

Chapter 14 snape's grudge

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



No one in Gryffindor Tower slept that night. They knew that the castle was being searched again, and the whole House stayed awake in the common room, waiting to hear whether Black had been caught. Professor McGonagall came back at dawn, to tell them that he had again escaped.

Throughout the day, everywhere they went they saw signs of tighter security; Professor Flitwick could be seen teaching the front doors to recognize a large picture of Sirius Black; Filch was suddenly bustling up and down the corridors, boarding up everything from tiny cracks in the walls to mouse holes. Sir Cadogan had been fired. His portrait had been taken back to its lonely landing on the seventh floor, and the Fat Lady was back. She had been expertly restored, but was still extremely nervous, and had agreed to return to her job only on condition that she was given extra protection. A bunch of surly security trolls had been hired to guard her. They paced the corridor in a menacing group, talking in grunts and comparing the size of their clubs.

Harry couldn't help noticing that the statue of the one-eyed witch on the third floor remained unguarded and unblocked. It seemed that Fred and George had been right in thinking that they -- and now Harry, Ron, and Hermione -- were the only ones who knew about the hidden passageway within it.

" D'you reckon we should tell someone?" Harry asked Ron.

" We know he's not coming in through Honeyduke's," said Ron dismissively. " We'd've heard if the shop had been broken into."

Harry was glad Ron took this view. If the one-eyed witch was boarded up too, he would never be able to go into Hogsmeade again.

Ron had become an instant celebrity. For the first time in his life, people were paying more attention to him than to Harry, and it was clear that Ron was rather enjoying the experience. Though still severely shaken by the night's events, he was happy to tell anyone who asked what had happened, with a wealth of detail.

"... I was asleep, and I heard this ripping noise, and I thought it was in my dream, you know? But then there was this draft... I woke up and one side of the hangings on my bed had been pulled down... I rolled over... and I saw him standing over me... like a skeleton, with loads of filthy hair... holding this great long knife, must've been twelve inches... and he looked at me, and I looked at him, and then I yelled, and he scampered.

" Why, though?" Ron added to Harry as the group of second year girls who had been listening to his chilling tale departed. " Why did he run?"

Harry had been wondering the same thing. Why had Black, having got the wrong bed, not silenced Ron and proceeded to Harry? Black had proved twelve years ago that he didn't mind murdering innocent people, and this time he had been facing five unarmed boys, four of whom were asleep.

" He must've known he'd have a job getting back out of the castle once you'd yelled and woken people up," said Harry thoughtfully. " He'd've had to kill the whole house to get back through the portrait hole... then he would've met the teachers..."

Neville was in total disgrace. Professor McGonagall was so furious with him she had banned him from all future Hogsmeade visits, given him a detention, and forbidden anyone to give him the password into the tower. Poor Neville was forced to wait outside the common room every night for somebody to let him in, while the security trolls leered unpleasantly at him. None of these punishments, however, came close to matching the one his grandmother had in store for him. Two days after Black's break-in, she sent Neville the very worst thing a Hogwarts student could receive over breakfast -- a Howler.

The school owls swooped into the Great Hall carrying the mail as usual, and Neville choked as a huge barn owl landed in front of him, a scarlet envelope clutched in its beak. Harry and Ron, who were sitting opposite him, recognized the letter as a Howler at once -- Ron had got one from his mother the year before.

"Run for it, Neville," Ron advised.

Neville didn't need telling twice. He seized the envelope, and holding it before him like a bomb, sprinted out of the hall, while the Slytherin table exploded with laughter at the sight of him. They heard the Howler go off in the entrance hall -- Neville's grandmother's voice, magically magnified to a hundred times its usual volume, shrieking about how he had brought shame on the whole family.

Harry was too busy feeling sorry for Neville to notice immediately that he had a letter too. Hedwig got his attention by nipping him sharply on the wrist.

" Ouch! Oh -- thanks, Hedwig."

Harry tore open the envelope while Hedwig helped herself to some of Neville's cornflakes. The note inside said:

Dear Harry and Ron,

How about having tea with me this afternoon 'round six? I'll come collect you from the castle. WAIT FOR ME IN THE ENTRANCE HALL; YOU'RE NOT ALLOWED OUT ON YOUR OWN.

