



CHAPTER SIXTEEN



The white king took off his crown and threw it at Harry's feet. They had won. The chessmen parted and bowed, leaving the door ahead clear. With one last desperate look back at Ron, Harry and Hermione charged through the door and up the next passageway.

"What if he's — ?"

"He'll be all right," said Harry, trying to convince himself. "What do you reckon's next?"

"We've had Sprout's, that was the Devil's Snare; Flitwick must've put charms on the keys; McGonagall transfigured the chessmen to make them alive; that leaves Quirrell's spell, and Snape's . . ."

They had reached another door.

"All right?" Harry whispered.

"Go on."

Harry pushed it open.

A disgusting smell filled their nostrils, making both of them pull their robes up over their noses. Eyes watering, they saw, flat on the floor in front of them, a troll even larger than the one they had tackled, out cold with a bloody lump on its head.

"I'm glad we didn't have to fight that one," Harry whispered as they stepped carefully over one of its massive legs. "Come on, I can't breathe."

He pulled open the next door, both of them hardly daring to look at what came next — but there was nothing very frightening in here, just a table with seven differently shaped bottles standing on it in a line.

"Snape's," said Harry. "What do we have to do?"

They stepped over the threshold, and immediately a fire sprang up behind them in the doorway. It wasn't ordinary fire either; it was

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purple. At the same instant, black flames shot up in the doorway leading onward. They were trapped.

“Look!” Hermione seized a roll of paper lying next to the bottles. Harry looked over her shoulder to read it:

*Danger lies before you, while safety lies behind,
Two of us will help you, whichever you would find,
One among us seven will let you move ahead,
Another will transport the drinker back instead,
Two among our number hold only nettle wine,
Three of us are killers, waiting hidden in line.
Choose, unless you wish to stay here forevermore,
To help you in your choice, we give you these clues four:
First, however slyly the poison tries to hide
You will always find some on nettle wine's left side;
Second, different are those who stand at either end,
But if you would move onward, neither is your friend;
Third, as you see clearly, all are different size,
Neither dwarf nor giant holds death in their insides;
Fourth, the second left and the second on the right
Are twins once you taste them, though different at first sight.*

Hermione let out a great sigh and Harry, amazed, saw that she was smiling, the very last thing he felt like doing.

“Brilliant,” said Hermione. “This isn’t magic — it’s logic — a puzzle. A lot of the greatest wizards haven’t got an ounce of logic, they’d be stuck in here forever.”

“But so will we, won’t we?”



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“Of course not,” said Hermione. “Everything we need is here on this paper. Seven bottles: three are poison; two are wine; one will get us safely through the black fire, and one will get us back through the purple.”

“But how do we know which to drink?”

“Give me a minute.”

Hermione read the paper several times. Then she walked up and down the line of bottles, muttering to herself and pointing at them. At last, she clapped her hands.

“Got it,” she said. “The smallest bottle will get us through the black fire — toward the Stone.”

Harry looked at the tiny bottle.

“There’s only enough there for one of us,” he said. “That’s hardly one swallow.”

They looked at each other.

“Which one will get you back through the purple flames?”

Hermione pointed at a rounded bottle at the right end of the line.

“You drink that,” said Harry. “No, listen, get back and get Ron. Grab brooms from the flying-key room, they’ll get you out of the trapdoor and past Fluffy — go straight to the owlery and send Hedwig to Dumbledore, we need him. I might be able to hold Snape off for a while, but I’m no match for him, really.”

“But Harry — what if You-Know-Who’s with him?”

“Well — I was lucky once, wasn’t I?” said Harry, pointing at his scar. “I might get lucky again.”

Hermione’s lip trembled, and she suddenly dashed at Harry and threw her arms around him.

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“*Hermione!*”

“Harry — you’re a great wizard, you know.”

“I’m not as good as you,” said Harry, very embarrassed, as she let go of him.

“Me!” said Hermione. “Books! And cleverness! There are more important things — friendship and bravery and — oh Harry — be *careful!*”

“You drink first,” said Harry. “You are sure which is which, aren’t you?”

“Positive,” said Hermione. She took a long drink from the round bottle at the end, and shuddered.

“It’s not poison?” said Harry anxiously.

“No — but it’s like ice.”

“Quick, go, before it wears off.”

“Good luck — take care —”

“GO!”

Hermione turned and walked straight through the purple fire.

Harry took a deep breath and picked up the smallest bottle. He turned to face the black flames.

“Here I come,” he said, and he drained the little bottle in one gulp.

It was indeed as though ice was flooding his body. He put the bottle down and walked forward; he braced himself, saw the black flames licking his body, but couldn’t feel them — for a moment he could see nothing but dark fire — then he was on the other side, in the last chamber.

There was already someone there — but it wasn’t Snape. It wasn’t even Voldemort.



THE MAN
WITH TWO FACES

It was Quirrell.
“*You!*” gasped Harry.

Quirrell smiled. His face wasn’t twitching at all.

“Me,” he said calmly. “I wondered whether I’d be meeting you here, Potter.”

“But I thought — Snape —”

“Severus?” Quirrell laughed, and it wasn’t his usual quivering treble, either, but cold and sharp. “Yes, Severus does seem the type, doesn’t he? So useful to have him swooping around like an overgrown bat. Next to him, who would suspect p-p-poor, st-stuttering P-Professor Quirrell?”

Harry couldn’t take it in. This couldn’t be true, it couldn’t.

“But Snape tried to kill me!”

“No, no, no. *I* tried to kill you. Your friend Miss Granger accidentally knocked me over as she rushed to set fire to Snape at that Quidditch match. She broke my eye contact with you. Another