CHAPTER NINETEEN

Fear No Evil

It was the oddest procession Harry had ever been part of.

Crookshanks went first, his bottlebrush tail held high, picking his way down the stairs as though he owned the house. After him came Lupin, Pettigrew and Ron, chained together at the wrists. They were trying to manage the narrow staircase three abreast, like a team in a six-legged race that had gone badly wrong.

Then came Snape. Lupin had handed him over at the bedroom door, so as to keep his own wand free for Pettigrew. Black had taken charge of him instead, using Snape's own wand. Snape went drifting down the stairwell ahead of it, with his toes knocking on each step and his head lolling on his chest.

Harry and Hermione came last.

Ron was not enjoying the stairs. Lupin's splint kept his broken leg as straight as a poker, which meant that every step down was really a sort of hop, and every hop jarred the bone. Ron told the staircase exactly what he thought of it. He went on telling it, at

length, all the way down. He used every word Fred and George had taught him since September. Harry suspected that he was also making up several on the spot.

'Ow- *ow*- you stupid, sodding, flaming-'

'Steady,' said Lupin.

'I *am* steady! It's the stairs that aren't! Who builds stairs like this? Bloody- *OW*- buggering, rotten, mouldy-'

Hermione made a small, shocked noise behind Harry. Pettigrew, who was being jerked down a step every time Ron hopped, gave a squeak through his gag.

From behind Snape came a bark of delighted laughter.

'Ha! Who taught you that last one?'

'Fred,' said Ron, through his teeth. 'George did the rest.'

'Good lads.' Black sounded genuinely approving. 'Prongs had a word for this staircase too, you know. I won't repeat it in front of Miss Granger. Remus nearly swallowed his own tongue the first time he heard it.'

'I remember,' said Lupin tightly, without turning round.

'Don't you go getting matey with me,' said Ron, in between hops. 'You broke my leg.'

'I did,' said Black. 'I'm sorry about that.'

'Sorry,' Ron repeated. 'He's *sorry*. You dragged me under a tree by my arm and snapped my leg on a root.'

'I had to get the rat.'

'Yeah, well.' Ron hopped down another step, swore again, and twisted round as far as the chain would let him. His face was grey with pain. All the same, he fixed Black with a look that Harry had last seen him give Malfoy. 'Next time you go after a rat, you leave Harry out of it. I don't care if you're innocent. I don't care if you're the Minister for Magic. You came into our dormitory with a knife. If

you ever come near Harry with one again, I'll twat you in the face again. And this time I won't stop at one.'

'It was a good punch,' said Black. He sounded, if anything, more delighted than before. 'Right on the nose.'

'You had a nosebleed. I saw it.'

'I bled all the way to Hogsmeade.'

'He's told everyone in Gryffindor Tower about it,' said Harry. 'Twice. The knife gets longer every time.'

'It *was* long,' said Ron indignantly.

Black was quiet for a few steps. When he spoke again, his voice had changed.

'You know something, Ron? You remind me of me. When I was your age.' He jerked his head back at Harry. 'As much as Harry reminds me of James.'

Ron opened his mouth to answer. Then he shut it again. 'Is that meant to be a compliment?'

'It's the best one I've got,' said Black. 'Any boy who'll go for me with a broken leg, on Harry's account, is all right by me. James would have liked you, Ron. He'd have liked you a lot.'

He laughed, a short, rough sound like a cough. Then he stopped laughing quite suddenly. In the light from Hermione's wand, Harry saw his hand go up to the dirty string at his throat.

'Twelve years,' he said, half to himself. 'Twelve years, and I never once mourned them. Did you know that? Not properly. Not the way you're meant to.'

'Twelve years is loads of time, though,' said Ron, puzzled. He hopped, and winced. 'Isn't it?'

'You'd think so.' Black's eyes had gone somewhere far away. 'But the dementors don't let you grieve. Every time one of them came past my cell, it was that night all over again. I'd be standing in

the lane at Godric's Hollow, with the roof gone off the house. I'd be finding James in the hall, and Lily upstairs. I'd be begging Hagrid to give me Harry, with Hagrid saying no. All the time I'd know it was my fault. It was fresh every time, as though it had only just happened. Over and over, year after year, until I started to believe.' He shook his head. 'So you never get past it. You're stuck in that one night, with no way out.'

Harry, behind him, said nothing at all. He was thinking of the cold on the train, and of a woman screaming.

'Anyway.' Black cleared his throat. 'I expect all the God business looks mad to you, Ron. A grown wizard hanging on to a bit of wood on a string.'

Ron hopped down two more stairs before he answered. Harry could hear his breath hissing between his teeth.

'Nah,' he said at last. 'Well. A bit.' He hopped again. 'But I get it. If I'd been shut up with those things for twelve years, I'd have hung on to anything going. You were right about Scabbers, weren't you? So you can't be *that* mad.' He was silent for a moment. Then, rather gruffly, he said, 'I've been wondering about it a bit myself, as it goes.'

'Have you?' said Black, surprised.

'Since the Ravenclaw match. Harry told me what Professor Lupin said about Patronuses. About them coming from God, sort of. Well, I saw Harry's. It had to come from *somewhere*.' Ron hopped, winced again, and added, with a sly look back over his shoulder, 'Mind you, I'd believe in anything after this year. Harry's started trusting *Malfoy*. If that's not a miracle, I don't know what is.'

'Malfoy?' said Black. 'Lucius's girl? The one Snivellus was sneering about?'

‘She’s in our year,’ said Ron. ‘Harry goes all quiet whenever she comes into the library. Pink, too. Very holy-looking. I reckon he’s praying for strength.’

‘I am not,’ said Harry.

‘Every Potions lesson.’

‘*Ron*.’

Black looked from one of them to the other, frowning. ‘Why would he need strength in Potions?’ he said. ‘Is she very bad at it?’

Behind Harry, Hermione made a small, sharp noise that was not quite a cough. Harry was extremely glad that Hermione’s wand was behind him.

Ahead of them, Lupin had turned his head. He must have been listening to Ron all the way down. There was an odd look on his tired face, soft and rather surprised. Then, quite slowly, it faded. It left him looking very old indeed.

‘Professor?’ said Harry. ‘What’s the matter?’

‘Nothing, Harry.’ Lupin turned back to the stairs. They had reached the bottom now. The dusty hall stretched away ahead of them, with its peeling wallpaper and its broken furniture. ‘Only... it should have been me saying that to him. A long time ago.’

