would be an enormous relief.

Breakfast was a very noisy affair at the Gryffindor table on the morning of the third task. The post owls appeared, bringing Harry a good-luck card from Sirius. It was only a piece of parchment, folded over and bearing a muddy paw print on its front, but Harry appreciated it all the same. A screech owl arrived for Hermione, carrying her morning copy of the Daily Prophet as usual. She unfolded the paper, glanced at the front page, and spat out a mouthful of pumpkin juice all over it.

"What?" said Harry and Ron together, staring at her. "Nothing," said Hermione quickly, trying to shove the paper out of sight, but Ron grabbed it. He stared at the headline and said, "No way. Not today. That old cow."

"What?" said Harry. "Rita Skeeter again?"

"No," said Ron, and just like Hermione, he attempted to push the paper out of sight.

"It's about me, isn't it?" said Harry.

"No," said Ron, in an entirely unconvincing tone. But before Harry could demand to see the paper. Draco Malfoy shouted across the Great Hall from the Slytherin table.

"Hey, Potter! Potter! How's your head? You feeling all right? Sure you're not going to go berserk on us?"

Malfoy was holding a copy of the Daily Prophet too. Slytherins up and down the table were sniggering, twisting in their seats to see Harry's reaction.

"Let me see it," Harry said to Ron. "Give it here."

Very reluctantly, Ron handed over the newspaper. Harry turned it over and found himself staring at his own picture, beneath the banner headline:

"HARRY POTTER "DISTURBED AND DANGEROUS"

The boy who defeated He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named is unstable and possibly dangerous, writes Rita Skeeter, Special Correspondent. Alarming evidence has recently come to light about Harry Potter's strange behavior, which casts doubts upon his suitability to compete in a demanding competition like the Triwizard Tournament, or even to attend Hogwarts School.

Potter, the Daily Prophet can exclusively reveal, regularly collapses at school, and is often heard to complain of pain in the scar on his forehead (relic of the curse with which You-Know-Who attempted to kill him). On Monday last, midway through a Divination lesson, your Daily Prophet reporter witnessed Potter storming from the class, claiming that his scar was hurting too badly to continue studying.

It is possible, say top experts at St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries, that Potters brain was affected by the attack inflicted upon him by You-Know-Who, and that his insistence that the scar is still hurting is an expression of his deep-seated confusion.

"He might even be pretending," said one specialist. "This could be a plea for attention."

The Daily Prophet, however, has unearthed worrying facts about Harry Potter that Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts, has carefully concealed from the wizarding public.

"Potter can speak Parseltongue," reveals Draco Malfoy, a Hogwarts fourth year. "There were a lot of attacks on students a couple of years ago, and most people thought Potter was behind them after they saw him lose his temper at a dueling club and set a snake on another boy. It was all hushed up, though. But he's made friends with werewolves and giants too.

We think he'd do anything for a bit of power."

Parseltongue, the ability to converse with snakes, has long been considered a Dark Art.

Indeed, the most famous Parselmouth of our times is none other than You-Know-Who himself. A member of the Dark Force Defense League, who wished to remain unnamed, stated that he would regard any wizard who could speak Parseltongue "as worthy of investigation. Personally, I would be highly suspicious of anybody who could converse with snakes, as serpents are often used in the worst kinds of Dark Magic, and are historically associated with evildoers." Similarly, "anyone who seeks out the company of such vicious creatures as werewolves and giants would appear to have a fondness for violence."

Albus Dumbledore should surely consider whether a boy such as this should be allowed to compete in the Triwizard Tournament. Some fear that Potter might resort to the Dark Arts in his desperation to win the tournament, the third task of which takes place this evening.

"Gone off me a bit, hasn't she?" said Harry lightly, folding up the paper.

Over at the Slytherin table, Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle were laughing at him, tapping their heads with their fingers, pulling grotesquely mad faces, and wagging their tongues like snakes.

"How did she know your scar hurt in Divination?" Ron said. "There's no way she was there, there's no way she could've heard -"

"The window was open," said Harry. "I opened it to breathe."

"You were at the top of North Tower!" Hermione said. "Your voice couldn't have carried all the way down to the grounds!"

"Well, you're the one who's supposed to be researching magical methods of bugging!" said Harry. "You tell me how she did it!"

"I've been trying!" said Hermione. "But I... but. . ."

An odd, dreamy expression suddenly came over Hermione's face. She slowly raised a hand and ran her fingers through her hair.

"Are you all right?" said Ron, frowning at her.

"Yes," said Hermione breathlessly. She ran her fingers through her hair again, and then held her hand up to her mouth, as though speaking into an invisible walkie-talkie. Harry and Ron stared at each other.

"I've had an idea," Hermione said, gazing into space. "I think I know. . . because then no one would be able to see ... even Moody. . . and she'd have been able to get onto the

window ledge . . . but she's not allowed . . . she's definitely not allowed ... I think we've got her! Just give me two seconds in the library - just to make sure!"

With that, Hermione seized her school bag and dashed out of the Great Hall.

"Oi!" Ron called after her. "We've got our History of Magic exam in ten minutes! Blimey," he said, turning back to Harry, "she must really hate that Skeeter woman to risk missing the start of an exam. What're you going to do in Binns's class - read again?"

Exempt from the end-of-term tests as a Triwizard champion, Harry had been sitting in the back of every exam class so far, looking up fresh hexes for the third task.

"S'pose so," Harry said to Ron; but just then. Professor McGonagall came walking alongside the Gryffindor table toward him.

"Potter, the champions are congregating in the chamber off the Hall after breakfast," she said.

"But the task's not till tonight!" said Harry, accidentally spilling scrambled eggs down his front, afraid he had mistaken the time.

"I'm aware of that, Potter," she said. "The champions' families are invited to watch the final task, you know. This is simply a chance for you to greet them."

