CHAPTER SIXTEEN

PROFESSOR TRELAWNEY'S PREDICTION

Harry's euphoria at finally winning the Quidditch Cup lasted at least a week. Even the weather seemed to be celebrating; as June approached, the days became cloudless and sultry, and all anybody felt like doing was strolling onto the grounds and flopping down on the grass with several pints of iced pumpkin juice, perhaps playing a casual game of Gobstones or watching the giant squid propel itself dreamily across the surface of the lake.

But they couldn't. Exams were nearly upon them, and instead of lazing around outside, the students were forced to remain inside the castle, trying to bully their brains into concentrating while enticing wafts of summer air drifted in through the windows. Even Fred and George Weasley had been spotted working; they were about to take their O.W.L.s (Ordinary Wizarding Levels). Percy was getting ready to take his N.E.W.T.s (Nastily Exhausting Wizarding Tests), the highest qualification Hogwarts offered. As Percy

hoped to enter the Ministry of Magic, he needed top grades. He was becoming increasingly edgy, and gave very severe punishments to anybody who disturbed the quiet of the common room in the evenings. In fact, the only person who seemed more anxious than Percy was Hermione.

Harry and Ron had given up asking her how she was managing to attend several classes at once, but they couldn't restrain themselves when they saw the exam schedule she had drawn up for herself. The first column read:

Monday
9 o'clock, Arithmancy
9 o'clock, Transfiguration
Lunch
1 o'clock, Charms
1 o'clock, Ancient Runes

"Hermione?" Ron said cautiously, because she was liable to explode when interrupted these days. "Er — are you sure you've copied down these times right?"

"What?" snapped Hermione, picking up the exam schedule and examining it. "Yes, of course I have."

"Is there any point asking how you're going to sit for two exams at once?" said Harry.

"No," said Hermione shortly. "Have either of you seen my copy of *Numerology and Gramatica*?"

"Oh, yeah, I borrowed it for a bit of bedtime reading," said Ron, but very quietly. Hermione started shifting heaps of parchment

around on her table, looking for the book. Just then, there was a rustle at the window and Hedwig fluttered through it, a note clutched tight in her beak.

"It's from Hagrid," said Harry, ripping the note open. "Buckbeak's appeal — it's set for the sixth."

"That's the day we finish our exams," said Hermione, still looking everywhere for her Arithmancy book.

"And they're coming up here to do it," said Harry, still reading from the letter. "Someone from the Ministry of Magic and — and an executioner."

Hermione looked up, startled.

"They're bringing the executioner to the appeal! But that sounds as though they've already decided!"

"Yeah, it does," said Harry slowly.

"They can't!" Ron howled. "I've spent *ages* reading up on stuff for him; they can't just ignore it all!"

But Harry had a horrible feeling that the Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures had had its mind made up for it by Mr. Malfoy. Draco, who had been noticeably subdued since Gryffindor's triumph in the Quidditch final, seemed to regain some of his old swagger over the next few days. From sneering comments Harry overheard, Malfoy was certain Buckbeak was going to be killed, and seemed thoroughly pleased with himself for bringing it about. It was all Harry could do to stop himself imitating Hermione and hitting Malfoy in the face on these occasions. And the worst thing of all was that they had no time or opportunity to go and see Hagrid, because the strict new security measures had not been lifted, and Harry didn't dare retrieve his Invisibility Cloak from below the one-eyed witch.

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Exam week began and an unnatural hush fell over the castle. The third years emerged from Transfiguration at lunchtime on Monday, limp and ashen-faced, comparing results and bemoaning the difficulty of the tasks they had been set, which had included turning a teapot into a tortoise. Hermione irritated the rest by fussing about how her tortoise had looked more like a turtle, which was the least of everyone else's worries.

"Mine still had a spout for a tail, what a nightmare. . . ."

"Were the tortoises *supposed* to breathe steam?"

"It still had a willow-patterned shell, d'you think that'll count against me?"

