

Suspense

Harry looked up at the tunnel ceiling. Huge cracks had appeared in it. He had never tried to break apart anything as large as those rocks by magic, and now it didn't seem a good moment to try—what if the whole tunnel caved in?

There was another thud and another 'ow!' from behind the rocks. They were wasting time. Ginny had already been in the Chamber of Secrets for hours. Harry knew there was only one thing to do.

"Wait there," he called to Ron. "Wait with Lockhart. I'll go on. If I'm not back in an hour ..."

There was a very pregnant pause.

"I'll try and shift some of these rocks," said Ron, who seemed to be trying to keep his voice steady. "So you can—can get back through. And Harry—"

"See you in a bit," said Harry, trying to inject some confidence into his shaking voice.

And he set off alone past the giant snake skin.

Soon the distant noise of Ron straining to shift the rocks was gone. The tunnel turned and turned again. Every nerve in Harry's body was tingling unpleasantly. He wanted the tunnel to end, yet dreaded what he'd find when it did. And then, at last, as he crept around yet another bend, he saw a solid wall ahead on which two entwined serpents were carved, their eyes set with great glinting emeralds.

Harry approached, his throat very dry. There was no need to pretend these stone snakes were real, their eyes looked strangely alive.

He could guess what he had to do. He cleared his throat, and the emerald eyes seemed to flicker.

"Open," said Harry, in a low, faint hiss.

The serpents parted as the wall cracked open, the halves slid smoothly out of site, and Harry, shaking from head to foot, walked inside.