She moved away. Harry gaped after her.

"She doesn't expect the Dursleys to turn up, does she?" he asked Ron blankly.

"Dunno," said Ron. "Harry, I'd better hurry, I'm going to be late for Binns. See you later."

Harry finished his breakfast in the emptying Great Hall. He saw Fleur Delacour get up from the Ravenclaw table and join Cedric as he crossed to the side chamber and entered. Krum slouched off to join them shortly afterward. Harry stayed where he was. He really didn't want to go into the chamber. He had no family - no family who would turn up to see him risk his life, anyway. But just as he was getting up, thinking that he might as well go up to the library and do a spot more hex research, the door of the side chamber opened, and Cedric stuck his head out.

"Harry, come on, they're waiting for you!"

Utterly perplexed. Harry got up. The Dursleys couldn't possibly be here, could they? He walked across the Hall and opened the door into the chamber.

Cedric and his parents were just inside the door. Viktor Krum was over in a corner, conversing with his dark-haired mother and father in rapid Bulgarian. He had inherited his father's hooked nose. On the other side of the room, Fleur was jabbering away in French to her mother. Fleur's little sister, Gabrielle, was holding her mother's hand. She waved at Harry, who waved back, grinning. Then he saw Mrs. Weasley and Bill standing in front of the fireplace, beaming at him.

"Surprise!" Mrs. Weasley said excitedly as he smiled broadly and walked over to them.

"Thought we'd come and watch you. Harry!" She bent down and kissed him on the cheek.

"You all right?" said Bill, grinning at Harry and shaking his hand. "Charlie wanted to come, but he couldn't get time off. He said you were incredible against the Horntail."

Fleur Delacour, Harry noticed, was eyeing Bill with great interest over her mother's shoulder. Harry could tell she had no objection whatsoever to long hair or earrings with fangs on them.

"This is really nice of you," Harry muttered to Mrs. Weasley. "I thought for a moment - the Dursleys -"

"Hmm," said Mrs. Weasley, pursing her lips. She had always refrained from criticizing the Dursleys in front of Harry, but her eyes flashed every time they were mentioned.

"It's great being back here," said Bill, looking around the chamber (Violet, the Fat Lady's friend, winked at him from her frame). "Haven't seen this place for five years. Is that picture of the mad knight still around? Sir Cadogan?"

"Oh yeah," said Harry, who had met Sir Cadogan the previous year.

"And the Fat Lady?" said Bill.

"She was here in my time," said Mrs. Weasley. "She gave me such a telling off one night when I got back to the dormitory at four in the morning -"

"What were you doing out of your dormitory at four in the morning?" said Bill, surveying his mother with amazement.

Mrs. Weasley grinned, her eyes twinkling.

"Your father and I had been for a nighttime stroll," she said. "He got caught by Apollyon Pringle - he was the caretaker in those days - your father's still got the marks."

"Fancy giving us a tour, Harry?" said Bill.

"Yeah, okay," said Harry, and they made their way back toward the door into the Great Hall. As they passed Amos Diggory, he looked around.

"There you are, are you?" he said, looking Harry up and down.

"Bet you're not feeling quite as full of yourself now Cedrics caught you up on points, are you?"

"What?" said Harry.

"Ignore him," said Cedric in a low voice to Harry, frowning after his father. "He's been angry ever since Rita Skeeters article about the Triwizard Tournament - you know, when she made out you were the only Hogwarts champion."

"Didn't bother to correct her, though, did he?" said Amos Diggory, loudly enough for Harry to hear as he started to walk out of the door with Mrs. Weasley and Bill. "Still, . . . you'll show him, Ced. Beaten him once before, haven't you?"

"Rita Skeeter goes out of her way to cause trouble, Amos!" Mrs. Weasley said angrily. "I would have thought you'd know that, working at the Ministry!"

Mr. Diggory looked as though he was going to say something angry, but his wife laid a hand on his arm, and he merely shrugged and turned away.

Harry had a very enjoyable morning walking over the sunny grounds with Bill and Mrs. Weasley, showing them the Beauxbatons carriage and the Durmstrang ship. Mrs. Weasley was intrigued by the Whomping Willow, which had been planted after she had left school, and reminisced at length about the gamekeeper before Hagrid, a man called Ogg.

"How's Percy?" Harry asked as they walked around the greenhouses.

"Not good," said Bill.

"He's very upset," said Mrs. Weasley, lowering her voice and glancing around. "The Ministry wants to keep Mr. Crouch's disappearance quiet, but Percy's been hauled in for questioning about the instructions Mr. Crouch has been sending in. They seem to think there's a chance they weren't genuinely written by him. Percy's been under a lot of strain. They're not letting him fill in for Mr. Crouch as the fifth judge tonight. Cornelius Fudge is going to be doing it." They returned to the castle for lunch.

"Mum - Bill!" said Ron, looking stunned, as he joined the Gryffindor table. "What're you doing here?"

"Come to watch Harry in the last task!" said Mrs. Weasley brightly. "I must say, it makes a lovely change, not having to cook. How was your exam?"

"Oh . . . okay," said Ron. "Couldn't remember all the goblin rebels' names, so I invented a few. It's all right," he said, helping himself to a Cornish pasty, while Mrs. Weasley looked stern, "they're all called stuff like Bodrod the Bearded and Urg the Unclean; it wasn't hard." Fred, George, and Ginny came to sit next to them too, and Harry was having such a good time he felt almost as though he were back at the Burrow; he had forgotten to worry about

that evening's task, and not until Hermione turned up, halfway through lunch, did he remember that she had had a brainwave about Rita Skeeter.

"Are you going to tell us - ?"

Hermione shook her head warningly and glanced at Mrs. Weasley.

"Hello, Hermione," said Mrs. Weasley, much more stiffly than usual.