Then, after a hasty lunch, it was straight back upstairs for the Charms exam. Hermione had been right; Professor Flitwick did indeed test them on Cheering Charms. Harry slightly overdid his out of nerves and Ron, who was partnering him, ended up in fits of hysterical laughter and had to be led away to a quiet room for an hour before he was ready to perform the charm himself. After dinner, the students hurried back to their common rooms, not to relax, but to start studying for Care of Magical Creatures, Potions, and Astronomy.

Hagrid presided over the Care of Magical Creatures exam the following morning with a very preoccupied air indeed; his heart didn't seem to be in it at all. He had provided a large tub of fresh flobberworms for the class, and told them that to pass the test, their flobberworm had to still be alive at the end of one hour. As flobberworms flourished best if left to their own devices, it was the easiest exam any of them had ever taken, and also gave

Harry, Ron, and Hermione plenty of opportunity to speak to Hagrid.

"Beaky's gettin' a bit depressed," Hagrid told them, bending low on the pretense of checking that Harry's flobberworm was still alive. "Bin cooped up too long. But still . . . we'll know day after tomorrow — one way or the other —"

They had Potions that afternoon, which was an unqualified disaster. Try as Harry might, he couldn't get his Confusing Concoction to thicken, and Snape, standing watch with an air of vindictive pleasure, scribbled something that looked suspiciously like a zero onto his notes before moving away.

Then came Astronomy at midnight, up on the tallest tower; History of Magic on Wednesday morning, in which Harry scribbled everything Florean Fortescue had ever told him about medieval witch-hunts, while wishing he could have had one of Fortescue's choco-nut sundaes with him in the stifling classroom. Wednesday afternoon meant Herbology, in the greenhouses under a baking-hot sun; then back to the common room once more, with sunburnt necks, thinking longingly of this time next day, when it would all be over.

Their second to last exam, on Thursday morning, was Defense Against the Dark Arts. Professor Lupin had compiled the most unusual exam any of them had ever taken; a sort of obstacle course outside in the sun, where they had to wade across a deep paddling pool containing a grindylow, cross a series of potholes full of Red Caps, squish their way across a patch of marsh while ignoring misleading directions from a hinkypunk, then climb into an old trunk and battle with a new boggart.

"Excellent, Harry," Lupin muttered as Harry climbed out of the trunk, grinning. "Full marks."

Flushed with his success, Harry hung around to watch Ron and Hermione. Ron did very well until he reached the hinkypunk, which successfully confused him into sinking waist-high into the quagmire. Hermione did everything perfectly until she reached the trunk with the boggart in it. After about a minute inside it, she burst out again, screaming.

"Hermione!" said Lupin, startled. "What's the matter?"

"P — P — Professor McGonagall!" Hermione gasped, pointing into the trunk. "Sh — she said I'd failed everything!"

It took a little while to calm Hermione down. When at last she had regained a grip on herself, she, Harry, and Ron went back to the castle. Ron was still slightly inclined to laugh at Hermione's boggart, but an argument was averted by the sight that met them on the top of the steps.

Cornelius Fudge, sweating slightly in his pinstriped cloak, was standing there staring out at the grounds. He started at the sight of Harry.

"Hello there, Harry!" he said. "Just had an exam, I expect? Nearly finished?"

"Yes," said Harry. Hermione and Ron, not being on speaking terms with the Minister of Magic, hovered awkwardly in the background.

"Lovely day," said Fudge, casting an eye over the lake. "Pity . . . pity . . ."

He sighed deeply and looked down at Harry.

"I'm here on an unpleasant mission, Harry. The Committee for

the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures required a witness to the execution of a mad hippogriff. As I needed to visit Hogwarts to check on the Black situation, I was asked to step in."

"Does that mean the appeal's already happened?" Ron interrupted, stepping forward.

"No, no, it's scheduled for this afternoon," said Fudge, looking curiously at Ron.

"Then you might not have to witness an execution at all!" said Ron stoutly. "The hippogriff might get off!"

Before Fudge could answer, two wizards came through the castle doors behind him. One was so ancient he appeared to be withering before their very eyes; the other was tall and strapping, with a thin black mustache. Harry gathered that they were representatives of the Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures, because the very old wizard squinted toward Hagrid's cabin and said in a feeble voice, "Dear, dear, I'm getting too old for this. . . . Two o'clock, isn't it, Fudge?"