Cheers,

Hagrid

" He probably wants to hear all about Black!" said Ron.

So at six o'clock that afternoon, Harry and Ron left Gryffindor Tower, passed the security trolls at a run, and headed down to the entrance hall.

Hagrid was already waiting for them.

" All right, Hagrid!" said Ron. " S'pose you want to hear about Saturday night, do you?"

" I've already heard all about it," said Hagrid, opening the front doors and leading them outside.

" Oh," said Ron, looking slightly put out.

The first thing they saw on entering Hagrid's cabin was Buckbeak, who was stretched out on top of Hagrid's patchwork quilt, his enormous wings folded tight to his body, enjoying a large plate of dead ferrets. Averting his eyes from this unpleasant sight, Harry saw a gigantic, hairy brown suit and a very horrible yellow-and-orange tie hanging from the top of Hagrid's wardrobe door.

" What are they for, Hagrid?" said Harry.

" Buckbeak's case against the Committee fer the Disposal o' Dangerous Creatures," said Hagrid. " This Friday. Him an' me'll be goin' down ter London together. I've booked two beds on the Knight Bus...."

Harry felt a nasty pang of guilt. He had completely forgotten that Buckbeak's trial was so near, and judging by the uneasy look on Ron's face, he had too. They had also forgotten their promise about helping him prepare Buckbeak's defense; the arrival of the Firebolt had driven it clean out of their minds.

Hagrid poured them tea and offered them a plate of Bath buns but they knew better than to accept; they had had too much experience with Hagrid's cooking.

" I got somethin' ter discuss with you two," said Hagrid, sitting himself between them and looking uncharacteristically serious.

" What?" said Harry.

" Hermione," said Hagrid.

" What about her?" said Ron.

" She's in a righ' state, that's what. She's bin comin' down ter visit me a lot since Chris'mas. Bin feelin' lonely. Firs' yeh weren' talking to her because o' the Firebolt, now yer not talkin' to her because her cat --"

"? C ate Scabbers!" Ron interjected angrily.

" Because her cat acted like all cats do," Hagrid continued doggedly. " She's cried a fair few times, yeh know. Goin' through a rough time at the moment. Bitten off more'n she can chew, if yeh ask me, all the work she's tryin' ter do. Still found time ter help me with Buckbeak's case, mind... She's found some really good stuff fer me... reckon he'll stand a good chance now..."

" Hagrid, we should've helped as well -- sorry --" Harry began awkwardly.

" I'm not blamin' yeh!" said Hagrid, waving Harry's apology aside. " Gawd knows yeh've had enough ter be getting' on with. I've seen yeh practicin' Quidditch ev'ry hour o' the day an' night -- but I gotta tell yeh, I thought you two'd value yer friend more'n broomsticks or rats. Tha's all."

Harry and Ron exchanged uncomfortable looks.

" Really upset, she was, when Black nearly stabbed yeh, Ron. She's got her heart in the right place, Hermione has, an' you two not talkin' to her --"

" If she'd just get rid of that cat, I'd speak to her again!" Ron said angrily. " But she's still sticking up for it! It's a maniac, and she won't hear a word against it!"

" Ah, well, people can be a bit stupid about their pets," said Hagrid wisely.

Behind him, Buckbeak spat a few ferret bones onto Hagrid's pillow.

They spent the rest of their visit discussing Gryffindor's improved chances for the Quidditch Cup. At nine o'clock, Hagrid walked them back up to the castle.

A large group of people was bunched around the bulletin board when they returned to the common room.

" Hogsmeade, next weekend!" said Ron, craning over the heads to read the new notice. " What d'you reckon?" he added quietly to Harry as they went to sit down.

" Well, Filch hasn't done anything about the passage into Honeydukes..." Harry said, even more quietly.

" Harry!" said a voice in his right ear. Harry started and looked around at Hermione, who was sitting at the table right behind them and clearing a space in the wall of books that had been hiding her.

" Harry, if you go into Hogsmeade again... I'll tell Professor McGonagall about that map!" said Hermione.