"Hello," said Hermione, her smile faltering at the cold expression on Mrs. Weasley's face. Harry looked between them, then said, "Mrs. Weasley, you didn't believe that rubbish Rita Skeeter wrote in Witch Weekly, did you? Because Hermione's not my girlfriend."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Weasley "No - of course I didn't!"

But she became considerably warmer toward Hermione after that.

Harry, Bill, and Mrs. Weasley whiled away the afternoon with a long walk around the castle, and then returned to the Great Hall for the evening feast. Ludo Bagman and Cornelius Fudge had joined the staff table now. Bagman looked quite cheerful, but Cornelius Fudge, who was sitting next to Madame Maxime, looked stern and was not talking. Madame Maxime was concentrating on her plate, and Harry thought her eyes looked red. Hagrid kept glancing along the table at her,

There were more courses than usual, but Harry, who was starting to feel really nervous now, didn't eat much. As the enchanted ceiling overhead began to fade from blue to a dusky purple, Dumbledore rose to his feet at the staff table, and silence fell.

"Ladies and gentlemen, in five minutes' time, I will be asking you to make your way down to the Quidditch field for the third and final task of the Triwizard Tournament. Will the champions please follow Mr. Bagman down to the stadium now."

Harry got up. The Gryffindors all along the table were applauding him; the Weasleys and Hermione all wished him good luck, and he headed off out of the Great Hall with Cedric, Fleur, and Viktor.

"Feeling all right, Harry?" Bagman asked as they went down the stone steps onto the grounds. "Confident?"

"I'm okay," said Harry. It was sort of true; he was nervous, but he kept running over all the hexes and spells he had been practicing in his mind as they walked, and the knowledge that he could remember them all made him feel better.

They walked onto the Quidditch field, which was now completely unrecognizable. A twenty-foot-high hedge ran all the way around the edge of it. There was a gap right in front of them: the entrance to the vast maze. The passage beyond it looked dark and creepy. Five minutes later, the stands had begun to fill; the air was full of excited voices and the rumbling of feet as the hundreds of students filed into their seats. The sky was a deep, clear blue now, and the first stars were starting to appear. Hagrid, Professor Moody, Professor McGonagall, and Professor Flitwick came walking into the stadium and approached Bagman and the champions. They were wearing large, red, luminous stars on their hats, all except Hagrid, who had his on the back of his moleskin vest.

"We are going to be patrolling the outside of the maze," said Professor McGonagall to the champions. "If you get into difficulty, and wish to be rescued, send red sparks into the air, and one of us will come and get you, do you understand?"

The champions nodded.

"Off you go, then!" said Bagman brightly to the four patrollers.

"Good luck, Harry," Hagrid whispered, and the four of them walked away in different directions, to station themselves around the maze. Bagman now pointed his wand at his throat, muttered, "Sonus," and his magically magnified voice echoed into the stands.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the third and final task of the Triwizard Tournament is about to begin! Let me remind you how the points currently stand! Tied in first place, with eighty-five points each - Mr. Cedric Diggory and Mr. Harry Potter, both of Hogwarts School!" The cheers and applause sent birds from the Forbidden Forest fluttering into the darkening sky.

"In second place, with eighty points - Mr. Viktor Krum, of Durmstrang Institute!" More applause. "And in third place - Miss Fleur Delacour, of Beauxbatons Academy!"

Harry could just make out Mrs. Weasley, Bill, Ron, and Hermione applauding Fleur politely, halfway up the stands. He waved up at them, and they waved back, beaming at him.

"So ... on my whistle, Harry and Cedric!" said Bagman. "Three - two - one -"

He gave a short blast on his whistle, and Harry and Cedric hurried forward into the maze.

The towering hedges cast black shadows across the path, and, whether because they were so tall and thick or because they had been enchanted, the sound of the surrounding crowd was silenced the moment they entered the maze. Harry felt almost as though he were underwater again. He pulled out his wand, muttered, "Lumos," and heard Cedric do the same just behind him.

After about fifty yards, they reached a fork. They looked at each other.

"See you," Harry said, and he took the left one, while Cedric took the right.

Harry heard Bagman's whistle for the second time. Krum had entered the maze. Harry sped up. His chosen path seemed completely deserted. He turned right, and hurried on, holding his wand high over his head, trying to see as far ahead as possible. Still, there was nothing in sight.

Bagman's whistle blew in the distance for the third time. All of the champions were now inside.

Harry kept looking behind him. The old feeling that he was being watched was upon him.

The maze was growing darker with every passing minute as the sky overhead deepened to navy. He reached a second fork.

"Point Me," he whispered to his wand, holding it flat in his palm.

The wand spun around once and pointed toward his right, into solid hedge. That way was north, and he knew that he needed to go northwest for the center of the maze. The best he could do was to take the left fork and go right again as soon as possible.

The path ahead was empty too, and when Harry reached a right turn and took it, he again found his way unblocked. Harry didn't know why, but the lack of obstacles was unnerving him. Surely he should have met something by now? It felt as though the maze were luring him into a false sense of security. Then he heard movement right behind him. He held out his wand, ready to attack, but its beam fell only upon Cedric, who had just hurried out of a path on the right-hand side. Cedric looked severely shaken. The sleeve of his robe was smoking.

"Hagrid's Blast-Ended Skrewts!" he hissed. "They're enormous - I only just got away!"

He shook his head and dived out of sight, along another path. Keen to put plenty of distance between himself and the skrewts, Harry hurried off again. Then, as he turned a corner, he saw ... a dementor gliding toward him. Twelve feet tall, its face hidden by its hood, its rotting, scabbed hands outstretched, it advanced, sensing its way blindly toward him. Harry could hear its rattling breath; he felt clammy coldness stealing over him, but knew what he had to do....

He summoned the happiest thought he could, concentrated with all his might on the thought of getting out of the maze and celebrating with Ron and Hermione, raised his wand, and cried, "Expecto Patronum!"

