

## ★ ★ THROUGH THE TRAPDOOR ★ ★

like this, people will think you're up to something. And Gryffindor really can't afford to lose any more points, can it?"

Harry flushed. They turned to go outside, but Snape called them back.

"Be warned, Potter — any more nighttime wanderings and I will personally make sure you are expelled. Good day to you."

He strode off in the direction of the staffroom.

Out on the stone steps, Harry turned to the others.

"Right, here's what we've got to do," he whispered urgently. "One of us has got to keep an eye on Snape — wait outside the staffroom and follow him if he leaves it. Hermione, you'd better do that."

"Why me?"

"It's obvious," said Ron. "You can pretend to be waiting for Professor Flitwick, you know." He put on a high voice, "'Oh Professor Flitwick, I'm so worried, I think I got question fourteen *b* wrong. . . .'"

"Oh, shut up," said Hermione, but she agreed to go and watch out for Snape.

"And we'd better stay outside the third-floor corridor," Harry told Ron. "Come on."

But that part of the plan didn't work. No sooner had they reached the door separating Fluffy from the rest of the school than Professor McGonagall turned up again and this time, she lost her temper.

"I suppose you think you're harder to get past than a pack of enchantments!" she stormed. "Enough of this nonsense! If I hear you've come anywhere near here again, I'll take another fifty points from Gryffindor! Yes, Weasley, from my own House!"



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN



Harry and Ron went back to the common room. Harry had just said, "At least Hermione's on Snape's tail," when the portrait of the Fat Lady swung open and Hermione came in.

"I'm sorry, Harry!" she wailed. "Snape came out and asked me what I was doing, so I said I was waiting for Flitwick, and Snape went to get him, and I've only just got away, I don't know where Snape went."

"Well, that's it then, isn't it?" Harry said.

The other two stared at him. He was pale and his eyes were glittering.

"I'm going out of here tonight and I'm going to try and get to the Stone first."

"You're mad!" said Ron.

"You can't!" said Hermione. "After what McGonagall and Snape have said? You'll be expelled!"

"SO WHAT?" Harry shouted. "Don't you understand? If Snape gets hold of the Stone, Voldemort's coming back! Haven't you heard what it was like when he was trying to take over? There won't be any Hogwarts to get expelled from! He'll flatten it, or turn it into a school for the Dark Arts! Losing points doesn't matter anymore, can't you see? D'you think he'll leave you and your families alone if Gryffindor wins the House Cup? If I get caught before I can get to the Stone, well, I'll have to go back to the Dursleys and wait for Voldemort to find me there, it's only dying a bit later than I would have, because I'm never going over to the Dark Side! I'm going through that trapdoor tonight and nothing you two say is going to stop me! Voldemort killed my parents, remember?"

He glared at them.

★ ★ THROUGH THE TRAPDOOR ★ ★

“You’re right, Harry,” said Hermione in a small voice.

“I’ll use the Invisibility Cloak,” said Harry. “It’s just lucky I got it back.”

“But will it cover all three of us?” said Ron.

“All — all three of us?”

“Oh, come off it, you don’t think we’d let you go alone?”

“Of course not,” said Hermione briskly. “How do you think you’d get to the Stone without us? I’d better go and look through my books, there might be something useful. . . .”

“But if we get caught, you two will be expelled, too.”

“Not if I can help it,” said Hermione grimly. “Flitwick told me in secret that I got a hundred and twelve percent on his exam. They’re not throwing me out after that.”

After dinner the three of them sat nervously apart in the common room. Nobody bothered them; none of the Gryffindors had anything to say to Harry any more, after all. This was the first night he hadn’t been upset by it. Hermione was skimming through all her notes, hoping to come across one of the enchantments they were about to try to break. Harry and Ron didn’t talk much. Both of them were thinking about what they were about to do.

Slowly, the room emptied as people drifted off to bed.

“Better get the cloak,” Ron muttered, as Lee Jordan finally left, stretching and yawning. Harry ran upstairs to their dark dormitory. He pulled out the cloak and then his eyes fell on the flute Hagrid had given him for Christmas. He pocketed it to use on Fluffy — he didn’t feel much like singing.

He ran back down to the common room.



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN



"We'd better put the cloak on here, and make sure it covers all three of us — if Filch spots one of our feet wandering along on its own —"

"What are you doing?" said a voice from the corner of the room. Neville appeared from behind an armchair, clutching Trevor the toad, who looked as though he'd been making another bid for freedom.

"Nothing, Neville, nothing," said Harry, hurriedly putting the cloak behind his back.

Neville stared at their guilty faces.

"You're going out again," he said.

"No, no, no," said Hermione. "No, we're not. Why don't you go to bed, Neville?"

Harry looked at the grandfather clock by the door. They couldn't afford to waste any more time, Snape might even now be playing Fluffy to sleep.

"You can't go out," said Neville, "you'll be caught again. Gryffindor will be in even more trouble."

"You don't understand," said Harry, "this is important."

But Neville was clearly steeling himself to do something desperate.

"I won't let you do it," he said, hurrying to stand in front of the portrait hole. "I'll — I'll fight you!"

"*Neville*," Ron exploded, "get away from that hole and don't be an idiot —"

"Don't you call me an idiot!" said Neville. "I don't think you should be breaking any more rules! And you were the one who told me to stand up to people!"

## ★ ★ THROUGH THE TRAPDOOR ★ ★

“Yes, but not to *us*,” said Ron in exasperation. “Neville, you don’t know what you’re doing.”

He took a step forward and Neville dropped Trevor the toad, who leapt out of sight.

“Go on then, try and hit me!” said Neville, raising his fists. “I’m ready!”

Harry turned to Hermione.

“*Do something*,” he said desperately.

Hermione stepped forward.

“Neville,” she said, “I’m really, really sorry about this.”

She raised her wand.

“*Petrificus Totalus!*” she cried, pointing it at Neville.

Neville’s arms snapped to his sides. His legs sprang together. His whole body rigid, he swayed where he stood and then fell flat on his face, stiff as a board.

Hermione ran to turn him over. Neville’s jaws were jammed together so he couldn’t speak. Only his eyes were moving, looking at them in horror.

“What’ve you done to him?” Harry whispered.

“It’s the full Body-Bind,” said Hermione miserably. “Oh, Neville, I’m so sorry.”

“We had to, Neville, no time to explain,” said Harry.

“You’ll understand later, Neville,” said Ron as they stepped over him and pulled on the Invisibility Cloak.

But leaving Neville lying motionless on the floor didn’t feel like a very good omen. In their nervous state, every statue’s shadow looked like Filch, every distant breath of wind sounded like Peeves swooping down on them.