The black-mustached man was fingering something in his belt; Harry looked and saw that he was running one broad thumb along the blade of a shining axe. Ron opened his mouth to say something, but Hermione nudged him hard in the ribs and jerked her head toward the entrance hall.

"Why'd you stop me?" said Ron angrily as they entered the Great Hall for lunch. "Did you see them? They've even got the axe ready! This isn't justice!"

"Ron, your dad works for the Ministry, you can't go saying things like that to his boss!" said Hermione, but she too looked very upset. "As long as Hagrid keeps his head this time, and argues his case properly, they can't possibly execute Buckbeak. . . ."

But Harry could tell Hermione didn't really believe what she was saying. All around them, people were talking excitedly as they ate their lunch, happily anticipating the end of the exams that afternoon, but Harry, Ron, and Hermione, lost in worry about Hagrid and Buckbeak, didn't join in.

Harry's and Ron's last exam was Divination; Hermione's, Muggle Studies. They walked up the marble staircase together; Hermione left them on the first floor and Harry and Ron proceeded all the way up to the seventh, where many of their class were sitting on the spiral staircase to Professor Trelawney's classroom, trying to cram in a bit of last-minute studying.

"She's seeing us all separately," Neville informed them as they went to sit down next to him. He had his copy of *Unfogging the Future* open on his lap at the pages devoted to crystal gazing. "Have either of you ever seen *anything* in a crystal ball?" he asked them unhappily.

"Nope," said Ron in an offhand voice. He kept checking his watch; Harry knew that he was counting down the time until Buckbeak's appeal started.

The line of people outside the classroom shortened very slowly. As each person climbed back down the silver ladder, the rest of the class hissed, "What did she ask? Was it okay?"

But they all refused to say.

"She says the crystal ball's told her that if I tell you, I'll have a horrible accident!" squeaked Neville as he clambered back down the ladder toward Harry and Ron, who had now reached the landing.

"That's convenient," snorted Ron. "You know, I'm starting to think Hermione was right about her" — he jabbed his thumb toward the trapdoor overhead — "she's a right old fraud."

"Yeah," said Harry, looking at his own watch. It was now two o'clock. "Wish she'd hurry up . . ."

Parvati came back down the ladder glowing with pride.

"She says I've got all the makings of a true Seer," she informed Harry and Ron. "I saw *loads* of stuff. . . . Well, good luck!"

She hurried off down the spiral staircase toward Lavender.

"Ronald Weasley," said the familiar, misty voice from over their heads. Ron grimaced at Harry and climbed the silver ladder out of sight. Harry was now the only person left to be tested. He settled himself on the floor with his back against the wall, listening to a fly buzzing in the sunny window, his mind across the grounds with Hagrid.

Finally, after about twenty minutes, Ron's large feet reappeared on the ladder.

"How'd it go?" Harry asked him, standing up.

"Rubbish," said Ron. "Couldn't see a thing, so I made some stuff up. Don't think she was convinced, though. . . ."

"Meet you in the common room," Harry muttered as Professor Trelawney's voice called, "Harry Potter!"

The tower room was hotter than ever before; the curtains were closed, the fire was alight, and the usual sickly scent made Harry cough as he stumbled through the clutter of chairs and tables to where Professor Trelawney sat waiting for him before a large crystal ball.

"Good day, my dear," she said softly. "If you would kindly gaze into the Orb. . . . Take your time, now . . . then tell me what you see within it. . . ."

Harry bent over the crystal ball and stared, stared as hard as he

could, willing it to show him something other than swirling white fog, but nothing happened.

"Well?" Professor Trelawney prompted delicately. "What do you see?"

The heat was overpowering and his nostrils were stinging with the perfumed smoke wafting from the fire beside them. He thought of what Ron had just said, and decided to pretend.

"Er —" said Harry, "a dark shape . . . um . . ."