" Can you hear someone talking, Harry?" growled Ron, not looking at Hermione.

" Ron, how can you let him go with you? After what Sirius Black nearly did to you! I mean it, I'll tell --"

" So now you're trying to get Harry expelled!" said Ron furiously. " Haven't you done enough damage this year?"

Hermione opened her mouth to respond, but with a soft hiss, Crookshanks leapt onto her lap. Hermione took one frightened look at the expression on Ron's face, gathered up Crookshanks, and hurried away toward the girls' dormitories.

" So how about it?" Ron said to Harry as though there had been no interruption. " Come on, last time we went you didn't see anything. You haven't even been inside Zonko's yet!"

Harry looked around to check that Hermione was well out of earshot.

" Okay," he said. " But I'm taking the Invisibility Cloak this time."

On Saturday morning, Harry packed his Invisibility Cloak in his bag, slipped the Marauder's Map into his pocket, and went down to breakfast with everyone else. Hermione kept shooting suspicious looks down the table at him, but he avoided her eye and was careful to let her see him walking back up the marble staircase in the entrance hall as everybody else proceeded to the front doors.

" Bye!" Harry called to Ron. " See you when you get back!"

Ron grinned and winked.

Harry hurried up to the third floor, slipping the Marauder's Map out of his pocket as he went. Crouching behind the one-eyed witch, he smoothed it

out. A tiny dot was moving in his direction. Harry squinted at it. The minuscule writing next to it read Neville Longbottom.

Harry quickly pulled out his wand, muttered, "Dissendium!" and shoved his bag into the statue, but before he could climb in himself, Neville came around the corner.

"Harry! I forgot you weren't going to Hogsmeade either!"

"Hi, Neville," said Harry, moving swiftly away from the statue and pushing the map back into his pocket. "What are you up to?"

"Nothing," shrugged Neville. "Want a game of Exploding Snap?"

"Er -- not now -- I was going to go to the library and do that vampire essay for Lupin --"

"I'll come with you!" said Neville brightly. "I haven't done it either!"

"Er -- hang on -- yeah, I forgot, I finished it last night!"

"Great, you can help me!" said Neville, his round face anxious. "I don't understand that thing about the garlic at all -- do they have to eat it, or --"

He broke off with a small gasp, looking over Harry's shoulder.

It was Snape. Neville took a quick step behind Harry.

"And what are you two doing here?" said Snape, coming to a halt and looking from one to the other. "An odd place to meet --"

To Harry's immense disquiet, Snape's black eyes flicked to the doorways on either side of them, and then to the one-eyed witch.

" We're not -- meeting here," said Harry. " We just -- met here."

" Indeed?" said Snape. " You have a habit of turning up in unexpected places, Potter, and you are very rarely there for no good reason... I suggest the pair of you return to Gryffindor Tower, where you belong."

Harry and Neville set off without another word. As they turned the corner, Harry looked back. Snape was running one of his hands over the one-eyed witch's head, examining it closely.

Harry managed to shake Neville off at the Fat Lady by telling him the password, then pretending he'd left his vampire essay in the library and doubling back. Once out of sight of the security trolls, he pulled out the map again and held it close to his nose.

The third floor corridor seemed to be deserted. Harry scanned the map carefully and saw, with a leap of relief, that the tiny dot labeled Severus Snape was now back in its office.

He sprinted back to the one-eyed witch, opened her hump, heaved himself inside, and slid down to meet his bag at the bottom of the stone chute. He wiped the Marauder's Map blank again, then set off at a run.

Harry, completely hidden beneath the Invisibility Cloak, emerged into the sunlight outside Honeydukes and prodded Ron in the back.

" It's me," he muttered.

" What kept you?" Ron hissed.

" Snape was hanging around."

They set off up the High Street.

" Where are you?" Ron kept muttering out of the corner of his mouth. " Are you still there? This feels weird..."

They went to the post office; Ron pretended to be checking the price of an owl to Bill in Egypt so that Harry could have a good look around. The owls sat hooting softly down at him, at least three hundred of them; from Great Grays right down to tiny little Scops owls (" Local Deliveries Only"), which were so small they could have sat in the palm of Harry's hand.

