

Disclaimer: Do I look like JKR? Then I don't own Harry Potter.

Summary: This is the sequel to "First Day of class" where Sirius was never arrested and was able to adopt Harry at the age of 18 months. Harry lived with the Dursleys for six months then little over a year with his godfather when Sirius gets an invitation from Dumbledore to take over Professor Binns' classes.

A/N: So many people begged me for a sequel that I ended up having ideas! I should be angry at you people giving me ideas! Now look at the result: another fic. Well, water under the bridge.

SPOILER ALERT: This is of course an absolute and utter AU by the mere fact that I am no JK Rowling but there may be parts of Deathly Hallows spread through the story. I will follow some canon but I will change a lot, especially after book 3. I see a lot of things happening quite differently if Harry had parents and especially had been brought up at Hogwarts, especially on book 7. Also I started writing this before book 7 came out and had already planned most of it and I don't intend to change that so there are things that will obviously not be canon compliant. So if you haven't read Deathly Hallows, bookmark this page, write the URL on a piece of paper, add to story alert but DO NOT start reading before you read the final book. Please.

I also beg that any review containing spoilers for book 7 be marked as having Spoilers quite plainly and big on the heading so if a reader likes to read reviews they will be warned.

Enjoy

PadyandMoony

The name is Potter *Black!*

By PadyandMoony

Chapter 1

An official student

Harry James Potter Black was making his awed way through the barrier between platforms 9 and 10. He had heard stories of course, but had never ridden the train, never set foot on platform 9 and 3/4. His father had been reluctant but Harry had begged and begged and was granted the right to reach the school as any other student would.

At 10:30 he took a portkey that Grandpa, *no*, Professor Dumbledore, he would have to remember, had prepared for him and Uncle Moony. His father had to prepare for the arrival of the students. His father was the deputy Head of Gryffindor. Gryffindor was the only house that had one, but since Aunt Minnie, Professor McGonagall *Harry*, had her deputy Headmistress obligations as well as Head of House, she had gladly accepted Sirius's help one year when Grandpa had been affected by an awful case of the flu, and

she had had to run the school for a few weeks that had taken him to recover, he wasn't twenty anymore after all. Harry had been seven and had taken care of Grandpa refusing to leave his bedside until the aged Headmaster was well again. Uncle Albus had become Grandpa over the first year that Harry had lived at Hogwarts. He was four when he announced very seriously at the staff table one night that Uncle was just wrong for him and from then on he'd be Grandpa. Only one person at the table managed to not burst in laughter and even he had a sneer on his face that Harry had learned to interpret as being highly amused.

Harry had grown up at Hogwarts being raised by his adoptive father, Sirius Black and his Uncle Moony. Harry couldn't go to the Wizarding School at Hogsmead because in the beginning there were still Death Eaters at large so Grandpa had arranged for Harry to be tutored by Remus Lupin, Uncle Moony, at Hogwarts. Remus had first lived in his own quarters but unable to resist his friend's and his nephew's puppy eyes (which Remus was sure Sirius had coached Harry into) moved to the Black family's quarters. During the summer they lived at N° 12 Grimmauld Place, the house that Sirius grew up in. Sirius inherited the house when Harry was four and his mother died. He had half his mind to torch the place but Remus pointed out that with his father's securities measures and a few added from Dumbledore there would be no safer dwelling except for maybe Hogwarts and so they had spent the better part of a summer cleaning the House from any dangerous Black artifacts and painting it so that it didn't remind Sirius of what the house was while he was growing up. Their hardest job had been a painting of his mother that wouldn't stop screaming until Harry showed up and said "hello Grandma" and the woman couldn't stop cooing at her new grandson. Sirius was quite horrified but had to relent at leaving the painting nonetheless. But he didn't keep the House-elf. Since the old elf almost had a coronary at the possibility of being freed Sirius donated him to Hogwarts' staff. He was still bound to the Black family but worked in the Hogwarts kitchen.

"Harry," came a cry from the crowd and Harry spotted Ron Weasley waving at him. Ron and Ginny had started being tutored by Remus two years ago when the twins had started Hogwarts. Mrs. Weasley had had an offer to work at the school in Hogsmead but there were no vacancies for her two younger children and she was about to reject the offer when Dumbledore offered her Remus' services. They had been worried about Harry never being around children his own age and this solved both families' problems. So when she apparated to work every day Mrs. Weasley took her youngest children to Hogwarts.

"Ron!" Harry waved and ran to his friends, "Hello Ginny, Mrs. Weasley."

"Hello Harry, Remus, excited?" Mrs. Weasley asked and Harry nodded.

"I so wanted to be going too," Ginny mumbled.

"Ginny, you'll be at Hogwarts every day in my classes or am I not enough?" Remus asked his lips twitching

"No it's not that Professor. I just wanted to be an official student too," she hurried to apologize.

"I know," he chuckled.

"I think it's best for you to look for a compartment, the twins and Percy have already boarded," Mrs. Weasley said turning to Harry and Ron she gave each a hug and said, "And mind you behave yourselves, I don't want any owls telling me you are up to no good like the twins." She finished sternly and both boys nodded. Harry decide to refrain from letting her know that his father had stocked him with products from Zonko's behind uncle Moony's back. Parents and parents that were teachers weren't supposed to do that. Of course Harry had also conveniently forgotten to tell his father about the products from Zonko's and detailed instructions Uncle Moony gave him behind Sirius's back. Not that Harry had many plans for pranks, he wasn't much of a prankster but he had all the intentions to pass products and instructions to the twins who would be more than happy to give them good use. They said goodbye to Ginny and Remus helped both boys in one of the empty compartments.

"See you both at the sorting," he said with a smile but his smile faltered at the horrified look on Harry's face. He knelt and looked at his nephew, "Harry."

"What if I get sorted into Slytherin? Dad will hate me! He'll give me back!"

"No he won't," he tried to stop Harry from building into hysterics.

"What if I am a squib and they say I can't be sorted anywhere?"

"We both had many proof during the years that that is not the case, I recall once when you stole your father's wand and the whole Great Hall was covered with cotton candy."

"That was so good," Ron said with a dreamy expression rubbing his stomach.

Harry was looking a little calmer but still uncertain, the train started to whistle and Remus knew he had to live.

He hugged the boy and said, "Everything will be just fine and Sirius and I will love you no matter what okay? Okay?" he insisted until the boy gave him a rejected nod. Remus ran out of the compartment and had to jump on the platform as the train was leaving. He saw the train leave and Harry and Ron wave. Ginny ran after the train until it disappeared from view. He said goodbye and apparated to Hogwarts, he needed to have a serious talk with his friend and make sure Sirius would not overreact if Harry was sorted somewhere else other than Gryffindor.

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Professor Black was getting his office in order. Pilling lessons plan and sorting through the call sheets. "Professor Black," he snorted. Ever since he took this job he never stopped imagining James reaction and teasing. Not that he had to imagine much, Remus had been merciless in the teasing department. The infamous Sirius Black joining what he had named "the enemy" in his school years. Handing detentions (not that he handed as many as lets say, Snape or McGonagall), disciplining students. But

nevertheless Sirius loved his job. He had been an Auror and had never thought of doing anything else. He had accepted this job because of Harry, for his safety, but ended up in love. Sirius loved telling tales, having the class hanging on his every word. Making boring Goblin rebellions sound like the most amazing novel. There was a knock on his door and before he could answer his best friend and brother entered with a grim face. His heart sank, the first thought he had was that something had happened to Harry and he sprang to his feet.

"What happened? I knew it! I shouldn't have let him go! Too dangerous! Bunch of Death Eaters out there just waiting to get their grubby little hands on my baby!"

"What are you going on about?" Remus asked bewildered.

"You come in here like something happened and what am I going on about?" Sirius cried nervously.

"Nothing happened. Well, nothing dangerous happened," Remus sighed and sat down on one of the chairs in front of Sirius desk gesturing that his friend should do the same, "We need to talk."

Sirius sat down and waited with dread.

"Harry had a minor nervous breakdown right before the train departed about how you would hate him and give him back, I have no idea to whom, I imagine the Dursleys,-"

"I'd never do that! He knows that!"

"Will you let me finish," Remus said annoyed, "that you would hate him if he was sorted into Slytherin. Now I assured him that you would not have a problem with that," he finished giving Sirius a penetrating look.

"He won't be," Sirius snorted.

"And if he was?"

"He won't, he'll be a Gryffindor."

"I am not that sure. Harry does have Gryffindor qualities but he also has qualities from the other houses too. He is fiercely loyal, Hufflepuff," Remus started ticking with his fingers, "he is very smart, Ravenclaw, and he is quite cunning, Slytherin." Sirius flinched at this, "And unlike you or Snape for that matter Harry doesn't have prejudices against the houses he sees both qualities and flaws in all of them. His fear comes from knowing that you despise Slytherin."

"Hey, I am not like Snape, I have never discriminated Slytherin students."

Remus nodded, "True, you are able to leave your dislike outside of your work. But you do despise Slytherin, they do represent what you worked hard to distance yourself from. Your family's dark past," he finished with a raised eyebrow.

Sirius sighed and ran his hand through his face.

"I love Harry," he bit his lips, "I love him like he was my own, since he was born. I used to feel guilty because I had been jealous of James for being his father and then James wasn't there anymore and I had Harry at the expense of his life." He shook his head to get rid of sad thoughts.

"You know that's not true, you would have given your life to save James if you could," Remus said leaning forward on his chair and putting a calming hand on his friend's knee.

"I know," he took a deep breath; "I won't lie to you, if he were to be a Slytherin it wouldn't be easy for me to digest, but I will always love and be proud of him."

"That's all I am asking of you," Remus said smiling.

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Ron and Harry were in the middle of stuffing their faces with chocolate frogs and Bertie Bot's Every flavor beans when a bushy haired girl entered their compartment looking for a toad. She looked at them with mild disgust at their lack of eating manners and introduced herself as Hermione Granger. Before they could even say their names she was telling them how she was muggleborn, her parents dentists and citing all the books she had already read in one breath. When she finished Ron said faintly.

"Ron Weasley," and she turned to Harry and spotting his scar very bluntly said.

"You're Harry Potter!"

"Yes thank you for informing me and it's Harry Potter Black," he answered annoyed. Two things he hated were his fame and people not acknowledging his dad.

"I read all about you," she said exited.

"I highly doubt that because I never gave any interview so anything you read is speculation," he said shortly.

She was a little taken aback but was not to be deterred, "I read you vanquished You-Know-Who, and-"

"My mum vanquished *Voldemort* when she gave her life for me. My dad explained it to me a few years back."

"I though your father was dead," she said bluntly. The nerve! No tact what so ever.

"My first dad, James died to save me, I was adopted by his best friend Sirius Black and am now his son," he said through gritted teeth. Ron sensing his friend discomfort tried to tell Hermione as politely as he knew how to, which wasn't very:

"Harry doesn't like to talk about what happened so drop it."

Hermione huffed and said, "You better change, we're almost there." And she stalked away leaving two dumbfound boys.

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Sirius was fidgeting on his chair. He had already received dirty looks from all the teachers, including his best friend for his lack of professorial behavior. After what felt like an eternity McGonagall finally came in leading the first years and in the middle of them was his little Harry. He was smaller than the average first year, Madam Pomfrey had never been able to tell if his stunted growth had been because of the Dursleys' horrendous care for six very important months in a toddler's life or if that was from the failed killing curse. Harry was animatedly talking with his best friend and Sirius could imagine their plotting. Harry and Ron weren't prankster like him and James had been but they were no saints. You couldn't blink and they had run to the forest, or "borrowed" the school brooms for a nightly stroll when Ron spent the night.

The students stood in a line in front of the school and the hat gave them his yearly serenade. Not that Sirius was paying any attention. He was having a hard enough time not to get up and bring Harry to his customary chair in between of him and Moony at the staff table. He kept repeating in his head "He's a student now, that's his place. He's all grown up and before you know it he'll be graduating and meeting some woman that will throw his head off and convince him to elope with her and you'll never see your baby again. Get him and lock him up in his room till he's fifty!" he even gave a little jerk upwards until he reasoned, "No, that wouldn't work."

"Black, Harry James Potter," McGonagall called and Sirius jerked when he realized he had missed the start of the sorting. Harry sat on the stool for a long time. Sirius was sweating, what was taking so long? After what seemed like an eternity the hat cried "Gryffindor!" and Sirius sagged in relief. He immediately burst into applause and smiled widely at his son who gave him a little wave before joining his table. He saw from the corner of his eyes Oliver Wood's yelp of "Yes!" and knew him and McGonagall would be cornered tonight for a possible review in the first year on the team rule. Oliver had had his eye on Harry since he first saw Harry flying on his own first year and had trained Harry for the seeker position ever since. When reminded that he could be training the opposition Oliver brushed them off saying Harry would be a Gryffindor.

Sirius turned with a smile to his best friend and couldn't help but snort at Remus' delighted face. No matter what Remus had preached Sirius knew that his friend had also hoped for Gryffindor.

When Minerva sat down Sirius couldn't help the comment, "Too bad you're going to have to say good bye to that shiny cup in your office Severus."

Snape narrowed his eyes and hissed, "Why would I?"

"Come on, not even you can deny Harry's talent as a seeker and since Charlie Weasley graduated Gryffindor hasn't had another permanent replacement," Remus said calmly.

"First years aren't aloud on the team," Snape sneered.

"Actually, as Mr. Wood was so kind to remind me in a lengthy letter this summer," McGonagall said and Sirius was impressed with Wood's fanaticism, "First years aren't allowed brooms but there's nothing in the rules concerning the House team. It's just a given that first years won't try for the teams. They can

use the school brooms, or lets say if some parent or alumni were to donate brooms for a certain team they could use those.”

Snape huffed and glared and Sirius was already thinking of the issue of Broom Weekly that he had in his quarters and his very large family vault.

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Harry dropped on his new bed with an exhausted sigh. He had wanted to talk to his dad but prefect Percy had ordered the first years to follow him. Like him and Ron couldn't go up to Gryffindor Tower with their eyes closed. Gryffindor! The hat had a hard time placing him, it said he would do well in any house but then it decided to go with the qualities Harry didn't have, he was clever, but not studious. He was loyal and hardworking but he was a little too reckless for Hufflepuff. He was cunning but not ambitious; he just wanted to make his very weird family proud, so no Slytherin. He was brave and daring. And as pointed out before, reckless, a prime flaw on Gryffindors. Harry smiled, if not for his dad and the fact that he wanted to be with Ron, he wouldn't have minded any house. He had friends in all of the Houses and knew for a fact that all the Houses had good and bad people. Peter Pettigrew had been a Gryffindor, and Aunt Andy a Slytherin. And he loved Aunt Andy. She spoiled him rotten.

Harry sighed and tried to sleep in this foreign bed, even being so exhausted and knowing his dad was in the same castle he was homesick. Weird thought!

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Hope you enjoyed the first chapter. This is my view of how Harry would have reacted differently to the situations he faced with an overprotective parent. Please let me know what you think.

Disclaimer: Do I look like JKR? Then I don't own Harry Potter.

Thanks for reviewing.

I also wanted to let everyone know a few things to expect from this story:

1- This isn't going to be full of angst. I suck at doing angst and action so I'll have to work around that to do this story. I am not just retyping JK Rowling's work because honestly I wouldn't be able to do her justice. I do this for amusement not work, so I write what pleases me.

2- This isn't just my view on how Harry would change but all of them around Harry. Sirius didn't go to Azkaban. Remus didn't spend most of his life alone and jobless. He also had a steady supply of Wolfsbane. Dumbledore may have been lonely most of his life but Harry wormed his way into his heart more closely and early than in Canon. I think this changes a lot of their attitudes from Canon.

3-My best is witty remarks and fluffy so there is going to be a lot of that.

Mainly: If you are looking for an action filled tragedy you can find some good ones on my favorites but not here. If you are looking for a light cute sort of comedy with some small angst you are very welcome and I hope I can be a relief in stressful days.

Chapter 2

What did you think of our classes?

Harry and Ron knew Hogwarts like the back of their hands. They knew the secret passages. They knew the ghosts and the house elves. They knew which steps to avoid and what day what stairway led where. They knew the teachers, or so they thought. Right in their first class they realized that sweet dear Aunt Minnie was strict Professor McGonagall. Harry wasn't naïve, he heard the stories about his Aunt Minnie from the older students but he'd always thought they were exaggerating, today he found out they weren't, and worst, she knew him and Ron like the back of *her* hand and was looking straight at them during parts of her no fooling around speech.

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"Good Morning Quineus. I hadn't had the chance to welcome you back," Sirius said brightly, "Found a way around the curse? Just take a year sabbatical between two years. You're the first to get a second

year on the position," he finished clapping Quirrell's shoulder and the Defense teacher gave a visible flinch

"Yes, Q-uite. If y-you'll excuse me-me I have to finish a c-class p-plan," Sirius frowned at Quirrell's retreating back. That was odd. Something really bad must have happened during last year for Quirrell to come back like that. He wasn't that fidgety and scared before. Quite the contrary. Sirius, of course, just like Snape would have loved the Defense position. But Dumbledore had explained why he wouldn't give it to either. The position had been cursed since Dumbledore refused to hire Voldemort many years ago and no teacher had stayed more than a year. Quirrell was the first to come back after he taught a year and left for another. Dumbledore wanted both Sirius and Snape permanently on the staff. Snape because Dumbledore didn't believe Voldemort was really dead, the curse still persisting was proof enough, and Snape's other services may be needed again. And Sirius because of Harry. Nonetheless Snape applied for the position every year. Sirius didn't bother, he liked his job and he wasn't about to jeopardize the chance of being around Harry all year long because of a teaching position.

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Another class where Harry was disappointed was Defense Against the Dark Arts. Harry had been eager to learn from Quirrell because of the stories he had heard from Oliver, Charlie, Cedric, Angelina, Marcus and many others about his classes two years ago, but now he was convinced they had all had a collective dream because this was utterly boring. Defense was one of Harry's favorite subjects. Unlike Ron, Harry had had extra classes with both his dad and Uncle Moony on the subject. They wanted Harry prepared to defend himself in case he needed. They were a little paranoid that way. His father even had his old boss Alastor Moody teaching Harry sometimes, and honestly he gave Harry the creeps. Finally at lunch time they met Ginny at the Gryffindor table. They usually had lunch with them because all the Weasley kids were Gryffindors so this was nothing new. She was all exited telling them how now that she was the only student Remus was going to speed up what she was learning and that she'd probably be able to see a lot of first year stuff anyway, except for potions, Remus was rubbish at potions. Harry had laughed when his dad, teasing his friend, gave him a cauldron with a big sign saying "This side up." Sirius had walked around with pink hair to the amusement of the students for a whole week.

Ginny had been talking to Hermione Granger who apparently was quite fascinated with the fact that someone that was not a student at the school had private tutoring at Hogwarts. Ginny of course, not wanting to spoil the moment that she knew Sirius was waiting for, forgot to mention that both Harry and Ron had had classes with her up until last year. Sirius had promised her photos and after all he did teach her that Bat Bogey hex that came in so handy when dealing with Fred and George.

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First Years had History of Magic as the first class on Tuesday morning and Sirius was grinning evilly. The little first years entered the class. Gryffindor and Ravenclaw. Now, of course there were a few that had older siblings and therefore already knew, but there were so many innocent little heads just waiting to cause mayhem and chaos.

"Good Morning class," he said.

"Good Morning," they all answered and he heard the usual "Oh, he's so handsome" that he always heard. Truth be told; he was quite vain and liked the swooning. He smirked at his son's gagging face. He had had several girlfriends during the years, never really finding one to settle down like James did. But they had never met Harry; he would only introduce one he felt that had some future, though Harry knew about his girlfriends. There was no way not to and he had a no lying to his son policy.

"Now, I am Professor Sirius Black," he said waving his wand and his name appeared in the Black board big as a house, "and I should start with the call sheet. He called the names and the students answered until he got to the name he wanted and paused for effect.

"Harry Potter...Black"

Harry raised his hand glaring daggers at his father. Whisper went through the class, Hermione could be heard, "Did he say Black?"

Years of experience had taught him that no matter how many times Harry yelled his whole name people stopped listening at Potter. He wanted to make sure the whole school and therefore their parents, especially the Death Eaters that weaseled their way out of Azkaban, knew that he was with his son everywhere. And even though the Daily Prophet proffered to tell people about Harry's life most of it was made up and rarely mentioned Sirius or what he did for a living. Making Harry become redder than Ron's hair was just an added bonus.

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Friday came and what Harry had always heard was confirmed. Professor Snape was the most horrible teacher ever. He tried to pick on Harry in front of the whole class and deducted points when Harry answered all the questions right for being cheeky. After class Harry told Ron to run ahead and stayed behind on the pretense of trying to talk Snape in giving the points back. After the last student left Snape waved his wand and the door was closed and Harry knew that a silencing charm had been put in place.

"Yes," Snape raised an eyebrow.

"That was harsh Uncle Sev," Harry raised an equal eyebrow.

Despite Sirius and Snape's differences which now a days were kept mostly for amusement then real rivalry, Harry through sheer child innocence and stubbornness had managed to warm his way through the cold Potions Master's heart.

"You know why," he answered.

"Yeah, I know, appearances," Harry sighed and then got to the point he wanted; "Did you do something to me during the feast?"

"How so?"

"My head hurt. Right here," he said pointing at his scar, "It was just a quick stab of pain, but weird. And I was looking at you at that moment."

Snape frowned and beckoned Harry closer.

"Did you tell your father?"

"No, I didn't want you two to fight," Harry said.

"I didn't do anything Harry. What was I doing when you felt the pain?"

Harry bit his lip in thought and answered, "Talking to Quirrell, he had his back to me."

Snape examined Harry's forehead but the scar was as white as ever, "If you feel pain again tell me, Sirius, Remus, Minerva or Albus immediately understood?"

Harry nodded, "What do you think happened?"

"I don't know but I don't like it. I'll talk to Sirius and Albus. We'll figure things out," he messed Harry's hair, "Now go and look appropriately downtrodden."

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"What do you mean his scar hurt?" Sirius cried annoyed.

"Exactly what I just said," Snape answered equally annoyed.

"Gentlemen, calm down," Dumbledore said calmly from behind his desk.

"What do you think this means? This has never happened before," Remus asked.

"Harry could have just had a headache," Dumbledore said.

"You don't believe that," Snape stated, "Exactly on his scar. Now, when we are guarding what we are guarding."

"No, I don't. Nevertheless Sirius should take Harry to Poppy for a check up. Just to be sure," Dumbledore said.

"Do you think Quirrell has something to do with this? He is the only unknown factor," Remus reasoned.

"I can't suspect Quineus just because of a child's headache," Dumbledore answered.

"But you can because he has been acting weird," Sirius said, "The other day I touched him and he almost jumped a mile. And he couldn't get away fast enough."

"Maybe the rumors are true and he encountered something that frightened him. He was just a scholar before. He didn't have any field experience," Dumbledore reasoned.

"But you are keeping an eye on him anyway aren't you?" Remus stated more than asked.

"Yes, I can't take chances. But I don't want to jump to conclusions. We did that once and if not for your extreme conviction on your friend Remus, Sirius would have been carted to Azkaban without

questioning. You are the sole reason that he never ended up there," Dumbledore said gravely and Sirius shuddered. He still remembered the questioning, the taste of Veritasserum and the Dementors that didn't leave his side until Crouch was satisfied of his innocence. He couldn't imagine years of that. A few hours still gave him nightmares at times.

