

They fell backward — Harry slammed the door shut, and they ran, they almost flew, back down the corridor. Filch must have hurried off to look for them somewhere else, because they didn't see him anywhere, but they hardly cared — all they wanted to do was put as much space as possible between them and that monster. They didn't stop running until they reached the portrait of the Fat Lady on the seventh floor.

"Where on earth have you all been?" she asked, looking at their bathrobes hanging off their shoulders and their flushed, sweaty faces.

"Never mind that — pig snout, pig snout," panted Harry, and the portrait swung forward. They scrambled into the common room and collapsed, trembling, into armchairs.

It was a while before any of them said anything. Neville, indeed, looked as if he'd never speak again.

"What do they think they're doing, keeping a thing like that locked up in a school?" said Ron finally. "If any dog needs exercise, that one does."

Hermione had got both her breath and her bad temper back again.

"You don't use your eyes, any of you, do you?" she snapped. "Didn't you see what it was standing on?"

"The floor?" Harry suggested. "I wasn't looking at its feet, I was too busy with its heads."

"No, *not* the floor. It was standing on a trapdoor. It's obviously guarding something."

She stood up, glaring at them.

"I hope you're pleased with yourselves. We could all have been killed — or worse, expelled. Now, if you don't mind, I'm going to bed."

Ron stared after her, his mouth open.

"No, we don't mind," he said. "You'd think we dragged her along, wouldn't you?"