Then they visited Zonko's, which was so packed with students Harry had to exercise great care not to tread on anyone and cause a panic. There were jokes and tricks to fulfill even Fred's and George's wildest dreams; Harry gave Ron whispered orders and passed him some gold from under the cloak. They left Zonko's with their moneybags considerably lighter than they had been on entering, but their pockets bulging with Dungbombs, Hiccup Sweets, Frog Spawn Soap, and a Nose-Biting Teacup apiece.

The day was fine and breezy, and neither of them felt like staying indoors, so they walked past the Three Broomsticks and climbed a slope to visit the Shrieking Shack, the most haunted dwelling in Britain. It stood a little way

above the rest of the village, and even in daylight was slightly creepy, with its boarded windows and dank overgrown garden.

" Even the Hogwarts ghosts avoid it," said Ron as they leaned on the fence, looking up at it. " I asked Nearly Headless Nick... he says he's heard a very rough crowd lives here. No one can get in. Fred and George tried, obviously, but all the entrances are sealed shut..."

Harry, feeling hot from their climb, was just considering taking off the cloak for a few minutes when they heard voices nearby. Someone was climbing toward the house from the other side of the hill; moments later, Malfoy had appeared, followed closely by Crabbe and Goyle. Malfoy was speaking.

"... should have an owl from Father any time now. He had to go to the hearing to tell them about my arm... about how I couldn't use it for three months..."

Crabbe and Goyle sniggered.

" I really wish I could hear that great hairy moron trying to defend himself... 'There's no 'arm in 'im, 'onest --'... That Hippogriff's as good as dead --"

Malfoy suddenly caught sight of Ron. His pale face split in a malevolent grin.

" What are you doing, Weasley?"

Malfoy looked up at the crumbling house behind Ron.

" Suppose you'd love to live here, wouldn't you, Weasley? Dreaming about having your own bedroom? I heard your family all sleep in one room -- is that true?"

Harry seized the back of Ron's robes to stop him from leaping on Malfoy.

" Leave him to me," he hissed in Ron's ear.

The opportunity was too perfect to miss. Harry crept silently around behind Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle, bent down, and scooped a large handful of mud out of the path.

" We were just discussing your friend Hagrid," Malfoy said to Ron. " Just trying to imagine what he's saying to the Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures. D'you think he'll cry when they cut off his Hippogriff's --"

SPLAT!

Malfoy's head jerked forward as the mud hit him; his silverblond hair was suddenly dripping in muck.

" What the --?"

Ron had to hold onto the fence to keep himself standing, he was laughing so hard. Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle spun stupidly on the spot, staring wildly around, Malfoy trying to wipe his hair clean.

" What was that? Who did that?"

" Very haunted up here, isn't it?" said Ron, with the air of one commenting on the weather.

Crabbe and Goyle were looking scared. Their bulging muscles were no use against ghosts. Malfoy was staring madly around at the deserted landscape.

Harry sneaked along the path, where a particularly sloppy puddle yielded some foul-smelling, green sludge.

SPLATTER!

Crabbe and Goyle caught some this time. Goyle hopped furiously on the spot, trying to rub it out of his small, dull eyes.

" It came from over there!" said Malfoy, wiping his face, and staring at a spot some six feet to the left of Harry.

Crabbe blundered forward, his long arms outstretched like a zombie. Harry dodged around him, picked up a stick, and lobbed it at Crabbe's back. Harry doubled up with silent laughter as Crabbe did a kind of pirouette in midair, trying to see who had thrown it. As Ron was the only person Crabbe could see, it was Ron he started toward, but Harry stuck out his leg. Crabbe stumbled -- and his huge, flat foot caught the hem of Harry's cloak. Harry felt a great tug, then the cloak slid off his face.

For a split second, Malfoy stared at him.

" AAARGH!" he yelled, pointing at Harry's head. Then he turned tail and ran, at breakneck speed, back down the hill, Crabbe and Goyle behind him.

Harry tugged the cloak up again, but the damage was done.

" Harry!" Ron said, stumbling forward and staring hopelessly at the point where Harry had disappeared, " you'd better run for it! If Malfoy tells anyone -- you'd better get back to the castle, quick --"

" See you later," said Harry, and without another word, he tore back down the path toward Hogsmeade.

