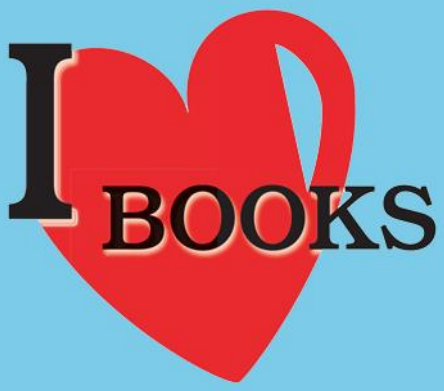


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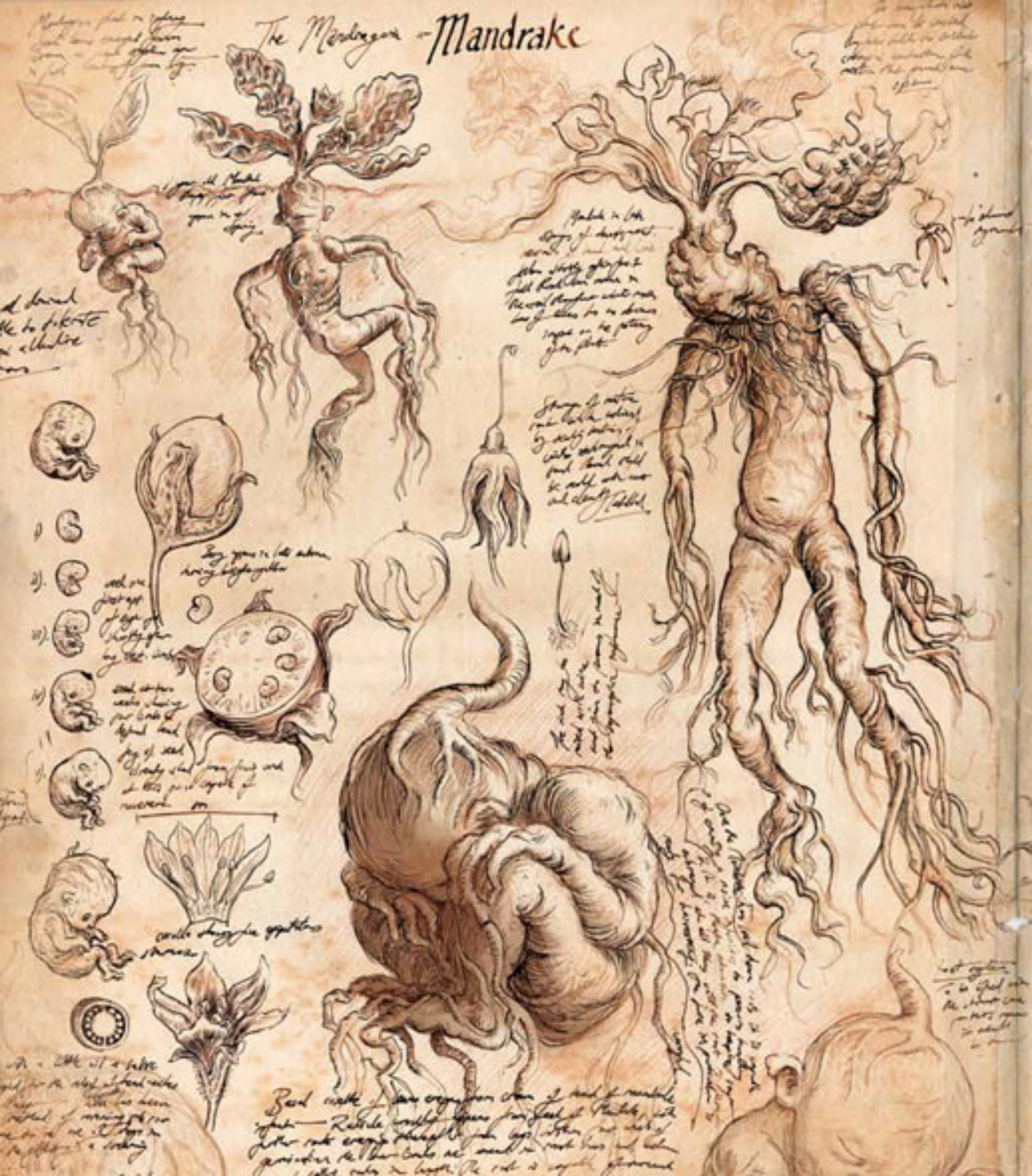
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She gave a sharp slap to a spiky, dark red plant as she spoke, making it draw in the long feelers that had been inching sneakily over her shoulder.