"What does it resemble?" whispered Professor Trelawney. "Think, now . . ."

Harry cast his mind around and it landed on Buckbeak.

"A hippogriff," he said firmly.

"Indeed!" whispered Professor Trelawney, scribbling keenly on the parchment perched upon her knees. "My boy, you may well be seeing the outcome of poor Hagrid's trouble with the Ministry of Magic! Look closer. . . . Does the hippogriff appear to . . . have its head?"

"Yes," said Harry firmly.

"Are you sure?" Professor Trelawney urged him. "Are you quite sure, dear? You don't see it writhing on the ground, perhaps, and a shadowy figure raising an axe behind it?"

"No!" said Harry, starting to feel slightly sick.

"No blood? No weeping Hagrid?"

"No!" said Harry again, wanting more than ever to leave the room and the heat. "It looks fine, it's — flying away. . . ."

Professor Trelawney sighed.

"Well, dear, I think we'll leave it there. . . . A little disappointing . . . but I'm sure you did your best."

Relieved, Harry got up, picked up his bag and turned to go, but then a loud, harsh voice spoke behind him.

"IT WILL HAPPEN TONIGHT."

Harry wheeled around. Professor Trelawney had gone rigid in her armchair; her eyes were unfocused and her mouth sagging.

"S — sorry?" said Harry.

But Professor Trelawney didn't seem to hear him. Her eyes started to roll. Harry sat there in a panic. She looked as though she was about to have some sort of seizure. He hesitated, thinking of running to the hospital wing — and then Professor Trelawney spoke again, in the same harsh voice, quite unlike her own:

"THE DARK LORD LIES ALONE AND FRIENDLESS, ABANDONED BY HIS FOLLOWERS. HIS SERVANT HAS BEEN CHAINED THESE TWELVE YEARS. TONIGHT, BEFORE MIDNIGHT . . . THE SERVANT WILL BREAK FREE AND SET OUT TO REJOIN HIS MASTER. THE DARK LORD WILL RISE AGAIN WITH HIS SERVANT'S AID, GREATER AND MORE TERRIBLE THAN EVER HE WAS. TONIGHT . . . BEFORE MIDNIGHT . . . THE SERVANT . . . WILL SET OUT . . . TO REJOIN . . . HIS MASTER. . . ."

Professor Trelawney's head fell forward onto her chest. She made a grunting sort of noise. Harry sat there, staring at her. Then, quite suddenly, Professor Trelawney's head snapped up again.

"I'm so sorry, dear boy," she said dreamily, "the heat of the day, you know . . . I drifted off for a moment. . . ."

Harry sat there, staring at her.

"Is there anything wrong, my dear?"

"You — you just told me that the — the Dark Lord's going to rise again . . . that his servant's going to go back to him. . . ."

Professor Trelawney looked thoroughly startled.

"The Dark Lord? He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named? My dear boy, that's hardly something to joke about. . . . Rise again, indeed —"

"But you just said it! You said the Dark Lord —"

"I think you must have dozed off too, dear!" said Professor Trelawney. "I would certainly not presume to predict anything quite as far-fetched as *that*!"

Harry climbed back down the ladder and the spiral staircase, wondering . . . had he just heard Professor Trelawney make a real prediction? Or had that been her idea of an impressive end to the test?

Five minutes later he was dashing past the security trolls outside the entrance to Gryffindor Tower, Professor Trelawney's words still resounding in his head. People were striding past him in the opposite direction, laughing and joking, heading for the grounds and a bit of long-awaited freedom; by the time he had reached the portrait hole and entered the common room, it was almost deserted. Over in the corner, however, sat Ron and Hermione.

"Professor Trelawney," Harry panted, "just told me —"

But he stopped abruptly at the sight of their faces.

"Buckbeak lost," said Ron weakly. "Hagrid's just sent this."

Hagrid's note was dry this time, no tears had splattered it, yet his hand seemed to have shaken so much as he wrote that it was hardly legible.

Lost appeal. They're going to execute at sunset.
Nothing you can do. Don't come down. I don't want
you to see it.
Hagrid

"We've got to go," said Harry at once. "He can't just sit there on his own, waiting for the executioner!"