He was quiet for a moment. Between him and Ron, Pettigrew wheezed.

‘I believed my friend was a murderer, Harry,’ Lupin said. ‘For twelve years. Do you know what that does to a man? Within a few days, every friend who had ever known what I was and stayed with me anyway was gone. James and Lily were dead. I thought Peter was dead. Sirius was in Azkaban, and I believed he had put all three of them in their graves. All I had left was our world, and our world has never been kind to people like me.’

Black, behind Snape, had gone very quiet.

‘So I left. For years. I went where wizards don’t go. I found a pack in the end, in the hills of mid-Wales.’ A faint smile touched his mouth. ‘Fianna, most of them, Hermione. It’s one of the thirteen tribes. I could see you were about to ask.’

‘I wasn’t,’ said Hermione, who had been.

‘They were good people, in their way. They did good work. There was a quarry above one village that had been poisoning a whole valley for thirty years. Things had crawled out of the slag heaps that weren’t animals any longer. We put them back where they came from. They still send for me, now and then. They did at Christmas.’ He said it quite simply, the way he might have described a school trip. ‘But I was never one of them. I was bitten, you see, not born. They never let me forget it, not for one day. I was a wizard, too, which was worse. The Garou haven’t much love for wizards. They think we play with the Wyrm’s fire.’ He glanced back, past Ron, at the dangling shape of Snape. His nostrils flared. ‘Some of us do.’

Pettigrew whimpered. The chain between his wrist and Lupin’s had begun to tremble again.

‘Still, at least I was *doing* something,’ said Lupin, more quietly. ‘I told myself I was fighting the good fight. Really I was running away from missing them. I’m a coward, Harry. I always have been. I let James and Sirius be brave for all of us. I just went along behind.’

‘You’re not a coward,’ said Harry at once. ‘You’re the best Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher we’ve ever had.’

‘Easily,’ said Ron. ‘Not that there’s much competition.’

‘*Ron*.’

‘What? It’s a compliment!’

Lupin gave a small, tired laugh.

Harry hesitated. Then, because it was dark, and because it seemed important, he said, ‘I never used to think I was brave either. At the Dursleys’ I just... kept my head down. Kept out of the way. I didn’t find out I could do things until I came to Hogwarts. Go after things.’ He frowned at Snape’s dangling feet. ‘Only I’m still scared, sometimes. Of people getting close. In case they turn round and... you know. Hurt you. Like Malfoy.’ The word was out before he could stop it. ‘Dracina, I mean. I was so sure she would. Then she didn’t.’

Lupin made a noise that was half a sigh and half a laugh. When Harry looked at him, he was smiling in a fond, knowing sort of way that Harry didn’t care for one bit.

‘Harry,’ he said, ‘when all this is over, remind me to tell you about James and the Black sisters.’

‘The Black sisters?’ Harry looked from Lupin to the back of Black’s matted head. ‘Are they... related to him?’

‘Oh, yes,’ said Lupin.

Black tutted loudly.

Harry opened his mouth to ask what that was supposed to mean. Before he could, Crookshanks had vanished into the hole in the floor, and everybody was suddenly much too busy to answer.

Climbing back down into the tunnel was a struggle. The three who were chained together had to go in sideways, one after another, with the chain clanking between them. Lupin kept his wand jammed against Pettigrew’s ribs the whole time. Harry watched them shuffle off into the earthy dark, bent nearly double, like three men edging along a ledge. Somewhere ahead of them, Crookshanks’s tail was just visible, a ginger flag in the gloom.

Harry went in after Black, who was steering Snape along in front of him. Snape’s lolling head kept knocking against the low earth

roof. Harry had a strong impression that Black was not trying very hard to stop it.

Hermione came last, with her wand lit. Harry could feel her there, very close behind him, all the way. Every time he stooped, the light stooped with him.

‘You know what this means?’ said Black suddenly, over his shoulder. ‘Turning Pettigrew in?’

‘You’re free,’ said Harry.

‘Yes...’ said Black. ‘But I’m also- I don’t know if anyone ever told you- I’m your godfather.’

‘Yeah, I knew that,’ said Harry.

He had found out in the Three Broomsticks, from underneath a table, which was not how he would have chosen to find out anything.

‘Well... your parents appointed me your guardian,’ said Black stiffly. ‘If anything happened to them...’

Harry waited. He hardly dared to think where this was going.

‘I’ll understand, of course, if you want to stay with your aunt and uncle,’ said Black. ‘But... well... think about it. Once my name’s cleared... if you wanted a... a different home...’

Something seemed to burst open inside Harry, low down, under his ribs. He had walked out on the Dursleys once, into the dark, with nowhere to go. He had never once let himself imagine a home that was his by right. There had never been any point.

‘What… live with you?’ he said. He straightened up too fast, cracking his head on a knob of rock that jutted from the roof. ‘Leave the Dursleys?’

‘Of course, I thought you wouldn’t want to,’ said Black quickly. ‘I understand, I just thought I’d-’

‘Are you insane?’ said Harry. His voice came out every bit as croaky as Black’s. ‘Of course I want to leave the Dursleys! Have you got a house? When can I move in?’

Black turned right round to stare at him. Behind him, Snape’s head was scraping along the roof of the tunnel. Black didn’t even notice.

‘You want to?’ he said. ‘You mean it?’

‘Yeah, I mean it!’ said Harry.

Then Black smiled. It was the first real smile Harry had ever seen on that wasted face, and it changed him completely. Ten years seemed to drop away from him at once. For a moment the starved mask slipped, and there behind it was the grinning best man from the wedding photograph in Harry’s album.

Behind Harry, Hermione gave a soft, glad little sigh.

Then Harry remembered. His face fell.

Old magic. Older than anything I can do. The magic of Elves, Harry. And of Númenor. It lives in your blood, and it lives in hers.

Dumbledore had said it at the end of last year, on the castle steps, with the lake blazing gold behind him. Harry had been turning it over ever since.

‘I can’t,’ he said. The words came out flat. ‘I’ve just remembered. I’m not allowed.’

Black’s smile faltered. ‘Not allowed?’

‘It’s Dumbledore. Well, it’s my mum, really.’ Harry tried to remember exactly how it had gone. ‘When she died, she left something on me. A sort of protection. Dumbledore says it’s old magic, the magic of Elves, whatever that means. It’s in my blood. It’s in Aunt Petunia’s too, because she was Mum’s sister. So as long as I keep living where she lives, it keeps working. He says I’ve got to go back there every summer.’ He scowled at the tunnel floor. ‘Fudge

said the same thing at the Leaky Cauldron. A blood ward, he called it. He said it was the safest place for me.'

