

Chapter 7 the boggart in the wardrobe

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Malfoy didn't reappear in classes until late on Thursday morning, when the Slytherins and Gryffindors were halfway through double Potions. He swaggered into the dungeon, his right arm covered in bandages and bound up in a sling, acting, in Harry's opinion, as though he were the heroic survivor of some dreadful battle.

" How is it, Draco?" simpered Pansy Parkinson. " Does it hurt much?"

" Yeah," said Malfoy, putting on a brave sort of grimace. But Harry saw him wink at Crabbe and Goyle when Pansy had looked away.

" Settle down, settle down," said Professor Snape idly.

Harry and Ron scowled at each other; Snape wouldn't have said 'settle down' if they'd walked in late, he'd have given them detention. But Malfoy had always been able to get away with anything in Snape's classes; Snape was head of Slytherin House, and generally favored his own students above all others.

They were making a new potion today, a Shrinking Solution. Malfoy set up his cauldron right next to Harry and Ron, so that they were preparing their ingredients on the same table.

" Sir," Malfoy called, " sir, I'll need help cutting up these daisy roots, because of my arm --"

" Weasley, cut up Malfoy's roots for him," said Snape without looking up.

Ron went brick red.

" There's nothing wrong with your arm," he hissed at Malfoy.

Malfoy smirked across the table.

" Weasley, you heard Professor Snape; cut up these roots."

Ron seized his knife, pulled Malfoy's roots toward him, and began to chop them roughly, so that they were all different sizes.

" Professor," drawled Malfoy, " Weasley's mutilating my roots, sir."

Snape approached their table, stared down his hooked nose at the roots, then gave Ron an unpleasant smile from beneath his long, greasy black hair.

" Change roots with Malfoy, Weasley."

" But, sir --!"

Ron had spent the last quarter of an hour carefully shredding his own roots into exactly equal pieces.

" Now," said Snape in his most dangerous voice.

Ron shoved his own beautifully cut roots across the table at Malfoy, then took up the knife again.

" And, sir, I'll need this shrivelfig skinned," said Malfoy, his voice full of malicious laughter.

" Potter, you can skin Malfoy's shrivelfig," said Snape, giving Harry the look of loathing he always reserved just for him.

Harry took Malfoy's shrivelfig as Ron began trying to repair the damage to the roots he now had to use. Harry skinned the shrivelfig as fast as he could and flung it back across the table at Malfoy without speaking. Malfoy was smirking more broadly than ever.

" Seen your pal Hagrid lately?" he asked them quietly.

" None of your business," said Ron jerkily, without looking up.

" I'm afraid he won't be ateacher much longer," said Malfoy in a tone of mock sorrow. " Father's not very happy about my injury --"

" Keep talking, Malfoy, and I'll give you a real injury," snarled Ron.

"? C he's complained to the school governors. And to the Ministry of Magic. Father's got a lot of influence, you know. And a lasting injury like this" -- he gave a huge, fake sigh -- " who knows if my arm'll ever be the same again?"

" So that's why you're putting it on," said Harry, accidentally beheading a dead caterpillar because his hand was shaking in anger, " To try to get Hagrid fired."

" Well," said Malfoy, lowering his voice to a whisper, " partly, Potter. But there are other benefits too. Weasley, slice my caterpillars for me."

A few cauldrons away, Neville was in trouble. Neville regularly went to pieces in Potions lessons; it was his worst subject, and his great fear of Professor Snape made things ten times worse. His potion, which was supposed to be a bright, acid green, had turned --

" Orange, Longbottom," said Snape, ladling some up and allowing to splash back into the cauldron, so that everyone could see.

" Orange. Tell me, boy, does anything penetrate that thick skull of yours? Didn't you hear me say, quite clearly, that only one cat spleen was needed? Didn't I state plainly that a dash of leech juice would suffice? What do I have to do to make you understand, Longbottom?"

Neville was pink and trembling. He looked as though he was on the verge of tears.

" Please, sir," said Hermione, " please, I could help Neville put it right --"

" I don't remember asking you to show off, Miss Granger," said Snape coldly, and Hermione went as pink as Neville. " Longbottom, at the end of this lesson we will feed a few drops of this potion to your toad and see what happens. Perhaps that will encourage you to do it properly."

Snape moved away, leaving Neville breathless with fear.

" Help me!" he moaned to Hermione.

