

He couldn't remember how long they'd been in the Shack for, once Snape had shown up. Surely it wasn't this long? It felt like they'd waited an age already. Buckbeak scratched impatiently at the ground.

At last, they heard footsteps. The strange group began to emerge from beneath the Willow; Snape levitating Ron, Lupin dragging Pettigrew, Harry and Sirius beaming at each other with Hermione bringing up the rear. Harry's chest tightened as the moon became clear, and everything all went horribly, horribly wrong.

"What if we went after him?" he whispered, watching Pettigrew transform.

"And try and look for a rat in the dark, with a werewolf running about?" Hermione retorted. Harry conceded the point. Then, he froze.

"Hermione, we need to move," he urged. She huffed.

"Harry, we can't interfere!"

"No, we need to *move*, before Lupin runs into the forest," he reminded pointedly, already up on his feet and yanking on Buckbeak's rope. Horror filled Hermione's eyes, and she whipped around. "Hagrid's cabin," Harry said, already running, Buckbeak at his side. "It'll be empty by now."

Fang barked at them when they threw themselves through the door, but Hermione soothed the huge dog. Buckbeak seemed delighted to be home, making himself comfortable in the bed Hagrid still had made up for him. "Don't go to sleep," Harry lightly scolded the animal, rolling his eyes.

They listened to Lupin howl and Sirius yelp, unable to see anything through Hagrid's window. "Why didn't you follow me?" Harry asked, knowing that outside at that moment a version of him was running towards the lake.

"I couldn't leave Ron," Hermione retorted. "I thought about getting help, but—I couldn't leave him. And then Dumbledore showed up anyway."

Harry scowled to himself — Dumbledore, as always, swooping in at the last minute. How convenient.

When they couldn't stand waiting any longer, the two students and the hippogriff snuck out of the cabin. Sure enough, there was Dumbledore, striding down towards the lake. Harry watched with his jaw clenched as the headmaster conjured stretchers for his and Sirius' unconscious forms, hurrying back to do the same for Snape and Ron while Hermione jogged at his side the whole way back to the castle.

From there, the clock was ticking — as soon as Macnair appeared to summon the dementors, Harry tugged on Buckbeak's rope to wake up the dozing hippogriff, then hoisted himself up onto the beast's back. Getting Hermione up there wasn't quite so smooth, with one of her arms out of commission, but with a bit of fumbling she was seated behind him, her face buried in Harry's shoulder, whimpering quietly.