

"Hagrid! Look! Red sparks, the others are in trouble!"

"You two wait here!" Hagrid shouted. "Stay on the path, I'll come back for yeh!"

They heard him crashing away through the undergrowth and stood looking at each other, very scared, until they couldn't hear anything but the rustling of leaves around them.

"You don't think they've been hurt, do you?" whispered Hermione.

"I don't care if Malfoy has, but if something's got Neville ... it's our fault he's here in the first place."

The minutes dragged by. Their ears seemed sharper than usual. Harry's seemed to be picking up every sigh of the wind, every cracking twig. What was going on? Where were the others?

At last, a great crunching noise announced Hagrid's return. Malfoy, Neville, and Fang were with him. Hagrid was fuming. Malfoy, it seemed, had sneaked up behind Neville and grabbed him as a joke. Neville had panicked and sent up the sparks.

"We'll be lucky ter catch anythin' now, with the racket you two were makin'. Right, we're changin' groups — Neville, you stay with me an' Hermione, Harry, you go with Fang an' this idiot. I'm sorry," Hagrid added in a whisper to Harry, "but he'll have a harder time frightenin' you, an' we've gotta get this done."

So Harry set off into the heart of the forest with Malfoy and Fang. They walked for nearly half an hour, deeper and deeper into the forest, until the path became almost impossible to follow because the trees were so thick. Harry thought the blood seemed to be getting thicker. There were splashes on the roots of a tree, as though the poor creature had been thrashing around in pain close by. Harry could see a clearing ahead, through the tangled branches of an ancient oak.