

Harry listened. A soft rustling and clinking seemed to be coming from up ahead.

"Do you think it's a ghost?"

"I don't know ... sounds like wings to me."

"There's light ahead — I can see something moving."

They reached the end of the passageway and saw before them a brilliantly lit chamber, its ceiling arching high above them. It was full of small, jewel-bright birds, fluttering and tumbling all around the room. On the opposite side of the chamber was a heavy wooden door.

"Do you think they'll attack us if we cross the room?" said Ron.

"Probably," said Harry. "They don't look very vicious, but I suppose if they all swooped down at once ... well, there's no other choice ... I'll run."

He took a deep breath, covered his face with his arms, and sprinted across the room. He expected to feel sharp beaks and claws tearing at him any second, but nothing happened. He reached the door untouched. He pulled the handle, but it was locked.

The other two followed him. They tugged and heaved at the door, but it wouldn't budge, not even when Hermione tried her Alohomora Charm.

"Now what?" said Ron.

"These birds ... they can't be here just for decoration," said Hermione.

They watched the birds soaring overhead, glittering — *glitter-ing?*

"They're not birds!" Harry said suddenly. "They're *keys*! Winged keys — look carefully. So that must mean ..." he looked around the chamber while the other two squinted up at the flock of keys. "... yes — look! Broomsticks! We've got to catch the key to the door!"