

Crookshanks. Of course. But what was he after?

He heard twin gasps as his two companions noticed the incoming, and then Hermione's hand flew to her mouth as she spotted the same thing Harry did. "Scabbers!"

Sure enough, Crookshanks was chasing a small brown blur across the grass — a blur that, when it stopped to turn sharply, had the distinct patchy fur of Ron's pet rat.

"He's alive!" Hermione exclaimed, lurching forward to try and grab the rat. Scabbers kept on straight past her, the bandy-legged cat hot on his tail.

"Not for much longer by the looks of it," Ron growled, already sprinting off in hot pursuit. Hermione hared after them, and Harry sighed, hurrying to catch up. He couldn't leave them out there, not if they were going to make such a racket while Dumbledore and the Minister were still lurking about.

They drew closer to the tree-line of the Forbidden Forest, Hermione faster than Ron as they followed the frantically zig-zagging rat. Harry sucked in a sharp breath as the bushy-haired girl dove, letting out a cry of triumph as her hands closed around Scabbers' wriggling form. "Got him!" she declared, then let out a quiet yelp.

Harry and Ron skidded to a halt, unable to do anything but watch as an enormous black dog leapt from the shadows, clamped its jaw around Hermione's wrist, and began to drag her away.

Right towards the Whomping Willow.

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Everything had unraveled so quickly.

The boys had chased after Hermione and the dog, but the Whomping Willow stopped them from getting too close — at least until Crookshanks somehow did something at the base of the tree, freezing it in place. By that point, Hermione had already disappeared through a hole at its roots. Harry and Ron had no choice but to follow.

From there, things had only gone downhill.

Now, Harry found himself inside what seemed to be the Shrieking Shack, staring at Hermione on a broken old four-poster bed with Scabbers still wriggling in one hand while her other arm was cradled gingerly in her lap. And stood in front of her, brandishing Hermione's wand, was none other than Sirius Black.

"Harry, Ron, run!" Hermione urged, but they both shook their heads — there was no way they were leaving her with the man who had betrayed Harry's parents.

Black disarmed them both, awe in his eyes as he stared at Harry, whispering his name reverently. Harry stepped back, wishing he had something else to defend himself with. Wishing he was capable of some kind of useful wandless magic.