For a long moment Black said nothing. Then, slowly, he nodded.

'Then Dumbledore knows what he's doing,' he said. 'He generally does. I'm not going to argue with him over a thing like that. Not if it keeps you alive.'

All the same, he went on looking at Harry, in the light of Hermione's wand, for rather longer than he needed to. Harry had the uncomfortable feeling that Black had heard exactly how fast the gladness had drained out of his voice.

'I saw you, you know,' Black said quietly. 'Last summer. The night you left. I'd been in Surrey a few days by then, working up the nerve to have a look at you. I was in that gap by the garage, at the end of Magnolia Crescent, when round the corner you came. You were dragging that trunk, with a face like thunder. I've seen that face on James exactly once. It was the day Snivellus called Lily that word, down by the lake.'

Harry stared at the back of his head. He remembered the gap between the garage and the fence, as black as the inside of a mouth, with two pale eyes in it.

'That was *you*?'

'That was me. You lit your wand at me.' Black's voice was almost fond. 'Then you fell over your trunk.'

'I was angry,' said Harry, with dignity.

'I could see that.' Black hesitated. 'I saw your aunt, too, while I was hanging about. Once or twice. She was out in the front garden, clipping a hedge that didn't need clipping, peering up and down the street every few seconds. Lily used to talk about her.' His voice had gone careful, the way people's voices went in hospitals. 'Harry... is everything all right? With your aunt and uncle?'

Harry didn't answer straight away.

He thought of the cupboard under the stairs, where he had slept for ten years. He thought of the cat flap Uncle Vernon had cut in his bedroom door, with a slice of cold bread pushed through it three times a day, when they remembered. He thought of Dudley's gang playing Harry Hunting, every summer, behind the shops. He thought of ten birthdays marked, if at all, with a coat-hanger or a pair of Uncle Vernon's old socks.

He wanted to tell Black everything. He wanted it so badly that his throat ached. He opened his mouth.

'Here,' called Lupin, from somewhere up ahead. 'Crookshanks has found the way out. Mind the roots, everybody.'

Harry closed his mouth again. The moment had gone.

The tunnel had begun to slope upwards. Harry could smell fresh air now, and wet leaves. There was no crack of furious branches as Lupin, Pettigrew and Ron clambered out into the night. Crookshanks must have pressed the knot on the trunk again. Black floated Snape up through the gap among the roots. Then he waited, holding the wand steady, for Harry and Hermione to go first.

At last everybody was above ground. The grounds lay very dark around them. Nothing showed except the castle windows, small and golden, a long way off up the slope.

Nobody spoke. They started up towards the castle.

Pettigrew was still wheezing behind his gag. Every so often he let out a thin little whimper. Harry hardly heard it. His thoughts were buzzing like a hive. How much was he going to tell Black about the Dursleys? What would Black say, when he heard? What would he *do*?

'One wrong move, Peter,' said Lupin, up ahead.

His voice didn't sound right. It was too low and much too rough, as though it were coming from somewhere deeper down in him than usual. Harry saw him drag his chained hand across his forehead, hauling Pettigrew's arm up with it. His wand hadn't moved an inch from Pettigrew's ribs.

Black had heard it too. He steered Snape round in a wide, careless arc, bumping him into a bush on the way. Then he lengthened his stride until he was walking at Lupin's shoulder.

'Remus,' he said quietly. 'Say it with me. The way Lily used to.'

Lupin didn't answer at first. Harry could hear his breathing, harsh and quick. Then, in a voice that seemed to cost him a great deal, he said, 'Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord.'

'And by thy great mercy defend us,' said Black.

'From all perils and dangers of this night,' said Lupin.

They said the last part together, so low that Harry barely caught it. 'For the love of thy only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.'

Harry had never heard the words before. They sounded very old, like something that had been said over and over in the dark for hundreds of years. To his surprise, he liked them. For a little while, the night seemed smaller.

After a minute or two, Black dropped back behind Snape again.

They trudged on across the dark lawn. Little by little the lit windows grew larger. Snape floated on ahead of Black like something drowned, with his chin nodding against his chest.

And then they were out.

A bank of cloud had drifted over the grounds while they were down in the tunnel. Now, all at once, it slid away. The lawn turned silver all around them. Every blade of grass threw its own small shadow.

Harry looked up.

The moon hung over the Forbidden Forest, perfectly round.

Lupin had stopped dead.

The chain snapped tight. Pettigrew was jerked off balance against Lupin's side, with Ron hopping and swearing at the far end. Behind them, Black pulled up so sharply that Snape swung on in the air for a moment, like a coat on a peg, before he stopped as well.

'Remus?' said Black.

Lupin didn't answer. He was standing perfectly rigid in the moonlight, with his face turned up towards the sky. Harry could see the sweat running down his cheeks. His chained hand had gone to his collar, dragging Pettigrew's wrist up with it. It was clutching at something there, so tightly that his knuckles shone.

'Sirius,' he gasped. 'Sirius- I can't- I haven't-'

His head turned, very slowly. It turned past Pettigrew. It turned past Snape, hanging in the air with his left sleeve dangling. Then it came round to Harry, and stopped.

Harry saw Lupin's nostrils flare. He saw a look come into Lupin's eyes that he had never expected to see on a teacher's face. Lupin was looking at him as though Harry were standing on the edge of a cliff in the dark.

'Get them away from me,' Lupin whispered. 'All of them. Get Harry away. *Especially* Harry...'

'Oh, no,' said Hermione. 'Oh, *no*.' Her voice had gone high and fast. 'He didn't take his Wolfsbane Potion tonight! Professor Snape said so, he said he took it to his office and Professor Lupin wasn't there! It's the only thing that holds it down, he told us himself! It's the full moon, too, when the tide's at its highest. Professor Snape told us that in his lesson. He's had Pettigrew chained to his wrist for an hour, and he said Pettigrew reeks of it! He's been breathing it in all

night! He can't hold it, he *can't*, there's nothing left in him to hold it with-'

Lupin's lips were moving. Harry caught the words, ragged and very fast.

'Our Father... which art in heaven... hallowed be thy name...'

His whole body had begun to shake.

'Run,' Black whispered. 'Run. Now.'

'...lead us not... into temptation...'