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Ron and Harry had been enjoying an afternoon of chatting with Hagrid and avoiding his rock cakes when someone called at the door. When Hagrid opened he was met by the grinning face of one of his colleagues.

"Come in Sirius, want some cake?"

Sirius was about to refuse when Harry said, "He'd love some. Dad looooves cake."

Sirius glared at his son but as he sat at the table he was obliged to take one of the cakes.

They kept talking a while and when they said their goodbyes Sirius turned to his laughing son.

"Not funny Harry. I like my teeth thank you very much."

"That was payback. You know the harassment I had to endure? there was Lavender and Parvati 'Oh Harry your dad is so cute. How is he outside of class? What does he like?' and Hermione, 'Oh, Harry you must know loads. Do you think you can tutor me? Do you think your dad could?' A nightmare I tell you!" Sirius chuckled and turned to an equally chuckling Ron, "Ron can you go up to the Tower alone? I have to take Harry somewhere."

Ron looked at Harry who shrugged, "Okay, see you Harry" and left.

"Where are we going?"

"To see Poppy about your headache," Sirius answered leading the way. Harry groaned.

"But I'm okay dad! It was just a little headache. I shouldn't have said anything."

"Yes you should," Sirius said seriously, "And if your scar hurts again I want to know immediately understood."

"Yeah, yeah," Harry mumbled. At the Hospital Wing Madam Pomfrey examined Harry thoroughly but couldn't find anything wrong. At the end Harry was looking expectantly but nothing happened.

"Where's my candy?" he asked.

"You are a grown young man now Harry. Hogwarts' student. Candies are for small children," she said.

"But," he gaped and tried to give her his best puppy eyes.

"That doesn't work on me young man," she huffed, but then giggled, ruffled his hair and gave him a chocolate frog.

Exiting the Wing Sirius sighed, "I am so proud. A perfect Marauder."

Harry grinned and then remembering his talk with Hagrid asked his dad, "Dad, were they trying to break in the vault Hagrid emptied at Gringotts when we met him there on my birthday?"

Sirius stiffened, "Why would you think that?"

"So they were?"

"That's none of your business Harry."

"Yep, they were. You only avoid a question when you can't answer without lying to me."

Sirius knelt in front of his son and told him sternly, "Harry, this is not something you should know.

Please don't go digging in the subject. There's no need for you to worry about this subject."

Harry shrugged, "I was just curious dad. I won't go looking for any information, I promise."

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Snape was brooding. Something was off and he couldn't exactly pinpoint what. He knew Quirrell was up to no good but how to prove it. Harry's headache wasn't enough. He smiled. *Harry*. He still remembered the first time the child had tried to befriend him. He was three and had been at Hogwarts for a week. He came to him during dinner with a piece of parchment and handed it to him with a smile.

"What's this?" he'd sneered at the kid. The boy was a little taken aback but valiantly answered.

"A drawing for your dungeon."

"And what, pray tell, would I want a drawing for?"

"Cause Uncle Moony said you're grumpy because the dungeon is dark. So I made a drawing for you to put up and have colors and be less grumpy," he answered brightly and innocently.

Remus coughed. Sirius outright laughed. Albus patted Remus' back and Minerva had a hand covering her twitching lips.

Snape glared at Remus.

"Did he now? Well I don't need this," he tried to give the drawings back. But Harry wouldn't take it.

"No it's for you Uncle Sevvie," he said brightly and ran to his father side. Snape kept mouthing Uncle Sevvie and switching between gapping at the child and glaring at his so called Uncle Moony.

From then on Harry had given Severus a picture a week and always called him Uncle Sevvie no matter how many times he glared, sneered or towered the kid. He was getting quite frustrated. Older children were terrified of him and this kid kept coming and calling him Uncle Sevvie. He had decided long ago that Potter's son had to be just like his father. That he had no right living when she didn't. But as he came back every day he saw more and more of her. Her eyes. Her smile. Her determination not to let him lock himself up. He missed her, he missed everything about her. His best and only true friend. A friend he lost to his own stupidity. But Harry would never know. He'd hate him and he couldn't lose him too. Harry had this valiant image of him as a spy, he never even considered that Severus had joined Voldemort by his own free will and repented afterwards. No Harry just thought about the sacrifice he made. The risks he'd taken.

With time he mellowed a little but he would be loath to admit it. Until the day that mutt of a father of Harry's allowed him on a broom by himself at the age of four. He had to admit the kid had talent but he

was four and consequently got scared at an owl that flew too close and lost his balance falling to the floor. They had managed to break his fall but Harry still bumped his head and was knocked out. He, spy for the Order, former Death Eater, who had been in many life or Death situations, had never been so scared in his entire life. They had rushed the child to the Hospital Wing and Poppy had treated him and declared that he would recover but none of the people there believed her until Harry woke up the next day as if nothing had happened. For the first time in their life, Severus Snape, Sirius Black and Remus Lupin spent over twelve hours in each other's company without uttering a single insult.

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All in all Harry was having a nice life as a Hogwarts student. On the first week Oliver had approached him about trying out for seeker and of course Harry did and was chosen among the very few that tried. Not many wanted to be seeker. It was the hardest job. The beaters always tried to take out the Seeker and the seeker only got to see some action when the snitch showed up. The broom problem was also solved. After he got chosen his dad decided to donate a new full set of Nimbus two thousands for the school to be used. The donation was to the school and not one specific team, meaning any of the teams could borrow the brooms at any time. So Harry promptly booked a broom for all the scheduled practices and games. Sirius decided to do that because as a teacher he couldn't be biased towards one team even being Deputy Head of Gryffindor. Harry strongly suspected that this decision had not only his Uncle's hand but whole arm.

Speaking of flying, their first official flying lesson had been scheduled with the Slytherins. All students were required to participate no matter if they had learned to fly from Madam Hooch herself. Harry groaned. If there was one person in this world he did not like at all that was Draco Malfoy Harry had managed to avoid confrontation with him until now even having to work hard to block out him snickering at every jibe Harry took in potions. That was one of the main reasons he disliked Malfoy. He was one of the Death Eater's children that would report Snape's behavior toward the Boy-Who-Lived to his parents. Harry had tried to be neutral to Malfoy at first, keeping in mind that his dad and Aunt Andy had come from the same Dark family as Malfoy and were nothing like them but ever since they were little and were forced to interact in public functions that his dad as head of the House of Black and representative to the Heir of the House of Potter had to be present. Malfoy had been an annoying, stuck up little snot that reminded him strongly of his cousin Dudley. Harry only knew Dudley because once a year he was forced to spend a week at his Aunt house to renew the blood protection his mother left him.

Now he was facing having to spend an hour listening to his other annoying cousin about how well he flew. The students hurried to the grounds in time for the lesson. Twenty brand new brooms were lying in two neat lines. Harry took one in between Neville Longbottom and Ron. Harry knew Neville from the same events where he'd met Malfoy and knew Neville lacked confidence, and that mixed with a broom was just an accident waiting to happen. He also knew that Malfoy would use this opportunity to bully

Neville and that would just make things worse so when Madam Hooch gave her instructions Harry decided to give Neville his own.

"Don't be scared Neville. The broom is like a dog, it knows if you're scared. You're the boss here. You're the one in charge."

"Up," Neville kept saying but nothing happened.

"It's like any other magic. You just have to believe you'll do it. Without thinking much. You know you can boss the broom around and therefore it will obey you. I know you can do this Neville."

"UP," Neville said with more conviction at Harry's last words and the broom flew to his hand. He gave a little start of surprise and smiled at Harry.

"Thanks."

"Gryffindors stick together," Harry said mimicking one of his dad's favorite sayings. The rest of the class went fairly calm.

"Good lesson. Those of you interested in continuing please sign up in the sheet in my office. Those of you who don't need or don't want to continue will be dismissed. Oh, and ten points to Gryffindor Mr. Potter Black for aiding a classmate," Madam Hooch said at the end of class. As the students went away Malfoy sneered from behind Harry:

"Saint Potter couldn't help himself, had to play the hero."

"That's Potter *Black, cousin*. And I just helped a friend. Why don't you go look up the meaning of the word in the dictionary, I know you are only used to goons," Harry hissed nodding at Crabbe and Goyle who were in their usual bodyguard position behind Malfoy.

"You're so full of yourself just because your *daddy* is a teacher here Potter."

"*Potter Black!* And at least I can be proud of what my father does. What about you?"

Malfoy seethed with anger and spat, "Then prove you don't need your daddy, meet me at midnight in the trophy room for a duel."

"Done, Ron's my second."

Malfoy paled and Harry knew he hadn't expected him to accept, "Crabbe," he spluttered.

"See you then, *cousin*."

A/N- I hope I changed enough not to be boring.

Disclaimer: Still not JKR. Don't own Harry Potter.

Chapter 3

When Trolls decide to take strolls

Hermione Granger was fuming, how could he be so stupid? She had no intention of letting this go on so she stalked towards the Deputy Head of Gryffindor office. She knew she should go to McGonagall but thought Professor Black more appropriate right now. When she knocked she heard Professor's Black voice calling her in. As she entered she was in shock. Right there in the office where Professors Black, McGonagall, Dumbledore and Snape and with them Potter Black and Weasley.

"What may I help you with Ms. Granger?" Professor Black asked.

"Well," she said, she would not be deterred, "Harry and Ron agreed to duel Malfoy at midnight."

Ron and Harry glared at her.

"Yes, we've been informed," Professor Dumbledore said calmly, "One of the Slytherin's prefect is fetching Mr. Malfoy and Mr. Crabbe as we speak."

"Oh, who told you?" she blurted before she could stop herself.

Dumbledore was about to answer when another knock at the door interrupted him. Marcus Flint, Slytherin Prefect and captain of the Slytherin team accompanied Malfoy, Crabbe and a blond couple that had the air of thinking themselves better than everyone in the room.

"Oh, good. Lucius, Narcissa I see we will not need to wait. Thank you Mr. Flint, Ms. Granger you may leave now," Dumbledore said pleasantly.

Hermione left but not before hearing the man called Lucius as:

"What is this about Dumbledore? I am a very busy man."

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Sirius snorted. Trust Malfoy to be so arrogant.

"Well you see Lucius your son challenged mine to a duel, and as my son knows the rules he knows he can not accept a duel without parental consent if he is under age. So he came to ask me. Since said duel is to be taken in Hogwarts grounds I had to ask Dumbledore and of course Minerva and Severus are here as heads of the boys Houses. Now, Harry accepts the duel so you and Cissy just need to give us your consent," he smirked.

Lucius narrowed his eyes towards his son, "Draco did now didn't he?" Draco gulped and nodded.

Sirius knew that Malfoy Jr. had put himself in quite a pickle. He probably had had no intention of showing up to the duel and just wanted for Harry and Ron to get in trouble. Sirius would bet his prized motorcycle, his other love besides Harry, that Filch would have gotten an anonymous tip. Fortunately Harry had the same idea and decided to follow protocol. Now, Sirius may have despised his family but he knew how the Wizarding World worked, and therefore had taught Harry all the pureblood customs.

"Well, I don't give my consent. Draco should have never lowered himself to ask a half blood into a duel and I won't have him besmirching the family name."

In other circumstances Sirius would have jumped at Malfoy's throat for the insult but since this was exactly what he was counting on he just shrugged, "Suit yourself."

"Was that all," Malfoy drawled. Dumbledore nodded, "Then I shall have a conference with my son. Excuse me."

"By Cissy," Sirius waved happily as the Malfoys exited. Narcissa looked shocked at her cousin which just served to amuse him even more.

"Now if you've wasted enough of my time I'll take Mr. Crabbe and head back to my work," Snape sneered.

"Bye Sevvv," Sirius waved again and this time was met with a murderous glare.

"Dad! Must you?" Harry whined.

"Oh, but it's so much fun!" he answered grinning.

"I have work to do too so I'll be leaving. Wise choice Mr. Potter Black in coming to your father," she said as she left and Sirius could swear Hermione, who was still waiting outside, was about to faint from seeing McGonagall smile.

"Ms. Granger, do you still need something?" Dumbledore asked kindly.

"No," she shook her head dumbfounded.

"Then why don't you two gentlemen accompany the lady to Gryffindor Tower," he said to the boys. Harry gave Sirius a quick hug and he and Ron mock bowed to the two Professors.

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"What happened?" Hermione asked as they approached Gryffindor Tower.

"After I cooled down I figure Malfoy was just a lot of talk and no action, so why would he challenge me? So we figured he had laid a trap. Only underage wizards and witches aren't aloud to duel without parental consent so I thought I'd ask my dad for it. At first he was furious with me but then he too cooled down and I think he came to the same conclusion as me and decided to call the Malfoys for the consent. He knew Lucius Malfoy isn't stupid and would know that my dad must have trained me so there was a chance I'd win. A half blood winning against a pureblood! He couldn't have that so he wouldn't accept. So I ended up in a better light because everyone will think that Malfoy chickened out while I accepted."

"But then shouldn't Mr. Malfoy have accepted?" she asked.

"No, because this way he can claim that Draco would have won if they dueled, which if they actually had and Harry won he couldn't do. This is bad for Draco at school because he messed up, but for the Malfoy family losing to Harry would be worse than refusing to duel," Ron explained.

"That's quite stupid thinking," she said.

"It's how the purebloods think. They think they're better. That's why Voldemort had so many followers. Of course not all think like that. My dad doesn't, Aunt Andy doesn't, my first dad and his family didn't, the Longbottoms also fought Voldemort. But many do."

Suddenly Ron turned towards Hermione and asked through narrowed eyes, "And why were you going to tell on us?"

"Well you told first so it didn't matter anyway," she said righteously.

"That's not the point. The point is you were going to snitch on us," he spat.

"You were going to break the rules," she yelled.

"So what's it to you?" he yelled back.

"You were going to lose Gryffindor points. I think that is quite selfish," she yelled once more and stalked away.

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From that day Hermione and Ron where not talking to each other. In Harry's opinion that had been an improvement since from day one they mostly fought when they talked. Time went by and suddenly they had been official Hogwarts students for two months already and today was the most hated day on the Black family's calendar. Halloween. Ten years to the day when Harry's birth parents had been killed. Ten years to the day when Moony and Padfoot had lost both Prongs and Wormtail. One to death and one worse than dead. Harry knew this was a depressing day for his dad and Uncle so before breakfast he stopped by their quarters. He said the password and found the both of them brooding on the couch. He silently joined them and first hugged his dad and then his Uncle.

This was a sad day for him. He didn't remember his parents but he missed what he would have had. It was his understanding that had James and Lily lived he would be the son of the four of them, because his dad and Uncle would be as much part of his life as now. Just like Uncle Moony was as much his father as his dad. His dad just had the title. He was the fun parent and Uncle Moony the reliable one.

It didn't help them try to make this a normal day that the whole Wizarding World made so much fuss. Of course, Halloween had always been an important day for Wizards and Witches but after 1981 it became a holiday to be celebrated. Except the three in this room didn't think there was anything to celebrate. Sometimes Harry felt selfish. His parents death had served to rid the world of Voldemort even if temporarily as Grandpa said. He didn't think Voldemort was really gone, just licking his wounds. But Harry wanted his parents, he wanted to know them, not just imagine them from all the stories dad and Uncle Moony told him. Grandpa had promised to let him see a memory in his pensive when he was older. He said that now Harry was too young to realize that the memory wouldn't be real and he wouldn't be able to deal with seeing them talking and moving and not actually interacting. Harry thought he would but adults often thought like that and since they had to provide the memory there was not much Harry could do.

Harry sat there between his dad and Uncle in an awkward three way hug (he was hugging his Uncle with his arms and had his legs on his father's lap being held by a firm grasp) for quite a while until his Uncle tightened the hug, kissed the top of his head and clearing his throat said:

"That's enough wallowing for a day. We all have classes to attend to."

His dad nodded and also kissed Harry. Harry knew this day would be specially hard for his dad, he knew he blamed himself for suggesting Pettigrew as a secret keeper and to top things he had to teach the downfall of Voldemort to his third years. He once told Harry that if he had to be depressed on this day and on the day he'd talk about this day he'd just join the two depressing acts instead of spreading it out even if he had to move classes around this week to fit the schedules.

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Oh, how he hated this day and all the memories it brought. He had just finished his annual telling of the downfall of Voldemort. There wasn't a dry eye in the room. There never was. Because everything was made public by his trial he had to tell them of how he suggested to use Pettigrew as a decoy, of how he found their bodies in the ruins of the house and found little Harry crying, his crib upturned in a make shift cage that protected him from the debris. The dual feelings of grief for his friends and elation for Harry. Most people thought Hagrid had been the first in the scene because he left with Harry but no, he had landed his bike just seconds after the explosion. He saw it from a distance and rushed thinking he could still save them just to find them already dead. He was the one that handed the baby to Hagrid thinking Dumbledore was going to keep him safe and rushed to take his revenge on Pettigrew just to be set up by the rat and have him escape. For years they hadn't had a clue to where until Percy Weasley became a Hogwarts student and on a round of the castle as Padfoot he caught the so well known sent of Wormtail and finally caught the rat. Poor Percy had been horrified at having a murderer as a pet for so long so Sirius gave him an Owl as replacement.

Sighing he got up to head to the Great Hall for the dreaded feast and in the hall he was almost ran over by a speeding and maybe crying Hermione Granger. He frowned but saw the girl run into one of the girls bathrooms, he couldn't go there. He'd have to let Minerva know. As he continued walking he also glimpsed his son scolding a red faced Ron Weasley.

"I don't care if she is Ron, you shouldn't have said that!" Harry's voice carried. "You'll have to apologize."

"Okay, okay, when I see her I'll tell her she isn't all that insufferable," Ron grunted.

"I said apologize not insult her more!" Harry huffed.

"Problems in paradise?" Sirius arched an eyebrow.

"Ron said Hermione was a nightmare and no one could stand her and she heard," Harry glared at Ron.

"Oh, that was why I was almost ran over by a first year projectile," he said keeping the pace with them.

"She was being a nightmare, correcting me in class, being all bossy," Ron tried to defend himself.

"Maybe she was just trying to help," Sirius suggested, at Ron's glare he said, "Look I know Ms. Granger needs to work a little on her attitude but maybe she was trying to help she just doesn't know how to do it without sounding bossy. Anyway I agree with Harry, you should apologize but you'll have to wait because I saw her go in the Girl's toilet and you can't go there, so I suggest you go enjoy the feast now."

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Oh, how he hated Halloween! He couldn't help but go through everything that happened. He remembered the Owl from Sirius about a week before telling him there was something important he needed to tell him. But he was away on a mission. He was trying to convince a Werewolf faction to if not join them at least keep neutral. He remembered until today when the Phoenix Patronus caught him on his way back with the message of James and Lily's death and Sirius arrest. He rushed back just to find Sirius waiting for his transportation to Azkaban. They weren't even going to give him a trial! Dumbledore thought he'd been the secret keeper and apparently there were witnesses to the explosion. But he refused to believe them. Sirius would never betray James. So to convince Remus, Dumbledore pushed for a questioning and trial with Crouch certain that Sirius would confess under Veritasserum. Oh, Boy where they shocked! Remus was shocked! Peter? Little fumbling Peter? The plan had been a good one if not for Peter being a two way backstabbing traitor.

When the trial was over he had taken Sirius home. He was a mess. Hurt, pale, suffering from the Dementors and Veritasserum effect. Crying that he had as good as killed them and that they should have never changed Secret Keeper before telling Remus. That was what Sirius had wanted to tell him. About the change, so Peter could tell him the address to Godric's Hallow. Honestly Remus thought that waiting for him wouldn't have changed anything because he had thought it a good plan. He would have agreed and never suspect what Peter was up too.

Took them almost a week to stop wallowing on their grief for a second to remember that neither knew what had been done of Harry. A new spark ignited on Sirius and he all but stormed Dumbledore's office demanding to see his Godson. Dumbledore refused telling him Harry was safe and that he shouldn't have any contact with the Wizarding World. Dumbledore could be stubborn that way. But Sirius could be more so he went straight to the ministry and applied for permanent guardianship. Took him almost six month to get it even with James and Lily's will to back him up. The fact that he had been suspected, even if proved innocent, had weighed a lot against him. But in the end the Ministry was not able to overwrite the magic of the Potter's Will and continue denying Sirius' rights. So Dumbledore was forced to tell them where Harry was and both him and Sirius almost throttled the Headmaster right there and then. What the bloody hell had he been thinking? Petunia? She hated magic! Dumbledore was quite taken aback from this revelation. He had believed she would have welcomed her nephew and let any grudge she might have had go in the face of an innocent child.

When they got to Number four Privet Drive they found that she didn't. Harry was mostly kept shut in a cupboard under the stairs. Was fed the bare minimum to survive and was changed only when Petunia couldn't stand the smell anymore. He had developed very little from what he had been at fifteen month, having little interaction with people, and what interaction he had was negative and no toys to play. He was shy and scared. Two things he had never been before. Poppy had been furious when she examined him. He had bruises from abuse, was malnourished and had several untreated diaper rashes. They had their work cut out for them to help him recover. Sirius quit his Auror job and for the first year never left his Godson sight. The first time he left Harry alone was when he started teaching at Hogwarts and that had been Harry's first act of "rebellion" too. He had staged an illness so that Sirius would cancel his classes. It was funny and Remus had rejoiced the fact that Harry was finally starting to be comfortable enough to test his boundaries.

He sighted his best friend pushing his food around at the head table, cheek propped up by his fist, and sat next to him. Sirius pose represented well his own feelings today. He was about to start pushing his own food when Quirrel came running in the Hall announcing a Troll in the Dungeons and promptly fainted.

Immediately his and Sirius stance changed. They both had the same thought and from Severus face apparently he was thinking that too. A nod from him told Remus he'd deal with the third floor corridor and Remus and Sirius started helping the teachers search for the troll. Before he left he saw Harry and Ron follow Percy and sighed relieved.

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He had done his fair share of stupid things in his life but right now, dangling from a Trolls neck, he was sure this one topped them all. From the corner of his eyes he saw Ron take out his wand and cry:

"Wingardium Leviosa"

After the troll was knocked out by his own club Harry and Ron didn't waist time to see if it would wake up. They grabbed Hermione and started running for their life not even realizing where they were going. They ran for long until they reached a door and started trying to open it. It was unlocked and once inside they didn't know what to fear most. The growling gigantic three headed dog or the fuming Potions Master who grabbed both boys by the gruff of their neck and hauled them outside before pushing Hermione and effectively locking the door behind him.

He turned to the three shaking first years and hissed, "Follow me." And limped in front of the. Harry couldn't help himself.

"Are you hurt sir?"

"That is none of your business Potter Black."

"What was that dog guarding?" Apparently Hermione had a rough time keeping her mouth shut too.

Snape turned around and faced them with pure fury in his eyes, "You'll do well to forget that dog and anything you may have seen there," he said coldly, turned around and kept leading them until they met, McGonagall and Oh, No! His dad on the Hall in front of the girl's toilet they had left.

"We found the troll Severus. Someone knocked it out," Sirius said and spotting the children he hissed, "Shouldn't you be up in your Tower?"

Harry gulped but before he could answer Hermione jumped in, "They came to save me. I didn't know about the Troll and they came to fetch me but the Troll was already in the bathroom and Ron knocked it out with it's own club. Then we ran until we found that door and thought we'd be safe but instead there was that dog there." She said all in one breath.

Sirius paled and to Harry's embarrassment started examining him, lifting robes and shirts while Harry tried to push them down.

"What were you thinking?" Sirius cried shaking Harry, "No forget that, you obviously weren't thinking!" he hugged him and kept trading in between shaking and hugging him until McGonagall stopped him.