A silver stag erupted from the end of Harry's wand and galloped toward the dementor, which fell back and tripped over the hem of its robes. . . . Harry had never seen a dementor stumble.

"Hang on!" he shouted, advancing in the wake of his silver Patronus, "You're a boggart! Riddikulus!"

There was a loud crack, and the shape-shifter exploded in a wisp of smoke. The silver stag faded from sight. Harry wished it could have stayed, he could have used some company...but he moved on, quickly and quietly as possible, listening hard, his wand held high once more.

Left ... right... left again . . . Twice he found himself facing dead ends. He did the Four-Point Spell again and found that he was going too far east. He turned back, took a right turn, and saw an odd golden mist floating ahead of him.

Harry approached it cautiously, pointing the wand's beam at it. This looked like some kind of enchantment. He wondered whether he might be able to blast it out of the way.

"Reducio!" he said.

The spell shot straight through the mist, leaving it intact. He supposed he should have known better; the Reductor Curse was for solid objects. What would happen if he walked through the mist? Was it worth chancing it, or should he double back?

He was still hesitating when a scream shattered the silence.

"Fleur?" Harry yelled.

There was silence. He stared all around him. What had happened to her? Her scream seemed to have come from somewhere ahead. He took a deep breath and ran through the enchanted mist.

The world turned upside down. Harry was hanging from the ground, with his hair on end, his glasses dangling off his nose, threatening to fall into the bottomless sky. He clutched them to the end of his nose and hung there, terrified. It felt as though his feet were glued to the grass, which had now become the ceiling. Below him the dark, star-spangled heavens stretched endlessly. He felt as though if he tried to move one of his feet, he would fall away from the earth completely.

Think, he told himself, as all the blood rushed to his head, think. . .

But not one of the spells he had practiced had been designed to combat a sudden reversal of ground and sky. Did he dare move his foot? He could hear the blood pounding in his ears. He had two choices - try and move, or send up red sparks, and get rescued and disqualified from the task.

He shut his eyes, so he wouldn't be able to see the view of endless space below him, and pulled his right foot as hard as he could away from the grassy ceiling.

Immediately, the world righted itself. Harry fell forward onto his knees onto the wonderfully solid ground. He felt temporarily limp with shock. He took a deep, steadying breath, then got up again and hurried forward, looking back over his shoulder as he ran away from the golden mist, which twinkled innocently at him in the moonlight.

He paused at a junction of two paths and looked around for some sign of Fleur. He was sure it had been she who had screamed. What had she met? Was she all right? There was no sign of red sparks - did that mean she had got herself out of trouble, or was she in such trouble that she couldn't reach her wand? Harry took the right fork with a feeling of increasing unease . . . but at the same time, he couldn't help thinking. One champion down.

. .

The cup was somewhere close by, and it sounded as though Fleur was no longer in the running. He'd got this far, hadn't he? What if he actually managed to win? Fleeting, and

for the first time since he'd found himself champion, he saw again that image of himself, raising the Triwizard Cup in front of the rest of the school. . . .

He met nothing for ten minutes, but kept running into dead ends. Twice he took the same wrong turning. Finally, he found a new route and started to jog along it, his wandlight waving, making his shadow flicker and distort on the hedge walls. Then he rounded another corner and found himself facing a Blast-Ended Skrewt.

Cedric was right - it was enormous. Ten feet long, it looked more like a giant scorpion than anything. Its long sting was curled over its back. Its thick armor glinted in the light from Harry's wand, which he pointed at it.

"Stupefy!"

The spell hit the skrewt's armor and rebounded; Harry ducked just in time, but could smell burning hair; it had singed the top of his head. The skrewt issued a blast of fire from its end and flew forward toward him.

"Impedimenta!" Harry yelled. The spell hit the skrewt's armor again and ricocheted off; Harry staggered back a few paces and fell over. "IMPEDIMENTA!"

The skrewt was inches from him when it froze - he had managed to hit it on its fleshy, shell-less underside. Panting, Harry pushed himself away from it and ran, hard, in the opposite direction - the Impediment Curse was not permanent; the skrewt would be regaining the use of its legs at any moment.

He took a left path and hit a dead end, a right, and hit another; forcing himself to stop, heart hammering, he performed the Four-Point Spell again, backtracked, and chose a path that would take him northwest.

He had been hurrying along the new path for a few minutes, when he heard something in the path running parallel to his own that made him stop dead.

"What are you doing?" yelled Cedric's voice. "What the hell d'you think you're doing?"

And then Harry heard Krum's voice.

"Crucio!"

The air was suddenly full of Cedric's yells. Horrified, Harry began sprinting up his path, trying to find a way into Cedric's. When none appeared, he tried the Reductor Curse again. It wasn't very effective, but it burned a small hole in the hedge through which Harry forced his leg, kicking at the thick brambles and branches until they broke and made an opening; he struggled through it, tearing his robes, and looking to his right, saw Cedric jerking and twitching on the ground, Krum standing over him.

Harry pulled himself up and pointed his wand at Krum just as Krum looked up. Krum turned and began to run.

"Stupefy!" Harry yelled.

The spell hit Krum in the back; he stopped dead in his tracks, fell forward, and lay motionless, facedown in the grass. Harry-dashed over to Cedric, who had stopped twitching and was lying there panting, his hands over his face.

"Are you all right?" Harry said roughly, grabbing Cedric's arm.

"Yeah," panted Cedric. "Yeah ... I don't believe it... he crept up behind me. ... I heard him, I turned around, and he had his wand on me. . . ."

Cedric got up. He was still shaking. He and Harry looked down at Krum.

"I can't believe this ... I thought he was all right," Harry said, staring at Krum.

"So did I," said Cedric.

"Did you hear Fleur scream earlier?" said Harry.