Harry didn't run. He couldn't. Ron was still shackled to Pettigrew, and Pettigrew was still shackled to Lupin. Harry flung himself forward, towards Ron, but Black's arm came round his chest like an iron bar. Black hurled him backwards on to the grass.

'Leave it to me - RUN!'

'...but deliver us... deliver us...'

Lupin's head snapped back.

'...deliver us from...'

The last word never came. What came instead was a scream, and halfway through, the scream turned into something else.

Harry would remember the sounds for the rest of his life. He would remember them long after he had begun to forget the sight. First there was a crack, sharp and wet, like a green branch being snapped across somebody's knee. Then came another, then a whole string of them, popping up the length of Lupin's back. Harry could see his spine moving under the shabby robes, the bones shifting and lengthening one after another. Lupin's shoulders heaved upwards. They kept on heaving. The robes, already split down the back in the Shack, tore the rest of the way and fell away in rags. Somewhere in those rags, Harry thought dimly, was his father's Invisibility Cloak.

One of Lupin's arms flew out wide as the spasm took him. It swept through the air at head height, exactly where Harry had been standing before Black threw him down.

Lupin was growing. He was six feet tall, then seven, then taller still, so that Harry's head tipped back to follow him. His arms were stretching. His hands were stretching too, the fingers lengthening, the knuckles swelling into great knots. Out of the ends of them slid the black nails Harry had seen in the Shack. They were longer now, curved and thick, like the hooks in a butcher's window. Lupin's wand slid out of his stretching fingers into the grass.

The face was the worst. Lupin's jaw was being pushed forward from inside, with a slow crunching like a boot on gravel. His mouth was splitting backwards, towards his ears. His nose darkened, flattened and spread. Teeth were crowding up out of his gums, far too many of them and far too long, shoving the old ones aside. Harry saw a single human tooth drop out into the grass. Coarse grey hair came pushing out of the skin of his face, his neck and his heaving chest, thickening while Harry watched.

Something at Lupin's throat snapped as his neck thickened. A small dark object went flying out of the ruin of his collar. It bounced end over end across the grass and came to rest beside Harry's hand.

Harry looked down at it. It was a little plain cross on a broken leather cord.

He didn't think. He snatched it up and shoved it into the pocket of his robes, the way you might grab something precious from a burning house.

When he looked up again, Lupin was gone.

The thing that stood in his place was nine feet tall. Harry knew that without having to measure it, because Snape had drawn it for them in cold light above their desks, in the middle of a thunderstorm.

It stood on two legs like a man, but nothing else about it was like a man at all. It was mostly shoulders. A wolf's head sat on top of them, grey and shaggy, running with sweat. Heat came off it in waves. Harry could smell it from where he lay, a reek of wet dog with hot iron underneath.

Its eyes were yellow. There was nothing of Lupin in them at all.

Lupin's wand lay in the grass at its feet, where it had fallen.

The head turned. The iron manacle was still locked round one of its wrists. The wrist had grown thicker than Harry's thigh, and the iron was creaking. The thing looked down at it with a sort of mild curiosity. Then it closed its other hand round the cuff and pulled. The iron burst apart with a noise like a pistol shot. The broken chain whipped back across Pettigrew's face.

Then it threw back its head and howled.

Harry had heard wolves howl in films on the Dursleys' television, a long, sad sound with music under it. This one had no music under it. It went in at his ears, ran down the length of his spine and went out through the soles of his feet. It went on for a very long time. Somewhere far off, across the grounds, every bird in the Forbidden Forest seemed to take off at once.

Then it stopped. Its head came down, and it sniffed.

It bent first over Pettigrew, who had dropped to the grass the moment the chain struck him. Its muzzle wrinkled. Its lips peeled back from the dreadful teeth. Then it straightened and turned towards Snape, who was still hanging in the air where Black had left him, turning gently on nothing. It sniffed at his dangling left arm. Harry heard a low, grinding growl.

Then, slowly, it turned its head and looked at Harry.

Harry felt his scar prickle. It was only a faint, cold tingle, like a draught under a door, and it was gone again almost at once. The

thing's nostrils opened wide. Its lips crept back and back. A sound came out of its chest, deep and rough, like a millstone grinding. It was very nearly a word.

'*Wyyyrrrm*.'

Me, thought Harry stupidly. *Why me?* Pettigrew was right there, and Lupin had said he reeked of it. Snape was two yards away, with that left arm Lupin couldn't bear to breathe near. Why would it want *him*-

Then the back of Harry's neck went hot.

The dementors were cold; they crept into you and drained you dry. This fear came up hot, from the very back of his skull, from the part of him that remembered being small in the dark while something big went hunting. His legs wanted to run. His knees wanted to fold up under him. His whole body was trying to do both at once.

It's a bear, said a reasonable voice inside his head. *That's all. A big bear. Or a dog, a very big dog. You didn't see what you thought you saw. Nobody ever does. You'll laugh about it in the morning*-

Harry knew that voice. He had heard Snape describe it, in the half-dark of the Defence classroom. *The mind will not hold the sight; it closes over the place the way water closes over a stone.* He could feel it happening. He could feel his own head trying to paint over the thing in front of him, the way you might paint over a damp patch on a wall.

No, Harry thought. *It's Lupin. It's Lupin. I saw it happen.*

He scrambled up off the grass.

'B-bear,' Ron was saying. 'It's a bear, Harry, there's a bear, get away from the bear-'

His face had gone a dreadful greyish white. He was trying to drag himself towards Harry on his splinted leg, with Pettigrew's whole weight dragging on his chained wrist.

‘It’s not a *bear*, Ron! Bears are smaller!’

Hermione hadn’t moved at all. She was standing bolt upright, with her wand still pointed rigidly at Pettigrew. She wasn’t looking at the thing. She seemed unable to look at it. Her lips were moving very fast. She was reciting, the way she muttered revision notes outside the classroom before exams.

‘Nine feet. Five shapes. Silver burns them. Silver wounds do not close. Very little else troubles them at all...’

Pettigrew was curled up on his side in the grass, with his knees under his chin and his hands over his head. A thin, high keening was leaking out round his gag.

Only Black seemed untouched by it. *The mad*, Snape had said, of the few the fear could not touch. *The dying. And those with a certain... grounding.*

Black walked forward into the moonlight, between Harry and the thing, as steadily as a man crossing a road.

‘Moony,’ he said. ‘Moony. Look at me. It’s Padfoot. It’s only me.’