" Hey, Harry," said Seamus Finnigan, leaning over to borrow Harry's brass scales, " have you heard? Daily Prophet this morning -- they reckon Sirius Black's been sighted."

" Where?" said Harry and Ron quickly. On the other side of the table, Malfoy looked up, listening closely.

" Not too far from here," said Seamus, who looked excited. " It was a Muggle who saw him. 'Course, she didn't really understand. The Muggles think he's just an ordinary criminal, don't they? So she phoned the telephone hot line. By the time the Ministry of Magic got there, he was gone."

" Not too far from here ..." Ron repeated, looking significantly at Harry. He turned around and saw Malfoy watching closely. " What, Malfoy? Need something else skinned?"

But Malfoy's eyes were shining malevolently, and they were fixed Harry. He leaned across the table.

" Thinking of trying to catch Black single-handed, Potter?"

" Yeah, that's right," said Harry offhandedly.

Malfoy's thin mouth was curving in a mean smile.

" Of course, if it was me," he said quietly, " I'd have done something before now. I wouldn't be staying in school like a good boy, I'd be out there looking for him."

" What are you talking about, Malfoy?" said Ron roughly.

" Don't you know, Potter?" breathed Malfoy, his pale eyes narrowed.

" Know what?"

Malfoy let out a low, sneering laugh.

" Maybe you'd rather not risk your neck," he said. " Want to leave it to the Dementors, do you? But if it was me, I'd want revenge. I'd hunt him down myself."

" What are you talking about?" said Harry angrily, but at that moment Snape called, " You should have finished adding your ingredients by now; this potion needs to stew before it can be drunk, so clear away while it simmers and then we'll test Longbottom's..."

Crabbe and Goyle laughed openly, watching Neville sweat as he stirred his potion feverishly. Hermione was muttering instructions to him out of the corner of her mouth, so that Snape wouldn't see. Harry and Ron packed away their unused ingredients and went to wash their hands and ladles in the stone basin in the corner.

" What did Malfoy mean?" Harry muttered to Ron as he stuck his hands under the icy jet that poured from the gargoyle's mouth " Why would I want revenge on Black? He hasn't done anything to me -- yet."

" He's making it up," said Ron savagely. " He's trying to make you do something stupid..."

The end of the lesson in sight, Snape strode over to Neville, who was cowering by his cauldron.

" Everyone gather 'round," said Snape, his black eyes glittering, " and watch what happens to Longbottom's toad. If he has managed to produce a

Shrinking Solution, it will shrink to a tadpole. If, as I don't doubt, he has done it wrong, his toad is likely to be poisoned."

The Gryffindors watched fearfully. The Slytherins looked excited. Snape picked up Trevor the toad in his left hand and dipped a small spoon into Neville's potion, which was now green. He trickled a few drops down Trevor's throat.

There was a moment of hushed silence, in which Trevor gulped; then there was a small pop, and Trevor the tadpole was wriggling in Snape's palm.

The Gryffindors burst into applause. Snape, looking sour, pulled a small bottle from the pocket of his robe, poured a few drops on top of Trevor, and he reappeared suddenly, fully grown.

" Five points from Gryffindor," said Snape, which wiped the smiles from every face. " I told you not to help him, Miss Granger. Class dismissed."

Harry, Ron, and Hermione climbed the steps to the entrance hall. Harry was still thinking about what Malfoy had said, while Ron was seething about Snape.

" Five points from Gryffindor because the potion was all right! Why didn't you lie, Hermione? You should've said Neville did it all by himself!"

Hermione didn't answer. Ron looked around.

" Where is she?"

Harry turned too. They were at the top of the steps now, watching the rest of the class pass them, heading for the Great Hall and lunch.

" She was right behind us," said Ron, frowning.

Malfoy passed them, walking between Crabbe and Goyle. He smirked at Harry and disappeared.

" There she is," said Harry.

Hermione was panting slightly, hurrying up the stairs; one hand clutched her bag, the other seemed to be tucking something down the front of her robes.

" How did you do that?" said Ron.

" What?" said Hermione, joining them.

" One minute you were right behind us, the next moment, you were back at the bottom of the stairs again."

" What?" Hermione looked slightly confused. " Oh -- I had to go back for something. Oh no --"

A seam had split on Hermione's bag. Harry wasn't surprised; he could see that it was crammed with at least a dozen large and heavy books.

" Why are you carrying all these around with you?" Ron asked her.