"You were very lucky. Professor Black is right you should have told a teacher instead of coming yourselves. Fifteen points from Gryffindor for you foolhardiness. Nevertheless you did the unimaginable and knocked the troll out so five points to Gryffindor each. Sirius please escort them to the Tower. Yes Sirius to the Gryffindor Tower not your quarters. You may also let go of your son before he suffocates."

They walked in silence to the tower and when they reached it Sirius said gravely, "As Minerva has already dealt the punishment she sees fit," the tone suggested he did not agree with that, "I won't punish you now. During term, when I am your teacher. But you will not be aloud on your broom during the Christmas Holidays."

"But dad..."

"No Harry. My heart almost stopped beating when I saw you outside of the safety of your dorm. You have to understand how stupid and dangerous that was. You are my whole life and I will not have you endanger yourself, Understood?" he said sternly kneeling to be eye level with Harry.

Yes, he did. That didn't mean he was happy about it. Did he mention how very much he hated Halloween?

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A/N: Before you say anything I know I changed the time of the lesson I just wanted to make things a little different from canon as to not get boring. Also I had to get them knowing about Fluffy, after all Harry promised not to go *looking* for information, not to ignore the ones that pop up in front of him.

Also I didn't want to make Remus or Sirius suspect each other because I needed their friendship to be as hard as a rock, and I guess suspecting the other to be a Death Eater would have shaken the grounds.

Disclaimer: So I though of calling her, decided not to make an international phone call, and thus I still don't own Harry Potter.

Answering a question I didn't put Severus thoughts about Halloween because that will come at a later date.

I want to apologize to my "The Marauders read Trials of a Champion" readers but I don't know why I have been having a major author's block on that story while ideas for this one keep popping up inside my head. I will not give up but it may be a while before I update.

Chapter 4- Of traditions passed along

Hogwarts life was interesting if nothing else. In two months she had gone from the bossy know-it-all freak from school to the, well, just bossy know-it-all. But now she had friends. Two very good friends. Ron had apologized, if a little awkwardly and Harry, well against Harry she just had his penchant for going against the rules. But maybe that wasn't bad, he did save her life by disobeying orders. Poor Harry, after that whole ordeal with his father he had been treated to similar hugging and scolding by his Uncle right in the middle of the Great Hall. At least her parents weren't here. Ron too had a big scolding from his mum when she brought Ginny in but at least she did that in private.

But there was one thing bugging her and her new friends. That trapdoor under the three headed dog. Harry told her about a package he'd seen Hagrid take from Gringotts on his birthday. Apparently they'd met there and shared a cart. That same day there was a break in. Ron insisted that whatever it was Professor Snape was after it. Harry didn't agree and Hermione figured Harry would know him well enough. Though with how Snape seemed to hate Harry she couldn't blame Ron's reasoning.

But there were other things that came with this new friendship. Like what she just did right now. Racing back to Ron and holding the jar with the fire that she had just set on Snape, she was so caught up on what she had been doing that she'd knocked down a few teachers including Quirrell, Black ad Lupin.

Reaching Ron she saw that Harry caught the snitch, well he kind of swallowed it, but the important thing is he landed safely and Gryffindor won. She and Ron rushed toward him but Professors Black and Lupin had reached him first and another session of public hugging went on. Poor Harry! Professors Black and Lupin were quite young, she guessed thirty or at least very close, they shouldn't have forgotten yet what embarrassed an eleven year old boy. Harry was blushing furiously and trying to escape his guardians grip. When he finally managed he grabbed Ron and Hermione and rushed them to Hagrid's hut where they found chocolate milk and cake that Harry and Ron declined and she thought best to do so too.

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"So Harry, What happened ter yeh broom," Hagrid asked.

"Don-" Harry started to answer but was cut off by an outraged Ron.

"Snape jinx it!"

Harry had to try really hard not to start laughing.

"What?" he asked.

"Yes, he did," Hermione stated, "I read all about jinxes. You have to keep eye contact and he wasn't blinking and when I put him on fire the broom stopped bucking."

"You did WHAT?" Oh, Uncle Sev was not going to be happy. His dad on the other hand would be gleeful for a month.

"Lit up a fire on his robes to distract him," she said casually.

"Now, why would Professor Snape wanna hurt Harry?" Hagrid asked.

"Because he hates him and Harry knows he was after whatever is hidden under that three headed dog?" Ron cried.

"How do you know about Fluffy?" Hagrid asked preoccupied.

"Fluffy? That's Fluffy? The puppy you said you got last year?" Harry asked bewildered.

"Yes, sweet puppy," Hagrid said fondly. The kids where looking at him as if he was the one with three heads. "Now yeh three leave whatever Fluffy is guarding be," he said sternly, "That's between Professor Dumbledore and Nicolas Flamel."

"Whose- Ouch" Ron was glaring at Harry and rubbing his thigh.

"That's okay Hagrid. We won't go looking for anything. We should go now. Bye, Bye," he said urging his friends out.

"Oh, yes," Hermione said and started pushing Ron, "We've got loads of homework."

"But I don't want to do homework," Ron protested but was pushed out.

When they were out of ear shot Hermione turned to Harry.

"What do you know?"

"Nicolas Flamel is an old friend of Dumbledore's. They worked together on the twelve uses of dragon's blood. He's also famous for something else but I can't remember now."

"That's okay I'll find out," Hermione said.

"No, Hermione. I promised my dad I wouldn't go looking-"

"And you're not. I am."

Ron looked at her proudly, "Our Hermione is learning so fast." He wiped a fake tear.

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He was definitely in a bad mood. Not proof enough. He snorted. What was he waiting for?

A shy knock came from the door and he barked an invitation. The door opened and closed and green eyes were looking apologetically up at him.

"You okay Uncle Sev?"

"Yes, your friend didn't manage to torch me too much," he grunted.

"She was just trying to help. And she thought you were jinxing my broom."

"For your information I was chanting the counter jinx. But I guess that's what I get for being a good actor," he sighed dramatically.

Harry chuckled and sat on the chair next to Severus'.

"Dad said he thinks Quirrell was jinxing my broom. Told me to never be alone with him."

"And he is right. If I am a good actor that man is even better. He has everyone fooled."

"Why would he though?"

"I am not sure and I don't like the possibilities I am coming up with."

"You think he's a Death Eater?"

"He's too young to be one. He was still in school when the Dark Lord fell. But you can never be sure.

What I am sure is that someone tried to knock you out that broom and I had a hard time keeping you up even though I know your father and Remus were chanting too. No student could have managed that.

And Quirrell is my only suspect."

Harry bit his lips worried.

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Christmas this year was going to be spent at Grimmauld Place. Not that Harry cared since he couldn't fly anyway. The Weasleys were going to Romania to visit Charlie and Ginny had been unbearable with all her talk about seeing the dragons up close. Harry would have liked to see a dragon up close but even if he had been invited there was no way his dad would let him go. A few years back the Weasleys wouldn't have been able to afford taking all the kids but since Mrs. Weasley started working their situation improved a little. Not a lot, Ron still grumbled about having to use Charlie's old wand and not getting a pet. That had always been a sore point for Ron, his poverty while Harry was the heir to two of the biggest fortunes of the Wizarding World. The Blacks, being the adoptive son of the Head of the house and the Potters, which he would come to once he turned seventeen. Right now his dad was executor. He usually was very generous with Harry's pocket money but after confabulating with Uncle Moony, his dad had come to the conclusion that he'd been too lenient on Harry and decided to take away his pocket money until further notice. So to buy his Christmas gifts Harry had to hand his father the list of what he wanted to get and to his Uncle Moony what he wanted to get his dad, which meant his dad knew how much he spent on him since Uncle Moony got the money from him. He just didn't know what he got.

The week before the holidays started he already had everything he wanted. His dad made fun of Harry because of that and said that he was becoming a second Moony. He had spent Sunday with his dad and Uncle and had forgotten about the time so now he found himself running through the passages and shortcuts to try to get to Gryffindor Tower before curfew. As he was passing a room with which he new he could get from one corridor to another he ran past a weird mirror. He wouldn't have stopped but he saw more than one person in the reflection from the corner of his eyes. He backed and stood in front of the mirror. He let out a gasp of surprise for he knew all the people in the mirror. Right there looking back at him, next to his reflection were his birth parents. His mother with his green eyes, his father with his messy hair. Next to his father was his adoptive father with an arm around James shoulder laughing. Uncle Moony was next to him laughing too and to the side of his mother was Uncle Sev, unguarded like Harry saw him very few times. Smiling like few knew he could. Next to his best friend, but not hiding, not calling them names in front of everyone to keep appearances. This was what they would, they should, have been in a world without Voldemort. Harry didn't know how long he stood there seeing James ruffle his hair, Lily hugging him. How long he watched Prongs, Moony and Padfoot joke around or Lily and Sev laugh and talk like he could have just imagined. Strong hands grabbed him and turned him around and he was met by soft, concerned brown eyes.

"Harry, are you okay?"

He just stared at his Uncle and then back at the mirror. They were still there except there were two Remuses and one was trying to catch his attention.

"Harry, come back. It's just an illusion," he said running a hand through the boys face and turning it to face him.

"We're all there. We're happy. My parents too. And you and dad. And Uncle Sev doesn't have to pretend," he said lost.

Remus smiled sadly.

"It's an illusion Harry. The Mirror of Erised shows your hearts greatest desire. You're seeing us in a world that we would all have wanted. But it's not real. It's just a dream, and a wise man once told me that *"It does not do to dwell in dreams and forget to live."*

Harry nodded and swallowed a painful lump.

"I'll take you to your dorm and talk to Albus to get this out of here. Ron and Hermione got worried when you didn't show up after curfew and alerted Sirius and Minerva. We've been looking for a couple of hours already."

Harry nodded and left with him but not before stealing a last glance at the mirror.

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Harry stretched on his bed. Got up. Did not change from his pajamas and went to the kitchen for breakfast. He loved having breakfast on pajamas, but he only could do that here. Down the stairs he greeted his Grandmother's painting.

"Hello Grandma."

"Hello Harry, how was school?"

His Grandmother was a very weird woman. She was always polite and well behaved when he was in the house but if dad or Uncle Moony came here without him she would shriek for hours. His Dad had tried every spell he knew and a few muggle methods to get her down but had no success.

"Fine, thank you. We arrived yesterday by portkey but you were sleeping," to Sirius relief, "Dad had to see the Gryffindors off since he was already taking the holiday off and leaving Aunt Minnie to deal with them alone."

"And you were sorted in?"

"Gryffindor."

"No doubt influence of that good for nothing father of yours," she wrinkled her nose, "Shame of my flesh. I hope you behaved like a noble Black should."

"Yes I did," there was no need to talk about the Troll, or what led to the duel.

"Good, now go on. You need nourishment."

"Good morning mother," came his dad's voice from the top of the stairs.

"Humph," she huffed and the curtains around her paintings closed.

Sirius shook his head and grinned at Harry. He too was in pajamas and putting an arm around Harry's shoulders and leading him to the kitchen he said.

"Now, what sort of mischief and mayhem should we cause today young Harry?"

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Christmas morning dawned bright and early and Padfoot was padding his way to his friend's room. If there was one day he didn't mind waking up early that was Christmas day. He got in the room lunged for the bed. Licked the face of the person sleeping there and jumped off before Remus cries of "Urgh Sirius!" had ended. Then he proceeded to do the same in his son room and was already trotting through the halls to the drawing room when the cry of "DAAAD!" had died.

Impatient he flapped his tail while seated next to the enormous Christmas tree. Two very grumpy figures came in.

"Worse than a child," Remus grumbled, "Harry was never like that."

Padfoot didn't mind. With a pop he transformed back and sat between his grumbling friend and his son that was still rubbing the sleep off his eyes.

"PRESENTS!" he cried and started handing parcels out.

"Sirius, do you see your son shouting and jumping on his bottom?" Remus asked ironically.

"That's because he doesn't appreciate the good things in life," Sirius answered.

"Wha?" asked Harry whose brain was still half asleep, while he mechanically opened a wrapping paper.

Sirius and Remus were staring at the object being unwrapped mesmerized. Somewhere Sirius knew he should be groaning but he couldn't prevent the flow of memories.

Harry finally woke up by the beauty of the cloak and stammered:

"Is this, is this..."

"Your father's Invisibility Cloak," Sirius said hoarsely.

"We had a lot of adventures with that cloak. We've told you all about them Harry," Remus said with a sad smile.

Harry touched the cloak reverently and before he got up to try it he read the note attached and laughed.

When Harry was up and all of him you could see was his head Remus caught the note and chuckled too.

Sirius tore himself of the memories of another eleven year old with glasses and messy hair head's running around without a body and grabbed the note from Remus' hand.

Dear Harry,

Your father James left this with me before he died. I think it is time I hand it to you, even though Sirius would have wanted you to have it sooner. I was quite tempted to let him running around and invisible toddler but alas, Minerva stopped me.

Use it well.

Happy Christmas

Grandpa

"I guess it's a good thing we can count with Minerva then," Sirius tried to sound dignified. By the extreme laughter coming from the other two occupants of the room he thought he must have failed miserably.

"Humph," Sirius grunted, "I am going to open my presents now," and he grabbed the one with Harry's handwriting. He always opened first Harry's then Moony's, then any other that the staff and his cousin may have sent. He unwrapped the paper and inhaled deeply. Looking up at him from a huge silver frame that had a stag, a wolf, a dog and a lily carved where various versions of James, Lily, Remus, himself and Harry. He saw from the corner of his eyes that Remus had a similar gift.

"Did you like it?" Harry asked worried, "It's for your offices. I noticed you didn't have a lot of pictures of family around and I decided to kind of make a collage with your years at Hogwarts and afterwards. I had to ask Grandpa to come get all the photo albums and he showed me how to make the copies. I tried really hard to only get pictures that had only you four and not, well you know. Is it okay?"

In a second Harry had been engulfed by Remus and Sirius in a three way hug.

"It's perfect," Remus whispered and Sirius nodded in Harry's head.

"But how did you get it. You had us buy the presents and this frame wasn't in the list. As a matter of fact I remember Moony's present being a book."

"Yeah, and Sirius' a Chudley Cannons shirt," Remus said and then, "Oh, that was Ron's. I thought it weird that you bought a Chudley Cannons shirt for Sirius but I just thought you were angry because of your grounding."

"I had ordered and paid for the frames in the summer when you let me wander a little in Diagon Alley to talk to Hagrid. This took a while to get ready. I had to choose from a lot of pictures from your Hogwarts years. But I had to ask you to buy something so I just added Ron's and Hermione's birthday presents for next year in the list," he beamed at his own cleverness.

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He woke up late and dreaded having to meet Albus and the other cheery staff at the Christmas feast. The one person he wanted here had gone to London and even if he was here they would have had to keep their public façade of hate. Though he knew Harry would find a way to sneak to his chambers for a private hug and exchange of gifts. And speaking of gifts he spotted his at the bedside table. He stretched and went cautiously to them. There were four gifts. One from Albus and Minerva of course. One from Harry and one he mostly dreaded. Why the mutt and the wolf insisted on giving him a gift he would never know. He was always afraid it would be rigged and explode on him. So far it never had but Severus was sure they were just luring him to a false sense of security. He poked at them with his wand trying to find Harry's and levitate the Marauder's far away from him. He carefully unwrapped Harry's gift and gasped. In a beautiful silver frame with cauldrons and herbs engraved he found pictures of him and Lily in school. Pictures he thought lost forever. There she was, smiling at and with him, discussing a potion. He also found the few pictures of him and Harry. He was always afraid of taking pictures with Harry, what if someone found them? There was a note and he smiled while he read it.

Dear Uncle Sev,

I found these pictures in my mom's old stuff. Grandpa helped me make copies and put a concealing charm. Anyone that doesn't know the truth about our relationship from us will see a copy of your Potion Mastery's diploma. Even if someone figures out about us but is not told by us they will not be able to see this pictures. You can keep them in your Quarters instead of your office if you want. I just thought you'd like something to remember mum by.

Happy Christmas.

Harry

He carefully placed the frame on his bedside table and stared at it forever losing himself in the memories of the beautiful witch from his neighborhood. His first true friend. For a long time his only true friend, until Harry came and showed him that he didn't have to be alone and angry all the time.

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Harry and Sirius were mounting Sirius' flying motorcycle. They were going to visit Aunt Andy and Uncle Ted to say Happy Christmas even though Christmas lunch must have ended hours ago. The Tonks usually spent Christmas with Ted's family and Sirius and Harry stopped by in the evening.

"Ok pup lets do the check. Security charmed helmet check?" Sirius asked.

Laughing Harry answered.

"Check."

"Security sticking charm for underage wizards check."

Harry tried to move from the seat and unable said, "Check."

"Warm jacket and warming spells so Andy doesn't have my hide for taking the poor boy in this gelid weather in such a dangerous piece of machinery from hell check?"

"Check."

"Ok, than we just have to take off," he said turning the engine on and opening the garage door, "Hey pup, how long do you reckon Snape is going to throw detection spells and glare at his present this year?"

"Don't know, last year it was a whole month."

"Maybe we can break a record. Never thought the best prank on Snape would be actually not pranking him," Sirius laughed as they soared through the skies.

A/N: I hope you enjoyed this and I always enjoy your reviews.

Disclaimer: So I though of calling her, decided not to make an international phone call, and thus I still don't own Harry Potter.

I've posted a challenge on my Bio. Go check it out. Major SPOILER ALERT!

Chapter 5- Junior Marauders in action

The first thing Hermione did when meeting her friends in the Common Room after Christmas break was drop one of the biggest and heaviest books Harry had ever seen on the table they were seated at playing chess.

"I found him."

"Who?" the boys asked in unison and Hermione rolled her eyes impatiently.

"Nicolas Flamel. And I know what Snape is after."

"Hermione, I don't think Professor Snape-" Harry started but she cut him.

"Nicolas Flamel is the only maker of the Philosopher Stone. A stone that is known to turn any metal into gold and produce an elixir that gives the drinker eternal life," she said quite didactically, "That's what their keeping under that trapdoor."

"Who wouldn't want unlimited gold and eternal life?" Ron asked, "I bet Snape can't wait to put his hands on it."

"It's not Snape," Harry said annoyed then he sighed and tried to reason calmly, "Look, I know he's not the nicest of people," at his friend's snorts he amended, "ok, he's a bastard, but Professor Dumbledore trusts him. Besides I know my dad suspects Quirrell."

"Oh, come on Harry, Quirrell? He's scared of his own shadow," Ron snorted.

"Yeah, but he wasn't always like that and my dad told me to never be alone with him. He reckons he was the one jinxing my broom. He just can't prove it."

"But why would he?" Hermione tried to reason.

"Ron just said it didn't he? Who wouldn't want unlimited gold and eternal life," Harry answered.

"Well, lets hope he doesn't know how to get past Fluffy," Ron said.

"But Fluffy won't be the only defense will he. That would be too easy," Hermione said frowning.

"No, I remember that some of the teachers were doing something other than just preparing for classes on the summer. We even came back early because dad was doing most of the Head of House duties for McGonagall," Harry said biting his lips.

"So that's at least one more protection, McGonagall, will be something to do with transfiguration," Hermione started counting with her fingers, "Who else?"

Harry scrunched his face trying to remember, "There was Sprout and Flitwick. I am sure Snape did something and I think Quirrell too."

"Oh, great, so our two suspects were involved in the protection. That's rich," Ron snorted and Harry shook his head at his friend insistence on Snape.

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Classes and practice took most of their time. They were so busy they almost forgot about the stone. There was also not much time to discuss just the three of them seeing as now that she was already done with all her Pre-Hogwarts studies Remus had cut on classes time for Ginny or else as he said she would be completely bored her first year. He was helping her get a little ahead but he didn't want to make her an outcast on her first year for knowing a lot more than others. That wasn't Ginny's style, more Hermione's. So she spent a lot of the time while her mother was teaching in the Gryffindor Common room with them.

There had also been an outbreak in pranks, apparently the twins had been very inspired by some of Charlie's more outgoing friends at the reserve and were trying to put all they learned in practice. You couldn't walk a step without being caught unaware by a dungbomb, being turned upside down by a gravity spell or have to spend the day talking in riddles.

Harry was having fun not only at the pranks but by the fact that once again the twins were not only avoiding capture by Filch but by their deputy head of House and his best friend too. Sirius and Remus were quite ruffled at them besting the Marauders and vowed to find out their secret.

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"You're going to do what now?" he cried outraged.

"You heard me perfectly well," the other sneered.

"I object!"

"This isn't a courtroom Sirius," Dumbledore said calmly.

"Then I'll do it," Sirius said firmly.

"You can't. It wouldn't be fair would it," Snape sneered.

"Oh, yes, because you are going to be so unbiased," Sirius sneered back.

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When he went back to his quarters he found Harry twirling around on one of the rotating chairs on his desk and a silvery cloak on the desk. Great either the mutt or the old coot gave Harry more means for mischief.

"To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?"

Harry stopped the chair and very seriously said, "Ron, Hermione and Ginny are right now trying to decide if I should break a leg or jump from the Astronomy Tower."

"Excuse me," he raised an eyebrow.

"Wood just told us about you volunteering to referee and they feel that I'd be safer jumping from the Tower than on a broom."

"Quite," he said sitting on another chair. Harry turned really serious and asked.

"You're not going to undermine Gryffindor are you?"

Severus sighed, "I'll have to show a bias towards Hufflepuff Harry but I am confident on your seeker skills to catch the snitch before I make too much damage."

"The Hufflepuffs won't be happy. They don't like being seen as the House that needs help. Cedric was quite angry at the fact that Madam Hooch isn't refereeing and not just because he thinks you'll jinx my broom again." Snape cringed at the again.

"I know, but unfortunately Mr. Diggory and his housemates will have to bear with said 'help'. If I wasn't biased against Gryffindor and worst you, people would start to question things. And if there is one thing that I agree with Black and Lupin is that one of us should be close by in case Quirrell tries again. And I think the Hufflepuffs will agree that neither Black nor Lupin would be a good choice."

Harry smiled at the thought of his dad and uncle refereeing.

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The match went better than Harry could expect. He managed to catch the snitch in a record time giving Severus time to award Hufflepuff only few penalties for no reason. Dumbledore attended the game which not only served to appease his father and uncles but to give Severus an excuse not be his complete usual charming self. There was also a scuffle between Ron, Neville Malfoy and his goons, and although Ron and Neville had come out a little worse of wear, Harry knew that standing up for Malfoy meant a lot to Neville. When Harry left the changing rooms he saw Snape going towards the Forbidden Forest. He hesitated biting his lips but decided to go back to the castle. If Uncle Sev found him eavesdropping on him Voldemort would seem like the nicest guy on earth.

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"Can you believe this? My own father!" Harry ranted.

"I know Harry, I know," Ron sympathized.

"I don't see what you are complaining about they are quite right," Hermione said in a no nonsense tone. They were walking towards Hagrid's hut. Time had seemed to fly by and they were now nine weeks away from the end of year exams.

"But, but," Harry tried to struggle with words, "That's hypocrisy. Uncle Moony said dad and my first father never did it and now he expects us to."

"Well Harry," Hermione tried to reason, "People do grow up. I expect that happened to Professor Black too."

Harry looked at her horrified.

"You know, since, as you did point out, the professors are giving us so much homework, maybe we should be studying instead of visiting Hagrid," she pointed out.

Ron joined the horrified look.

"So it's not bad enough that he sets us all that homework, *my own father* would expect *me* to ignore my friends," Harry said dramatically and Ron nodded. Hermione huffed and knocked on Hagrid's door.

