



NORBERT THE NORWEGIAN RIDGEBACK



Harry and Hermione didn't get a chance to answer. Madam Pomfrey came over at that moment and made them leave, saying Ron needed sleep.

"It's too late to change the plan now," Harry told Hermione. "We haven't got time to send Charlie another owl, and this could be our only chance to get rid of Norbert. We'll have to risk it. And we *have* got the Invisibility Cloak, Malfoy doesn't know about that."

They found Fang the boarhound sitting outside with a bandaged tail when they went to tell Hagrid, who opened a window to talk to them.

"I won't let you in," he puffed. "Norbert's at a tricky stage — nothin' I can't handle."

When they told him about Charlie's letter, his eyes filled with tears, although that might have been because Norbert had just bitten him on the leg.

"Aargh! It's all right, he only got my boot — jus' playin' — he's only a baby, after all."

The baby banged its tail on the wall, making the windows rattle. Harry and Hermione walked back to the castle feeling Saturday couldn't come quickly enough.

They would have felt sorry for Hagrid when the time came for him to say good-bye to Norbert if they hadn't been so worried about what they had to do. It was a very dark, cloudy night, and they were a bit late arriving at Hagrid's hut because they'd had to wait for Peeves to get out of their way in the entrance hall, where he'd been playing tennis against the wall.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN



Hagrid had Norbert packed and ready in a large crate.

“He’s got lots o’ rats an’ some brandy fer the journey,” said Hagrid in a muffled voice. “An’ I’ve packed his teddy bear in case he gets lonely.”

From inside the crate came ripping noises that sounded to Harry as though the teddy was having his head torn off.

“Bye-bye, Norbert!” Hagrid sobbed, as Harry and Hermione covered the crate with the Invisibility Cloak and stepped underneath it themselves. “Mommy will never forget you!”

How they managed to get the crate back up to the castle, they never knew. Midnight ticked nearer as they heaved Norbert up the marble staircase in the entrance hall and along the dark corridors. Up another staircase, then another — even one of Harry’s short-cuts didn’t make the work much easier.

“Nearly there!” Harry panted as they reached the corridor beneath the tallest tower.

Then a sudden movement ahead of them made them almost drop the crate. Forgetting that they were already invisible, they shrank into the shadows, staring at the dark outlines of two people grappling with each other ten feet away. A lamp flared.

Professor McGonagall, in a tartan bathrobe and a hair net, had Malfoy by the ear.

“Detention!” she shouted. “And twenty points from Slytherin! Wandering around in the middle of the night, how *dare* you —”

“You don’t understand, Professor. Harry Potter’s coming — he’s got a dragon!”

“What utter rubbish! How dare you tell such lies! Come on — I shall see Professor Snape about you, Malfoy!”



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The steep spiral staircase up to the top of the tower seemed the easiest thing in the world after that. Not until they'd stepped out into the cold night air did they throw off the cloak, glad to be able to breathe properly again. Hermione did a sort of jig.

"Malfoy's got detention! I could sing!"

"Don't," Harry advised her.

Chuckling about Malfoy, they waited, Norbert thrashing about in his crate. About ten minutes later, four broomsticks came swooping down out of the darkness.

Charlie's friends were a cheery lot. They showed Harry and Hermione the harness they'd rigged up, so they could suspend Norbert between them. They all helped buckle Norbert safely into it and then Harry and Hermione shook hands with the others and thanked them very much.

At last, Norbert was going . . . going . . . *gone*.

They slipped back down the spiral staircase, their hearts as light as their hands, now that Norbert was off them. No more dragon — Malfoy in detention — what could spoil their happiness?

The answer to that was waiting at the foot of the stairs. As they stepped into the corridor, Filch's face loomed suddenly out of the darkness.

"Well, well, well," he whispered, "we *are* in trouble."

They'd left the Invisibility Cloak on top of the tower.

C H A P T E R F I F T E E N



THE FORBIDDEN FOREST

Things couldn't have been worse.

Filch took them down to Professor McGonagall's study on the first floor, where they sat and waited without saying a word to each other. Hermione was trembling. Excuses, alibis, and wild cover-up stories chased each other around Harry's brain, each more feeble than the last. He couldn't see how they were going to get out of trouble this time. They were cornered. How could they have been so stupid as to forget the cloak? There was no reason on earth that Professor McGonagall would accept for their being out of bed and creeping around the school in the dead of night, let alone being up the tallest Astronomy Tower, which was out-of-bounds except for classes. Add Norbert and the Invisibility Cloak, and they might as well be packing their bags already.

Had Harry thought that things couldn't have been worse? He was wrong. When Professor McGonagall appeared, she was leading Neville.



THE FORBIDDEN FOREST



“Harry!” Neville burst out, the moment he saw the other two. “I was trying to find you to warn you, I heard Malfoy saying he was going to catch you, he said you had a drag —”

Harry shook his head violently to shut Neville up, but Professor McGonagall had seen. She looked more likely to breathe fire than Norbert as she towered over the three of them.

“I would never have believed it of any of you. Mr. Filch says you were up in the Astronomy Tower. It’s one o’clock in the morning. *Explain yourselves.*”

It was the first time Hermione had ever failed to answer a teacher’s question. She was staring at her slippers, as still as a statue.

“I think I’ve got a good idea of what’s been going on,” said Professor McGonagall. “It doesn’t take a genius to work it out. You fed Draco Malfoy some cock-and-bull story about a dragon, trying to get him out of bed and into trouble. I’ve already caught him. I suppose you think it’s funny that Longbottom here heard the story and believed it, too?”

Harry caught Neville’s eye and tried to tell him without words that this wasn’t true, because Neville was looking stunned and hurt. Poor, blundering Neville — Harry knew what it must have cost him to try and find them in the dark, to warn them.

“I’m disgusted,” said Professor McGonagall. “Four students out of bed in one night! I’ve never heard of such a thing before! You, Miss Granger, I thought you had more sense. As for you, Mr. Potter, I thought Gryffindor meant more to you than this. All three of you will receive detentions — yes, you too, Mr. Longbottom, *nothing* gives you the right to walk around school at night, especially these days, it’s very dangerous — and fifty points will be taken from Gryffindor.”