" You know how many subjects I'm taking," said Hermione breathlessly. " Couldn't hold these for me, could you?"

" Right then," said Professor Lupin, when everyone was ready. " If you'd follow me."

Puzzled but interested, the class got to its feet and followed Professor Lupin out of the classroom. He led them along the deserted corridor and around a corner, where the first thing they saw was Peeves the Poltergeist, who was floating upside down in midair and stuffing the nearest keyhole with chewing gum.

Peeves didn't look up until Professor Lupin was two feet away; then he wiggled his curly-toed feet and broke into song.

" Loony, loopy Lupin," Peeves sang. " Loony, loopy Lupin, loony, loopy Lupin --"

Rude and unmanageable as he almost always was, Peeves usually showed some respect toward the teachers. Everyone looked quickly at Professor Lupin to see how he would take this; to their surprise, he was still smiling.

" I'd take that gum out of the keyhole if I were you, Peeves," he said pleasantly. " Mr. Filch won't be able to get in to his brooms."

Filch was the Hogwarts caretaker, a bad-tempered, failed wizard who waged a constant war against the students and, indeed, Peeves. However, Peeves paid no attention to Professor Lupin's words, except to blow a loud wet raspberry.

Professor Lupin gave a small sigh and took out his wand.

" This is a useful little spell," he told the class over his shoulder. " Please watch closely."

He raised the wand to shoulder height, said, " Waddiwasi!" and pointed it at Peeves.

With the force of a bullet, the wad of chewing gum shot out of the keyhole and straight down Peeves's left nostril; he whirled upright and zoomed away, cursing.

" Cool, sir!" said Dean Thomas in amazement.

" Thank you, Dean," said Professor Lupin, putting his wand away again. " Shall we proceed?"

They set off again, the class looking at shabby Professor Lupin with increased respect. He led them down a second corridor and stopped, right outside the staffroom door.

" Inside, please," said Professor Lupin, opening it and standing back.

The staffroom, a long, paneled room full of old, mismatched chairs, was empty except for one teacher. Professor Snape was sitting in a low armchair, and he looked around as the class filed in. His eyes were glittering and there was a nasty sneer playing around his mouth. As Professor Lupin came in and made to close the door behind him, Snape said, " Leave it open, Lupin. I'd rather not witness this." He got to his feet and strode past the class, his black robes billowing behind him. At the doorway he turned on his heel and said, " Possibly no one's warned you, Lupin, but this class contains Neville

Longbottom. I would advise you not to entrust him with anything difficult. Not unless Miss Granger is hissing instructions in his ear."

Neville went scarlet. Harry glared at Snape; it was bad enough that he bullied Neville in his own classes, let alone doing it in front of other teachers.

Professor Lupin had raised his eyebrows.

"I was hoping that Neville would assist me with the first stage of the operation," he said, "and I am sure he will perform it admirably."

Neville's face went, if possible, even redder. Snape's lip curled, but he left, shutting the door with a snap.

"Now, then," said Professor Lupin, beckoning the class toward the end of the room, where there was nothing but an old wardrobe where the teachers kept their spare robes. As Professor Lupin went to stand next to it, the wardrobe gave a sudden wobble, banging off the wall.

"Nothing to worry about," said Professor Lupin calmly because a few people had jumped backward in alarm. "There's a Boggart in there."

Most people seemed to feel that this was something to worry about. Neville gave Professor Lupin a look of pure terror, and Seamus Finnigan eyed the now rattling doorknob apprehensively.

"Boggarts like dark, enclosed spaces," said Professor Lupin. "Wardrobes, the gap beneath beds, the cupboards under sinks -- I've even met one that had lodged itself in a grandfather clock. This one moved in yesterday

afternoon, and I asked the headmaster if the staff would leave it to give my third years some practice."

" So, the first question we must ask ourselves is, what is a Boggart?"

Hermione put up her hand.

" It's a shape-shifter," she said. " It can take the shape of whatever it thinks will frighten us most."

" Couldn't have put it better myself," said Professor Lupin, and Hermione glowed. " So the Boggart sitting in the darkness within has not yet assumed a form. He does not yet know what will frighten the person on the other side of the door. Nobody knows what a Boggart looks like when he is alone, but when I let him out, he will immediately become whatever each of us most fears.

" This means," said Professor Lupin, choosing to ignore Neville's small sputter of terror, " that we have a huge advantage over the Boggart before we begin. Have you spotted it, Harry?"