The door was opened and a harassed and sweaty Hagrid on an apron opened it.

"Oh, hello there. Nice to see you. I am a bit busy at the moment, can't entertain," Hagrid said and shut the door. The three kids goggled at the door. Harry knocked on it again more forcefully. Hagrid opened and shoving himself in Harry said.

"Yes Hagrid, we would love to come in."

Inside the hut Harry felt like he had just entered one a sauna. Every window and drapes were closed and there was a roaring fire going on under a big cauldron.

"What's that?" Hermione asked while she and Ron peeked inside the cauldron.

"Nothing, nothing. Now why don't yeh kids go have fun outside such a nice day."

Harry joined his friends when Ron cried.

"Hagrid! How did you get a dragon's egg?"

What? Ok, this is not what Harry meant when he said he would have liked to see a dragon up close.

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She was giving the finish touches to her essays seated on her desk, dangling her feet with her lip sticking out the corner of her mouth. Remus always had them doing their homework during lesson time. He said that they would have been consumed by homework once they entered first year so they had to enjoy the opportunity of free time to play before that. He usually read and wrote his articles while she did her homework pausing every now and then to answer a question.

"Pst."

She looked up but Remus was still seated there completely absorbed in writing his article for "*Magical creatures, do we understand them?*" She shrugged and went back to her essay.

"Pst."

And now she felt a pebble knock her thigh. She looked in the direction the pebble came and saw Harry, Ron and Hermione making signs from the door. She made a sign with her hand for them to wait. Wrote the last sentence of her essay quickly, put away her stuff and practically launched herself at Remus's desk putting the essay on top of his parchment. Remus gave a little start of surprise and looking at Ginny said pleasantly.

"All done then?"

"Yes," she said biting her lip and wondering if asking to be released would be too much of a give away.

"Then go join the pebble throwing scoundrels outside," he said smiling. She heard groans from outside. Yep, there was no getting anything past Remus.

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"He has a what?"

"A dragon's egg that he is hatching in his hut," Harry repeated slowly.

"And apparently he found out that it's a Norwegian Ridgeback," Hermione said huffed.

"A what? In his hut?" Ginny kept repeating.

"We thought of asking Charlie if he can come get it before it hatches. But no one can know or Hagrid will be in big trouble. I mean Azkaban trouble," Harry tried to impress the issue.

"And where do I get in this?" she asked.

"Well," Hermione started, "We had first thought of sending him an owl but the school owls aren't that fast and by the time we got an answer the egg may have hatched already. So Harry remembered that your brother flooes your house twice a week. We figured that you could talk to him there."

"You'd have to say you have big brother stuff to talk to him, so mum and dad will leave you two alone," Ron told her. Harry knew that both Bill and Charlie were given alone time to be big brothers to the others. To help them with the kind of stuff that they wouldn't go to Mr. and Mrs. Weasley for. And their parents respected that privacy so the kids could rely on that help.

"Ok, I think he said he'd floo tomorrow. I do hope we have enough time," she said worried and the others mirrored her worries, "What was he *thinking?*"

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"So what were they up to?" he asked eagerly.

Remus lifted his eyes from the article he was reading for what felt the hundredth time and answered once again his bouncing friend.

"As I have said before; I have no idea. I didn't follow them to eavesdrop," and went back to the article.

Sirius was pacing, almost jumping on the balls of his feet in front of the couch where Remus was seated in their quarters.

"Oh, come on Moony! This has to be big if they couldn't even wait for her class to finish!" Sirius begged.

"Still doesn't change the fact that I have no idea what they are up to," Remus said without taking his eyes of his article this time. He really should have locked himself in his room if he had wanted to be able to read this.

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"HE HAS A WHAT?"

"Shush, you want mom and dad to hear you," Ginny pleaded with her brother's head in the fireplace. She peered towards the door from her kneeling position in front of the fire and sighed in relief. Turning back to her brother.

"Can you come get it? Hagrid is going to be in so much trouble if someone finds out. And he wants to hatch it and raise it in his hut," she begged.

"Oh, yes. Such a fine idea, raise a *dragon* in a *wooden* hut. Why didn't we think of that in the reserve?" Charlie said sarcastically.

"You know, that is not helping," she scolded him crossing her arms on her chest.

"Ok, I'll see what I can do. I can't come up there but I may be able to get some friends that are coming to see me to fetch it. But I'll have to ask them to come earlier or the egg will have hatched. I'll let you know tomorrow what I can arrange and keep me posted. Good idea telling me now instead of owling me," he praised.

"Wasn't mine, was Harry's," she blushed.

"Always said that kid can think on his feet. Bye sis."

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Two days later the four kids found themselves once again in Hagrid's furnace, I mean hut. They were begging with him to let Charlie's friend take the dragon's egg. Using every argument they could find but they were all being completely ignored by Hagrid, granted they were using arguments as a grown dragon is dangerous and wood is flammable. Things that didn't really bother Hagrid.

"But it will be lonely," Ginny said, "It won't have any dragon friends. Do you want that Hagrid? At the reserve he'll have a bunch of dragon friends and Charlie said you could visit any time you want." She knew she was resorting to big emotional blackmail, but honestly, what choice did they have. And Ginny, being the youngest and only girl of seven kids was a master at emotional blackmail and puppy eyes. Harry did have to admire that.

Hagrid was starting to show signs of defeat at this words so Harry lunged.

"They are coming the day after tomorrow. So the egg will hatch in the reserve. Charlie said that it's much safer for the dragon to travel as an egg than as a baby," well that wasn't exactly what Charlie told Ginny, it was more like, it's safer for everyone involved to carry an egg than a dragon, but Hagrid didn't *need* to know that.

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The plan had been laid. Harry and Ron, being the ones that knew the castle better of the group since Ginny would be at home, got the egg from Hagrid and were taking it to Charlie's friends up in the tallest Tower where they had to meet them at midnight. They were using Harry's Invisibility Cloak and coupled with their knowledge of secret passages they were able to avoid Filch and Mrs. Norris. Once up in the

Tower Harry took the cloak off and stored it in his robes pocket, he really loved how small such a big cloak got. They waited a while until Charlie's friend showed up. They suspended the wooden box that Hagrid had prepared for the dragon's egg in a harness between two brooms. Hagrid had wanted the egg to keep warm so Harry had put a warming charm on the box that Hagrid had filled with hay and to Harry's astonishment a teddy bear.

"So Norbert won't be lonely in the trip," he'd said. Harry was really glad they were getting rid of the egg before it hatched or he thought that Hagrid would have been a lot more attached to the dragon, if naming an egg wasn't already being attached.

Harry and Ron were so relieved to get rid of the egg that they forgot all about the Invisibility Cloak once they started back towards Gryffindor Tower. They were almost there when turning a corner they came face to face with Draco Malfoy and one of the teachers.

"I am telling you, I heard the Weasleys, Potter and Granger saying they'd be at the tallest tower at midnight tonight," he had been saying and the teacher had been saying:

"I don't care what you heard you had no right to walk around school at night-" that's when he had stopped and landed his eyes on Harry and Ron. Malfoy smirked evilly and Harry tried feebly.

"Hi dad," waving his hand a little.

Sirius eyes narrowed and Harry strangely had the thought that he quite reminded him of Uncle Sev right then.

"What are you two doing outside of your dorms," he hissed dangerously. Harry and Ron gulped but didn't respond. Sirius hauled the three towards his office. And dangerously said:

"Now, I really don't care what noble reason any of you may have had to be out in the halls at such a time. As I said, nothing gives you that right," Harry did think that was very rich coming from a Marauder but wisely said nothing. "This will cost you fifty points each and a detention to be set."

"What?" Harry and Ron cried.

"That's not fair," Malfoy protested, "I came to let McGonagall know. You're just doing that because of Potter."

"Where you not out of bounds Mr. Malfoy?" Sirius asked dangerously and Malfoy decided to shut up, "As you may have noticed, I actually took away more points from my house than Slytherin so be very careful who you are calling biased. I will accompany you and Ron to your respective dormitories while Mr. Potter *Black*," he stressed the last word looking at Malfoy pointedly, "will come with me for a little father son chat." Harry gulped again. Now he was in for it.

A/N: I hope you enjoyed this and I always enjoy your reviews.

I took away points from Slytherin too because as Sirius said nothing gave them the right to be out, it would be unfair if Draco just got a detention.

Disclaimer: So I though of calling her, decided not to make an international phone call, and thus I still don't own Harry Potter.

Chapter 6- No good did shall go unpunished

Once he entered what he liked to call the Marauders quarters Harry saw his Uncle laid on the couch reading. Remus raised an eyebrow at Harry and at Sirius fuming face. Sirius went straight to his own room where sounds of smashing could be heard. Harry bit his lip and stood there rooted in the middle of the living room. Remus gestured for him to sit next to him and studied him cautiously. Harry really didn't want to make his Uncle stressed two days before the full moon but there was really not much he could do.

"Want to tell me what happened?" Remus asked calmly. Harry shook his head. He hated this calm way Remus had of talking to you when you did something bad. He'd rather he yelled and ranted like his dad. This made him feel like he was a huge disappointment.

Sirius came back after he had calmed down a little, not much mind you.

"So, want to tell me why were you out in the halls at night when I *told* you about our suspicions about Quirrell?" he said through gritted teeth.

"What? You were out Harry? Why?" Remus asked Harry.

Harry for his part was contemplating his shoes very interestedly. Remus put a hand on Harry's chin and gently made him look at him. And there it was. That *look* Remus had that made you feel like crawling up in a wall and dying. He gulped and said in a cracked voice.

"I was helping a friend."

"Which friend? Who? Why? How? Why didn't you just come and ask us for help?" Sirius asked.

Harry shook his head. Truth be told he never even thought of talking to his father. In hindsight that would have been better.

"I can't tell you," he whispered.

"Was this friend worth risking your safety in such a way Harry?" Remus asked and Sirius started:

"Nothing is-"

"Let Harry answer Sirius."

Harry nodded, "Yes."

"I hope this friend appreciates what you've done Harry. However Sirius is right, nothing is worth risking your life in such a foolhardy way. The next time you have to promise to come to us understood."

"I promise," Harry said in a small voice.

"I don't know what punishment Sirius issued as a teacher but I am going to issue one as a former teacher. You are to serve a detention with Severus tomorrow night," Remus said calmly and Harry's eyes widened.

"What? He'll kill me."

"As much as I hate to admit it," Sirius said, "Snape does care for you as much as us. Therefore he has the same right as us to freak out and scold you, and he won't be able to do that in public. Tomorrow night I will escort you to his quarters under you cloak."

"Relax, Harry, Severus will have had the whole day to calm down," Remus said. Knowing Uncle Sev Harry didn't think that was a good thing.

"Now go to your room Harry. You will sleep here tonight," Sirius said shortly. Harry got up and took a last look at his dad and Uncle and feeling like the worst person in the world he headed to his old room.

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Once they were sure Harry was asleep Sirius started ranting.

"How could he? Of all the things to do. No care for his safety. How can someone be so foolhardy?"

"Yes, imagine *that*," Remus said sarcastically, "Imagine running around with a werewolf."

Sirius stopped pacing and turned to glare at his friend.

"This is completely different. Harry knows better than we did."

"Yes, he does. But he is still eleven Sirius. At eleven we thought ourselves immortal. It's not different for Harry. He probably didn't even think he was risking his neck. He probably even forgot all about Quirrell."

Sirius huffed, paced and then huffed a little more. Then with a sigh he dropped on the couch next to Remus.

"I can't bear to think of something happening to him Moony."

"I know. Me neither," Remus answered exhaling slowly.

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In the morning Harry didn't know what to dread more, facing his housemates about the loss of points or his guardians. He got dressed with the clean school robes that were by his bed and took his school bag. Harry guessed Kreacher had brought them. He understood why Sirius didn't like the elf, he had worshiped Sirius' parents and therefore believed everything they spewed, which was what Sirius ran away from. But Kreacher wasn't all that bad once you took a little time to talk to him. And Harry had. When he was little he sometimes stayed in the kitchens with the house-elves when his dad was teaching and his Uncle was recovering from the full moon. In those times Harry made friends with all the house-elves including Kreacher. Especially because he brought news from his Grandmother's portrait to Kreacher and the little elf had appreciated that a lot. Maybe if Harry had met Kreacher when he was older he would have seen the elf as Sirius did, but at four years old, Harry really didn't understand why his dad didn't like the elf.

He went into the living room where he found his Uncle getting his teaching things ready. Harry bit his lips and fidgeted a bit on the spot. Remus looked up. Put his books down and walked to Harry. He kneeled down and once again made Harry look at him. Harry asked in a small voice.

"You and dad hate me now?"

"No, cub, why would you think that?" he said in a soothing voice.

"Dad's not here."

"He went to tell Severus what happened," Harry cringed. Remus sighed and said seriously "What you did yesterday was foolish and we hope you never repeat it," Harry nodded, "We were so angry because we love you so much and you put yourself at risk. You did one bad thing Harry. You made one bad decision. That doesn't make you a bad person nor does it make us forget all the reasons we have for being proud of you and loving you. Ok." Harry nodded shyly and Remus pulled him into a hug.

That was the position Sirius found them when he came back to the quarters. He cleared his throat and Remus kissed the top of Harry's head. He picked his bag and left giving Sirius a pointed look and mouthing "stay calm". Sirius waved him off. Harry did not see all this since he once again was enthralled by his shoe fascination. He started a little when he felt one of his father's hands on his shoulder and the other under his chin. When he looked up he found Sirius occupying Remus' previous position.

"I am not going to shout with you or ask you who this friend was or what you were doing for him. Especially after the little chat I had with Hagrid," Harry's eyes widened, "He seems to think you are a good boy that should not be punished. I had a feeling his vehement defense of you may have something to do with your nightly escapade but he wasn't volunteering any details," at this Harry left out a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding.

Sirius raised an eyebrow, "Good thing you take after your mother in the facial features department and not after James. You just confirmed my thoughts."

Harry fidgeted and said softly, "M'sorry."

Sirius sighed and said, "No you're not," Harry moved to protest, "Do you regret whatever you did to help Hagrid," Harry shook his head, "Than you are just sorry you got caught."

"No," Harry protested, "I'm sorry I forgot to ask yours and Uncle Moony's help. I was so focused on the fact that Grandpa couldn't find out that I never thought to ask. I am really sorry dad. I didn't even remember about Quirrell. I never thought I was risking my life. Never thought he might do something. I promise I'll remember to come to you next time."

Sirius grimaced and said, "I really hope there isn't the need for that, but if you have too please come to us ok?"

Harry nodded fervently. Sirius smiled and hugged him kissing the top of his head.

"I'm sorry too pup. I was so nervous last night that I overreacted," Sirius bit his lips hard, "I think I may have exaggerated on the points taken from the three of you. I don't think we ever got such a sum in one of our escapades. But I don't think Minerva would have been lighter, not with-" he cut himself abruptly.

"The Philosopher stone being guarded here?" Harry supplied.

"How do you know?" Sirius looked suspiciously at Harry.

"I didn't go looking dad! Hagrid let slip that whatever was down there had to do with Nicolas Flamel and Hermione figured out the rest. I *did not* go looking for anything dad!" he pleaded desperately.

Sirius scrutinized him and said, "Ok, but I want you and your friends as far from the issue as possible."

Harry nodded vigorously he *really* didn't want his dad angry again.

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As Harry had predicted; Gryffindors were very upset with Harry and Ron and were not afraid to show it. The only people that still talked to them were Hermione and Ginny because they knew what had happened and Neville. Harry guessed that was because Neville knew how you felt being an outcast.

"Don't worry guys. Hermione will earn those points back to us in no time. And it's not like we're that bad off. With Malfoy losing points too and the two games we won we're still second and Slytherin isn't all that ahead," he'd said trying to cheer them up. Harry just wished that the rest of his housemates had the same optimism.

That was nothing of course compared to the dreaded detention. At seven o'clock on the spot his executioner, ahem, his dad escorted him under the Invisibility Cloak to the dungeons where he left Harry and the cloak to their own mercy. Harry was a mess. He stood there on the spot as Severus was finishing grading some essays in complete silence and not looking at him for about five minutes. Severus did know how to do very good psychological torture.

Finally, Severus looked up, raised an eyebrow and stared at Harry a little more before saying.

"Do you intend to stand there all night?"

Harry didn't even reply and quickly sat on the chair in front of the desk.

"As you can see there is quill, ink and parchment in front of you. I want you to write a hundred times:

"I will never again be a dunderhead and risk my life in some harebrained scheme that would give my guardians heart attacks."

Harry gaped at Severus. That was it?

"Well?"

Harry started without waiting for his Uncle to change his mind and decide to take those famous chains and whips Mr. Filch was always talking about.

At a quarter to nine Harry was finally done and after writing "giving my guardians heart attacks" for a hundred time he was positively feeling like the worst person on the planet again. He had never thought that he would have worried his dad and Uncles so much. All he had thought was that he had to avoid Filch to avoid detention but that this outing was no different than any of the Marauders escapades he always had heard about. Except the Marauders didn't have Dark Wizards wanting nothing better than to find them alone in a dark corridor and do them in. He bit his lips and said.

"I'm done sir."

Severus extended his hand and took the roll of parchments. Gave it a once through and satisfied ignited the parchment in flames and it promptly disappeared. At Harry's shocked face:

"Can't have anyone finding out what I had you writing. Now come here," he motioned to himself. Harry slowly rose and went to stand in front of Severus chair. Severus put his hands on Harry's shoulders and said looking in his eyes.

"Did you understand why this was so stupid?"

Harry nodded.

"Answer out loud."

"Yes, sir."

"I know it's not fair Harry. I know that any other student can and will break curfew a few times, I myself did so at school, but as much as we want to give you as normal a life as we can, we can't pretend you're just like any other student. I know Ron didn't get double punished and this may seem unfair to you but Ron isn't on the Dark Lords most wanted list, he isn't even in his radar. We have to impress this on you because all it takes was for it to have been Quirrell instead of Sirius to be patrolling the halls that night. I know the Headmaster may want more proof but I know he was the one to jinx your broom and let that troll in. Trolls are Quirrell's specialty. Do you understand this."

"Yes."

"Do you promise to never go out after curfew again?"

"Yes."

Severus face softened and he pulled Harry into a hug.

"You saved my life Harry. You gave me purpose, don't take that away from me," he whispered and Harry had the impression he wasn't supposed to have heard that so he stayed quiet hugging his Uncle.

Later Severus escorted Harry to the Tower under the cloak and told Harry to tell anyone that he was serving extra punishment with Sirius.

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"They all hate me! It's been a week and no one wants to talk to me. They have even started to talk to Ron again. But not me. *No*. It's like what I did was worse somehow even though everyone knows that I already served a detention and still have one to be set," Harry ranted. He knew he was being childish. He knew he was eleven, closer to twelve, and twelve year olds did not rant about the injustice of life seated on their grandfather's lap but Harry was depressed.

"Maybe they think that because the points were taken by your father?" Dumbledore reasoned.

"Like that's my fault. And dad said Aunt Minnie would have done the same."

"Probably. But that doesn't change the fact that your housemates are upset at the loss of points and when people are upset they are hardly rational," Dumbledore said pointedly. Harry crossed his arms and huffed.

"You know, when I started school I wasn't very popular. Quite the contrary. I had arrived here with what you could call a bad reputation and people were afraid of me."

"You did?" Harry asked bewildered. He couldn't imagine his grandfather being anything but loved and idolized by the whole Wizarding world.

"Oh, yes," he said playing with one of the many trinkets on his desk instead of looking at Harry, lost in memories. "My father had been sentenced to Azkaban for killing muggles and many thought I'd be the same as him."

Harry was shocked. His Grandpa's dad was a muggle hater. He couldn't help himself.

"Why did he do it?"

Dumbledore smiled at Harry and hesitated a bit as if contemplating if he could tell Harry this secret.

"If you don't want-"

"No, it's ok. I never told anyone. Only Aberforth and I know the truth. But the people this secret involves are long gone," he inhaled deeply, "I had a sister Harry, her name was Arianna. She was seen doing magic by some muggles and they attacked her. Because of this attack she became unstable and tried to repress her magic. But that doesn't work Harry, our magic has to get out, has to be used. It's a part of us. She was seven and she became unsafe. My mother had to take care of her all the time because if she got nervous or agitated she could blow up everything around, she had no control. Enraged my father sought revenge, but when he was arrested he let everyone think he was a muggle hater so the Ministry wouldn't take Arianna away. If they had known they would have locked her up in St. Mungos and we'd never see her again and they wouldn't take good care of her. So he died in Azkaban, for his daughter."

"And everyone thought you were both dark because of that?"

"As you can see, sometimes there is more to the story than we know. But we can only react to what we know."

"Is she dead too? Arianna I mean."

Dumbledore nodded sadly, "After my mother died on one of Arianna's loses of control I had to take care of her. But I was young and wanted the world. I didn't want to be stuck at home taking care of an unstable child. I made a friend that wanted the same as me and we started making plans. I thought I'd take her with me and everything was going to be fine. Aberforth, in all his crudeness, was wiser. He had no trouble telling me and my friend that. My friend wasn't happy and a fight ensued. I tried to stop them and soon we were in a three way duel. One of the spells hit Arianna. I never knew which," he finished in a whisper.

Harry hugged him and said, "It's not your fault grandpa. You tried to stop. You made a bad decision. Uncle Moony said that that doesn't make you bad."

"Yes, Remus is very wise in that way," Dumbledore smiled on Harry's head. He had never told this to anyone. How had this child opened him like this? How had he shown him that he didn't have to carry this by himself.

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About a week before exams were to start Harry and Ron were informed of their detention. They were to meet Mr. Filch at eleven. Harry thought it a bit rich that they would be out at night serving a detention for being out at night but wisely said nothing. Filch took him, Malfoy and Ron to the outskirts of the forest where they met Hagrid. Malfoy of course whined about there being werewolves in the forest and Harry couldn't help but roll his eyes. It wasn't even the full moon yet? And the only werewolf around spent the full moon curled up in his room snoring with Padfoot. Of course Malfoy would never know *that*. They were supposed to find an injured unicorn. Hagrid took them inside the Forest where they followed a path of silver blood. They found some centaurs that were no help whatsoever expect for saying Mars was bright. When the path got divided Hagrid split them in two, Malfoy, Harry and Fang (according to Hagrid's whisper Harry could defend himself from the "annoying twerp" better than Ron) and Hagrid and Ron.

They set off to find the Unicorn. And they did. In a clearing they found the beautiful unicorn knocked down and a horrible hooded something hunched down on it. Draco Malfoy being the brave boy he was promptly screamed and ran away with Fang at his heels leaving Harry rooted to the spot. Of course the scream alerted the hooded creature that looked up and at that moment Harry felt pain as never before. His head was about to crack open. He fell to the floor and couldn't think properly. The hooded creature launched itself at Harry and it was by pure survival instinct that Harry managed to cry *Impedimenta* and *Protego*. That slowed the creature's progress but Harry had no idea how long he'd be able to keep it at bay. He couldn't move and he felt darkness getting closer. Suddenly he heard hooves and a scuttling of robes. He lost consciousness as he felt two strong arms lifting him.

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Once again Sirius Black, Remus Lupin and Severus Snape were surrounding a small boy's bed. This time though they were in the Marauders Quarters instead of the Hospital Wing. Albus didn't think it wise for the whole school to know what happened. Even they didn't exactly know what happened. When Hagrid and Ron came bounding inside the castle, Hagrid holding Harry's unconscious form all he could tell them was that the centaur Firenze had saved Harry from a creature Firenze swore was some form of Lord Voldemort. Severus had gone looking for Malfoy and found him hiding under his covers in his dorms. Malfoy wasn't much help. He just told them about finding the unicorn and the hooded figure. Not that Severus could inquire more after all he had to make it look like his only concern had been Malfoy and the kid was fine. Shaken up but fine.