The thing didn’t even look at him. It swung one arm, almost lazily, the way you might brush away a fly. Black left the ground. He flew twenty feet through the air and hit the grass with a thud. He rolled over twice and lay still. Snape’s wand went spinning away from him into the dark.

Snape, Harry saw dimly, went on hanging in the air exactly where he was.

The thing came for Harry.

‘*Expelliarmus!*’

He didn’t know why he said it. It was just the spell his hand knew best. The jet of scarlet light struck the creature full in the chest

and splashed off it, like a cup of water thrown on a bonfire. There was no wand to take. It didn't even slow down.

Harry threw himself sideways. As he did, his foot shot out from under him on the dew-wet grass, and he went down flat on his back.

The claws went through the air exactly where his head had been a moment before. He felt the wind of them stir his hair. They tore four deep furrows in the turf beyond him, flinging up clods of earth.

Harry rolled. As he came up, the very tips of the claws raked across his left arm, just above the elbow. For a second he felt nothing at all. Then four lines of fire opened up along his arm, one after another. His sleeve was hanging off him in ribbons. Blood was running down hot over his wrist and dripping off his fingers.

He was on his feet. He didn't remember getting up. He was running.

He ran downhill, towards the lake, because downhill was the way his legs were going. Behind him he heard it coming, with a heavy, rapid thudding like somebody beating a carpet. Then, all at once, the sound stopped.

Harry felt a rush of hot air pass over his head.

The thing landed in front of him. It had jumped clean over him, thirty feet at least. It came down in a crouch between Harry and the lake, with a thump that he felt through the soles of his trainers. It turned round on all fours to face him.

Harry skidded to a halt. He very nearly fell over again.

It didn't charge. It began to circle instead, low to the ground, with its head down and its shoulders rolling. Harry turned on the spot to keep it in front of him. He had seen something move like that once before. Aunt Marge's bulldog had circled him exactly like that in the back garden at Privet Drive, the year before Hogwarts, just before it

chased him up a tree. Fluffy and the basilisk had both been bigger. Neither of them had looked at him like that.

It's herding me, he thought. *It won't let me get to the lake.*

The thing rose up on its hind legs. It went on rising until it blotted out half the stars.

Harry raised his wand. His hand was shaking so badly that the tip was jumping about all over the place.

'*Petrificus Totalus!*'

It was the Body-Bind Curse, the one Hermione had used on Malfoy in their first year, the night they went after the Stone. It hit the creature square in the middle of its chest. One arm snapped in to its side. Its legs jerked together. It swayed, and for one wild second Harry's heart leapt.

Then a shudder ran through the whole huge body, from its feet right up to its ears. There was a sharp crackling, like ice breaking up on a pond in March. Harry could almost see the curse go, flaking away in the moonlight, burnt off by the thing's own heat. Snape's voice came back to him in a rush. *Rage as a substance. It sits in them like fire in a lamp.*

The arm swung free. It hadn't even fallen over.

'GET AWAY FROM HIM!'

Hermione had turned round at last. Harry didn't know what had broken through to her, the fear or the blood running down his arm, but her face had changed completely. It was white and savage. There was nothing left in it of the girl who muttered revision notes.

'*Impedimenta!* GET AWAY! *Incarcerous!*'

The first spell hit the creature in the shoulder. It staggered one step sideways, no more. Thick ropes burst out of Hermione's wand with the second, lashing themselves round its arms and chest. It flexed its shoulders. The ropes snapped like cotton thread.

‘*Diffindo!* Don’t you TOUCH him! Don’t you *dare* touch him!’

The Severing Charm struck it on the flank. Harry saw a thin dark line open up in the grey fur, as neatly as if it had been drawn with a ruler. Then, while he watched, it closed again. The edges simply crept back together. A second later there was no mark there at all.

Very little else troubles them, Snape had said, *and what does, they heal while you stand watching.*

The creature hadn’t even turned its head. As far as it was concerned, Hermione might not have been there at all. It wanted Harry.

Hermione drew breath for another spell. Then, from the grass at her feet, Pettigrew’s keening changed. It went lower and stopped. Hermione’s wand whipped round to point at him instead.

‘And *you* stay where you are!’ she screamed.

Her wand jerked from Pettigrew to the creature, then back again, then back. She couldn’t cover them both. She was crying with rage now.

It dropped to all fours and came at him again.

Harry ran. He ran uphill this time, away from the lake, with no idea where he was going. His left arm was throbbing horribly. His breath was sobbing in and out of him. He could hear the thing behind him, the carpet-beating sound coming closer and closer.

‘PROFESSOR!’ Harry screamed, over his shoulder. ‘PROFESSOR LUPIN!’

At the same moment, the grounds went dark. A thin cloud had slid across the face of the moon. It wasn’t much of a cloud, just a grey veil, but the silver went out of the grass all at once.

The sound behind Harry stopped.

He spun round. The creature had halted a few yards away. It was standing hunched over, with its arms hanging, shaking its head

slowly from side to side. Its claws curled up and uncurled again. Then, to Harry's astonishment, it began to whine.

It sounded almost like somebody trying to say a name.

Just for a second, Harry thought Lupin was in there somewhere, trying to get out.

Then the cloud drifted on, and the moonlight came back across the lawn. Its head came up. Whatever had stirred in it had sunk out of sight again.

Harry was already backing away from it, step by step, with his wand held out in front of him. His mind was racing. *Nine feet. Five shapes. Silver burns them.* He had nothing silver. Professor McGonagall had a silver dagger, Snape had said, but she was up at the castle, a quarter of a mile away-

He shoved his wand into his torn left hand. His right hand went into the pocket of his robes. His fingers closed on the little cross. Then they found something else underneath it, something small and cold.

It was a Sickle, a silver Sickle, left over from Hogsmeade.

The werewolf lunged.

Harry threw. He didn't aim. There wasn't time to aim. It was a Seeker's throw, quick and flat, from the wrist. The coin spun glinting through the moonlight and struck the creature right on the end of its muzzle.

There was a hiss like water dropped on a hot stove. A puff of smoke went up. The stink of burning hair rolled across the grass, with something far worse underneath it. It screamed. It reared up, clawing at its own face, and the scream it gave was almost human. For one horrible moment it sounded exactly like Lupin.

Harry felt sick. *I did that. I hurt him. That's Lupin, and I hurt him-*

It lowered its hands. There was a black, smoking mark on the end of its muzzle, the size of a coin. It wasn't closing up. It wasn't closing at all.

It looked at Harry. The fur rose all along its back. A snarl came out of it, so low that Harry felt it in his chest.