Trying to answer a question with Hermione next to him, bobbing up and down on the balls of her feet with her hand in the air, was very off-putting, but Harry had a go.

" Er -- because there are so many of us, it won't know what shape it should be?"

" Precisely," said Professor Lupin, and Hermione put her hand down, looking a little disappointed. " It's always best to have company when you're dealing with a Boggart. He becomes confused. Which should he become, a headless corpse or a flesh-eating slug? I once saw a Boggart make that very mistake -- tried to frighten two people at once and turned himself into half a slug. Not remotely frightening.

'The charm that repels a Boggart is simple, yet it requires force of mind. You see, the thing that really finishes a Boggart is laughter. What you need to do is force it to assume a shape that you find amusing.

" We will practice the charm without wands first. After me, please... riddikulus!"

" Riddikulus!" said the class together.

" Good," said Professor Lupin. " Very good. But that was the easy part, I'm afraid. You see, the word alone is not enough. And this is where you come in, Neville."

The wardrobe shook again, though not as much as Neville, who walked forward as though he were heading for the gallows.

" Right, Neville," said Professor Lupin. " First things first: what would you say is the thing that frightens you most in the world?"

Neville's lips moved, but no noise came out.

" I didn't catch that, Neville, sorry," said Professor Lupin cheerfully.

Neville looked around rather wildly, as though begging someone to help him, then said, in barely more than a whisper, " Professor Snape."

Nearly everyone laughed. Even Neville grinned apologetically. Professor Lupin, however, looked thoughtful.

" Professor Snape... hmmm... Neville, I believe you live with your grandmother?"

" Er -- yes," said Neville nervously. " But -- I don't want the Boggart to turn into her either."

" No, no, you misunderstand me," said Professor Lupin, now smiling. " I wonder, could you tell us what sort of clothes your grandmother usually wears?"

Neville looked startled, but said, " Well... always the same hat. A tall one with a stuffed vulture on top. And a long dress... green, normally... and sometimes a fox-fur scarf."

" And a handbag?" prompted Professor Lupin.

" A big red one," said Neville.

" Right then," said Professor Lupin. " Can you picture those clothes very clearly, Neville? Can you see them in your mind's eye?"

" Yes," said Neville uncertainty, plainly wondering what was coming next.

" When the Boggart bursts out of this wardrobe, Neville, and sees you, it will assume the form of Professor Snape," said Lupin. " And you will raise your wand -- thus -- and cry " Riddikulus" -- and concentrate hard on your grandmother's clothes. If all goes well, Professor Boggart Snape will be forced into that vulture-topped hat, and that green dress, with that big red handbag."

There was a great shout of laughter. The wardrobe wobbled more violently.

" If Neville is successful, the Boggart is likely to shift his attention to each of us in turn," said Professor Lupin. " I would like all of you to take a moment now to think of the thing that scares you most, and imagine how you might force it to look comical..."

The room went quiet. Harry thought... What scared him most in the world?

His first thought was Lord Voldemort -- a Voldemort returned to full strength. But before he had even started to plan a possible counterattack on a Boggart-Voldemort, a horrible image came floating to the surface of his mind....

A rotting, glistening hand, slithering back beneath a black cloak... a long, rattling breath from an unseen mouth... then a cold so penetrating it felt like drowning...

Harry shivered, then looked around, hoping no one had noticed. Many people had their eyes shut tight. Ron was muttering to himself, " Take its legs off." Harry was sure he knew what that was about. Ron's greatest fear was spiders.

" Everyone ready?" said Professor Lupin.

Harry felt a lurch of fear. He wasn't ready. How could you make a Dementor less frightening? But he didn't want to ask for more time; everyone else was nodding and rolling up their sleeves.

" Neville, we're going to back away," said Professor Lupin. " Let you have a clear field, all right? I'll call the next person forward... Everyone back, now, so Neville can get a clear shot --"

They all retreated, backed against the walls, leaving Neville alone beside the wardrobe. He looked pale and frightened, but he had pushed up the sleeves of his robes and was holding his wand ready.

" On the count of three, Neville," said Professor Lupin, who was pointing his own wand at the handle of the wardrobe. " One -- two -- three -- now!"

A jet of sparks shot from the end of Professor Lupin's wand and hit the doorknob. The wardrobe burst open. Hook-nosed and menacing, Professor Snape stepped out, his eyes flashing at Neville.