Then there was Dumbledore. He had never wanted to throttle the twinkling old coot more. Dumbledore was the one that set the detention. He said he had thought Hagrid would have been with the kids all the time and therefore they wouldn't be in danger. He had suspected Voldemort to be the one killing Unicorns for their blood but had no way of confirming it. When Harry reported his scar hurting he figured

it reacted to closeness to Voldemort and thought Harry would be able to identify him. Severus may have held himself back but Sirius did no such thing. It took both Remus and Severus to hold him back and Dumbledore was promptly banned from the room.

Thinking rationally he knew Dumbledore needed to know for sure that it was Voldemort and not some greedy teacher after the stone. He knew Dumbledore truly believed Harry would have been safe. The man had learned to love Harry like his own grandson even though Severus knew that when Harry had first defeated Voldemort, Dumbledore had seen him as a means to an end. That wasn't true anymore. The same way Harry warmed his way in Severus' heart he did in Dumbledore's. But Dumbledore was still Dumbledore and had the whole school's safety to think of. But right now, none of the three men in the room were interested in being rational.

Madam Pomfrey said Harry only needed rest. Harry may have known how to perform the charms but there was a reason they were learned after fourth years. It took a lot to perform and keep a shield up like Harry did. Grown wizards would have felt drained. Harry was just too young to be able to do that and walk away.

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There was always dark and green and a cruel high laugh. But now that laugh didn't come from the dark. It came from a hooded figure. He wanted out, he wanted light, he wanted to get away from that laugh. There was a voice calling him and he wanted to get to the voice but the laugh wouldn't let him. He fought valiantly to get to the voice, the voice he knew.

"Shh, it's all right pup. You're safe. I won't let anything happen to you," the voice said and as Harry found his way to awareness he realized the voice belonged to his dad who was holding him almost like a baby rocking back and forth and making soothing voices. Running a hand through his head. Harry didn't make a noise, he just let his dad rock him like when he was little and had nightmares. He didn't see the two figures going toward the doors or listened to their whispered conversation.

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"He hasn't had a nightmare like that for a long time, has he?" Severus asked even though he knew the answer.

"No," Remus sighed, "He stopped having nightmares about a green light and a cruel laugh that left him like that a few years back. It's about that night. But he was too little to remember consciously."

Severus looked at the rocking figures inside the room and sighed and with a grim expression said, "Unfortunately that's not the last time he'll have such nightmares."

Remus nodded grimly.

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Ron and Hermione had been properly terrified when Harry told them what happened and who the adults thought that had been killing the unicorns was but somehow they didn't share Harry's complete and utter terror of what could happen. Yes, they were afraid of Voldemort coming back but they had the utter belief that even though Dumbledore had no grounds to kick Quirrell out, Quirrell wouldn't dare try anything with the Headmaster there. There was also the fact that Ron still thought Snape a likelier candidate than Quirrell.

Harry thought that maybe this was the result of Harry having heard more about Voldemort from his dad, Uncles and Grandfather than them, or maybe because, as he let the adults know, his scar had not stopped burning since that night in the forest. He really wished it would because it was interfering with his exams. Uncle Sev had given him a pain potion but it hadn't work leaving the Potions Masters quite ruffled at the inefficiency of one of his potions.

But the last exam came and when they were outside walking to Hagrid's for an end of term tea and cake a horrible thought crossed Harry's mind.

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A/N: I hope you enjoyed this and I always enjoy your reviews.

I took Remus calling Harry cub and Sirius calling him pup from many stories I read that do that. I just thing it's the epitome of cuteness.

I though to put the scene with Dumbledore in CoS because of the whole parselmouth thing but I don't think it would have worked with Harry being a year older.

Disclaimer: I still don't own Harry Potter.

Chapter 7- Walking with the enemy

He was in the middle of grading the end of term exams when an un-descriptive owl flew in. He reached for the letter and saw the Ministry seal. He opened it and read and then effectively cursed in a couple of languages he knew. He got up and all but stalked to the Headmaster's office. What the bloody hell were they playing at? And why now? After all this time? Well he would have none of it!

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The three kids ran as fast as they could to the Headmasters office. One of them barked out a password and they were in the rotating stairs. The other two were so worried that they didn't even have time to be awed by the beauty of said office. Said very empty office. Harry turned to one of the portraits.

"Uncle Phineus where is Grandpa?"

Hermione stared and mouthed Grandpa. But Harry had no time to explain.

"Well, you don't come here to talk to me all year, then with the arrogance that is so common on insufferable children just go barking demands for information-"

"Uncle Phineus I don't have time for your long tirades, I need to know where my Grandfather is. It's an emergency!" he said irritated.

"Everything is an emergency to you brats-"

"Now," and he turned to another portrait, "Professor Dipet, would you know?"

"Yes in fact," Dipet started just to be rudely interrupted.

"That mongrel of a father of yours came here all altered with a missive from the ministry and they both left for London," Phineus answered ruffled at being swapped for Dipet like that.

"Thank you Uncle, Professor Dipet," he nodded and tried to leave calmly but once out of ear shot he cried to his friends.

"They left! How could they leave?"

"What now?" Ron asked equally nervous.

Hermione bit her lip and started running. Shocked the boys ran after her straight to the Deputy Headmistress's office.

"Professor McGonagall, Professor McGonagall you have to call Professor Dumbledore back!" Hermione cried opening the door without knocking.

McGonagall was startled by the abrupt entrance of the three flushed children and said in a stern tone.

"What is the meaning of this?"

"Hagrid told a stranger how to get past Fluffy. We think he is going after the Philosopher's stone. And now Grandpa left and Quirrell has his way open to him!" Harry cried.

McGonagall's first instinct was to berate the kids for knowing more than they should but Harry's slip of calling Dumbledore Grandpa told her the boy was really preoccupied. He hadn't slipped once. And of course she knew of Dumbledore's and the three young teacher's suspicions about Quirrell.

"I don't have to remind you three not to go looking for trouble and let the adults deal with this. I will alert Dumbledore of your suspicions and don't fret. Fluffy was by no means the only protection. Now I want you three to go up to your dorms and stay there for the rest of the day. Do I make myself clear?"

They silently left and made their way to the Tower. Hermione saw Harry bite his lips in thought and turn to them.

"I'll meet you up in the Tower."

"Harry. Professor McGonagall said-" Hermione started.

"I am not going to look for Quirrell. I am just letting someone else know of our suspicions. Just to be on the safe side."

Assuming he meant Professor Lupin they both nodded and left but Hermione didn't miss Ron's frown or last glance at Harry.

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He hated coming to the Ministry. No matter who you were, or were with in his case, it took you an eternity to get through all the security measures. Finally after over an hour of telling their names and having their wands checked and rechecked a dozen times they were in front of the moron in chief. Sorry, he meant Minister Fudge. And he was by no means any calmer than when he first read that accursed letter.

"What is the meaning of this Fudge? You have no legal right to annul Harry's adoption. You people already tried to keep him from me once and it didn't work!" he all but barked.

"Sirius is right Cornelius. That letter has no grounds whatsoever and I find myself quite disappointed to have to remind you of that," Dumbledore said in his always pleasant voice, the one which made you feel very tiny.

"What letter?" Fudge stammered.

"This one," Sirius growled shoving said letter under Fudge's nose.

"We did not send that letter. I did not sign that. It's a forgery!" Fudge pleaded.

Sirius was about to bite his head off when a horrible thought crossed his mind. Dumbledore was already waving his wand through the letter and it glowed red. Wrong color. An authentic signature would have glowed blue. How could they have been so stupid not to check? Sirius stormed out and Dumbledore told Fudge before following him.

"So sorry for the misunderstanding Cornelius, have a nice day."

"Quirrell," Sirius spat on the way to the lifts, "He knew that I'd go to you for help and we'd both leave."

"Yes I am afraid so, lets not waste any more time Sirius."

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Ron was seated in one of the armchairs by the fire. Arm propped up by his elbow on his knees, biting his nails, which was an accomplishment seeing as he was shaking said knee up and down non stop. Hermione was pacing in front of him.

"What's taking him so long? He should have been here long ago?" she asked wringing her hands.

At the display the twins just had to know what was going on.

"May we be of service?" Fred asked.

"No," Ron answered, "We're waiting for Harry. He should have been here long ago."

"Ah, then we may be of service," said George and he disappeared up the stairs. Ron and Hermione looked at Fred astounded but he just whistled calmly. After a short moment George came back and said.

"Not to fret, he is walking down the third floor corridor with Professor Quirrell."

Apparently that was to fret because both kids bolted out the door.

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"We have to tell someone," Ron said running to McGonagall's office but no one was there.

"What now?" he asked.

"Professor Lupin," she said.

Ron looked outside, almost moonrise.

"No he is, hum, otherwise engaged tonight."

"I quite think Professor Lupin will think Harry's safety is more important than whatever he is doing."

"It's not quite his choice," Ron said biting his lip, "There is one other person but I don't know."

"Well it's not like we have a choice, let's go.' Hermione said.

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They were down the trapdoor and through the Devil's Snare. Quirrell was working out how to get the flying key to open the door and Harry said.

"I could fetch it for you."

"Do I look stupid boy," Quirrell answered.

"Do you really want an answer?" if he was going to die he at least was going to say whatever he wanted.

After all, the body bind Quirrell put him prevented him from moving. Not talking. He had tried to let Uncle Sev know about Fluffy but apparently Quirrell had been tailing him just waiting for the moment he would be alone. Apparently he had orders to get the stone and kill the boy. Harry just couldn't figure why he wasn't dead already.

Quirrell decided to mount a broom and after missing the key a lot of times in which Harry knew he would have gotten it he descended, opened the door, hovered Harry in front of him and went through just to find themselves face to face with a gigantic chess set. Aunt Minnie Harry thought fondly and sadly.

"Guess we have to play then," Quirrell drawled.

He took the place of one of the pieces and floated Harry to another. Harry just hoped he wouldn't have to be sacrificed because this game was turning brutal.

Miraculously they made their way through intact and Harry was almost sighing when he found himself face to face with a Troll. With an almost lazy flick of his wand Quirrell hit the Troll's mouth with a cutting hex effectively killing it.

"I have a special talent with Trolls," he smirked at Harry's shocked face.

In the other room they were trapped by two walls of fire. A row of bottles on a table and a piece of parchment that Quirrell read out loud was right in front of them. Good old Uncle Sev, Harry thought fondly. His Uncle always said that Wizards didn't have an ounce of logic. Well he actually said no one; wizard or muggle had an ounce of logic. And he hadn't put it as politely as that.

It took Quirrell quite a long time to figure the puzzle. All the better, thought Harry. By now Ron and Hermione must be missing him and hopefully going for help.

Once through the fire they found themselves in the last chambers but there was no stone on a pedestal like Harry imagined. No, the only thing there was the Mirror of Erised and Harry wondered if he would see his dad, Uncle Moony and Uncle Sev's reflection once again before joining his birth parents. *Cheerful thought Harry.* He scolded himself. But the truth was he was terrified and couldn't do anything but think or give cheeky answers.

Quirrell was in front of the Mirror examining it and muttering. Harry caught the words "presenting the stone" and "how do I get it" when he decided to pay attention and looked at Quirrell's back. His scar flared in pain again and he did not like what that meant. Then he heard it.

"Use the boy, the old fool would have told him how to."

And Harry had the sinking feeling he understood why he wasn't dead yet. He felt the body bind lift and his legs walk commanded by someone else. He decided he would stall the best he could. Help had to be on the way and there was no way he'd let Voldemort get the stone. He was in front of the Mirror but he didn't see his family, instead he saw himself winking at him and putting the stone in his own pocket. He felt a weight on his pants but didn't dare make a sound.

"What do you see Potter?"

"No one forgetting that my name is Potter *Black.*"

"Don't get cheeky with me boy," Quirrell said grabbing Harry by the scruff of his neck and shaking him.

"I see myself as Quidditch captain getting the House Cup," he lied. Quirrell got annoyed and shoved him aside. He went back to the mirror and Harry thought that just maybe he'd get lucky and could use Quirrell's distraction to get away when the voice spoke again.

"Let me talk to him, he lies."

"Are you sure master?" Quirrell asked and Harry was starting to think he must have some kind of mental disorder when he started unrolling his turban and Harry found out that that hadn't been Quirrell making voices. Once again Harry's scar flared in pain and he was looking straight in the ugly face of Lord Voldemort, which just happened to be residing on the back of Quirrell's head.

"Why don't you give me that stone like a nice boy so Quineus can kill you swiftly instead of painfully Harry?"

"I have no idea what you are talking about," Harry tried to sound brave but he wasn't sure he managed with all the terrified shaking his body was doing and all.

"I am talking about the stone on your pocket Harry. You wouldn't want to beg for death like your pathetic father now would you?"

"My father wasn't pathetic and he didn't beg!" Harry shouted.

"No, you're right," Voldemort laughed, but it wasn't warm like Uncle Moony's or that funny bark his dad had or even the deep one Uncle Sev had, no this was a cruel laugh. "He put up a fight he did. Quite entertaining and useless. But enough chatting. Seize him!" he ordered and Quirrell threw himself at Harry and grabbed his arms. Harry never felt pain like this. Not even in the forest. His forehead was splitting open, he couldn't think or hear. And suddenly the pain was gone and Harry looked up to see Quirrell staring at his hands and stammering

"It burns master."

Harry looked at them and saw they were red, he also felt the smell of burning flesh.

"I don't care! GET THAT STONE!"

Quirrell launched himself at Harry again but this time Harry grabbed Quirrell's face and as Quirrell screamed in pain he grabbed on to Quirrell by the arm and hung on tightly. He was in so much pain but all he thought was that if Quirrell was distracted by the pain he wouldn't get the stone. He held as long as he could but he could feel blackness inching closer. He thought he heard other cries in the middle of Quirrell's screams and a familiar voice calling his name. Then he knew no more.

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The wolf was pacing, something happened to his cub. He could feel it. He whined and scratched the door even though he knew his human counterpart had locked the door very tightly. He had to get to his cub.

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He was running through the corridors with the limp small body in his arms. Was he too late? How long had it taken for him to get back through the chambers. Had he managed to pull Quirrell off him fast enough. He shuddered at the image of Voldemort's spirit leaving Quirrell's body to death. There was nothing to do for him. He would have died once Voldemort left him even without whatever Harry did.

He was running as best as he could, he could hear Harry's breath get more haggard by the second. He didn't stop at the two figures he met in the halls. They were now following him and one used his wand to bang the infirmary doors open. Madam Pomfrey stalked from her office.

"What is the meaning of this? Harry? Oh, my, put him here," she motioned to one of the beds.

"Now leave," she ordered, "Let me do my job," and waved her wand at the three men.

He was quite shocked to find himself being pushed outside the Ward by wind and hear the doors shutting them out.

"What happened Severus?" the aged Headmaster asked. Severus turned to him with a lost expression.

He saw the same expression on Sirius face that was still watching the door as if he could be with his son that way, as if he let the door out of sight Harry would leave them.

"Quirrell, he took Harry," he answered detachedly. Never taking his eyes off the door. "Weasley and Granger came to see me. They were worried. Somehow the twins found out that Quirrell was taking Harry through the third floor corridor. When I got there. Oh, God, I thought I was too late. Quirrell was screaming in pain, but I didn't care, I just heard Harry's painful screams. And yet he wouldn't let go of Quirrell. He kept grabbing him even though he was in pain."

"What of Quirrell?" Dumbledore asked.

"Dead. The Dark Lord was sharing his body and when he left Quirrell died."

"He was possessed?"

"No Albus, he knew what he was doing," Severus looked Dumbledore told him. "I told you!" he shouted,

"We all did but you insisted on giving him a chance. Second chances are good and all but some people don't deserve them!" and he stalked to one of the chairs. He didn't even make a move when he saw the Werewolf that trotted to Sirius' side and nudged his hand with his muzzle whining. Lupin was on the Wolfsbane there was no risk. He was in control. He did wonder how he managed to free himself.

The wolf guided Sirius to a chair and jumped on the next setting his head on Sirius' lap. Sirius stroked the wolf's head mechanically, never taking his eyes off the door.

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Hours later Madam Pomfrey stalked out the infirmary and dumped a red stone on Dumbledore's hand forcefully. She then turned to Sirius and the wolf that had gotten up.

"I did all I could. I had to give him all the restorative potions I had in stock. He is magically and physically exhausted and I do not expect him to wake up for a couple of days, but he should survive. Though after he wakes up he will need to rest and don't worry if he gets tired easily for a while. You may sit with him but in turns. As I said he will be out for days and the last thing he needs is for you all to drop from exhaustion at once."

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"But Ginny never misses class?" he heard a voice from the distance.

"Because on the day after the full moon we usually had study sessions with whatever teacher was available to chaperone us. Sometimes even Madam Pomfrey. So nobody would notice and realize. If every month we didn't come once, students would talk and parents could complain."

"That's rubbish. You said he was perfectly safe."

"He is. The Wolfsbane lets him keep his mind. Also prevents him from hurting himself. That was the worst part of the transformations before. He would hurt himself and take days to recover. Now he just needs a day and it's mostly because he stays up the whole night and the magical effort of the transformation. Professor Lupin said this job saved him. That otherwise he wouldn't be able to afford the potions and would have felt the stress much more. Right now it's just a minor inconvenience that he has to deal with but is not life threatening or anything. He may live as long as any other wizard."

He decided he was too tired and went back to sleep. Apparently Hermione found out about Uncle Moony's furry little problem.

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He watched his son sleep begging him to wake up. He had been unconscious for two days already. *His son*. He remembered the first time Harry called him daddy. The feelings of joy and guilt. He wasn't daddy, James was. He tried to tell the two and a half year old that but he had rolled his eyes and said:

"He' my first daddy. You my other daddy."

Simple child logic. Took him quite awhile to stop feeling guilty. Having nightmares of James accusing him of knowing Pettigrew was a spy and setting him up to steal his son. A lot of late talks with Moony later he started to realize that he wasn't talking James place but he was a daddy now. The joy of hearing the word never faded.

When he had apparated with the Ministry case worker at the Dursleys he was afraid Harry wouldn't remember him. But he found that wasn't true. He found a scared toddler locked up in a cupboard. When he finally stopped shaking at Sirius gentle voice coaxing him out he looked up and cried "Pa-foo" in a small voice. Ran into his godfathers arms and grabbed on for dear life. Sirius had taken him straight to Hogwarts and Poppy had quite a hard job of checking him because he wouldn't let go of Sirius. Until he compromised and sat on the bed holding a handful of Sirius sleeves. Still she couldn't get near without the boy shaking. The only other person Harry had made any sign of recognition was Remus. When he came in Harry cried "Mooney" and made to go to Remus but when Remus picked him up Sirius found that his sleeve with arm attached was taken with Harry.

Sirius fire called Auror Headquarters presenting his resignation as soon as Harry was asleep. He had to give his godson his full attention, and he didn't actually need the job. But Moody had refused. He said he'd only accept a leave of absence. But Sirius knew he wouldn't be an Auror any more, even when he went back to work. He couldn't have such a dangerous job. If something happened to him there was no way the Ministry would let Remus keep Harry. The only reason Remus was listened about his innocence

was because Dumbledore wanted to convince him of Sirius's guilt or else he could have yelled and yelled and all the bigots would do was give him a cell next to Sirius'.

He shuddered to think what would have been of Harry if he had ended up in Azkaban. He didn't think the Dursleys would have killed him. Petunia wanted the protection Lily's sacrifice gave her and her precious Duddykins too. That's why she agreed to the yearly visits. But he wouldn't be happy. He would probably be made as their house elf. Given just enough not to starve to death and be abused both physically and mentally if the bruises the almost two year old had where anything to go by.

Sirius had wanted to kill the Dursleys but he knew Harry needed the damn protection, so he left all the Dursley dealings to Remus. He was good at keeping his temper. He had to learn. Contrary to popular belief a werewolf did not fight his inner wolf all month long. There was no inner wolf, any other day and night of the month he was as normal as any person. On the night of the full moon he transformed into a wolf and forgot who he was but only that night. But people didn't think that and any sign of rage from him was interpreted with fear of him letting the supposed inner wolf win. Because of that he was able to put his anger aside to deal with the Dursleys. Something Sirius wasn't.

The door opened and non other than Remus himself walked in looking like the kneazel that ate the pixie. He sat on the chair by Harry's bed's other side and stroked Harry's hair. He brushed some invisible lint and by then Sirius couldn't take it anymore.

"What? What did you do? What do you know?"

"Oh, nothing. I just took a stroll to Filch's office."

"Any particular reason?"

"Yes."

"And, what did you find there?"

"It's a question of what I didn't find there. More precisely on the Highly Dangerous confiscated items drawer."

He grinned. And Sirius became impatient.

"I have no idea what you are going on about."

"Well, you see, when Ron and Hermione told us Fred and George knew exactly where and with who Harry was I started thinking."

"NO!" Sirius said grinning.

"Oh, I am quite sure of it. It would explain how come we never catch them. And not even Filch knows this castle as well as you and me."

"Worthy successors," Sirius beamed.

"Who's worthy?" came a hoarse voice from the bed and both jumped.

"Harry! You're up," Remus cried helping his nephew seat up while Sirius fetched him water.

"So who's a worthy successor," Harry asked trying to delay the time he knew he'd have to talk about what happened.

"It burns master."

Remus gave him a knowing look but obliged, "The Weasley twins, we suspect that they found and worked out the marauder's Map."

"Uau," the Marauder's Map to Harry was stuff of legend. Harry had always wanted to be able to use it but according to what Remus and Sirius told him Peter Pettigrew had lost the Map to Filch on their seventh year when he was caught out of bounds. At the time the Marauder's hadn't cared seeing as they were about to graduate and thought that some future mischief maker could find the map. But once Remus told him that when Harry had been born James had lamented not being able to give his son the map. He had even come up with a plan to rescue the map from Filch but was never able to put it in action. In all their years at Hogwarts Remus and Sirius had never thought of doing it.

Harry fidgeted with the glass in his hands until Sirius gently took it and put it in the bedside table.

"Pup, we need to know what happened," Sirius said gently stroking Harry's fringe from his face.

Harry shook his head. He didn't want to tell them, they would hate him, he killed a man, he was no better than Voldemort.

"Harry," Remus said gently holding one of Harry's hands and Harry had to fight the urge to take his hand back. He had no right to be touching someone as good as Remus. "We know the basics but we need to understand what happened when you were alone with Quirrell so we can help you through this." Harry took away his hand and crossed his arms shaking his head violently.

"Ha-" Sirius started just to be interrupted by a voice from the door.

"May I have a private word with Harry?"

The three looked up and saw Severus Snape standing in all his dark robed forlornness at the Wards door. Sirius moved to protest but understanding that maybe Snape could relate better to Harry right now Remus stopped him. Remus had a good idea of what was troubling his young nephew. Not that he hadn't had to kill in the first war, but he had been much older and had entered the situation willingly. He ushered the protesting father outside and closed the doors casting a silencing spell.

Snape sat in the chair that Remus had previously occupied and waited in silent for Harry to make the first move. A long while later he heard the whispered words.

"I killed him."