Harry, Ron and Hermione were joined at their tray by a curly-haired Hufflepuff boy Harry knew by sight, but had never spoken to. 'Justin Finch-Fletchley,' he said brightly, shaking Harry by the hand. 'Know who you are, of course, the famous Harry Potter … and you're Hermione Granger – always top in everything …' (Hermione beamed as she had her hand shaken, too) 'and Ron Weasley. Wasn't that your flying car?'

Ron didn't smile. The Howler was obviously still on his mind.

'That Lockhart's something, isn't he?' said Justin happily, as they began filling their plant pots with dragon-dung compost. 'Awfully brave chap. Have you read his books? I'd have died of fear if I'd been cornered in a telephone box by a werewolf, but he stayed cool and – zap – just *fantastic*.

'My name was down for Eton, you know, I can't tell you how glad I am I came here instead. Of course, mother was slightly disappointed, but since I made her read Lockhart's books I think she's begun to see how useful it'll be to have a fully trained wizard in the family …'

After that they didn't have much chance to talk. Their earmuffs were back on and they needed to concentrate on the Mandrakes. Professor Sprout had made it look extremely easy, but it wasn't. The Mandrakes didn't like coming out of the earth, but didn't seem to want to go back into it either. They squirmed, kicked, flailed their sharp little fists and gnashed their teeth; Harry spent ten whole minutes trying to squash a particularly fat one into a pot.

By the end of the class, Harry, like everyone else, was sweaty, aching and covered in earth. They traipsed back to the castle for a quick wash and then the Gryffindors hurried off to Transfiguration.

Professor McGonagall's classes were always hard work, but today was especially difficult. Everything Harry had learned last year seemed to have leaked out of his head during the summer. He was supposed to be turning a beetle into a button, but all he managed to do was give his beetle a lot of exercise as it scuttled over the desk top avoiding his wand.

Ron was having far worse problems. He had patched up his wand with some borrowed Spellotape, but it seemed to be damaged beyond repair. It kept crackling and sparking at odd moments, and every time Ron tried to transfigure his beetle it engulfed him in thick grey smoke which smelled of rotten eggs. Unable to see what he was doing, Ron accidentally squashed his beetle with his elbow and had to ask for a new one. Professor McGonagall wasn't pleased.

Harry was relieved to hear the lunch bell.

corridor he came across somebody who looked just as preoccupied as he was. Nearly Headless Nick, the ghost of Gryffindor Tower, was staring morosely out of a window, muttering under his breath, '… don't fulfil their requirements … half an inch, if that …'

'Hello, Nick,' said Harry.

'Hello, hello,' said Nearly Headless Nick, starting and looking round. He wore a dashing, plumed hat on his long curly hair, and a tunic with a ruff, which concealed the fact that his neck was almost completely severed. He was pale as smoke, and Harry could see right through him to the dark sky and torrential rain outside.

'You look troubled, young Potter,' said Nick, folding a transparent letter as he spoke and tucking it inside his doublet.

'So do you,' said Harry.

'Ah,' Nearly Headless Nick waved an elegant hand, 'a matter of no importance … it's not as though I really wanted to join … thought I'd apply, but apparently I "don't fulfil requirements".'

In spite of his airy tone, there was a look of great bitterness on his face.

'But you would think, wouldn't you,' he erupted suddenly, pulling the letter back out of his pocket, 'that getting hit forty-five times in the neck with a blunt axe would qualify you to join the Headless Hunt?'

'Oh – yes,' said Harry, who was obviously supposed to agree.

'I mean, nobody wishes more than I do that it had all been quick and clean, and my head had come off properly, I mean, it would have saved me a great deal of pain and ridicule. However …' Nearly Headless Nick shook his letter open and read furiously.

'We can only accept huntsmen whose heads have parted company with their bodies. You will appreciate that it would be impossible otherwise for members to participate in hunt activities such as Horseback Head-Juggling and Head Polo. It is with the greatest regret, therefore, that I must inform you that you do not fulfil our requirements. With very best wishes, Sir Patrick Delaney-Podmore.'

Fuming, Nearly Headless Nick stuffed the letter away.

'Half an inch of skin and sinew holding my neck on, Harry! Most people would think that's good and beheaded, but oh no, it's not enough for Sir Properly Decapitated-Podmore.'

Nearly Headless Nick took several deep breaths and then said, in a far calmer tone, 'So – what's bothering you? Anything I can do?'