"Yeah," said Cedric. "You don't think Krum got her too?"

"I don't know," said Harry slowly.

"Should we leave him here?" Cedric muttered.

"No," said Harry. "I reckon we should send up red sparks. Someone'll come and collect him . . . otherwise he'll probably be eaten by a skrewt."

"He'd deserve it," Cedric muttered, but all the same, he raised his wand and shot a shower of red sparks into the air, which hovered high above Krum, marking the spot where he lay. Harry and Cedric stood there in the darkness for a moment, looking around them. Then Cedric said, "Well... I s'pose we'd better go on. . . ."

"What?" said Harry. "Oh . . . yeah . . . right. . ."

It was an odd moment. He and Cedric had been briefly united against Krum - now the fact that they were opponents came back to Harry. The two of them proceeded up the dark path without speaking, then Harry turned left, and Cedric right. Cedric's footsteps soon died away.

Harry moved on, continuing to use the Four-Point Spell, making sure he was moving in the right direction. It was between him and Cedric now. His desire to reach the cup first was now burning stronger than ever, but he could hardly believe what he'd just seen Krum do. The use of an Unforgivable Curse on a fellow human being meant a life term in Azkaban, that was what Moody had told them. Krum surely couldn't have wanted the Triwizard Cup that badly....Harry sped up.

Every so often he hit more dead ends, but the increasing darkness made him feel sure he was getting near the heart of the maze. Then, as he strode down a long, straight path, he saw movement once again, and his beam of wandlight hit an extraordinary creature, one which he had only seen in picture form, in his Monster Book of Monsters.

It was a sphinx. It had the body of an over-large lion: great clawed paws and a long yellowish tail ending in a brown tuft. Its head, however, was that of a woman. She turned her long, almond-shaped eyes upon Harry as he approached. He raised his wand, hesitating. She was not crouching as if to spring, but pacing from side to side of the path, blocking his progress. Then she spoke, in a deep, hoarse voice.

"You are very near your goal. The quickest way is past me."

"So ... so will you move, please?" said Harry, knowing what the answer was going to be.

"No," she said, continuing to pace. "Not unless you can answer my riddle. Answer on your first guess - I let you pass. Answer wrongly - I attack. Remain silent - I will let you walk away from me unscathed."

Harry's stomach slipped several notches. It was Hermione who was good at this sort of thing, not him. He weighed his chances. If the riddle was too hard, he could keep silent, get away from the sphinx unharmed, and try and find an alternative route to the center.

"Okay," he said. "Can I hear the riddle?"

The sphinx sat down upon her hind legs, in the very middle of the path, and recited:

"First think of the person who lives in disguise,

Who deals in secrets and tells naught but lies.

Next, tell me what's always the last thing to mend,

The middle of middle and end of the end?

And finally give me the sound often heard

During the search for a hard-to-find word.

Now string them together, and answer me this,

Which creature would you be unwilling to kiss?"

Harry gaped at her.

"Could I have it again . . . more slowly?" he asked tentatively. She blinked at him, smiled, and repeated the poem. "All the clues add up to a creature I wouldn't want to kiss?" Harry asked.

She merely smiled her mysterious smile. Harry took that for a "yes." Harry cast his mind around. There were plenty of animals he wouldn't want to kiss; his immediate thought was a Blast-Ended Skrewt, but something told him that wasn't the answer. He'd have to try and work out the clues. . . .

"A person in disguise," Harry muttered, staring at her, "who lies ... er ... that'd be a - an impostor. No, that's not my guess! A - a spy? I'll come back to that. . . could you give me the next clue again, please?"

She repeated the next lines of the poem.

"The last thing to mend," Harry repeated. "Er ... no idea . . . 'middle of middle' . . . could I have the last bit again?"

She gave him the last four lines.

"The sound often heard during the search for a hard-to-find word," said Harry. "Er . . . that'd be ... er ... hang on - 'er!' Er's a sound!"

The sphinx smiled at him.

"Spy ... er ... spy ... er ..." said Harry, pacing up and down. "A creature I wouldn't want to kiss . . . a spider!"

The sphinx smiled more broadly. She got up, stretched her front legs, and then moved aside for him to pass.

"Thanks!" said Harry, and, amazed at his own brilliance, he dashed forward.

He had to be close now, he had to be. ... His wand was telling him he was bang on course; as long as he didn't meet anything too horrible, he might have a chance. . . .

Harry broke into a run. He had a choice of paths up ahead. "Point Me!" he whispered again to his wand, and it spun around and pointed him to the right-hand one. He dashed up this one and saw light ahead.

The Triwizard Cup was gleaming on a plinth a hundred yards away. Suddenly a dark figure hurtled out onto the path in front of him.

Cedric was going to get there first. Cedric was sprinting as fast as he could toward the cup, and Harry knew he would never catch up, Cedric was much taller, had much longer legs - Then Harry saw something immense over a hedge to his left, moving quickly along a path that intersected with his own; it was moving so fast Cedric was about to run into it, and Cedric, his eyes on the cup, had not seen it -

"Cedric!" Harry bellowed. "On your left!"

Cedric looked around just in time to hurl himself past the thing and avoid colliding with it, but in his haste, he tripped. Harry saw Cedric's wand fly out of his hand as a gigantic spider stepped into the path and began to bear down upon Cedric.

"Stupefy!" Harry yelled; the spell hit the spider's gigantic, hairy black body, but for all the good it did, he might as well have thrown a stone at it; the spider jerked, scuttled around, and ran at Harry instead.

"Stupefy! Impedimenta! Stupefy!"

But it was no use - the spider was either so large, or so magical, that the spells were doing no more than aggravating it. Harry had one horrifying glimpse of eight shining black eyes and razor-sharp pincers before it was upon him.