"Sunset, though," said Ron, who was staring out the window in a glazed sort of way. "We'd never be allowed . . . 'specially you, Harry. . . ."

Harry sank his head into his hands, thinking.

"If we only had the Invisibility Cloak. . . ."

"Where is it?" said Hermione.

Harry told her about leaving it in the passageway under the one-eyed witch.

". . . if Snape sees me anywhere near there again, I'm in serious trouble," he finished.

"That's true," said Hermione, getting to her feet. "If he sees *you*. . . . How do you open the witch's hump again?"

"You — you tap it and say, *'Dissendium,'* " said Harry. "But —"

Hermione didn't wait for the rest of his sentence; she strode across the room, pushed open the Fat Lady's portrait and vanished from sight.

"She hasn't gone to get it?" Ron said, staring after her.

She had. Hermione returned a quarter of an hour later with the silvery cloak folded carefully under her robes.

"Hermione, I don't know what's gotten into you lately!" said Ron, astounded. "First you hit Malfoy, then you walk out on Professor Trelawney —"

Hermione looked rather flattered.

They went down to dinner with everybody else, but did not return to Gryffindor Tower afterward. Harry had the cloak hidden down the front of his robes; he had to keep his arms folded to hide the

lump. They skulked in an empty chamber off the entrance hall, listening, until they were sure it was deserted. They heard a last pair of people hurrying across the hall and a door slamming. Hermione poked her head around the door.

"Okay," she whispered, "no one there — cloak on —"

Walking very close together so that nobody would see them, they crossed the hall on tiptoe beneath the cloak, then walked down the stone front steps into the grounds. The sun was already sinking behind the Forbidden Forest, gilding the top branches of the trees.

They reached Hagrid's cabin and knocked. He was a minute in answering, and when he did, he looked all around for his visitor, pale-faced and trembling.

"It's us," Harry hissed. "We're wearing the Invisibility Cloak. Let us in and we can take it off."

"Yeh shouldn've come!" Hagrid whispered, but he stood back, and they stepped inside. Hagrid shut the door quickly and Harry pulled off the cloak.

Hagrid was not crying, nor did he throw himself upon their necks. He looked like a man who did not know where he was or what to do. This helplessness was worse to watch than tears.

"Wan' some tea?" he said. His great hands were shaking as he reached for the kettle.

"Where's Buckbeak, Hagrid?" said Hermione hesitantly.

"I — I took him outside," said Hagrid, spilling milk all over the table as he filled up the jug. "He's tethered in me pumpkin patch. Thought he oughta see the trees an' — an' smell fresh air — before —"

Hagrid's hand trembled so violently that the milk jug slipped from his grasp and shattered all over the floor.

"I'll do it, Hagrid," said Hermione quickly, hurrying over and starting to clean up the mess.

"There's another one in the cupboard," Hagrid said, sitting down and wiping his forehead on his sleeve. Harry glanced at Ron, who looked back hopelessly.

"Isn't there anything anyone can do, Hagrid?" Harry asked fiercely, sitting down next to him. "Dumbledore —"

"He's tried," said Hagrid. "He's got no power ter overrule the Committee. He told 'em Buckbeak's all right, but they're scared. . . . Yeh know what Lucius Malfoy's like . . . threatened 'em, I expect . . . an' the executioner, Macnair, he's an old pal o' Malfoy's . . . but it'll be quick an' clean . . . an' I'll be beside him. . . ."

Hagrid swallowed. His eyes were darting all over the cabin as though looking for some shred of hope or comfort.

"Dumbledore's gonna come down while it — while it happens. Wrote me this mornin'. Said he wants ter — ter be with me. Great man, Dumbledore. . . ."

Hermione, who had been rummaging in Hagrid's cupboard for another milk jug, let out a small, quickly stifled sob. She straightened up with the new jug in her hands, fighting back tears.

"We'll stay with you too, Hagrid," she began, but Hagrid shook his shaggy head.