'No,' said Harry. 'Not unless you know where we can get seven free Nimbus Two Thousand and Ones for our match against Sly–'

The rest of Harry's sentence was drowned by a high-pitched mewing from somewhere near his ankles. He looked down and found himself gazing into a pair of lamp-like

yellow eyes. It was Mrs Norris, the skeletal grey cat who was used by the caretaker, Argus Filch, as a sort of deputy in his endless battle against students.

'You'd better get out of here, Harry,' said Nick quickly. 'Filch isn't in a good mood. He's got flu and some third-years accidentally plastered frog brains all over the ceiling in dungeon five; he's been cleaning all morning, and if he sees you dripping mud all over the place …'

'Right,' said Harry, backing away from the accusing stare of Mrs Norris, but not quickly enough. Drawn to the spot by the mysterious power that seemed to connect him with his foul cat, Argus Filch burst suddenly through a tapestry to Harry's right, wheezing and looking wildly about for the rule-breaker. There was a thick tartan scarf bound around his head, and his nose was unusually purple.

'Filth!' he shouted, his jowls aquiver, his eyes popping alarmingly as he pointed at the muddy puddle that had dripped from Harry's Quidditch robes. 'Mess and muck everywhere! I've had enough of it, I tell you! Follow me, Potter!'

So Harry waved a gloomy goodbye to Nearly Headless Nick, and followed Filch back downstairs, doubling the number of muddy footprints on the floor.

Harry had never been inside Filch's office before; it was a place most students avoided. The room was dingy and windowless, lit by a single oil lamp dangling from the low ceiling. A faint smell of fried fish lingered about the place. Wooden filing cabinets stood around the walls; from their labels, Harry could see that they contained details of every pupil Filch had ever punished. Fred and George Weasley had an entire drawer to themselves. A highly polished collection of chains and manacles hung on the wall behind Filch's desk. It was common knowledge that he was always begging Dumbledore to let him suspend students by their ankles from the ceiling.

Filch grabbed a quill from a pot on his desk and began shuffling around looking for parchment.

'Dung,' he muttered furiously, 'great sizzling dragon bogies … frog brains … rat intestines … I've had enough of it … make an *example* … where's the form … yes …'

He retrieved a large roll of parchment from his desk drawer and stretched it out in front of him, dipping his long black quill into the ink pot.

'*Name* … Harry Potter. *Crime* …'

'It was only a bit of mud!' said Harry.

'It's only a bit of mud to you, boy, but to me it's an extra hour scrubbing!' shouted Filch, a drip shivering unpleasantly at the end of his bulbous nose. '*Crime* … befouling the castle … *suggested sentence* …'

Dabbing at his streaming nose, Filch squinted unpleasantly at Harry, who waited with bated breath for his sentence to fall.

But as Filch lowered his quill, there was a great BANG! on the ceiling of the office,


THE PHOENIX LIVES TO AN IMMENSE AGE AS IT CAN REGENERATE, BURSTING INTO FLAMES WHEN ITS BODY BEGINS TO FAIL AND RISING AGAIN FROM THE ASHES AS A CHICK.
PHOENIX EGGS ARE GLOSSY GREEN OR BLUE IN COLOUR. THEY REQUIRE NO INCUBATION BUT MAY NOT HATCH FOR SEVERAL YEARS. PHOENIXES ARE NOTORIOUSLY TRICKY BIRDS TO RAISE OR DOMESTICATE, LARGELY DUE TO THEIR UNCANNY ABILITY TO VANISH AT WILL.
PHOENIX SONG IS UNMISTAKABLE: MUSICAL, HAUNTING AND VERY LOUD. IT IS REPUTED TO INCREASE THE COURAGE OF THE PURE OF HEART AND TO STRIKE FEAR INTO THE HEARTS OF THE IMPURE.
FEMALE
PHOENIXES WILL REGURGITATE INDIGESTIBLE PLANT MATERIAL AS PELLETS. THESE ARE HIGHLY SOUGHT AFTER BOTH FOR THEIR MEDICINAL PROPERTIES AND FOR THE PECULIAR APPEARANCE OF GEMSTONES WITHIN.
THESE RARE STONES OR "PHOENIX FLINT" ARE SAID TO AFFORD PROTECTION FROM COLD IN HIGH PLACES TO THOSE WHO WEAR THEM.
MALE
PHOENIX TEARS HAVE POWERFUL HEALING PROPERTIES.
'PHOENIX FLINT'
PHOENIX FEATHERS POSSESS MAGICAL PROPERTIES AND ARE EMPLOYED IN THE MANUFACTURE OF WANDS, STAFFS & AMULETS.
THE VANE FEATHERS EMIT A FAINT LIGHT. TAIL FEATHERS ARE HOT TO THE TOUCH.
THE PHOENIX

RUBEUS



HAGRID