Severus sighed, an eleven year old shouldn't have to feel this, "Technically, no you didn't. His fate was sealed when he let the Dark Lord possess him willingly. When he let the Dark Lord draw from him to keep himself alive. He would have died anyway by the damage made by the Dark Lord even if he had been freed right there and then uninjured. Ironically, the only thing that was keeping him going longer was the Dark Lord, but soon his magic would have been too depleted for the Dark Lord to keep using his body and he would leave a shell behind as he did. Your actions just sped the process up."

"But they did speed the process up. And I knew he was hurting. He kept yelling *"It burns master."* And I didn't let go. I was just thinking that I had to keep him from the stone and hoping someone would get there before I let go," Harry said softly and hurriedly. Like this was some awful secret that he didn't want anyone to hear. Severus wiped the tear tracks on Harry's face gently with his thumbs and turning the boys head towards him he said.

"You were right. You can't even begin to imagine the horror that would come had the Dark Lord managed to retrieve the stone. I wish you hadn't had to make that choice Harry but you made the right one. This doesn't make you evil. Voldemort killed for pleasure and power. What you did was out of love for the people you care for. It's that love that Voldemort possessing Quirrell couldn't bare to touch. The same love that Lily had and left you with that saved your life all those years ago and that still lives in your blood, in your skin."

Sad green eyes looked at him intensely and Severus continued, "Some times we have to do things that are horrible and unimaginable to protect those we love. Your parents, Sirius, Remus, Dumbledore and-" he hesitated, "myself, we've all had to kill in the first war. But what differs our killing from the ones Voldemort did was that we did it because at the time we had no other choice, and they haunt us, we never stop regretting them, that's what makes us different from him." He swallowed hard as he got up and sat on the bed pulling Harry into a hug. He kept rubbing circles on the boys back and running a hand through the messy hair while he let Harry digest everything. He had been reluctant to add himself to the list because he knew that he wasn't all that innocent. Yes, the only time he'd killed directly was at the Order's service. Voldemort thought Snape potions skills too valuable to risk him on the fields. But he wasn't naïve, he knew his potions had helped the Death Eaters achieve their goals. How many faceless lives had he taken indirectly? He didn't know, but they haunted him even more than the ones he'd taken to fight against Voldemort. Those he had taken out of self defense and defense of others. Not the firsts one. He had joined Voldemort out of hatred and bitterness. Hatred for all his cruel father represented to him. A hatred that made him lose the most important person in his life. That was his biggest regret. That she had died hating him, hating what he had become. It was to achieve her forgiveness that he fought so hard to defeat Voldemort. Maybe one day he would. Maybe one day he would forgive his foolish decisions.

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A/N- Before I get flamed I have nothing against fics that make Remus feel sick for long or say that his lycanthropy shortens his life. That make him fight the wolf. I actually like quite a fair few of them.

I haven't seen any evidence in the books that suggest he wouldn't live as long as others. Greyback had to have been a Werewolf for some time before he bit Remus if he already had a reputation of biting children and raising them, and he was quite well and kicking on book six and seven. So I assume he has

to be at least close to sixty. (Being over twenty when he bit Remus). And in book three Remus is quite active up until his transformation. So for this fic, any supposed illness comes after the transformation and I will assume Remus looked more worn and sick in the books than he would if he had a steady job and Wolfsbane. The only mention of the wolf showing up when he is human was in Deathly Hallows and I wrote and planed this before DH so I will just ignore that for the sake of my story.

Disclaimer: I still don't own Harry Potter. When will I own it?

A/N: Ok. I had a review that asked if Harry and the other kids didn't get suspicious of Sirius and Remus sleeping in the same room and I realized I never described the Marauder's Quarters. There are three rooms, one for each, a common room or living room and a bathroom. There will be no Sirius/Remus pairing. They are friends, brothers. I have nothing against Sirius/Remus pairing. Actually like it but that is not what is going on here. Sorry if I confused you. I tried to get a description of the room into an earlier chapter but it didn't work.

Check out my C2, there's a new answer to my challenge.

Beta offers are still appreciated!

Chapter 8- And the year ends

After the initial shock dimmed a little another thought seized Harry powerfully.

"He saw you," he said worriedly.

"What?" Severus asked from his seated position on the bed.

Harry sat up on the bed properly leaving Severus embrace and said.

"It was your voice I heard down in the chamber. You where the one there. Voldemort saw you. He'll know! You can't spy anymore."

Severus sighed. He had hoped Harry wouldn't figure that one out. He and Dumbledore had already decided on a course of action.

"He may not have recognized me," he tried but at the boy's skeptic look he amended, "He probably saw me. Albus and I talked about this, but if the time comes that I have to be at his side again I will show up and if he asks me I'll say I never suspected him to be with Quirrell. That I was just stopping a greedy wizard and trying to stay on Dumbledore's good side. We can only hope he buys it."

"No," Harry shook his head desperately, "It's too dangerous."

"If the Dark Lord ever comes back Harry, we will *need* spies, and I am in the best position to do so. But I don't want you to worry about that. We will cross that bridge when we come to it."

Harry was not appeased by this. Dumbledore had always believed that sooner or later Voldemort would rise again and Harry always worried what would happen to his family then. All of them were in the thick of it. But Uncle Sev was the one with the most dangerous position. One single moment of suspicion from Voldemort would cost the man his life.

"How did you know how to get to me Uncle Sev?" he asked tiredly as he laid back down on his Uncle's chest.

"Your friends came looking for me. They had thought you had gone to tell Remus about your suspicion, but the moon was almost up and you were not back yet. Young Mr. Weasley knew you couldn't be with

Remus since Remus never lets you near him hours before moonrise. I think he even suspected that you never had the intention of going to Remus since he would have been of little help that night. So they came to me. I rushed down and had to go through the traps, I was so scared I'd been too late."

"Ron came to you Uncle Sev. I think you're losing your touch," Harry tried to joke but his eyes were dropping already. Severus stroked his hair lulling him back to sleep.

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The next time Harry woke he found Sirius by his bedside grading papers.

"Hello pup," he said cheerfully.

Harry stretched and said, "Hi dad."

"Hagrid was here earlier, he wanted to see you. He handed his resignation to Dumbledore but Dumbledore didn't accept," Harry was shocked.

"What? Why?"

"Seemed to think he was at fault," Sirius eyed Harry and raising an eyebrow said, "I have to hand it to you Harry. In all my Hogwarts years I *never* smuggled dragon eggs."

Harry smiled sheepishly while he sat down properly.

"I still say you should have come to me but I now understand that there was more at stake than saving a friend from detention. Hagrid could have been thrown in Azkaban for that, so I am lifting your allowance suspension that I had first planned to lift around the time that mess happened."

Harry grinned at this. Not much for the money. He knew that even without pocket money he'd get what he wanted by asking his dad, but because this meant his dad had forgiven him.

"When do I get out of here?"

"If you're lucky for the feast," Harry pouted, "You got seriously injured son and its best if you don't strain yourself."

"S'boring."

"I know," Sirius chuckled.

The doors to the wing opened a crack and a small head poked in. She smiled, turned back and yelled:

"He's up," and she bounded to a seat next to the bed.

"Hello Sirius."

"Hello Ginny," Sirius said getting up.

Neville, Ron, Hermione and the twins followed Ginny's lead making a weird circle around Harry's bed.

"Now, I'll leave you youngsters alone but don't tire Harry out."

"DAD!"

"Don't look at me like that. Poppy said you need all the rest you can get," Sirius said leaving. As the doors closed behind him the onslaught began.

"Quirrell kidnapped you?"

"Snape saved you?"

"You faced You-Know-Who?"

Harry didn't have the time to think about one question before another came so he put to fingers in his mouth and whistled sharply.

"OK! Now you can talk," he said as he caught their attention, "How did you find out about Voldemort?"

"The whole school knows what happens," Hermione explained, "When we went to find Professor Snape Nearly Headless Nick saw us and though Snape sent us back to our dormitories I think Nick followed him."

Great! Now the whole school knew Severus was the one to save him. So in the unlikely event that Voldemort didn't recognize him, his Death Eaters would be very eager to fill him in.

"How did you do it?" came Neville's shy question.

"Dunno exactly," Harry shrugged, "I was told that because of my mom's sacrifice Quirrell couldn't touch me. All I knew was that he was hurting and I just grabbed him and hoped that someone would find us before I passed out and let him go."

"Guess Snape isn't all that bad then. I'll do my best not to call him a Greasy Git to his face," Ron said.

"It would be best to not call him that at all," Ginny pointed out.

"Impossible," Ron, Fred and George cried at the same time.

Wanting to change the subject and feeling mischievous Harry asked innocently.

"So, how did you two know where I was?"

"Hum, you know, hum, luck," Fred mumbled. The others looked at him and George skeptically.

"Really? Luck," Harry shrugged, "Too bad then. I guess I'll have to tell Uncle *Moony* he was wrong."

"Who?" Neville, Ginny and Hermione asked. Harry was very careful not to call Remus Uncle Moony in company of other students and only his best friend had been privy to the Marauders tales. Fred and George were still mouthing 'Uncle Moony' when Ron asked.

"So he thinks he knows. Does Padfoot think so too?" glad that his friend was catching on so fast Harry took the bait. Ron wasn't as thick as he liked people to think.

"Yes but I think they're wrong seeing as this was luck. Alas, they'll be disappointed," he faked sighed and this took Fred and George out of their stupor. Fred seized Harry and George seized Ron and they started shaking them.

"You know them? You know the Marauders?" Fred yelled.

"Tell us!" George demanded.

Ginny and Hermione tried to bat Fred from Harry while Neville tried to pry George's grip on his brother.

Sirius poked his head back inside just in time to see Neville holding tight on George and both Ginny and Hermione hauling Fred to a seat.

"Everything ok?" he asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Everything just dandy dad," replied a ruffled Harry.

Very reluctantly, and with an expression that said that he was not fooled, Sirius left.

"Spill Harry, "George demanded, "Do you know them?"

"I may, I may not," Harry said inspecting his fingernails.

"Harry, we *need* to know!" Fred cried desperately.

"It's not that hard to figure out," Ron said.

"Who are you talking about?"

"The Marauders, a group of Mischief Makers that attended Hogwarts about twenty years ago and went by the nicknames of Moony, Padfoot and Prongs," Ron said.

"And Wormtail," Fred said thinking he at least knew something the other boys didn't.

"I wouldn't remind Moony and Padfoot of that Fred," Harry said coolly.

"Why?" George.

Hermione rolled her eyes and said, "It's obvious isn't it. Four friends that went to Hogwarts twenty years ago. If you think that the nicknames have meanings than Moony is Professor Lupin because-" she paused looking at Neville.

"It's ok Hermione. I know. Professor Lupin was a very good friend of my parents and when Ron and Ginny started getting lessons with him he offered me a spot and told Grams about his condition. Grams didn't have a problem with it but she didn't want me gone all day long. So I was home schooled."

"Oh, ok. Well than that's Moony. I heard Professor Black is a dog Animagus and so that's Padfoot."

"Yeah, and my first dad transformed into a stag, thus Prongs."

"You're the heir to the marauders," Fred said faintly.

"We've been taught by one. We've been in the presence of two for three years!" George cried a little hysterically.

Sirius chose that moment to come back in, "Ok, visit ov-humph" he got the air knocked out of him as the twins jumped him and held tight to his waist while kneeled.

"WE LOVE YOU PROFESSOR PADFOOT!" came both voices in unison. Sirius could just glare at his laughing son.

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Madam Pomfrey relented to Harry's pleas and let him out in time for the leaving feast. Gryffindor had to forfeit the last game so Slytherin won the Quidditch Cup because of twenty points. That meant that they also won the House cup passing Gryffindor that was in second by fifty points. Hermione had managed to gain back some of the points Harry and Ron had lost but with the loss in Quidditch it just wasn't enough. Even though they lost both cups the Gryffindors were once again talking to Harry. Harry attributed this to his encounter with Voldemort.

Professor Dumbledore cleared his throat, "Another year gone and now we must face that horrible time of year where you must do nothing but relax. Yes, I know how you dread the days without homework,

classes and detentions. But fear not. They will be awaiting you in September. Until then you must be strong," laughter was heard all around, "Before I leave you to this wonderful feast I must award a few last minute points. To Ms. Granger and Mr. Weasley for overcoming preconceived notions and seeing more than meets the eyes, fifteen points each."

Applauses were heard all along and Hermione and Ron looked dumbfounded, "To Mr. Harry Potter for outstanding courage and pure nerve in the face of impossible odds, twenty points. And this calls for a change of decoration," as Dumbledore clapped his hands half the Green and Silver flags that adorned the Great Hall turned Gold and Red and the Gryffindor table roared in applauses and cheers.

From the corner of his eyes Harry saw his Uncle Sev shaking McGonagall's hand stiffly. Slytherin and Gryffindor tying for the House Cup had to be a first.

The whole hall broke in laughter when Sirius launched himself at Severus, hugging him and crying, "Finally together Sevvy!" Even the Slytherins were having a hard time holding their laughter while Remus tried to pry his friend from a murderous looking Severus.

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The ride to Kings Cross was fairly normal. Harry, Ron, Hermione and Neville shared a compartment and shared the very tasty snacks that the house-elves gave Harry when he went to say goodbye to Kreacher. At the Platform Harry met the Grangers and exchanged phone numbers. Than he and Remus, that had ridden in anther compartment to give the children privacy, walked to an empty alley from where they apparated to a shadowy corner of Privet Drive. They then walked to Number four and Remus knocked. After a moment the door opened to reveal a blond woman with an expression of extreme distaste.

"Good afternoon Petunia. How was your year," Remus said pleasantly. Harry really admired this talent Remus had to keep a pleasant tone no matter what.

"You're here," she huffed.

"Yes, we are."

"Well, then get in before the neighbors see you," she said impatiently.

Remus and Harry got in and headed to the smallest room in the house where they found a bunk bed, a desk and two chairs.

"Such a pleasant woman," Remus said closing the door and Harry grinned.

Harry hated having to come here. But that was the only way to keep his mother's protection. And his Grandfather confirmed to Harry that that protection is what saved him in his encounter with Voldemort. He realized more than ever how much he needed it. As long as he could call this place home and have the intention to come back at least once a year the protection would last until he turned seventeen. It didn't matter if he had other homes.

Harry put his rucksack on the top bed so Remus could take the bottom. Sirius and Remus had been adamant. They would only let Harry back here if one of them stayed with him. Petunia hadn't wanted one wizard much less two, but Sirius told her that they didn't need the protection because they could always put other spells on Harry. That was a lie but she didn't *need* to know that. Since she wanted the protection for her family she had to give in. Petunia may call wizards freaks but she knows they are human beings before being freaks. And she knows that foul human beings would have no problem taking revenge on her for what her sister did to their master. Even if she had kept herself away from the wizarding world. And she wasn't about to be unprotected.

Harry sighed and prepared himself for the worst part of the year for him.

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As predicted Harry was having an awful time that was made even more awful by the fact that no one seemed to bother to reply his letters.

"Children don't usually write letters all the time," Remus had said but that did not improve Harry's mood.

Two whole weeks of being holed up in this house had passed. Harry and Remus avoided going outside because the Dursleys had spread the rumor that they were insane, and they didn't appreciate all the staring. So they mostly kept to their room. Harry doing his homework and Remus doing his research and writing articles for many magazines under a penname. He had very controversial ideas exposed in these articles and didn't want them to bring attention to the fact that The Boy Who Lived lived with a werewolf. The only conversations he had other than with Remus were with Sirius through a two way mirror. Sirius was up at Hogwarts trying to let everything ready for September so he could take Harry to Kings Cross this time.

The most dreaded part of the day in Harry's opinion was dinner. His Uncle Vernon left early for work so they didn't see him at breakfast or lunch, but at dinner he had no problems taking jibes at Harry, Remus and Harry's parents. More than once Harry noticed Remus knuckles going extremely white around his fork and knife and he could almost hear him gritting his teeth. Harry knew that like him his Uncle was holding back by a thread.

If Harry did go out he had to contend with Dudley's gang. Fortunately his guardians and Moody had taught him muggle defense and Harry was fast so he could almost always outrun them. Almost. One time he tripped and Piers Polkiss got to him and punched him in the stomach. He was about to get the second punch when a very angry Remus Lupin showed up from nowhere and lifted Piers easily from Harry. The rest of the gang scampered but Remus had time to grab Dudley by his collar.

Remus had then hauled both boys with Harry at his tows to the Polkiss's and ranted with Mrs. Polkiss that the next time he would press charges against her son. He then hauled Dudley back to Privet Drive where a shouting match that Harry heard from his room ensued.

"My Diddykins would never do that. He must have been trying to protect himself from that hoodlum freak!" Petunia screeched.

"Four against one Petunia! We warned you we would not stand for anything like this. I'll just pack up and Harry and I will be gone for good," he had yelled and Harry could see he had turned marching to the stairs. After a second of silence where Remus was already on the first step Petunia said in a pained voice:

"No, wait. I'll talk to Dudley, this won't happen again."

"It better not," Remus said coldly and marched upstairs.

Harry quickly scampered to seat at the bed and look innocent. Remus banged the door behind him and started pacing and clenching and unclenching his fists.

"How these.....*people*," he spluttered, "can be related to Lily is beyond me."

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Harry ran to the drawing room of Grimmauld Place and launched himself at Sirius hugging him like there was no tomorrow. Sirius lifted him a second then put him down.

"Missed me?"

"You are the best dad ever. If I ever forget I allow you to smack me really hard," Harry said not letting go.

"I don't smack you," Sirius said seriously as he watched his best friend drop on the couch exhaustedly as if he hadn't had a relaxed moment in weeks.

"That bad," he flinched.

"I swear they get worse every year," Remus said tiredly.

"Well no more bad mood," Sirius pouted, "Now we get on with the fun. Marauder Summer."

"What?" Harry asked eagerly.

"Well, Charlie Weasley contacted me. Apparently the Weasleys had intended to invite you to go with them on Christmas but with you being grounded they changed their mind. So Charlie said we could go visit Norbert now."

"Really," Harry was jumping on the balls of his feet.

"Yeah, yeah. A week on the reserve. We'll be back just in time for the moon."

"Great! Did you hear that Uncle Moon-" Harry said turning but stopped at the sight that met him. He and Sirius chuckled and putting a finger to his lips Sirius motioned for Harry to follow him out. And so they left a peaceful sleeping Remus on the couch.

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The reserve was great. Harry was having such a blast that he didn't even notice the continue lack of letters. He saw Norbert who apparently was really Norberta. She was bigger than Hagrid's Hut and Charlie said she would still grow a lot. Harry couldn't believe she had fitted in that egg.

He got to see many other dragons and watch the handlers try to subdue one that had been hurt but wouldn't let anyone near to treat him. It took ten simultaneous stunners to put him down.

Harry got to fly the Nimbus 2000 he got for his 11th birthday like he wouldn't have been able in London and play fetch with Padfoot.

Remus was in heaven. He grilled the handlers for everything from dragon care to regulation. Harry could almost see invisible rolls of parchment being written in his Uncle's head.

All in all the Lupin-Potter-Black family had a very enjoyable holiday and was able to cleanse themselves from the Dursleys.

They did have a nasty shock when they entered Grimmauld Place.

Disclaimer: I still don't own Harry Potter. When will I own it?

Thanks for reviewing. It makes my day!

From Chapter 8- And the year ends

They did have a nasty shock when they entered Grimmauld Place.

Chapter 9- Where did the letters go?

"May I be informed why I haven't heard hide nor hair from you for the past THREE WEEKS!"

"What?" Sirius asked bewildered and Harry looked scared at Severus' furious face.

"Harry wrote to you many times Severus, you are the one that didn't write back," Remus said annoyed.

"Not true. I wrote many letters that weren't answered," Severus retorted almost like a pouting child,

"And where were you? I've been in this God forsaken house for THREE DAYS with that screeching portrait and there wasn't a clue as to where you were! You could be dead for all I knew!"

"We were at the dragon reserve. I told Albus!" Sirius yelled back. He did not like being scolded.

"Albus is in the yearly meeting of the International Confederation of Wizards. I was at Spinner's End. I have had no contact with him. Up until last week, I just thought the Dursleys were being difficult, but when days went by from the date Harry should have returned with no answer I came here."

Remus tried to calm the glaring men, "I am sure this is a misunderstanding," but his efforts were in vain. Severus was about to open his mouth when Remus lost it.

"Look, Harry wrote to you. He hasn't receive a single letter from anyone since summer started," he hissed, "Now stop acting like a two year old, you're scaring him."

That brought Severus out of his biting mode. He looked at where Harry was shaking and deflated. He walked to him and kneeling in front of him put a hand on his shoulder. He pretended not to notice Harry's flinch.

"M'sorry," Harry mumbled.

"No, I am sorry. I was just so worried and managed to work myself in hysterics these past few days. I overreacted and didn't mean to scare you."

Harry nodded and Severus ruffled his hair smiling.

"Now that we are calmer," Remus said, "What's this about the letters not arriving. Did you have trouble with any other mail Severus?"

Severus pondered the question, "No. Just Harry's."

"You didn't get any letters from Ron, Ginny, Neville or Hermione?" Sirius asked Harry.

"No. I wrote to everybody except you dad because we had the mirror. But no one answered."

"I'll fire call the Weasleys and see if they got them," Remus said. "Call Hermione Harry."

"Why? Do you think someone is intercepting my letters? Why would they?"

"I don't know. Let's find out," Sirius said leaving with Remus to the kitchen.

Harry went to the phone Sirius had installed in order to communicate with Petunia and dialed Hermione's number.

"Hum, hello, may I talk to Hermione please?"

....

"It's Harry."

....

"Yes, fine Mrs. Granger. We went to the dragon reserve. It was brilliant, oh yeah sorry. My Uncle is giving me the evil eye. I need to ask Hermione something. Sorry I can't talk more."

"Thanks."

Harry danced a little in the spot while waiting. Severus just stared and rolled his eyes. He didn't like telephones. He just thought that it made so much more sense to actually see the person you're talking too.

"Hey Hermione. Did you get my letters?"

....

"No, didn't get them."

....

"Hum."

....

"No."

....

"Dunno."

....

"Dunno."

....

"Dunno."

Now Severus was really getting impatient.

"Hum."

AHRG! He had to resist the urge to get the blasted thing and know what the girl was saying.

"OK."

....

"See ya."

Harry hanged up and looked up.

"So?"

"She didn't get them and said she sent me loads of letters. She thought I was ignoring her and apparently she got letters from Neville, Ron and Ginny saying I didn't answer their letters either. Can I meet them at Diagon Alley on my birthday. They are going to go there to get all their school stuff because it's Neville's birthday. Please!"

"That's not my call. You'll have to ask the mutt."

And speaking of said mutt, here he comes back with his faithful sidekick.

"Molly says the kids didn't get letters from Harry but they got them from Hermione and Neville. She also says they wrote," Remus said frowning and sitting on the couch. Harry bounded to the couch and sat near his Uncle swinging his feet while Sirius and Severus sat grimly on the armchairs in front of it.

"This isn't good," Sirius grimaced, "If someone intercepted those letters they already have information on you Severus."

Harry's feet stopped abruptly as the realization of the jeopardy of the situation sunk in.

Severus sat pensively with his arm propped up by his elbow on the chair's arm and his mouth settled on his fisted hand.

"What I don't get is why stop them?" Remus said, "I mean, this way we know they were intercepted. Why not just read them and send them along. This doesn't sound like a mistake one of the Death Eaters that was smart enough to keep out of Azkaban would make."

"But why?" Harry asked worried, "Why would someone stop my letters? It doesn't make sense. I am just a kid. They can't hope to gain any valuable information from my friends' letters."

"That depends on what they think is valuable," Snape said, "You won't know important things but they could find out who is important to you. To use them."