"Yeh're ter go back up ter the castle. I told yeh, I don' wan' yeh watchin'. An' yeh shouldn' be down here anyway. . . . If Fudge an' Dumbledore catch yeh out without permission, Harry, yeh'll be in big trouble."

Silent tears were now streaming down Hermione's face, but she hid them from Hagrid, bustling around making tea. Then, as she

picked up the milk bottle to pour some into the jug, she let out a shriek.

"Ron! I — I don't believe it — it's *Scabbers*!"

Ron gaped at her.

"What are you talking about?"

Hermione carried the milk jug over to the table and turned it upside down. With a frantic squeak, and much scrambling to get back inside, Scabbers the rat came sliding out onto the table.

"Scabbers!" said Ron blankly. "Scabbers, what are you doing here?"

He grabbed the struggling rat and held him up to the light. Scabbers looked dreadful. He was thinner than ever, large tufts of hair had fallen out leaving wide bald patches, and he writhed in Ron's hands as though desperate to free himself.

"It's okay, Scabbers!" said Ron. "No cats! There's nothing here to hurt you!"

Hagrid suddenly stood up, his eyes fixed on the window. His normally ruddy face had gone the color of parchment.

"They're comin'. . . ."

Harry, Ron, and Hermione whipped around. A group of men was walking down the distant castle steps. In front was Albus Dumbledore, his silver beard gleaming in the dying sun. Next to him trotted Cornelius Fudge. Behind them came the feeble old Committee member and the executioner, Macnair.

"Yeh gotta go," said Hagrid. Every inch of him was trembling. "They mustn' find yeh here. . . . Go now. . . ."

Ron stuffed Scabbers into his pocket and Hermione picked up the cloak.

"I'll let yeh out the back way," said Hagrid.

They followed him to the door into his back garden. Harry felt strangely unreal, and even more so when he saw Buckbeak a few yards away, tethered to a tree behind Hagrid's pumpkin patch. Buckbeak seemed to know something was happening. He turned his sharp head from side to side and pawed the ground nervously.

"It's okay, Beaky," said Hagrid softly. "It's okay . . ." He turned to Harry, Ron, and Hermione. "Go on," he said. "Get goin'."

But they didn't move.

"Hagrid, we can't —"

"We'll tell them what really happened —"

"They can't kill him —"

"Go!" said Hagrid fiercely. "It's bad enough without you lot in trouble an' all!"

They had no choice. As Hermione threw the cloak over Harry and Ron, they heard voices at the front of the cabin. Hagrid looked at the place where they had just vanished from sight.

"Go quick," he said hoarsely. "Don' listen. . . ."

And he strode back into his cabin as someone knocked at the front door.

Slowly, in a kind of horrified trance, Harry, Ron, and Hermione set off silently around Hagrid's house. As they reached the other side, the front door closed with a sharp snap.

"Please, let's hurry," Hermione whispered. "I can't stand it, I can't bear it. . . ."

They started up the sloping lawn toward the castle. The sun was sinking fast now; the sky had turned to a clear, purple-tinged grey, but to the west there was a ruby-red glow.

Ron stopped dead.

"Oh, please, Ron," Hermione began.

"It's Scabbers — he won't — stay put —"

Ron was bent over, trying to keep Scabbers in his pocket, but the rat was going berserk; squeaking madly, twisting and flailing, trying to sink his teeth into Ron's hand.

"Scabbers, it's me, you idiot, it's Ron," Ron hissed.

They heard a door open behind them and men's voices.

"Oh, Ron, please let's move, they're going to do it!" Hermione breathed.

"Okay — Scabbers, stay *put* —"

They walked forward; Harry, like Hermione, was trying not to listen to the rumble of voices behind them. Ron stopped again.

"I can't hold him — Scabbers, shut up, everyone'll hear us —"

The rat was squealing wildly, but not loudly enough to cover up the sounds drifting from Hagrid's garden. There was a jumble of indistinct male voices, a silence, and then, without warning, the unmistakable swish and thud of an axe.

Hermione swayed on the spot.

"They did it!" she whispered to Harry. "I d — don't believe it — they did it!"