

Hermione's explanation of the Time-Turner left him gobsmacked. "They trusted a *fourteen year-old*. With a *time machine*?? No offence," he added, realising how that sounded. Hermione snorted.

"It is a bit ridiculous, isn't it? All so I could take some extra classes. But Professor Dumbledore insisted I shouldn't have to 'curb my thirst for knowledge'," she quoted. Harry's brow furrowed. What was Dumbledore planning? For that matter, *why* was he letting them save Sirius?

Unless he needed Harry's godfather for part of his grand plan? On the run, unable to spend much real time with Harry, but always just out of reach as a taunt of what might've been. Harry's stomach churned uncomfortably. He had the awful feeling they were playing right into Dumbledore's hand, but there was nothing he could do about it. Not if he wanted to save Sirius.

"So what's the plan?" he asked. "You said we're just outside, walking down to Hagrid's. How do we save Sirius? Go into the woods and look for him?"

"No, we can't disrupt the original flow of time. If we warn Sirius now, tonight will never happen," Hermione whispered.

"So... if we save him, it has to happen after he's already captured?" Harry thought carefully about Dumbledore's words, his specific instructions about Flitwick's office window. *Two innocent lives*. "Buckbeak."

"What?" Hermione was puzzled.

"Buckbeak. The other innocent life we save. We go and grab Buckbeak, wait until Sirius gets captured, then fly up to the window and go get him. He can escape on Buckbeak—they'll both be free."

"Harry, Buckbeak was killed," Hermione pointed out cautiously. Harry gave her a shrewd look.

"Was he?" he returned. "We heard the axe swing, we didn't see it. There's a chance."

It was a small chance, but it was all they had left.

Carefully, the two of them stuck to the edges of the lawn, sneaking behind the greenhouses and into the edge of the forest until they could see Hagrid's house. It was utterly bizarre, Harry thought, hearing his own voice as Hagrid let them in under the invisibility cloak. "You've been doing this all year?" he murmured to Hermione. "Does it get any less weird?"

"Not in the slightest," she replied quietly, and the two shared a slightly manic smile. "We have to wait for the Committee to see Buckbeak, or Fudge will think Hagrid's hiding him."

The wait was excruciating. But finally, Hagrid opened the back door, and Harry could see himself, Ron and Hermione walk out of it. They threw the cloak over themselves, entirely unaware of their audience.