

Harry was lucky that Buckbeak was familiar with him; once it was safe to move, the hippogriff was reluctant to leave Hagrid's pumpkin patch, and as Harry's furiously beating heart reminded him that it would just take one glance out the window for the people in Hagrid's hut to see him and ruin everything, he quietly begged the huge beast to move.

At last, Buckbeak was at the treeline, trotting at Harry's side. He forged on into the woods, skidding to a halt when Hagrid's back door slammed open. Harry couldn't stifle his smirk when Macnair and the Committee member exclaimed over Buckbeak's disappearance, even if Dumbledore did sound far too amused for his liking. Had this been the man's plan all along? Had he known about Pettigrew the whole time?

"And now we wait?" Hermione asked him, hugging herself around the waist with her good arm. Harry glance up through the trees; the sun was barely setting. It would be hours yet before Sirius would be captured.

"And now we wait," he agreed. "We should move, we won't be able to see the Whomping Willow from here." They stuck to the edge of the forest, hiding in the growing shadows as they moved closer to the Willow. They watched as Hermione appeared, sprinting after Scabbers. It was strange, watching things that had already happened from an entirely different perspective. Watching *himself* do things he'd already done.

At last they were all down in the tunnel, and it was silent once more. "How the hell have you been keeping track of yourself all year?" Harry breathed, shaking his head in astonishment. "I'd go mad." No wonder Hermione had spent the whole school year looking like she was on the verge of a breakdown. She was living about five extra hours to every day. Having to remember where she'd been at what time and who had seen her, so she didn't accidentally cross her own timeline. All for the sake of a few extra classes?

"It's been tough," Hermione agreed. "A few times I'd turn it back a couple of hours just to take a nap in an empty classroom. I don't think I'll do it again. It's too much."

"Dumbledore and McGonagall never should've let you do it in the first place," Harry muttered. "They should've just told you to self-study. You're smart enough not to need the lessons."

Hermione blushed, ducking her head bashfully. "It doesn't matter now. I've already dropped Divination, and I think I'll drop Muggle Studies as well."

That still left her with Arithmancy, Ancient Runes and Care of Magical Creatures, but Harry didn't say a word as they both caught sight of Professor Lupin sprinting across the grass towards the Willow. He levitated a branch to press the knot, sliding into the passageway like he'd done it a million times before. He probably had.

Shortly after, Snape appeared. He used the same branch as Lupin, grabbing Harry's invisibility cloak on the way down. A possessive urge reared in Harry, telling him to grab the cloak out of Snape's hands, but he ignored it. To his astonishment, Snape had been on their side. He'd been willing to listen.