It came so fast that Harry didn't see it move. He ducked. That was the only reason he still had a head. The back of its forearm caught him across the ribs at the end of its swing, and then he was flying through the air. He hit the slope, bounced, and rolled over several times. He fetched up on his back in the long grass, with the sky wheeling above him.

He couldn't breathe. He tried to suck in air, and a knife went into his side. His glasses had been knocked crooked. One lens was cracked straight across, so that he saw two moons, one a little above the other.

He fumbled for his wand. His fingers found it in the grass.

The creature was on him before he could sit up.

It crouched over him on all fours, with one huge hand planted on either side of his head. Its breath poured down into his face, hot and stinking of meat. A long string of drool came swinging down from its jaws and spattered on his cheek. The jaws opened. Harry could see right down into them, past all those teeth, into the dark red of its throat.

He jabbed his wand straight up into its face.

'*Lumos!*'

The light blazed out right in front of its eyes. Its pupils had opened up huge and black for the night. The light went into them like a pair of pins. It reared back with a yelp. Its jaws snapped shut, blindly. They closed with a clack like a trap, an inch from the end of Harry's nose.

Harry rolled out from underneath it. He scrambled on his hands and knees through the grass, sobbing for breath, with his wand still blazing in his fist.

There was a boulder a few yards up the slope, a great lump of grey stone half sunk in the turf. Harry threw himself into the black shadow behind it.

'*Nox*,' he breathed. The light at the end of his wand went out.

He pressed his back against the cold stone. He clamped his teeth together. He tried not to breathe at all.

On the other side of the boulder, the creature was hunting for him.

He could hear it. It was snuffling at the grass, quite slowly, in long, wet draws of breath. Every so often it stopped to snort and sneeze, because the smoke of its own burnt muzzle was still in its nose. Now and then there was a soft thump, as it swept one huge hand across the ground. Then it came closer. Harry could hear the grass hissing against its legs. He could smell it again, the wet dog and the hot iron. A long drop of drool fell past the edge of the boulder and landed on the turf beside his trainer.

It was right above him now. It was standing on the other side of the rock, so close that Harry could feel its heat coming round the edge of the stone. He heard it sniff, once, then again, more deeply.

It can smell me, he thought. *It doesn't need eyes. It can smell me-*

Then the wind changed.

It came off the lake in a sudden gust, cold and fresh, smelling of water weed. It went streaming up the slope past the boulder, flattening the grass as it came. Harry heard it lift its head. It sniffed the new air, puzzled. Then, with a grunt, it turned away from the rock. It went padding off downhill, towards the water, snuffling as it went.

Harry breathed again, very carefully, through his mouth.

Inch by inch, he began to edge round the far side of the boulder, away from it, keeping low. He went one yard, then two. Another gust tugged at his hair. He was nearly clear.

The wind dropped.

Harry heard it stop. He heard it turn. The snuffling began again, faster now, coming back up the hill towards him. It had found the trail of blood he had left on the grass. He ran.

He had gone three strides when something caught his ankle. It was the creature's hand. It had found him blind, by feel. The claws hooked round his leg, just above the trainer, and pulled. Harry went sliding back across the grass towards it on his stomach, clawing at the turf, tearing up handfuls of it. He kicked out wildly with his other foot. It hit something hard and furry. It made no difference at all. He twisted round and kicked again. Then the claws tore loose, through cloth and skin together. His leg was free. It was wet now, too, and burning.

He rolled over on to his back. He couldn't get any further. He had been dragged right back to the boulder, and the cold stone was against the back of his head.

The creature stood over him against the moon, blinking the light out of its eyes. The burn on its muzzle was still raw and black. It leant down towards him and sniffed. It breathed him in, long and slow, as though it had found two smells on him, with no way of telling which one was Harry.

The grinding sound came again, very nearly the same word. '*Wyyyrrrm*.'

Wyrm, Harry thought. *That's what Lupin called Pettigrew. Why me? What does it think is in me?*

His hand had gone back into his pocket. He didn't remember putting it there. His fingers had closed round the little cross.

A cross in a coward's hand is a stick of wood.

Lupin had said that, in the autumn, in a lesson about vampires. Harry had never felt more like a coward in his life. He didn't even know whether he believed in God. He didn't know whether he believed in anything any more, apart from teeth. He pulled the cross out anyway, because there was nothing else. He held it up between himself and the creature with a hand that would not keep still.

It stopped.

Its nostrils twitched at the little cross. It had hung round Lupin's neck for years; it must have smelt of nobody else. The yellow eyes fixed on it and stayed there. Far down in them, Harry thought he saw Lupin again.

'Professor,' said Harry. His voice came out in a croak. 'Professor Lupin. It's me. It's Harry. *Please*.'

It whined. Its head sank lower. Its lips came slowly down over the teeth.

Then it breathed in again.

Whatever it smelt on him, it was stronger than the cross. Harry watched the last of Lupin sink out of sight in its eyes. Its lips curled up. It reared back on its haunches to spring.

Harry stuffed the cross back into his pocket. He threw up his wand.

'*Protego!*'

It was the Shield Charm. Hermione had drilled it into him in the common room every single night for a fortnight before the Quidditch final. 'I'm not losing you to a man with a knife,' she had said. A shimmering wall burst out of the end of Harry's wand. It hung in the

air between them, silvery-blue and faintly humming, just as the creature sprang.

It hit the shield at full stretch. The shield rang. Harry felt the jolt right up to his shoulder.

The werewolf was flung backwards. It flew ten feet through the air, hit the ground, rolled over and came up on all fours.

It threw back its head and roared. The fur stood up along its spine in a ridge. The raw burn on its muzzle split open and began to bleed. Then it hurled itself at the shield again.

This time the shield held it, just. The creature hung there against it, snarling, so close that its breath fogged the shimmering surface. It looked at Harry through it.

Then it raised one hand and began to claw at the shield.

The noise was like fingernails dragged down a blackboard, only a hundred times louder. It went straight through Harry's teeth. The claws dug in. A chunk of the shield came away under them, a jagged piece of light the size of a dinner plate. It fell glittering into the grass, where it faded and went out.

Harry poured everything he had into the charm. His arm shook. His whole body shook. The shield shuddered and thickened for a moment, then thinned again.

Another chunk came away. Then another. It went on tearing pieces off the shield, in no hurry at all. There were holes in it now. The shield was shrinking. It covered his chest, then only his face. One black claw came through a gap and stopped, quivering, an inch from his right eye.