"So my friends are in danger because of me?" Harry asked shocked.

Remus held Harry's forearm and said gently, "Harry, this is not your fault."

"But they wouldn't be if not for me. You wouldn't be.."

"Yes we would," Sirius said inhaling deeply and leaning forward, "Harry, the three of us were very engaged on the war and therefore we are always targets. The Weasleys are the biggest Blood traitor family there is, the Longbottoms were not quiet either, and Hermione is a Muggleborn. They would always be targets, with or without you. "

Severus frowned and said, "Remus is right though. This does not look like a Death Eater's job. Besides the ones who evaded capture won't be stupid to try anything so big as attempting the life of any of these people. They may become targets because of you but your fame also protects them. An attempt to someone close to The Boy Who Lived would be highly publicized."

Remus sighed and got up, "Either way we will not find out today. We should unpack and get ready for later. Would you rather spend the night at Severus's Harry?"

Harry nodded and Severus sneered, "Forgot the Wolfsbane on your little trip?"

Remus smiled pleasantly, "Not at all. I thought you'd appreciate the time with Harry but if it is an inconvenience for you Harry will be perfectly safe in his room while Padfoot and I are in the basement."

"Harry is not an inconvenience," Severus pouted.

Remus smirked and winked at Harry. Sirius wasn't even trying to hold back his laughter.

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That night while Padfoot and Moony spent a peaceful night at Grimmauld Place, Harry and Severus spent it at Spinner's End. Severus inherited the house from his parents and kept it for sentimental values. He loathed the memories he had of his father here, but at the same time he cherished the ones he had of his mother and Lily. Lily had lived a few blocks away and he had watched her for a long time before he decided to approach her to tell her she was a witch. He had observed her and had seen the magical signs. He had planned for long on how he would introduce her to his world. Well, things didn't go exactly as planned, but he got there in the end and she became his best friend.

He had been poor, even though his mother came from a long line of purebloods and nowadays he was loaded after inheriting the Prince's fortune since he was the last one. But at the time, his mother had been shunted from the family for marrying a muggle. And when that muggle turned bitter and violent towards his wife and son because of their magic, they had done nothing to help them, condemning them to endure what Tobias Snape dished out.

Eileen had loved Severus deeply though and had protected him the best she could, many times diverting his father's rage towards herself. That's why he kept this house. As awful as the memories of his father were there was love too. Love from two women that had seen something worthwhile on him. His father's hatred drove him to Voldemort but his mother's and Lily's love brought him back. And in this house he could feel their presence.

At the beginning, when he first started teaching, he didn't take much care of the house and you could feel no one lived there often. But as Harry entered his life he wanted to know where Severus lived and Severus started tidying up. He borrowed two House elves from Dumbledore and the house was back in the pristine state that Eileen kept it. He even had a room just for Harry.

Harry loved to come here and hear the stories about his mother's childhood. Here they could be free because there wasn't a witch or wizard for miles. And the muggles couldn't care less about who they were.

They were having dinner and Harry was telling Severus all about the dragon reserve and Severus was telling Harry about the research he had been doing that only Harry knew about when they heard a crash from Harry's room. In a flash Severus was on his feet, wand in hand. He hesitated but there was no way he was leaving Harry in the kitchen alone so he whispered:

"Stay behind me at *all* times." Harry nodded and followed Severus silently. When they got upstairs Severus gestured for Harry to stay near the wall next to the door. Severus kicked the door and pointed his wand straight at... a house-elf? A very excited house elf that was jumping on Harry's bed!

"Who are you? Who's your master?" Severus asked and Harry picked in from the door.

The house-elf stopped jumping and went to the floor. Tugging his years he said.

"Dobby, sir."

"Who's your master?" Severus asked again.

"Dobby can't. Dobby is not supposed to be here sir. But Dobby had to warn Harry Potter sir!" the elf said agitatedly and lunged for a lamp that was on the bedside. Severus was quicker and grabbed the elf by the pillow case he was wearing. He put the elf back on the bed and asked gently.

"What must you warn Harry of?" Hearing his name Harry entered, minding to stay behind Severus.

"Harry Potter must not go to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Terrible things will happen there and Harry Potter must stay safe," Dobby said.

"But I live there!" Harry protested and Severus shushed him with a glare.

"What terrible things Dobby?"

The elf lunged for the lamp again and once again Severus caught him in mid air.

"No punishing yourself Dobby. In this house house-elves do not punish themselves," Severus said sternly.

"Professor sir is very kind. Master is always saying Professor Snape is a greasy cruel bastard, but he is wrong."

Harry snickered but quickly tried to cover it up with a cough at his Uncle's second glare.

"So your master knows me? Who's your master?"

"Dobby can't say," the little elf shook his head desperately, "Dobby is going to have to punish himself for being here. Dobby is not supposed to. But Dobby must protect Harry Potter sir."

"From what?" Harry asked.

"Dobby can't say," the elf squeaked.

"Dobby," Severus tried again, "As a Hogwarts teacher I must know if something will endanger the students."

"No. Dobby can't. Dobby is trying to keep Harry Potter away from Hogwarts but is not being able to. Dobby thought that if he stopped Harry Potter's letters, Harry Potter wouldn't go back but Dobby heard Harry Potter sir and Professor sir talking about the new school term."

"Hey, you're the one that stopped my letters!" Harry cried, "Give them back!"

Dobby sheepishly produced a stack of envelopes tied together with a rope and started handing them to a glaring Harry.

"If Harry Potter sir promises not to go back to Hogwarts he can have his letters," the elf said.

"I live there! My dad and Uncle are there! My friends are there! Grandpa is there! Uncl- the other teachers are there!" he growled.

"Dobby, wouldn't it be better to just tell us what is going to happen so we can stop it?" Severus asked kindly trying to reason with the elf.

The little elf shook his head vigorously and twitching his ears with his hands he said, "No Dobby can't. Dobby is very sorry but Dobby can not let Harry Potter go back," he dropped the letters, clicked his fingers, and chaos ensued. All the furniture started moving around and Dobby vanished with a crack before the furniture stopped.

Now they were in deep trouble! Severus thought from the spot where he had been sprawled on the floor by a flying quilt.

"Uncle Sev! He did magic!" Harry cried hysterically from his spot in the floor.

"Yes he did," Severus huffed.

"But Uncle Sev. The Trace! They'll know I'm with you!"

"Don't worry. I'll figure something up," he grunted getting up and flicking his wand to get everything in place again. No use avoiding magic now. He never used magic in this house when Harry was here because of the Trace the ministry had on underage wizards. They would know if magic was done around Harry. They would know the address and to link that to Severus would take just a second. Now how to explain that he had Harry Potter in his house and not seem like he was doing it by free will? He had to act quickly. He knew that it was a matter of time before Lucius or some other former colleagues found out.

He ushered a very nervous Harry downstairs just in time for an owl to zoom inside. And yes there it was. The official Ministry letter telling Harry off.

An idea came to his mind and he smirked at Harry. This would be good and would let him use magic at least this time.

He straightened up and put his best "Big Bat from the dungeons" face, went to the fire and lit it up. He threw floo powder and yelled "Mafalda Hopkirk, Improper Use of Magic Office, Ministry of Magic". After a nauseating sensation he was face to face with a little witch with square spectacles and stack of papers and stamps on her desk. She turned to the fireplace and faced the sour looking man.

"May I help you sir."

"Yes!" he growled, "I am Severus Snape, Hogwarts Potions Master and I just received an Owl saying that improper use of Magic was done in my house! I want to speak to the imbecile that sent it."

"I know who you are sir. Your house you say. Where is it?" she asked nervously.

"Spinner's End," he growled back.

"Oh, my. That's your house? I sent that to a Harry Potter Black. That is a muggle neighborhood. I was not aware that was your house sir," she almost pleaded.

"So, Dumbledore sticks me with taking care of the insufferable brat while his father is indisposed and I am attacked by Ministry Owls? I am supposed to stop doing magic just for the little stuck up hero? That's an outrage! I want to speak with someone responsible. I will take this to my good friend Lucius Malfoy and I am sure he will be more than happy to take this to Minister Fudge himself."

"No, no please sir. This will not happen in the future. Of course I should have checked that that it was a wizard's residence. I will rectify the mistake and cancel the notification. Please sir, don't take this to Fudge," she begged.

He sneered, "I'll see what I can do," and took his head out of the fire cutting the communication. He looked at a worried Harry.

"That should take care of this. By this time tomorrow either the whole ministry will know how Severus Snape was stuck taking care of a child he clearly hates by Dumbledore or she will have made any trace that you were here disappear and never tell anyone."

"You sure Uncle Sev?" Harry asked worried.

Severus got up, ruffled Harry's hair and ushering him back to the kitchen said, "Positive. I am not a Slytherin for nothing you know? Now lets continue eating." As an after thought he added, "Though it's best to start keeping our public façade here too, you never know who can decide to check for themselves." He grimaced. *Great the stupid elf took away the one place they hadn't had to worry about anything.* He also had the nagging sensation he had seen that house-elf somewhere but couldn't place him. It was driving him crazy. He was a spy for God's sakes! That's what he does; pays attention to details! Where had he seen that elf? But wasn't that the mark of a good elf? Not being seen?

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"So at least we know that the letters weren't read," Sirius said escorting Harry outside.

"We assume that, since they didn't look open," Remus corrected from behind, "We still don't know who that house-elf belongs too."

Sirius gave his friend a look that clearly said, "stop worrying Harry," and said, "Yes, but they were all still *sealed.*" They stopped at a darker corner of Grimmauld Place and Sirius look Harry's hand, "Ready pup?" Harry nodded and was promptly engulfed by a sensation of being squeezed from all sides. When it stopped he found himself in an Alley next to the Leaky Cauldron. They entered the pub, said good morning to Tom and proceeded to go through the passageway to Diagon Alley where they met the

Weasleys, Longbottoms and Grangers at Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlor. As soon as they were spotted identical readheads ran to them and cried.

"Professor Moony, Professor Padfoot, such a pleasure to see you. Please teach us your ways."

Harry heard his Uncle groan and went to meet his friends, "Hey guys. Happy birthday Neville," he patted the boy's shoulder.

"You too Harry. What did you get?"

"Oh, we are getting a pet for me. I think an owl. We have a family owl but I'd like to have one that was just mine."

"That is very nice," Mrs. Weasley said pleasantly, "OH, will you two stop pestering Sirius and Remus. Honestly!" she huffed.

Sirius waved his hand dismissively and said, "It's okay Molly. They are good boys."

Mrs. Weasley gave him a look that clearly said she thought her sons were anything but *good boys*.

"So where to?" Harry asked.

"Ginny already got her wand," Ron said. "We still have to get our books and potions supplies and you need to go to the pet store."

"And the Quidditch store," Harry said and his friend said.

"Obviously!"

"Excuse me, that is not obvious. What would we want to go there for?" Hermione asked and she got shocked looks from all the Weasley children, Neville, Harry and Sirius.

"What do you mean what would we want to go there for?" Sirius asked faintly.

"Not everyone is a Quidditch nut Sirius," Remus explained calmly.

"But Moony," Sirius said desperately, "Quidditch."

"That's okay dad," Harry patted his distraught father. "We can go there first. You'll feel better." He said ushering Sirius and Ron who was in a similar state of shock. Hermione was quite huffed and heard her mother tell her father:

"I see Quidditch for them is the same as football for you honey."

"Completely understandable," Mr. Granger defended himself.

As Quidditch Quality Supplies came into view the kids were promptly awed by the display.

"Look it's the new Nimbus Two Thousand and one," Ginny said as she goggled the broom. Ron started reciting all the brooms quality to the others while Remus followed Sirius in the store directly to the counter.

"Sir can I have one of those?" Sirius said pointing at the broom.

"What are you doing?" Remus asked.

"Getting Harry's birthday present of course," Sirius rolled his eyes while the salesman produce the gleaming broomstick.

"I thought we were getting him an *owl* not another broom," Remus said sternly.

"But Moony look at this. Harry needs the best. Look it has safety features and all."

"Harry already *has* a very good broom that you got to him just last year."

"I know that Moony, but look, safety!" Sirius tried to reason with his friend.

"Yes sir this has the latest safety features in the market," the salesman said worried. He looked like he would like nothing better than to kick Remus out the store.

"Harry is very happy with his broom," Remus said taking the broom from Sirius and putting it on the counter.

"But that's the same broom the rest of the school has. This one is the best. Harry needs the best to win," Sirius said taking it back.

"Are you are saying that Harry would only win if the broom was the best? That's not very flattering to his flying skills."

"That's not what I said," Sirius said offended.

"I actually agree with that," came a drawl from behind. They both turned and groaned inwardly.

"Lucius," Sirius said with a grimace.

"Getting Potter all the help he can get?" Lucius Malfoy drawled.

"I am getting my *son* a present," Sirius said through greeted teeth.

"It's completely understandable," Lucius sneered, "My Draco is in the team this year, seeker, and Potter won't stand a chance with a matching broom much less an inferior one. I just got Draco and the rest of the team a whole batch of Nimbus Two Thousand and One."

"At least I didn't have to buy my son's way onto the team," Sirius sneered. Lucius eyes narrowed and he spat,

"I was under the impression you bought them a brooms too."

"Actually," Remus cleared his throat, "Sirius bought the whole school new brooms, and I believe the Slytherin team made good use of them. And that was after Harry got in the team."

Lucius looked at him as if he was a disgusting thing and turned smirking to Sirius. "When your father is Deputy Head of House it's quite easy to do so."

Sirius dropped the broom and the salesman rushed to gather it.

"I think Harry will keep his broom and *when* he beats your precious son and his better broom we'll see who's laughing," he said through greeted teeth and stormed out of the shop with Remus on his tows.

Harry looked at his father worried and decided to follow.

Sirius was pacing and glaring at the store and the blond leaving the store.

"Hum, dad, everything okay?" Harry asked worried but Sirius didn't answer just kept glaring.

"Everything is fine. Your dad just had a slight misunderstanding with his cousin's husband," Remus said calmly. Harry nodded in understanding.

"Look where he's headed. I bet he is up to no good," Sirius said pointing to Knockturn Alley where Lucius had just entered.

Remus sighed and said, "He's always up to no good Sirius. Why don't we go to the pet store? Harry already has his potions ingredients, so I'll tell the others to meet us at Flourish and Blotts," Remus said heading to talk to Mr. Weasley. Harry smiled. Severus always gave him his potions ingredients that he got with his own supplies with the best suppliers, not the ones that had everything in bulk for the students.

Remus came back and led them to *Eeylops Owl Emporium*. Sirius however kept glaring at Knockturn Alley.

"Or you know Uncle Moony, we could always get a cat," Harry said innocently. Sirius head snapped back at his son.

"Don't joke like that!"

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A/N- Big thanks to my beta Swaddict1986.

Disclaimer: I still don't own Harry Potter. When will I own it?

I am so sorry about the delay. I must confess my beta gave this back to me a while ago but I only had time for the last check now.

Thanks for reviewing.

Chapter 10- Mess with the press

The family of three came out of the pet store with a snowy owl that apparently had been in there for a long time. Harry didn't understand why because she was beautiful and feisty, meaning she would blend right in his family. They went to Flourish and Blotts where they found an enormous crowd. Pushing their way inside Sirius saw the familiar sea of red hair and asked.

"What's going on here?"

"Gilderoy Lockhart is signing his autobiography," Arthur answered mildly annoyed and Sirius groaned.

"Not Lockhart."

"Do you know him dad?" Harry asked.

"Yes," Remus answered for his friend, "He's a pompous git a couple of years older than us. He was a Hufflepuff and was already seeking fame in school. Tried to claim a few of the Marauder's pranks for himself. James was not happy and suffice it to say that Lockhart found himself victim of those same pranks."

Harry looked at his book list and said with a frown, "We need his whole set of books."

"Oh, great!" Sirius grunted, "I bet the new teacher is some love sick witch."

"You don't know who the new teacher is?" Arthur asked.

Sirius shook his head, "No, I haven't talked to Albus since I left Hogwarts and he hadn't had one yet then."

"Harry give me your list," Remus said, "I'll try to get your books as fast as possible so we can leave."

Arthur looked grim and said, "No use. I already tried. The clerks are all busy with the signing. I was only able to get the ones I got second hand because that part of the store is separate."

And true to what Arthur said, Harry noticed Ginny holding a cauldron with a set of used books inside. He went to join his friends and heard Hermione say:

"Do you think he'll sign our books? He wrote our whole Defense set."

Harry bit back a laugh and almost lost it when he saw that Ginny and Ron were doing the same. The crowd started pushing even more and as much as they tried to stay together the people just kept separating them. Suddenly Harry and Neville were in the front row of the crowd that was facing a desk full of books called "Magical Me". They turned around and tried craning their necks to find the others.

"Do you see the others?" Neville asked.

"No. I think they are in the back. My dad isn't going to be happy when he doesn't find me," Harry fretted.

"Your dad?! You're worried about him? My Gran will skin me. She told me to stay close all the time. She was right next to us talking to Mrs. Weasley about Lockhart," Neville said agitated then pulled a face, "It was quite disturbing."

Harry grimaced in sympathy. He was distracted from disturbing thoughts by almost getting slapped in the face when the people that were in front of him started clapping. He turned back to see and what they were cheering and found a blond man wearing robes of forget-me-not blue winking and flashing dazzling white teeth to the crowd. A photographer dancing around him was taking pictures. When he was turning his face for the pictures Lockhart spotted Harry and shouted.

"It can't be. Harry Potter!"

He pulled Harry to the front and started shaking his hand for the photographer. Harry fought to get away, but Lockhart had a firm grasp on his shoulder and said through his smiling teeth.

"Nice big smile Harry. Together we'll make the front page."

But Harry wasn't smiling. He was squirming and from behind he could feel Neville trying to swat Lockhart's arm away.

"I'd let me go if I was you. This won't be good for your health," Harry growled.

"Nonsense Harry. Everyone likes publicity," he said from the corner of his mouth then he turned louder to the crowd, "When young Harry stepped into Flourish and Blotts to buy my autobiography "Magical Me"- which I shall present to him free of charge- he had no idea he would shortly be getting much more than my book, -" the crowd applauded again and Harry heard a yell of "Geroff my son!" getting closer. *Someone was going to get in trouble!* "In fact, he and his fellow students will be getting the real magical me. Yes, yes, Ladies and Gentlemen, I have proudly accepted the post of Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry."

"*WHAT?*" came a horrified yell that Harry knew so well. His dad had a look of shock and revulsion just a couple of rows away from them.

"Yes, yes sir. I accepted the task of imparting my supreme knowledge on the field to our children and young Harry here will get to experience what it is to learn from the best. Yes, please, more photos."

Harry didn't know if it was the words "supreme knowledge", saying he was "the best" or asking for photos but Lockhart managed to get Sirius even more furious and in a second Sirius did what Neville hadn't managed. He parted the crowd and hauled Lockhart off Harry yelling:

"Unhand my son NOW!" he grabbed the photographer's camera and hissed:

"If I see a single picture of Harry in the Prophet I'll sue you and your newspaper for all you have to the last Knut."

The photographer gulped and vanished before Sirius could take away his camera. Lockhart, who apparently did not know when to shut up, started talking to Sirius.

"Now, now sir. There is no need to get so testy. There is nothing wrong with young Harry being introduced to a little publicity by someone that is more experienced such as myself."

Sirius eyes narrowed and refused to think what his younger self would have interpreted from such a sentence. Lockhart may be vain, but Sirius dearly hoped for his own sake that he wouldn't be that stupid and sick. He hissed.

"If what you say is true and we will have to contend with you at the school you better stay away from my son. Do I make my self clear?"

"Who's your son?" Lockhart asked and Harry slapped his forehead still being held close to his father.

"Sir, Harry is," Neville tried to help.

"Let's go," Sirius barked and led Harry and Neville through the crowd back to their group leaving a flabbergasted Lockhart behind. Harry and Neville joined Ron, Hermione and Ginny at the front of the store where Ginny asked:

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah, just ruffled. I hope Lockhart heeds dad's warning."

Hermione gave Sirius who was a little further talking to the Weasleys, Remus and the Grangers a glance.

"He would be nuts not to," she said, "He looks furious."

"Dad doesn't like when the press thinks they have the right to harass me," he started explaining when a drawl, very much like the one Sirius heard in the Quidditch store, came from the stairs.

"Need your daddy to pprotect the wittle baby."

Harry's and Ron's eyes narrowed and Harry hissed:

"What do you want Malfoy?"

Draco descended the stairs and towered over Harry.

"Bet you loved that little stunt. Can't go anywhere without letting everyone know."

"Harry doesn't like his fame," Ginny growled.

"Oh, the wittle Weasel is going to pprotect baby Potter now," he sneered.

Harry was stung by this, but truth be told he was quite tempted to let Ginny have a go at Malfoy.

"Now, now Draco, move along," came Mr. Malfoy's drawl from behind Draco, "It wouldn't do to be seen in such company," he finished eyeing Hermione with disgust. Ron and Neville automatically moved in front of her. Harry was about to retort but his dad was faster.

"Better than being seen with you Lucy."

Lucius turned to face Sirius and Mr. Weasley. From the other side the Grangers came to their daughter's side.

"The name is Lucius," Mr. Malfoy hissed, "Arthur. Taking a stroll? Wouldn't think you would have time with all those raids," he turned to Ginny and caught one of the used books in her cauldron, "Apparently you're doing them just for fun," he finished eyeing the book with distaste.

"You are Arthur?" Sirius turned to him, "Should have called me. I always enjoy catching Death Eaters red handed," he finished turning back to Mr. Malfoy.

"When we visit Malfoy Manor I'll call you," Mr. Weasley said smirking.

"How dare you," Mr. Malfoy said reaching for his wand but Mr. Weasley was faster and landed a punch on his face. There was a clunk of metal as Ginny's cauldron dropped to the floor as Mr. Malfoy and Mr. Weasley started wrestling. Sirius joined but it wasn't clear if he was trying to pull them apart or helping Mr. Weasley. The kids were cheering Sirius and Mr. Weasley, and Mrs. Granger, Mrs. Longbottom and Mrs. Weasley were yelling for them to stop. Finally Remus and Mr. Granger managed to pull Sirius and Mr. Weasley away while one of the store clerks pulled Mr. Malfoy up.

"Gentlemen, please," he said.

Mr. Malfoy tried to straighten his robes and his hair but you could see a bruise already forming above his left eye. He was still holding Ginny's book and thrust it back in her cauldron saying, "Here, that's the best your father will ever be able to afford," then he hauled Draco out of the store.

Harry ran to his father while the Weasley kids went to theirs.

"That was brilliant dad."

"Don't encourage him Harry," Remus said sternly picking up the owl's cage that he had put on the floor,

"Did you forget Malfoy is in the Hogwarts's Board of Governors?" he finished to Sirius.

"He hasn't been able to sack Dumbledore no matter how much he's tried and he won't be able to sack me," Sirius said defensively.

"That's no reason to start brawling in front of the children," Mrs. Weasley said, "Honestly Arthur! And to accuse him in that way! He can create a lot of trouble for you."

"I won't pretend I don't know what he is," Mr. Weasley said indignantly. Mrs. Weasley huffed.

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"Could you repeat that again? I think I may have had something in my ears."

"Gilderoy Lockhart is the new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher," was said very slowly.

"What possessed Albus to do that?"

"And Sirius and Arthur punched Lucius Malfoy," came from the couch.

Sirius who was standing by the fireplace in the Black house's drawing room sent his best friend a death glare.

