



CHAPTER FOURTEEN



“Wonder what it’s like to have a peaceful life,” Ron sighed, as evening after evening they struggled through all the extra homework they were getting. Hermione had now started making study schedules for Harry and Ron, too. It was driving them nuts.

Then, one breakfast time, Hedwig brought Harry another note from Hagrid. He had written only two words: *It’s hatching*.

Ron wanted to skip Herbology and go straight down to the hut. Hermione wouldn’t hear of it.

“Hermione, how many times in our lives are we going to see a dragon hatching?”

“We’ve got lessons, we’ll get into trouble, and that’s nothing to what Hagrid’s going to be in when someone finds out what he’s doing —”

“Shut up!” Harry whispered.

Malfoy was only a few feet away and he had stopped dead to listen. How much had he heard? Harry didn’t like the look on Malfoy’s face at all.

Ron and Hermione argued all the way to Herbology and in the end, Hermione agreed to run down to Hagrid’s with the other two during morning break. When the bell sounded from the castle at the end of their lesson, the three of them dropped their trowels at once and hurried through the grounds to the edge of the forest. Hagrid greeted them, looking flushed and excited.

“It’s nearly out.” He ushered them inside.

The egg was lying on the table. There were deep cracks in it. Something was moving inside; a funny clicking noise was coming from it.

They all drew their chairs up to the table and watched with bated breath.



NORBERT THE NORWEGIAN RIDGEBACK



All at once there was a scraping noise and the egg split open. The baby dragon flopped onto the table. It wasn't exactly pretty; Harry thought it looked like a crumpled, black umbrella. Its spiny wings were huge compared to its skinny jet body, it had a long snout with wide nostrils, the stubs of horns and bulging, orange eyes.

It sneezed. A couple of sparks flew out of its snout.

"Isn't he *beautiful*?" Hagrid murmured. He reached out a hand to stroke the dragon's head. It snapped at his fingers, showing pointed fangs.

"Bless him, look, he knows his mommy!" said Hagrid.

"Hagrid," said Hermione, "how fast do Norwegian Ridgebacks grow, exactly?"

Hagrid was about to answer when the color suddenly drained from his face — he leapt to his feet and ran to the window.

"What's the matter?"

"Someone was lookin' through the gap in the curtains — it's a kid — he's runnin' back up ter the school."

Harry bolted to the door and looked out. Even at a distance there was no mistaking him.

Malfoy had seen the dragon.

Something about the smile lurking on Malfoy's face during the next week made Harry, Ron, and Hermione very nervous. They spent most of their free time in Hagrid's darkened hut, trying to reason with him.

"Just let him go," Harry urged. "Set him free."

"I can't," said Hagrid. "He's too little. He'd die."



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They looked at the dragon. It had grown three times in length in just a week. Smoke kept furling out of its nostrils. Hagrid hadn't been doing his gamekeeping duties because the dragon was keeping him so busy. There were empty brandy bottles and chicken feathers all over the floor.

"I've decided to call him Norbert," said Hagrid, looking at the dragon with misty eyes. "He really knows me now, watch. Norbert! Norbert! Where's Mommy?"

"He's lost his marbles," Ron muttered in Harry's ear.

"Hagrid," said Harry loudly, "give it two weeks and Norbert's going to be as long as your house. Malfoy could go to Dumbledore at any moment."

Hagrid bit his lip.

"I — I know I can't keep him forever, but I can't jus' dump him, can't."

Harry suddenly turned to Ron.

"Charlie," he said.

"You're losing it, too," said Ron. "I'm Ron, remember?"

"No — Charlie — your brother, Charlie. In Romania. Studying dragons. We could send Norbert to him. Charlie can take care of him and then put him back in the wild!"

"Brilliant!" said Ron. "How about it, Hagrid?"

And in the end, Hagrid agreed that they could send an owl to Charlie to ask him.

The following week dragged by. Wednesday night found Hermione and Harry sitting alone in the common room, long after everyone else had gone to bed. The clock on the wall had just



NORBERT THE
NORWEGIAN RIDGEBACK



chimed midnight when the portrait hole burst open. Ron appeared out of nowhere as he pulled off Harry's Invisibility Cloak. He had been down at Hagrid's hut, helping him feed Norbert, who was now eating dead rats by the crate.

"It bit me!" he said, showing them his hand, which was wrapped in a bloody handkerchief. "I'm not going to be able to hold a quill for a week. I tell you, that dragon's the most horrible animal I've ever met, but the way Hagrid goes on about it, you'd think it was a fluffy little bunny rabbit. When it bit me he told me off for frightening it. And when I left, he was singing it a lullaby."

There was a tap on the dark window.

"It's Hedwig!" said Harry, hurrying to let her in. "She'll have Charlie's answer!"

The three of them put their heads together to read the note.

Dear Ron,

How are you? Thanks for the letter — I'd be glad to take the Norwegian Ridgeback, but it won't be easy getting him here. I think the best thing will be to send him over with some friends of mine who are coming to visit me next week. Trouble is, they mustn't be seen carrying an illegal dragon.

Could you get the Ridgeback up the tallest tower at midnight on Saturday? They can meet you there and take him away while it's still dark.

Send me an answer as soon as possible.

Love,
Charlie



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They looked at one another.

“We’ve got the Invisibility Cloak,” said Harry. “It shouldn’t be too difficult — I think the cloak’s big enough to cover two of us and Norbert.”

It was a mark of how bad the last week had been that the other two agreed with him. Anything to get rid of Norbert — and Malfoy.

There was a hitch. By the next morning, Ron’s bitten hand had swollen to twice its usual size. He didn’t know whether it was safe to go to Madam Pomfrey — would she recognize a dragon bite? By the afternoon, though, he had no choice. The cut had turned a nasty shade of green. It looked as if Norbert’s fangs were poisonous.

Harry and Hermione rushed up to the hospital wing at the end of the day to find Ron in a terrible state in bed.

“It’s not just my hand,” he whispered, “although that feels like it’s about to fall off. Malfoy told Madam Pomfrey he wanted to borrow one of my books so he could come and have a good laugh at me. He kept threatening to tell her what really bit me — I’ve told her it was a dog, but I don’t think she believes me — I shouldn’t have hit him at the Quidditch match, that’s why he’s doing this.”

Harry and Hermione tried to calm Ron down.

“It’ll all be over at midnight on Saturday,” said Hermione, but this didn’t soothe Ron at all. On the contrary, he sat bolt upright and broke into a sweat.

“Midnight on Saturday!” he said in a hoarse voice. “Oh no — oh no — I’ve just remembered — Charlie’s letter was in that book Malfoy took, he’s going to know we’re getting rid of Norbert.”