It was then that Harry knew he was going to die.

He knew somewhere underneath all the screaming going on in his head. He was going to die here, on the grass, with the castle windows in plain sight up the hill. After Quirrell and the basilisk,

after everything, it was going to be Lupin who did it. He was thirteen years old. He was never going to tell Black about the Dursleys now. Hermione was going to watch it happen. His mother had died for him in Godric's Hollow, and it had all been for nothing, because he was going to die anyway, on a lawn, in the dark.

His face was wet. He didn't care.

'Please,' he whispered. He didn't know who he was saying it to.

The last of the shield began to give.

Then, across the lawn, Harry heard a voice.

It was hoarse and broken. It sounded as though its owner had blood in his mouth. Harry turned his eyes, without moving his head, and saw Black. He had got up on to his knees in the grass, twenty feet away. His face was running with blood in the moonlight. His hands were clasped in front of him. The little wooden cross was dangling from his fist.

'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,' Black was saying, 'I will fear no evil, for thou art with me-'

Then Black wasn't there.

A great black dog came hurtling out of the place where he had knelt. It came across the grass like a thrown spear. It hit the creature in the side just as the shield shattered, and the two of them went crashing away together into the dark.

Harry lay where he was for a moment, with the broken charm still fizzing feebly at the end of his wand. Then he rolled over and pushed himself up. He didn't know how he did it. His ribs screamed. His leg buckled under him once before it held.

Twenty yards down the slope, the dog and the creature were tearing at each other.

It should have been over in a second. The dog was huge, as dogs went, the size of a bear itself, but next to the creature it looked like a

terrier going for a carthorse. It didn't seem to know that. It flew at the creature's arm and sank its teeth in up to the gums. The werewolf tore it loose and flung it away. The dog hit the grass, rolled and came straight back, going for the throat this time. The creature's claws raked down its back. Harry heard the dog yelp. Then it was in again, snarling, low and fast, snapping at the great legs.

They rolled over on the grass, locked together, so that Harry couldn't tell where the black fur ended and the grey began. Claws flashed in the moonlight. Fur flew. Blood spattered dark across the silver lawn.

Yet the creature didn't kill it.

Harry saw that. Somewhere far back in his head, he heard Lupin in the Shack. *In their animal form, my war form would tolerate my friends.* It could have killed the dog ten times over. Twice he saw the great jaws open right above the dog's neck. Twice they closed on nothing. The creature would fling the dog off, howl at it and then, instead of finishing it, simply wait for it to come back.

Harry stood and stared. He was swaying on his feet. Blood was dripping off his fingers. More of it was running down his leg into his trainer. He couldn't look away. He didn't notice anything else at all.

'Harry- oh, Harry, your *arm*-'

Hermione had run to him. Her wand hung forgotten from her fingers. Her hands were on his face, then on his arm, then on his ribs, so that he gasped. She seemed to be checking all of him at once, as if to make sure it was still there.

'You're bleeding everywhere, it touched you, it *touched* you-'

'I'm all right,' said Harry. He wasn't. 'It's only my arm, Hermione. I've got another one.'

Then she looked past him. She screamed.

Harry whipped round.

All through the fight, Pettigrew had been lying curled up in the grass, keening to himself. He wasn't curled up any longer. He must have been waiting for exactly this, for the moment when nobody at all was watching him. He had clawed the gag down off his mouth. Now he flung himself forward across the grass on his belly, dragging Ron with him by the chain, towards the place where Lupin had changed.

Lupin's wand was still lying there.

Ron was dragged sideways. His bandaged leg gave way under him. He fell heavily.

Pettigrew's hand closed on the wand.

There was a bang and a burst of light. Ron jerked once and lay still. Crookshanks came flying out of the grass at Pettigrew, spitting. There was a second bang. The cat was flung high into the air and dropped back to the ground in a limp ginger heap.

'*Expelliarmus!*' Harry yelled.

His own wand was pointing at Pettigrew. Lupin's wand leapt out of Pettigrew's hand, spun high into the night and vanished somewhere out of sight.

'Stay where you are!' Harry shouted. He was running, or doing something like running, lurching forward on his torn leg.

He was too late.

Pettigrew had changed. A naked pink tail whipped through the empty cuff at the end of Ron's chain. Harry heard a tiny scurrying sound, away through the long grass. Then there was nothing.

Behind him there was a howl, and then a deep, rumbling growl. Harry spun round.

The werewolf was running.

It was bounding away from them on all fours, faster than any horse, towards the black wall of the Forbidden Forest. As it ran, its

shape seemed to fold down and lengthen. What reached the trees could never have stood upright. It was a wolf the size of a pony.

Harry would wonder, afterwards, what had made it go. In the middle of that howl he thought he had heard something that sounded very like a man sobbing.

'Sirius, he's gone, Pettigrew transformed!' Harry yelled.

The dog was lying in the grass where the creature had left it. It was bleeding badly. There were deep gashes across its muzzle and along its back. At Harry's words, though, it heaved itself up on to its paws. A moment later it was gone, streaking away across the grounds, and the thud of its paws died away into silence.

Harry and Hermione ran to Ron.

'What did he do to him?' Hermione whispered.

Ron's eyes were half open. His mouth hung slack. He was breathing, they could both hear him breathing, but when Harry bent over him there was no sign that Ron knew who he was.

'I don't know...'

Harry looked round wildly. Black was gone. Lupin was gone. There was nobody left with them except Snape, who was still hanging in the air a few yards from Ron, unconscious, turning very gently in the breeze.

'We'd better get them up to the castle and tell someone,' said Harry. He dragged a hand across his face. He tried to make his brain work. 'Come-'

Then, from somewhere out in the darkness, they heard a yelping. It was a whining, howling noise, a dog in pain...

'Sirius,' Harry muttered. He stared out into the dark.

For a moment he hovered, torn in two. Ron was beyond any help they could give him for the present. Black sounded as if he were dying. Harry started to run. Hermione came pounding after him.

It hurt. Every stride hurt. His leg was on fire. His side was full of knives. He ran on anyway, downhill, after the yelping, which seemed to come from somewhere down by the water. Harry flung himself at the slope as fast as his legs would go. The air was growing colder around him with every step. He didn't stop to wonder why.

The yelping stopped.

Then they reached the lake, and they could see the reason.

Sirius was a man again. He was crouched in the grass at the water's edge, with his arms wrapped over his head. The string at his throat had snapped somewhere in the fight. The cross was gone.