Neville backed away, his wand up, mouthing wordlessly. Snape was bearing down upon him, reaching inside his robes.

" R -- r -- riddikulus! " squeaked Neville.

There was a noise like a whip crack. Snape stumbled; he was wearing a long, lace-trimmed dress and a towering hat topped with a moth-eaten vulture, and he was swinging a huge crimson handbag.

There was a roar of laughter; the Boggart paused, confused, and Professor Lupin shouted, " Parvati! Forward!"

Parvati walked forward, her face set. Snape rounded on her. There was another crack, and where he had stood was a bloodstained, bandaged mummy; its sightless face was turned to Parvati and it began to walk toward her very slowly, dragging its feet, its stiff arms rising --

" Riddikulus!" cried Parvati.

A bandage unraveled at the mummy's feet; it became entangled, fell face forward, and its head rolled off.

" Seamus!" roared Professor Lupin.

Seamus darted past Parvati.

Crack! Where the mummy had been was a woman with floorlength black hair and a skeletal, green-tinged face -- a banshee. She opened her mouth wide and an unearthly sound filled the room, a long, wailing shriek that made the hair on Harry's head stand on end -- " Riddikulus!" shouted Seamus.

The banshee made a rasping noise and clutched her throat; her voice was gone.

Crack! The banshee turned into a rat, which chased its tail in a circle, then -- crack!- became a rattlesnake, which slithered and writhed before -- crack! -- becoming a single, bloody eyeball.

" It's confused!" shouted Lupin. " We're getting there! Dean!"

Dean hurried forward.

Crack! The eyeball became a severed hand, which flipped over and began to creep along the floor like a crab.

" Riddikulus!" yelled Dean.

There was a snap, and the hand was trapped in a mousetrap.

" Excellent! Ron, you next!"

Ron leapt forward.

Crack!

Quite a few people screamed. A giant spider, six feet tall and covered in hair, was advancing on Ron, clicking its pincers menacingly. For a moment, Harry thought Ron had frozen. Then --

" Riddikulus!" bellowed Ron, and the spider's legs vanished; it rolled over and over; Lavender Brown squealed and ran out of its way and it came to a halt at Harry's feet. He raised his wand, ready, but --

" Here!" shouted Professor Lupin suddenly, hurrying forward. Crack!

The legless spider had vanished. For a second, everyone looked wildly around to see where it was. Then they saw a silvery-white orb hanging in the air in front of Lupin, who said, " Riddikulus!" almost lazily.

Crack!

" Forward, Neville, and finish him off!" said Lupin as the Boggart landed on the floor as a cockroach. Crack! Snape was back. This time Neville charged forward looking determined.

" Riddikulus!" he shouted, and they had a split second's view of Snape in his lacy dress before Neville let out a great " Ha!" of laughter, and the Boggart exploded, burst into a thousand tiny wisps of smoke, and was gone.

" Excellent!" cried Professor Lupin as the class broke into applause. " Excellent, Neville. Well done, everyone... Let me see... five points to Gryffindor for every person to tackle the Boggart -- ten for Neville because he did it twice... and five each to Hermione and Harry."

" But I didn't do anything," said Harry.

" You and Hermione answered my questions correctly at the start of the class, Harry," Lupin said lightly. " Very well, everyone, an excellent lesson. Homework, kindly read the chapter on Boggarts and summarize it for me... to be handed in on Monday. That will be all."

Talking excitedly, the class left the staffroom. Harry, however, wasn't feeling cheerful. Professor Lupin had deliberately stopped him from tackling the Boggart. Why? Was it because he'd seen Harry collapse on the train, and thought he wasn't up to much? Had he thought Harry would pass out again?

But no one else seemed to have noticed anything.

" Did you see me take that banshee?" shouted Seamus.

" And the hand!" said Dean, waving his own around.

" And Snape in that hat!"

" And my mummy!"

" I wonder why Professor Lupin's frightened of crystal balls?" said Lavender thoughtfully.

" That was the best Defense Against the Dark Arts lesson we've ever had, wasn't it?" said Ron excitedly as they made their way back to the classroom to get their bags.

" He seems like a very good teacher," said Hermione approvingly. " But I wish I could have had a turn with the Boggart --"

" What would it have been for you?" said Ron, sniggering. " A piece of homework that only got nine out of ten?"