He was lifted into the air in its front legs; struggling madly, he tried to kick it; his leg connected with the pincers and next moment he was in excruciating pain. He could hear

Cedric yelling "Stupefy!" too, but his spell had no more effect than Harry's - Harry raised his wand as the spider opened its pincers once more and shouted "Expelliarmus!"

It worked - the Disarming Spell made the spider drop him, but that meant that Harry fell twelve feet onto his already injured leg, which crumpled beneath him. Without pausing to think, he aimed high at the spider's underbelly, as he had done with the skrewt, and shouted "Stupefy!" just as Cedric yelled the same thing.

The two spells combined did what one alone had not: The spider keeled over sideways, flattening a nearby hedge, and strewing the path with a tangle of hairy legs.

"Harry!" he heard Cedric shouting. "You all right? Did it fall on you?"

"No," Harry called back, panting. He looked down at his leg. It was bleeding freely. He could see some sort of thick, gluey secretion from the spider's pincers on his torn robes. He tried to get up, but his leg was shaking badly and did not want to support his weight. He leaned against the hedge, gasping for breath, and looked around.

Cedric was standing feet from the Triwizard Cup, which was gleaming behind him.

"Take it, then," Harry panted to Cedric. "Go on, take it. You're there."

But Cedric didn't move. He merely stood there, looking at Harry. Then he turned to stare at the cup. Harry saw the longing expression on his face in its golden light. Cedric looked around at Harry again, who was now holding onto the hedge to support himself. Cedric took a deep breath.

"You take it. You should win. That's twice you've saved my neck in here."

"That's not how it's supposed to work," Harry said. He felt angry; his leg was very painful, he was aching all over from trying to throw off the spider, and after all his efforts, Cedric had beaten him to it, just as he'd beaten Harry to ask Cho to the ball. "The one who reaches the cup first gets the points. That's you. I'm telling you, I'm not going to win any races on this leg."

Cedric took a few paces nearer to the Stunned spider, away from the cup, shaking his head.

"No," he said.

"Stop being noble," said Harry irritably. "Just take it, then we can get out of here."

Cedric watched Harry steadying himself, holding tight to the hedge.

"You told me about the dragons," Cedric said. "I would've gone down in the first task if you hadn't told me what was coming."

"I had help on that too," Harry snapped, trying to mop up his bloody leg with his robes. "You helped me with the egg - we're square."

"I had help on the egg in the first place," said Cedric.

"We're still square," said Harry, testing his leg gingerly; it shook violently as he put weight on it; he had sprained his ankle when the spider had dropped him.

"You should've got more points on the second task," said Cedric mulishly. "You stayed behind to get all the hostages. I should've done that."

"I was the only one who was thick enough to take that song seriously!" said Harry bitterly.

"Just take the cup!"

"No," said Cedric.

He stepped over the spider's tangled legs to join Harry, who stared at him. Cedric was serious. He was walking away from the sort of glory Hufflepuff House hadn't had in centuries.

"Go on," Cedric said. He looked as though this was costing him every ounce of resolution he had, but his face was set, his arms were folded, he seemed decided.

Harry looked from Cedric to the cup. For one shining moment, he saw himself emerging from the maze, holding it. He saw himself holding the Triwizard Cup aloft, heard the roar of

the crowd, saw Cho's face shining with admiration, more clearly than he had ever seen it before . . . and then the picture faded, and he found himself staring at Cedric's shadowy, stubborn face.

"Both of us," Harry said.

"What?"

"We'll take it at the same time. It's still a Hogwarts victory. We'll tie for it."

Cedric stared at Harry. He unfolded his arms.

"You - you sure?"

"Yeah," said Harry. "Yeah . . . we've helped each other out, haven't we? We both got here. Let's just take it together."

For a moment, Cedric looked as though he couldn't believe his ears; then his face split in a grin.

"You're on," he said. "Come here."

He grabbed Harry's arm below the shoulder and helped Harry limp toward the plinth where the cup stood. When they had reached it, they both held a hand out over one of the cup's gleaming handles.

"On three, right?" said Harry. "One - two - three -"

He and Cedric both grasped a handle.

Instantly, Harry felt a jerk somewhere behind his navel. His feet had left the ground. He could not unclench the hand holding the Triwizard Cup; it was pulling him onward in a howl of wind and swirling color, Cedric at his side.

Harry felt his feet slam into the ground; his injured leg gave way, and he fell forward; his hand let go of the Triwizard Cup at last. He raised his head.

"Where are we?" he said.

Cedric shook his head. He got up, pulled Harry to his feet, and they looked around.

They had left the Hogwarts grounds completely; they had obviously traveled miles - perhaps hundreds of miles - for even the mountains surrounding the castle were gone. They were standing instead in a dark and overgrown graveyard; the black outline of a small church was visible beyond a large yew tree to their right. A hill rose above them to their left. Harry could just make out the outline of a fine old house on the hillside.

Cedric looked down at the Triwizard Cup and then up at Harry.

"Did anyone tell you the cup was a Portkey?" he asked.

"Nope," said Harry. He was looking around the graveyard. It was completely silent and slightly eerie. "Is this supposed to be part of the task?"

"I dunno," said Cedric. He sounded slightly nervous. "Wands out, d'you reckon?"

"Yeah," said Harry, glad that Cedric had made the suggestion rather than him.

They pulled out their wands. Harry kept looking around him. He had, yet again, the strange feeling that they were being watched.

"Someone's coming," he said suddenly.

Squinting tensely through the darkness, they watched the figure drawing nearer, walking steadily toward them between the graves. Harry couldn't make out a face, but from the way it was walking and holding its arms, he could tell that it was carrying something. Whoever it was, he was short, and wearing a hooded cloak pulled up over his head to obscure his face. And - several paces nearer, the gap between them closing all the time - Harry saw that the thing in the person's arms looked like a baby ... or was it merely a bundle of robes?