'Nooo,' he moaned. 'Noooo... please...'

Harry could hear other words too, muttered underneath, broken and very fast. '...let him go... I let him go again... my fault... my fault...'

And then Harry saw them.

Dementors. There must have been a hundred of them, or more, sweeping round the curve of the shore in a single black swarm. Harry whirled about. The old cold was seeping into him, deep into his stomach. A fog was rising behind his eyes. More of them were drifting out of the night wherever he looked. They were making a ring.

'Hermione, think of something happy!' Harry yelled.

He lifted his wand. He blinked furiously to clear his sight. He shook his head hard, as if he could shake out the thin, far-off screaming that had begun inside it.

Something happy.

He grabbed at the first thing he could find. It was Black's face in the tunnel, an hour ago, breaking into that smile. *Have you got a house? When can I move in?* But he couldn't move in. He was going

back to Privet Drive at the end of term, and the smile went out like a match.

He grabbed at the Cup instead: Wood sobbing on his shoulder, with half of Gryffindor pouring on to the pitch. For a moment it was there. Then a howl went straight through the middle of it, and it was gone.

He reached for the Ravenclaw match, where he had done it before, with real silver pouring out of him. He reached for how that had felt.

It wasn't there either.

All that came was a pair of flat yellow eyes, with a black claw quivering in front of them. Then he saw a single human tooth, lying in the grass.

Something derived from God, Lupin had said, *and from your own soul. The two have to meet in you.* At the match, Harry had very nearly believed him.

But what sort of God would make a thing like that?

Lupin was the kindest grown-up Harry had ever met. Lupin prayed when he thought nobody was looking. Walking up the lawn, he had asked God to defend them all from the perils and dangers of this night. A few minutes later he had begged God, out loud, to deliver him from evil. God had let it happen anyway. God had let it tear its way out of him, bone by bone, while he screamed. Snape said the Garou believed they were soldiers. Soldiers for who? If that was what fought on the good side, Harry didn't want to see the other.

Then there were the dementors. Lupin had talked about *whatever it was that first thought of making dementors*, as though that were somebody else. But if God had made everything, he had made those too. Who would make a thing that ate happiness? Who would let a hundred of them loose round a lake on a summer night? Sirius had

sworn they stopped coming for him in Azkaban, once he believed. Here was Sirius, who had prayed his way out of Azkaban, down on his knees. Here they came anyway.

Maybe Sirius had only been lucky. Maybe there wasn't anybody up there at all. Maybe the church at the end of Magnolia Crescent was just a building with yew trees round it and a noticeboard about a jumble sale. Maybe there was only the dark, with the things that lived in it.

Lupin's cross was in his pocket. It was a stick of wood.

Something went cold inside Harry that had nothing to do with the dementors.

'*Expecto patronum!* Hermione, help me! *Expecto patronum!*'

His wand gave a sort of cough. A puff of silver mist trickled out of the end of it, wavered and fell apart.

'*Expecto-*' Hermione whispered, '*expecto- expecto-*'

But she couldn't do it.

The dementors drew nearer. They were ten feet off now, no more. They stood shoulder to shoulder round the pair of them like a black hedge, and the hedge was shrinking...

'*EXPECTO PATRONUM!*' Harry yelled. He was trying to drown out the screaming in his ears. '*EXPECTO PATRONUM!*'

A thin wisp of silver came out of his wand. It hung in front of him like mist over water.

Beside him, in the same instant, Hermione folded up and slid to the ground.

He was alone. He was completely alone...

'*Expecto- expecto patronum-*'

His knees struck the wet grass. Everything was going white. He dragged his mind round, by main force, to the one good thing he had left.

Sirius was innocent- innocent- We'll be OK-

He clung to it. He made himself believe it, for just as long as it took to say the words.

'*Expecto patronum!*' he gasped.

In the faint glimmer of the shapeless thing he had made, Harry saw one dementor pull up short, almost on top of him. The thin silver haze was holding it back. It couldn't pass. A dead, slimy hand came out from under the black cloak. It flapped at the mist, as though it meant to sweep it aside.

'No - no -' Harry gasped. 'He's innocent... *expecto- expecto patronum-*'

They were all looking at him; he could feel it. Their breathing rattled round him like a draught from a cellar. The one in front of him had gone still, as if it were making up its mind. Then both its rotting hands came up. They took hold of its hood and drew it back.

It had no eyes. Where they ought to have been, a thin grey crust of skin was drawn tight across two hollows. It did have a mouth, though... a shapeless, slack-lipped hole, which drew in the air with the wet gurgle of a dying man.

Terror locked every muscle in Harry's body. He could not have moved or made a sound to save his life. The little silver mist guttered and died.

The white fog had swallowed him. *Fight*, he told himself. *Expecto patronum...* He was blind. A long way off, the old screaming had started up again, the screaming he knew by heart. *Expecto patronum...* He felt about in the fog for Sirius. His hand closed on a bony wrist. *They can't have him. They can't...*

Then two cold, damp, powerful hands clamped round Harry's throat. They tipped his head back. They lifted his face towards the hole. It meant to take him first. Its breath was on his lips, thick and

foul. Inside his head his mother was screaming. *Please*, she was begging. It was the same word Harry had said himself, up on the lawn, to nobody at all. Her voice would be the last sound in his ears for ever-

Then, far off through the white fog, there seemed to be a light. It was silver. It was getting stronger...

The hands were gone. Harry pitched forward on to the grass.

He lay on his face, shaking, too sick and feeble to lift a finger. After a while he got his eyes open. The grass in front of his nose was blazing white... His mother had fallen silent. The cold was ebbing out of him... Something out there was pushing the dementors away. It was wheeling round him, round Sirius and Hermione, in a great bright circle... They were retreating... Warmth was creeping back into the night...

Harry dragged his head up off the ground. It was the hardest thing he had ever done. In the heart of the brightness he saw some kind of animal, going away from him at a gallop over the surface of the lake... Sweat was stinging his eyes. He squinted after it through his cracked lens... It shone like a unicorn...

He fought to keep his eyes open. He watched it slow to a trot on the other side of the water, then stop. In its glow, for just a moment, he could see that someone was waiting there for it... a figure, putting out a hand to stroke its neck... a figure he almost seemed to know... but that was impossible...

It made no sense. Harry's thoughts were coming apart. What strength he had left drained out of him all at once. His cheek dropped back on to the grass, and everything went black.