Would Malfoy believe what he had seen? Would anyone believe Malfoy? Nobody knew about the Invisibility Cloak -- nobody except Dumbledore. Harry's stomach turned over -- Dumbledore would know exactly what had happened, if Malfoy said anything --

Back into Honeydukes, back down the cellar steps, across the stone floor, through the trapdoor -- Harry pulled off the cloak, tucked it under his arm, and ran, flat out, along the passage... Malfoy would get back first... how long would it take him to find a teacher? Panting, a sharp pain in his side, Harry didn't slow down until he reached the stone slide. He would have to leave the cloak where it was, it was too much of a giveaway in case Malfoy had tipped off a teacher -- he hid it in a shadowy corner, then started to climb, fast as he could, his sweaty hands slipping on the sides of the chute. He reached the inside of the witch's hump, tapped it with his wand, stuck his head through, and hoisted himself out; the hump closed, and just as Harry jumped out from behind the statue, he heard quick footsteps approaching.

It was Snape. He approached Harry at a swift walk, his black robes swishing, then stopped in front of him.

" So," he said.

There was a look of suppressed triumph about him. Harry tried to look innocent, all too aware of his sweaty face and his muddy hands, which he quickly hid in his pockets.

" Come with me, Potter," said Snape.

Harry followed him downstairs, trying to wipe his hands clean on the inside of his robes without Snape noticing. They walked down the stairs to the dungeons and then into Snape's office.

Harry had been in here only once before, and he had been in very serious trouble then too. Snape had acquired a few more slimy horrible things in jars since last time, all standing on shelves behind his desk, glinting in the firelight and adding to the threatening atmosphere.

" Sit," said Snape.

Harry sat. Snape, however, remained, standing.

" Mr. Malfoy has just been to see me with a strange story, Potter," said Snape.

Harry didn't say anything.

" He tells me that he was up by the Shrieking Shack when he ran into Weasley -- apparently alone."

Still, Harry didn't speak.

" Mr. Malfoy states that he was standing talking to Weasley, when a large amount of mud hit him in the back of the head. How do you think that could have happened?"

Harry tried to look mildly surprised.

" I don't know, Professor."

Snape's eyes were boring into Harry's. It was exactly like trying to stare down a Hippogriff. Harry tried hard not to blink.

" Mr. Malfoy then saw an extraordinary apparition. Can you imagine what it might have been, Potter?"

" No," said Harry, now trying to sound innocently curious.

" It was your head, Potter. Floating in midair."

There was a long silence.

" Maybe he'd better go to Madam Pomfrey," said Harry. " If he's seeing things like --"

" What would your head have been doing in Hogsmeade, Potter?" said Snape softly. " Your head is not allowed in Hogsmeade. No part of your body has permission to be in Hogsmeade."

" I know that," said Harry, striving to keep his face free of guilt or fear. " It sounds like Malfoy's having hallucin --"

" Malfoy is not having hallucinations," snarled Snape, and he bent down, a hand on each arm of Harry's chair, so that their faces were a foot apart. " If your head was in Hogsmeade, so was the rest of you."

" I've been up in Gryffindor Tower," said Harry. " Like you told --"

" Can anyone confirm that?"

Harry didn't say anything. Snape's thin mouth curled into a horrible smile.

" So," he said, straightening up again. " Everyone from the Minister of Magic downward has been trying to keep famous Harry Potter safe from Sirius Black. But famous Harry Potter is a law unto himself. Let the ordinary people worry about his safety! Famous Harry Potter goes where he wants to, with no thought for the consequences."

Harry stayed silent. Snape was trying to provoke him into telling the truth. He wasn't going to do it. Snape had no proof -- yet.

" How extraordinarily like your father you are, Potter," Snape said suddenly, his eyes glinting. " He too was exceedingly arrogant. A small amount of talent on the Quidditch field made him think he was a cut above the rest of us too. Strutting around the place with his friends and admirers... The resemblance between you is uncanny."

" My dad didn't strut," said Harry, before he could stop himself. " And neither do I."

