

Hagrid's face twisted in dislike. "So she decided to come and welcome back the 'alf-giant professor, then?" he said knowingly. He fished the sausages out of the grill pan, pulling a loaf of bread out from a different cupboard. In short order, there was a pile of sausage sandwiches slathered in ketchup; Harry's mouth watered.

"She's got an agenda," Harry agreed. "Hate to say, getting rid of you is probably on it."

"Dumbledore won't let that 'appen," Hagrid insisted faithfully.

"She might not give him a choice." Harry hated the idea of Hagrid becoming collateral damage in the battle for dominance between Dumbledore and the Ministry. "Just promise me you'll be careful. No dragon eggs; no dangerous creatures in lessons. Nothing that'll let her use all those awful stereotypes about giants against you."

"Don't worry about me, 'Arry," Hagrid said. He didn't seem remotely concerned by the whole affair. "It'll be alright." He gave a savage grin. "In't the first time I've played the Ministry's game."

That was exactly what Harry was worried about.

"Anyways, I'm surprised; you 'aven't even asked me where I been all this time!"

Harry blinked — of course, he wasn't supposed to know that Hagrid had been seeking giants. "Well, now we've got all the boring stuff out of the way, you can tell me," he declared, reaching for another sandwich.

From the injuries Hagrid was sporting, it was bound to be an interesting story.

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Between quidditch celebrations and his visit with Hagrid — which had ended, somewhat awkwardly, when Ron and Hermione appeared on Hagrid's doorstep, and Hagrid tried to get the three of them to sit and talk together — Harry was worryingly behind on his homework. Sunday night found him up in the common room long after the rest of the Tower had gone to bed, fast asleep with his face pressed against the pages of a book on goblin wars. Inside his head, he was travelling down a long, dark corridor.

He tried his best not to let the dream draw him in, but the corridor just kept stretching ahead of him, a tiny voice in his head whispering that he was so *curious*, that he *needed* to find out what was at the end. He reached for the door, and it sprung open, revealing a bright light and —

Harry gasped awake, wand jumping into his hand as something touched his shoulder. He blinked into the darkness of the common room, heart stopping for a moment when huge green eyes blinked back.

"...Dobby?"

The elf was wearing a truly ludicrous amount of misshapen knitwear, a stack of lumpy hats piled atop his head. He looked wary; not his usual delight at seeing Harry.