Harry lowered his wand slightly and glanced sideways at Cedric. Cedric shot him a quizzical look. They both turned back to watch the approaching figure.

It stopped beside a towering marble headstone, only six feet from them. For a second. Harry and Cedric and the short figure simply looked at one another.

And then, without warning, Harry's scar exploded with pain. It was agony such as he had never felt in all his life; his wand slipped from his fingers as he put his hands over his face; his knees buckled; he was on the ground and he could see nothing at all; his head was about to split open.

From far away, above his head, he heard a high, cold voice say, "Kill the spare."

A swishing noise and a second voice, which screeched the words to the night: "Avada Kedavra!"

A blast of green light blazed through Harry's eyelids, and he heard something heavy fall to the ground beside him; the pain in his scar reached such a pitch that he retched, and then it diminished; terrified of what he was about to see, he opened his stinging eyes.

Cedric was lying spread-eagled on the ground beside him. He was dead.

For a second that contained an eternity, Harry stared into Cedric's face, at his open gray eyes, blank and expressionless as the windows of a deserted house, at his half-open mouth, which looked slightly surprised. And then, before Harry's mind had accepted what he was seeing, before he could feel anything but numb disbelief, he felt himself being pulled to his feet.

The short man in the cloak had put down his bundle, lit his wand, and was dragging Harry toward the marble headstone. Harry saw the name upon it flickering in the wandlight before he was forced around and slammed against it.

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The cloaked man was now conjuring tight cords around Harry, tying him from neck to ankles to the headstone. Harry could hear shallow, fast breathing from the depths of the hood; he struggled, and the man hit him - hit him with a hand that had a finger missing. And Harry realized who was under the hood. It was Wormtail.

"You!" he gasped.

But Wormtail, who had finished conjuring the ropes, did not reply; he was busy checking the tightness of the cords, his fingers trembling uncontrollably, rumbling over the knots. Once sure that Harry was bound so tightly to the headstone that he couldn't move an inch, Wormtail drew a length of some black material from the inside of his cloak and stuffed it roughly into Harry's mouth; then, without a word, he turned from Harry and hurried away. Harry couldn't make a sound, nor could he see where Wormtail had gone; he couldn't turn his head to see beyond the headstone; he could see only what was right in front of him. Cedric's body was lying some twenty feet away. Some way beyond him, glinting in the starlight, lay the Triwizard Cup. Harry's wand was on the ground at Cedric's feet. The bundle of robes that Harry had thought was a baby was close by, at the foot of the grave. It seemed to be stirring fretfully. Harry watched it, and his scar seared with pain again . . . and he suddenly knew that he didn't want to see what was in those robes ... he didn't want that bundle opened....

He could hear noises at his feet. He looked down and saw a gigantic snake slithering through the grass, circling the headstone where he was tied. Wormtail's fast, wheezy breathing was growing louder again. It sounded as though he was forcing something heavy across the ground. Then he came back within Harry's range of vision, and Harry saw him pushing a stone cauldron to the foot of the grave. It was full of what seemed to be water - Harry could hear it slopping around - and it was larger than any cauldron Harry had ever used; a great stone belly large enough for a full-grown man to sit in.

The thing inside the bundle of robes on the ground was stirring more persistently, as though it was trying to free itself. Now Wormtail was busying himself at the bottom of the cauldron with a wand. Suddenly there were crackling noises beneath it. The large snake slithered away into the darkness.

The liquid in the cauldron seemed to heat very fast. The surface began not only to bubble, but to send out fiery sparks, as though it were on fire. Steam was thickening, blurring the outline of Wormtail tending the fire. The movements beneath the robes became more agitated. And Harry heard the high, cold voice again.

"Hurry!"

The whole surface of the water was alight with sparks now. It might have been encrusted with diamonds.

"It is ready, Master."

"Now ..." said the cold voice.

Wormtail pulled open the robes on the ground, revealing what was inside them, and Harry let out a yell that was strangled in the wad of material blocking his mouth.

It was as though Wormtail had flipped over a stone and revealed something ugly, slimy, and blind - but worse, a hundred times worse. The thing Wormtail had been carrying had the shape of a crouched human child, except that Harry had never seen anything less like a child. It was hairless and scaly-looking, a dark, raw, reddish black. Its arms and legs were thin and feeble, and its face - no child alive ever had a face like that - flat and snakelike, with gleaming red eyes.

The thing seemed almost helpless; it raised its thin arms, put them around Wormtail's neck, and Wormtail lifted it. As he did so, his hood fell back, and Harry saw the look of revulsion on Wormtail's weak, pale face in the firelight as he carried the creature to the rim of the cauldron. For one moment, Harry saw the evil, flat face illuminated in the sparks dancing on the surface of the potion. And then Wormtail lowered the creature into the cauldron; there was a hiss, and it vanished below the surface; Harry heard its frail body hit the bottom with a soft thud.

Let it drown, Harry thought, his scar burning almost past endurance, please. . . let it drown. .

. .

Wormtail was speaking. His voice shook; he seemed frightened beyond his wits. He raised his wand, closed his eyes, and spoke to the night.

"Bone of the father, unknowingly given, you will renew your son!"

The surface of the water at Harry's feet cracked. Horrified, Harry watched as a fine trickle of dust rose into the air at Wormtail's command and fell softly into the cauldron. The diamond surface of the water broke and hissed; it sent sparks in all directions and turned a vivid, poisonous-looking blue.

And now Wormtail was whimpering. He pulled a long, thin, shining silver dagger from inside his cloak. His voice broke into petrified sobs.

"Flesh - of the servant - w-willingly given - you will - revive - your master. "

He stretched his right hand out in front of him - the hand with the missing finger. He gripped the dagger very tightly in his left hand and swung it upward.