" Your father didn't set much store by rules either," Snape went on, pressing his advantage, his thin face full of malice. " Rules were for lesser mortals, not Quidditch Cup-winners. His head was so swollen --"

" SHUT UP!"

Harry was suddenly on his feet. Rage such as he had not felt since his last night in Privet Drive was coursing through him. He didn't care that Snape's face had gone rigid, the black eyes flashing dangerously.

" What did you say to me, Potter?"

" I told you to shut up about my dad!" Harry yelled. " I know the truth, all right? He saved your life! Dumbledore told me! You wouldn't even be here if it wasn't for my dad!"

Snape's sallow skin had gone the color of sour milk.

" And did the headmaster tell you the circumstances in which your father saved my life?" he whispered. " Or did he consider the details too unpleasant for precious Potter's delicate ears?"

Harry bit his lip. He didn't know what had happened and didn't want to admit it -- but Snape seemed to have guessed the truth.

" I would hate for you to run away with a false idea of your father, Potter," he said, a terrible grin twisting his face. " Have you been imagining some act of glorious heroism? Then let me correct you -- your saintly father and his friends played a highly amusing joke on me that would have resulted in my

death if your father hadn't got cold feet at the last moment. There was nothing brave about what he did. He was saving his own skin as much as mine. Had their joke succeeded, he would have been expelled from Hogwarts."

Snape's uneven, yellowish teeth were bared.

" Turn out your pockets, Potter!" he spat suddenly.

Harry didn't move. There was a pounding in his ears.

" Turn out your pockets, or we go straight to the headmaster! Pull them out, Potter!"

Cold with dread, Harry slowly pulled out the bag of Zonko's tricks and the Marauder's Map.

Snape picked up the Zonko's bag.

" Ron gave them to me," said Harry, praying he'd get a chance to tip Ron off before Snape saw him. " He brought them back from Hogsmeade last time --"

" Indeed? And you've been carrying them around ever since? How very touching... and what is this?"

Snape had picked up the map. Harry tried with all his might to keep his face impassive.

" Spare bit of parchment," he said with a shrug.

Snape turned it over, his eyes on Harry.

" Surely you don't need such a very old piece of parchment?" he said. " Why don't I just -- throw this away?"

His hand moved toward the fire.

" No!" Harry said quickly.

" So!" said Snape, his long nostrils quivering. " Is this another treasured gift from Mr. Weasley? Or is it -- something else? A letter, perhaps, written in invisible ink? Or -- instructions to get into Hogsmeade without passing the Dementors?"

Harry blinked. Snape's eyes gleamed.

" Let me see, let me see..." he muttered, taking out his wand and smoothing the map out on his desk. " Reveal your secret!" he said, touching the wand to the parchment.

Nothing happened. Harry clenched his hands to stop them from shaking.

" Show yourself!" Snape said, tapping the map sharply.

It stayed blank. Harry was taking deep, calming breaths.

" Professor Severus Snape, master of this school, commands you to yield the information you conceal!" Snape said, hitting the map with his wand.

As though an invisible hand were writing upon it, words appeared on the smooth surface of the map.

" Mooney presents his compliments to Professor Snape, and begs him to keep his abnormally large nose out of other people's business."

Snape froze. Harry stared, dumbstruck, at the message. But the map didn't stop there. More writing was appearing beneath the first.

" Mr. Prongs agrees with Mr. Mooney and would like to add that Professor Snape is an ugly git."

It would have been very funny if the situation hadn't been so serious. And there was more ...

" Mr. Padfoot would like to register his astonishment that an idiot like that ever became a professor."

Harry closed his eyes in horror. When he'd opened them, the map had had its last word.

" Mr. Wormtail bids Professor Snape good day, and advises him to wash his hair, the slimeball."

Harry waited for the blow to fall.

" So ..." said Snape softly. " We'll see about this ..."

He strode across to his fire, seized a fistful of glittering powder from a jar on the fireplace, and threw it into the flames.

" Lupin!" Snape called into the fire. " I want a word!"

Utterly bewildered, Harry stared at the fire. A large shape had appeared in it, revolving very fast. Seconds later, Professor Lupin was clambering out of the fireplace, brushing ash off his shabby robes.

" You called, Severus?" said Lupin mildly.

" I certainly did," said Snape, his face contorted with fury as he strode back to his desk. " I have just asked Potter to empty his pockets. He was carrying this."

Snape pointed at the parchment, on which the words of Messrs. Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs were still shining. An odd, closed expression appeared on Lupin's face.

" Well?" said Snape.

Lupin continued to stare at the map. Harry had the impression that Lupin was doing some very quick thinking.

" Well?" said Snape again. " This parchment is plainly full of Dark Magic. This is supposed to be your area of expertise, Lupin. Where do you imagine Potter got such a thing?"

Lupin looked up and, by the merest half-glance in Harry's direction, warned him not to interrupt.

" Full of Dark Magic?" he repeated mildly. " Do you really think so, Severus? It looks to me as though it is merely a piece of parchment that insults

anybody who reads it. Childish, but surely not dangerous? I imagine Harry got it from a joke shop --"

" Indeed?" said Snape. His jaw had gone rigid with anger. " You think a joke shop could supply him with such a thing? You don't think it more likely that he got it directly from the manufacturers?"

Harry didn't understand what Snape was talking about. Nor, apparently, did Lupin.

" You mean, by Mr. Wormtail or one of these people?" he said. " Harry, do you know any of these men?"

" No," said Harry quickly.

" You see, Severus?" said Lupin, turning back to Snape. " It looks like a Zonko product to me --"

Right on cue, Ron came bursting into the office. He was completely out of breath, and stopped just short of Snape's desk, clutching the stitch in his chest and trying to speak.

" I -- gave -- Harry -- that -- stuff," he choked. " Bought -- it... in Zonko's... ages -- ago..."

" Well!" said Lupin, clapping his hands together and looking around cheerfully. " That seems to clear that up! Severus, I'll take this back, shall I?" He folded the map and tucked it inside his robes. " Harry, Ron, come with me, I need a word about my vampire essay -- excuse us, Severus --"

Harry didn't dare look at Snape as they left his office. He, Ron, and Lupin walked all the way back into the entrance hall before speaking. Then Harry turned to Lupin.

" Professor, I --"

" I don't want to hear explanations," said Lupin shortly. He glanced around the empty entrance hall and lowered his voice. " I happen to know that this map was confiscated by Mr. Filch many years ago. Yes, I know it's a map," he said as Harry and Ron looked amazed. " I don't want to know how it fell into your possession. I am, however, astounded that you didn't hand it in. Particularly after what happened the last time a student left information about the castle lying around. And I can't let you have it back, Harry."

Harry had expected that, and was too keen for explanations to protest.

" Why did Snape think I'd got it from the manufacturers?"

" Because..." Lupin hesitated, " because these mapmakers would have wanted to lure you out of school. They'd think it extremely entertaining."

" Do you know them?" said Harry, impressed.

" We've met," he said shortly. He was looking at Harry more seriously than ever before.

" Don't expect me to cover up for you again, Harry. I cannot make you take Sirius Black seriously. But I would have thought that what you have heard when the Dementors draw near you would have had more of an effect on

you. Your parents gave their lives to keep you alive, Harry. A poor way to repay them -- gambling their sacrifice for a bag of magic tricks."

He walked away, leaving Harry feeling worse by far than he had at any point in Snape's office. Slowly, he and Ron mounted the marble staircase. As Harry passed the one-eyed witch, he remembered the Invisibility Cloak -- it was still down there, but he didn't dare go and get it.

" It's my fault," said Ron abruptly. " I persuaded you to go. Lupin's right, it was stupid, we shouldn't've done it --"

He broke off; they reached the corridor where the security trolls were pacing, and Hermione was walking toward them. One look at her face convinced Harry that she had heard what had happened. His heart plummeted -- had she told Professor McGonagall?

" Come to have a good gloat?" said Ron savagely as she stopped in front of them. " Or have you just been to tell on us?"

" No," said Hermione. She was holding a letter in her hands and her lip was trembling. " I just thought you ought to know... Hagrid lost his case. Buckbeak is going to be executed."