Harry realized what Wormtail was about to do a second before it happened - he closed his eyes as tightly as he could, but he could not block the scream that pierced the night, that went through Harry as though he had been stabbed with the dagger too. He heard something fall to the ground, heard Wormtail's anguished panting, then a sickening splash, as something was dropped into the cauldron. Harry couldn't stand to look . . . but the potion had turned a burning red; the light of it shone through Harry's closed eyelids. . . .

Wormtail was gasping and moaning with agony. Not until Harry felt Wormtail's anguished breath on his face did he realize that Wormtail was right in front of him.

"B-blood of the enemy . . . forcibly taken . . . you will . . . resurrect your foe."

Harry could do nothing to prevent it, he was tied too tightly. . . . Squinting down, struggling hopelessly at the ropes binding him, he saw the shining silver dagger shaking in Wormtail's remaining hand. He felt its point penetrate the crook of his right arm and blood seeping down the sleeve of his torn robes. Wormtail, still panting with pain, rummaged in his pocket for a glass vial and held it to Harry's cut, so that a dribble of blood fell into it.

He staggered back to the cauldron with Harry's blood. He poured it inside. The liquid within turned, instantly, a blinding white. Wormtail, his job done, dropped to his knees beside the cauldron, then slumped sideways and lay on the ground, cradling the bleeding stump of his arm, gasping and sobbing.

The cauldron was simmering, sending its diamond sparks in all directions, so blindingly bright that it turned all else to velvety blackness. Nothing happened. . . .

Let it have drowned. Harry thought, let it have gone wrong. . . . ♦

And then, suddenly, the sparks emanating from the cauldron were extinguished. A surge of white steam billowed thickly from the cauldron instead, obliterating everything in front of Harry, so that he couldn't see Wormtail or Cedric or anything but vapor hanging in the air. ... It's gone wrong, he thought. . . . it's drowned. .. please . . . please let it be dead. ...

But then, through the mist in front of him, he saw, with an icy surge of terror, the dark outline of a man, tall and skeletally thin, rising slowly from inside the cauldron.

"Robe me," said the high, cold voice from behind the steam, and Wormtail, sobbing and moaning, still cradling his mutilated arm, scrambled to pick up the black robes from the ground, got to his feet, reached up, and pulled them one-handed over his master's head.

The thin man stepped out of the cauldron, staring at Harry . . . and Harry stared back into the face that had haunted his nightmares for three years. Whiter than a skull, with wide, livid scarlet eyes and a nose that was flat as a snake's with slits for nostrils . . .

Lord Voldemort had risen again.

Voldemort looked away from Harry and began examining his own body. His hands were like large, pale spiders; his long white fingers caressed his own chest, his arms, his face; the red eyes, whose pupils were slits, like a cat's, gleamed still more brightly through the darkness. He held up his hands and flexed the fingers, his expression rapt and exultant. He took not the slightest notice of Wormtail, who lay twitching and bleeding on the ground, nor of the great snake, which had slithered back into sight and was circling Harry again, hissing.

Voldemort slipped one of those unnaturally long-fingered hands into a deep pocket and drew out a wand. He caressed it gently too; and then he raised it, and pointed it at Wormtail, who was lifted off the ground and thrown against the headstone where Harry was tied; he fell to the foot of it and lay there, crumpled up and crying. Voldemort turned his scarlet eyes upon Harry, laughing a high, cold, mirthless laugh.

Wormtail's robes were shining with blood now; he had wrapped the stump of his arm in them.

"My Lord . . ." he choked, "my Lord . . . you promised . . . you did promise ..."

"Hold out your arm," said Voldemort lazily.

"Oh Master . . . thank you, Master ..."

He extended the bleeding stump, but Voldemort laughed again.

"The other arm, Wormtail."

"Master, please . . . please ..."

Voldemort bent down and pulled out Wormtail's left arm; he forced the sleeve of Wormtail's robes up past his elbow, and Harry saw something upon the skin there, something like a vivid red tattoo - a skull with a snake protruding from its mouth - the image that had appeared in the sky at the Quidditch World Cup: the Dark Mark. Voldemort examined it carefully, ignoring Wormtail's uncontrollable weeping.

"It is back," he said softly, "they will all have noticed it... and now, we shall see ... now we shall know ..."

He pressed his long white forefinger to the brand on Wormtail's arm.

The scar on Harry's forehead seared with a sharp pain again, and Wormtail let out a fresh howl; Voldemort removed his fingers from Wormtail's mark, and Harry saw that it had turned jet black.

A look of cruel satisfaction on his face, Voldemort straightened up, threw back his head, and stared around at the dark graveyard.

"How many will be brave enough to return when they feel it?" he whispered, his gleaming red eyes fixed upon the stars. "And how many will be foolish enough to stay away?"

He began to pace up and down before Harry and Wormtail, eyes sweeping the graveyard all the while. After a minute or so, he looked down at Harry again, a cruel smile twisting his snakelike face.

"You stand, Harry Potter, upon the remains of my late father," he hissed softly. "A Muggle and a fool. . . very like your dear mother. But they both had their uses, did they not? Your mother died to defend you as a child . . . and I killed my father, and see how useful he has proved himself, in death. ..."

Voldemort laughed again. Up and down he paced, looking all around him as he walked, and the snake continued to circle in the grass.

"You see that house upon the hillside, Potter? My father lived there. My mother, a witch who lived here in this village, fell in love with him. But he abandoned her when she told him what she was. ... He didn't like magic, my father . . .

"He left her and returned to his Muggle parents before I was even born. Potter, and she died giving birth to me, leaving me to be raised in a Muggle orphanage . . . but I vowed to find him ... I revenged myself upon him, that fool who gave me his name . . . Tom Riddle. . . ."

Still he paced, his red eyes darting from grave to grave.

"Listen to me, reliving family history . . ." he said quietly, "why, I am growing quite sentimental. . . . But look, Harry! My true family returns. . . ."