"That pompous git wouldn't know how to tell the difference between the killing curse and a cheering charm," Severus cried from his place in front of Sirius.

"Tell me about it," Sirius rolled his eyes.

Remus sighed and leaned forward, "Look at the bright side. At least we know he's not in league with Voldemort. Voldemort wouldn't want someone like him."

He was met by two death glares this time.

"I don't find this *funny* Lupin," Severus hissed and started pacing, "Great, we have a mad house-elf that says horrible things are bound to happen this year and to counteract that Albus hires that *ponce*."

"To be fair, maybe Albus hired him before Dobby's visit," Remus tried to reason.

"No, I flooded Hogwarts as soon as I left Harry here the day after the full moon and he hadn't hired anyone yet. That was about a fortnight ago. *What was he thinking?*"

Sirius scowl turned into a frown, "Any more news on the Dobby department?"

"No. I have no idea what he was talking about or who owns him," Severus sighed and dropped on the couch next to Remus, "What about Harry?"

"What about him?" Remus asked.

"That night he had awful nightmares... but that could be because of the threat of disaster Dobby left," Severus said.

Remus grimaced, "No, he had nightmares at the Dursley's too. More than once I woke up to find that he had descended to my bed. They are getting better though. At the reserve he didn't have them but that was possibly because he exhausted himself everyday, and now they are more far between. Still I found a certain mangy mutt sleeping by the foot of his bed a couple of times."

Sirius shrugged, "I heard him trashing and when Padfoot was there he calmed down. Why not?"

"It's expected," Severus said, "We can't expect him to go through what he did and come out unscratched. But he's strong. He isn't letting that affect the rest of his life."

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Harry, Remus and Sirius made their way through King's Cross. As they reached the barrier between platforms nine and ten they sighted the Weasleys going through. Only Mrs. Weasley, Ginny and Ron were left.

"There you are," Mrs. Weasley said, "I thought you'd be already inside. We're running late."

"Yes," Remus said shooting Sirius a nasty look, "*Someone* decided that he had to make breakfast instead of the house-elf and almost exploded the kitchen in the process."

Sirius grinned sheepishly, "You can't deny it was fun," he said winking at Harry.

"Well," Mrs. Weasley started in a disapproving tone, "we should go through. I'll go with Ginny."

Remus nodded as they made their way. He grabbed Ron's trolley, "Here Ron, I'll take your trolley and Sirius will take Harry's so you two can pass more discreetly."

Harry and Ron watched as both adults and trolleys went through. They started talking and walking calmly towards the barrier and when they were about to go through they were met with solid wall.

"Ow," Ron said rubbing his nose, "That hurt."

Harry touched the wall, "It's closed. How is it closed? The barrier isn't supposed to close until the parents leave."

"Do you think they can't come out?" Ron asked.

Harry frowned biting his lips. He kept touching the wall to see if it would budge. Ron nudged him and nodded towards a guard that was looking at them funnily. They smiled and made their way to one of the benches.

"Should we wait for them to come back?" Ron asked.

"I guess," Harry shrugged looking at the watch that was on the wall. Eleven O'clock, "We already missed the train. The parents should be getting out then dad can Apparate us back with him." So they decided to wait. And wait. And wait.

About half an hour of waiting later and no one coming off the barrier they were getting restless.

"Maybe they can't get out," Ron said, "What do we do?"

"How did you get here?" Harry asked.

"Dad's car. You?"

"Dad's bike. Uncle Remus Apparated with my stuff but dad had promised me that we would come in his bike. He misses it at Hogwarts and likes to milk it for everything he can."

Ron frowned, then sighed and frowned again, "Dad's car is giving us trouble but maybe we could get your dad's bike and follow the train. Do you know how to fly it?"

"Yes, I've seen dad do it loads of time. Never done it myself though. Shouldn't we wait?"

"Harry! They're trapped. We have to let someone know. We have to get to Hogwarts and let Dumbledore know. It's the humane thing to do. It's our duty," he finished solemnly.

Harry nodded and said, "Yeah, you're right. Let's go."

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Sirius squirmed. He was squashed between Molly and Remus. The train was packed. The barrier had closed behind him and Moony before Harry and Ron could pass through. Of course, for security reasons, you couldn't Apparate in or out of the platform or the train, so all the parents had to ride to Hogsmead to be able to Apparate back. He shook his leg. Harry and Ron were all alone at King's Cross. He had managed to send Hedwig, Harry's new owl, ahead with a message for someone to pick the boys. But who knew how long she'd take. Anything could happen. Sirius just hoped they stayed put.

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This wasn't so hard. Puft, his dad was always saying Harry was too young to drive the bike. They had been flying for a few hours now. It took them a while to catch up to the train since it had more than half an hour of head start, but thanks to the bike's speed they sighted it and had been following it ever since. Harry did have to admit he was getting a little hungry but there was no way to eat on the bike so he just kept going, Ron holding on him for dear life. Ron had never ridden the bike and it was one thing to ride a broom when you had control. It was another thing, and completely different to trust someone else to drive a huge flying motorcycle.

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"No way!" came from right next to him. Sirius looked at his friend who was looking out the window with his mouth hanging open.

"What?" he leaned forward to see and was promptly shocked out of words.

"They didn't!"

"What's going on," came Molly's voice and almost everyone in the crowded compartment looked out of the window.

"I am going to kill them!" Molly cried.

"Wicked!" one of the twins said. None of the occupants of the compartment could take away their eyes from the huge motorcycle that was flying on the skies and had just started going up again to hide in the clouds.

A/N- Big thanks to my beta Swaddict1986.

Disclaimer: I still don't own Harry Potter. When will I own it?

Chapter 10- Mess with the press

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"I am going to kill them!" came Molly's cry.

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Chapter 11- There's always a Howler

Touchdown! Harry was very proud. They managed to fly all the way to Hogwarts with no incidents whatsoever. They parked the bike next to Hagrid's Hut and went to the castle. The others would probably be getting out of the train now. They went up the stairs chatting happily and not paying attention to where they were going when they bumped into three very rigid people. Harry gulped.

"Hum, hi," he said shyly.

"So," a sneer answered, "Famous Harry Potter thought he'd make quite an entrance."

"Now, now Severus. I am sure they have a good reason for breaching the Decree for Secrecy and flying a motorcycle all over the country," Dumbledore said calmly. Harry and Ron gulped again.

"The barrier was blocked," Harry said quickly.

"We know," McGonagall said sternly.

"Yes, so we had to let you know," Ron started then, "You know?" he finished with a quiver.

"Professor Black sent an owl letting us know and asking for someone to fetch you two. Imagine my surprise when I got another message, incidentally after I had already sent Severus on his way, telling me you had been sighted following the train."

Both boys gulped again. *Oh, oh!*

"Now, why don't we go to Minerva's office so we can discuss your punishment while we wait for your parents," Dumbledore said as if he was inviting them for tea.

"My parents?" Ron squeaked.

"Yes Mr. Weasley," McGonagall said shortly, pursing her lips, "All the parents had to board the Express because the barrier was blocked from the other side as well. I expect yours will decide to come up to the castle."

Humongous Oh, Oh!

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"Of all the foolish things to do!" Molly was yelling. Arthur was trying to calm her with "*Molly dear,*" but it didn't seem to be working. "You were lucky no Muggles saw you or else Sirius would be in real trouble. If you so much as put a toe out of line again Ronald Weasley we will withdraw you from Hogwarts before you can even think to blink!"

Ron was dutifully nodding and looking downcast. Harry, for good measure was doing the same. They had gotten a detention each from McGonagall and only very quick thinking on Harry's part saved them from losing points.

"I can't fathom what could have gone through your minds to try to do something like that," Sirius said sternly, and when Molly wasn't looking he whispered, "Was it hard to drive? Did you get the hang of it okay? I mean. -completely irresponsible!" he finished louder.

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Sirius looked up and saw a familiar owl making its way through the Great Hall to the teacher's table. It stopped right in front of him and dropped a red envelope. He thought of making a run for it but he knew he wouldn't have time. So, with trembling fingers he opened it and the Hall was filled with Andromeda Tonks's voice.

"SIRIUS ORION BLACK! I TOLD YOU DIDN'T I? BUT *NO*, YOU HAD TO GO AND SHOW THE POOR BOY HOW TO DRIVE THAT RETCHED THING ALL OVER THE COUNTRY! ENCOURAGE HIM WITH YOUR RECKLESS BEHAVIOR! WE ARE SUPPOSED TO BE CLEARING THE BLACK NAME NOT BESMIRCHING IT MORE! YOU ARE AN ADULT! A TEACHER! START BEHAVING LIKE ONE!"

The older students were quite acquainted with Andromeda's voice since her only daughter had just graduated from Hogwarts two years before. It had been common back then to see their teacher receiving Howlers any time young Nymphadora was caught in some big mischief, usually accompanied by Charlie Weasley, her best friend, and her younger cousin. Andromeda had always been sure that whenever her little angels misbehaved it was all her cousin's doing, so he was the one that got the Howlers.

The envelope burst into flames and curled into ashes. The Hall was silent. With all the dignity he could muster, Sirius nodded to everyone and got up. On his way out he smacked his laughing best friend over the head.

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Harry, Ron, Hermione and Neville said goodbye to Ginny and proceeded to their first class, Herbology, with the Hufflepuffs.

"Who sent that Howler?" Hermione asked.

"Aunt Andy. She's my dad's favorite cousin. Which considering who her sisters are isn't a difficult feat."

"Who are they?"

"Malfoy's mum, Narcissa, who is stuck up just like her son. The other is Bellatrix Lestrange, Voldemort's most loyal and deranged Death Eater. She's in Azkaban for life," he answered and shot Neville an apologetic look. He wasn't about to tell them why unless Neville wanted him to.

"So, that's what she meant by clearing the Black name," Hermione said.

"The Blacks have a long reputation of being a Dark family. Even before You-Know-Who," Ron explained.

"Yeah, it's a sore subject to dad because he ran away from all that. But his brother didn't and when he figured out what a load of bull it all was, it was too late. He had become a Death Eater and ended up being killed because he deserted. Dad doesn't know exactly how but he kind of feels guilty for leaving. He doesn't say it but I know he thinks that maybe he could have prevented it. Lead Uncle Regulus to the other side."

Hermione nodded. Harry continued.

"Even after Voldemort's defeat, dad didn't talk to his parents. His dad died shortly after Regulus and his mum died when I was four. I only met her portrait. She actually likes me. I think she hopes I can keep the Noble House of Black's blood going on now that Regulus died."

"But you are not a Black. I mean, by blood," she added hastily at Harry's glare.

"Yes, I am. Firstly because I think my first dad James and dad are distantly related but mostly because dad adopted me magically too."

"What's that?" she asked.

"Magical adoption involves a blood bond," Neville explained, "There is a ritual that is done and blood of both the child and parent is shared making the child share the blood of the adoptive parent. It kind of adds a parent so Harry now is the son of James and Lily Potter and Sirius Black by blood too."

"And Remus Lupin," Harry added. At the other's looks he explained, "Dad was afraid that if something happened to him the Ministry wouldn't let me stay with Uncle Moony so when he performed the adoption ritual Uncle Moony did too. So even though he didn't adopt me legally, he did magically and dad named him my guardian in case something happens to him. He is hoping that with both the magical will and magical adoption he can bypass bigotry."

Hermione was about to ask another question when Ron shushed her.

"Lockhart," he said.

Lockhart was walking to the castle that they had just exited. Harry saw the greenhouse where they were headed. There was no way of bypassing Lockhart. He hoped he would ignore them. No such luck.

"Harry, oh young Harry. A word if you please."

"I don't," Harry answered. Hermione gave him a glare. The other two boys snickered but Lockhart ignored them.

"Yes, yes, come with me."

"I have class sir."

"Oh, I am sure you can be late. You three tell your teacher where Harry is. Go, scoot."

Ron and Neville gave Harry pitying looks and followed Hermione to the greenhouse.

"Didn't my dad tell you to leave me alone?"

"Oh, funny man, Sirius. I am sure he didn't mean it."

"I am sure he did."

"Harry, Harry, Harry." Lockhart said shaking his head, "I heard- well, of course, it was all my fault. Could have kicked myself. Flying a motorcycle to Hogwarts, Harry. That is not the way, no, no, no. I gave you the bug didn't I? One time on the front page and you couldn't wait for more right?"

"Uh, no!" Harry thought. Especially not after his dad's reaction when the Prophet arrived that morning. Harry was sure the editor of the Daily Prophet would never forget Sirius Black's Howler. Aunt Andy's was a nice whisper compared to it.

"It's completely natural to want more but that is not the way to get noticed. Just calm down. Plenty of time when you're older. Yes, I know what you're-"

"Hum, hum," someone cleared their throat from behind Lockhart. Lockhart turned and Harry grinned.

"Gilderoy. I was under the impression Harry had Herbology now," the man standing there said in his ever pleasant tone.

"Oh, yes, yes," Lockhart said a little flustered, "I was just having a word with young Harry, Remus."

Remus nodded and said, "Well, I think *young Harry* should go to class or else Sirius may want to know why he missed it. And we wouldn't want that now, would we?"

Lockhart paled at the thought and turned, "Yes, yes, Harry, scoot. Hurry to class," he said in a way that had Harry scowling.

Like I was the one that wanted to chat!

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"So he was bothering Harry now was he?" Sirius scowled in the staff room.

"I just think he wanted to get on Harry's good side. You know, get more publicity by being The Boy Who Lived's mentor. The problem is that Harry doesn't like publicity and Lockhart is going the wrong way. You have nothing to worry about," Remus said from one of the couches.

"With that ponce? We all have a lot to worry about," Severus cried from his chair and Flitwick nodded.

"Can you believe he wanted to show *me* how to properly produce the Patronus Charm that I have to teach my sixth years," he huffed, "The nerve. I was *his* teacher!"

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The teachers weren't the only ones aggravated by Lockhart. There wasn't a boy in Hogwarts that wasn't thinking of him as a pompous ponce. Especially after he had given his students quizzes with personal questions about his likes and dislikes instead of anything involving Defense Against The Dark Arts. Mysteriously, according to Harry, none of the girls seemed to share their views. Not even Hermione.

Then there was the other reason Harry was aggravated: Colin Creevey. He was a very excitable Muggle-born first year that was apparently in awe of Harry. Deep down Harry knew the boy was just overwhelmed with everything pertaining to magic, but Harry had always hated his fame. He hated being famous for living when his parents hadn't. Like he was better than them when Harry knew that it had been his mother that saved him. It wasn't anything he'd done. But no one saw it that way. They hailed him instead of his mum and Harry felt that was wrong.

And Colin asking for a signed photo was just too much. To add insult to injury, Malfoy showed up and had to make fun of him, causing Lockhart to hear *him* and give Harry another popularity lesson after he had them both pose for Colin. *Ugh!* He was really in a bad mood and his laughing father was not helping. "Dad, I came here for you to side with me, not laugh at me."

"Sorry," Sirius said from his office desk wiping tears off his face, "But did he *really* let loose a bunch of *Cornish pixies?*"

"Yeah," Harry chuckled, "And then he ran, leaving me, Ron, Hermione and Neville to round them up. Git."

Sirius sobered up and said, "I'll have another chat with him. If he annoys you again let me know."

Harry smiled and hugged him, "Thanks dad. Love you."

"Love you too," Sirius said kissing Harry's head.

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The staff room was full. All teachers, even Trewloney, were there when Sirius entered and politely said.

"Gilderoy, I was under the impression that English was your first language."

Lockhart paled and fumbled, "Excuse me?"

"Well, considering that I thought I was quite clear when I told you to leave my son alone and you didn't understand, I was wondering if maybe you don't understand English. So I will explain slowly: You are *not* to address my son about any non-school related matters. You are *not* to take pictures with him and you are *certainly not* to pull him away from his friends for little chats. Was I clear now?" he finished towering Lockhart, who was shorter than him. With each word he had taken a step closer and now Lockhart could feel his breath.

If someone had paid attention they would have noticed that Sirius had quite effectively imitated the Potions Master's style. Lockhart gulped and nodded.

"Good," Sirius said, turning and stalking to the seat next to Remus, who gave him an approving smile. Dumbledore cleared his throat and asked, "I expect the first day of classes went well?" A murmur of agreement ran through the room, "And you Remus, has any student approached you?"

"No, but I don't expect any to until a few weeks into the school year. Besides, having a tutor available to students in need of help is new for all of them."

"That was an excellent idea Albus," Sprout said, "Many students aren't comfortable coming to us with work that they are having trouble with. Having a neutral party to ask for help should have been done sooner."

"Remus was available only now," he said pleasantly.

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On this particular Saturday morning the majority of the Gryffindor team was not in a good mood. The only exited member was Oliver Wood who had woken all the members of the team at the crack of dawn for practice, then proceeded to explain tactics with diagrams and long speeches to explain each diagram. By the time they arrived at the pitch for the actual practice the sun was already properly up and Harry saw Ron, Neville, Hermione and Colin sitting on the stands. Harry noticed Ginny wasn't there and frowned. Maybe she was hanging with her first year friends. Lately Ginny hadn't been hanging with them like she used to before.

He mounted his broom and kicked off. They were about to start when George groaned.

"What?" Katie Bell asked.

"Look who's here," George pointed to several people in green robes approaching the pitch. The team descended and Oliver stalked over to Marcus Flint, the Slytherin team's captain.

"Flint!" he bellowed, "I booked this pitch for practice. You have no business here."

"Ah, but I do," said Flint unrolling a scroll of parchment, "We have special permission."

Wood took the parchment and Harry read over his shoulder recognizing his Uncle's writing.

I, Professor S. Snape, give the Slytherin team permission to practice today on the Quidditch pitch, owing to the need to train their new seeker.

"You've got a new seeker?" Wood asked.

Harry eyed Malfoy for the first time and said annoyed, "Yeah, my dad told me Malfoy is in the team. Forgot to mention."

Wood eyed Malfoy distastefully. Harry could see Ron, Neville and Hermione coming to where they were.

"What's going on?" Ron asked, "What are they doing here?" he said giving Malfoy a nasty look.

"We're here to train," Malfoy sneered, "We need to get used to our new state of the art brooms." He finished and for the first time the Gryffindor team notice the highly polished Nimbus Two Thousand and Ones the Slytherin team was carrying.

"At least no one in the Gryffindor team had to buy their way in," Hermione snorted, "They got in on pure talent."

The smug look on Malfoys face was replaced by a furious look.

"No one asked your opinion you filthy little *Mudblood!*"

There was a collective intake of breath and before anyone could act Ron had punched Malfoy and was on the floor wrestling with him. Flint tried to pry Ron off Malfoy but Fred and George held him back.

Alicia Spinnet cried "How dare you!" and Harry was keeping Hermione back who was calling for Ron to stop.

"He deserves it Hermione," he said.

Finally the fight stopped when Hagrid, having seen the commotion, approached and separated the two boys, easily holding one in each hand.

"You broke my wand!" Ron cried angrily to Malfoy and Harry saw his wand almost snapped in two, being held by a few splinters and the unicorn hair.

"Now, you both stop with that," Hagrid bellowed, "Unless yeh want a detention."

"He attacked me," Malfoy cried.

"He called Hermione a Mudblood," Angelina Johnson cried.

Hagrid's eyes narrowed, "If you want Malfoy I can take the two of yeh to McGonagall and Snape and see what they want ter do bout *both* accounts."

Malfoy scowled but said nothing. He turned to his team and joined them. Flint eyed Wood and said.

"The pitch if you please."

Wood scowled but motioned the others to leave. Harry saw Flint shoot him an apologetic look. Marcus was a friend of Harry's but he needed to survive in Slytherin, and to do that he couldn't antagonize Malfoy.

Hagrid took Harry, Ron, Neville and Hermione to his hut where he served them some hot chocolate and they explained to Hermione why the word Mudblood was such an insult. Ron was trying to put his wand back together with some spellotape but it wasn't working properly.

"Owl home and ask your parents for another one," Hermione said.

"Are you crazy? Do you want to see me dead?" Ron cried, "Mum will kill me if she finds out I've been fighting."

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Harry ran as fast as he could. He passed corridors and secret passages. He didn't pay attention to the portraits scolding him. His mind was reeling. He barked the password:

"I solemnly swear I am up to no good".

He entered the living room and looked frantically inside. Remus was seated at the table in the middle with some books open and looked up.

"Harry what-"

"Where's dad, Uncle Moony?" Harry asked nervously. Remus put his book down and came to the shaking boy. He guided him to an armchair and sat on the coffee table in front of it.

"He's patrolling tonight. Probably near the North Tower. You know how he enjoys scaring Sybill," he chuckled but Harry did not laugh. This wasn't good. "What happened?"

Harry looked nervous and his eyes darted everywhere then in a whisper he said, "I'm going mental Uncle Moony."

Remus blanched, "What?"

"I'm hearing voices," he answered, "I was in detention with Lockhart and I heard a voice that he didn't hear. I belong in St. Mungo's!" he finished flustered.

"Calm down," Remus tried to soothe him, "Let's try to reason this and find out where that voice came from before we get you a room with padded walls. What did the voice say?"

"Come... Come to me... Let me rip you...let me tear you.. let me kill you."

Remus paled. Harry was still shaking and he tried to calm him, "Are you sure there wasn't anyone there? Maybe someone was trying to prank you. Maybe one of the ghosts or Peeves."

Harry shook his head, "I know Peeves and all the ghosts' voices. And Lockhart didn't hear anything."

Remus bit his lip. Harry was watching him and he had to think quickly, "Look Harry. I'll look into this but I don't want you to worry. This was probably just a prank, okay?"

Harry nodded very unsure.

Disclaimer: I still don't own Harry Potter. When will I own it?

Loved your reviews.

Chapter 12- I hear voices

"AAAAAAATTTTCCCHHHHHHOOOOOOO!"

"Want some more?" he shoved the smoking goblet under his friend's nose. His friend glared at him, though the smoke coming from his ears dampened the effect of the glare.

Sirius was seated at the couch all bundled up in a woolen blanket with tons of discarded tissue paper in a bin next to him. Remus, who was standing in front of him deposited the goblet filled with Pepperup Potion on the side table next to the couch and went to sit on one of the arm chairs when Harry came in all wet and muddy.

"Harry, for God's sake get dried or you'll catch pneumonia!" Sirius cried and sneezed again.

"I think I'll catch pneumonia if I stand next to you," Harry said looking at his father. With a flick of his wand Remus dried and cleaned Harry.

"Thanks Uncle Moony," Harry said sitting next to Sirius and putting a hand to his forehead. "Are you okay dad?"

"Noooooo," Sirius whined and Remus rolled his eyes.

"Madam Pomfrey says he'll be just fine by tomorrow if he drinks his potions."

Sirius made a disgusted face and eyed said potion evilly.

"What brings you here today Harry?" Remus asked.

"Well, I was coming back from Quidditch practice and Filch caught me with the usual tirade of me getting the castle dirty on purpose, threatening disembowelment etc, etc. But then Nick created a diversion and got me out of a tight spot. Long story short he invited me to his Death Day Party. Can I go?" he asked expectantly.

Remus and Sirius stared at him in shock.

"Come again?" Sirius asked.

"Nick is going to have a Death Day Party. You know, it's his big five-o-o. So he invited me. The Headless Hunters, a group Nick wants to join, are going to be there and Nick thought that maybe my presence there could help him. Please dad, I owe him big."

Sirius looked reluctant but Remus said nonchalantly, "It's not dangerous or anything Sirius. Just a party with ghosts. Most of which know Harry."

Sirius sighed, "Okay. But don't go alone. We still don't know what that voice you heard was and if anything happens the ghosts won't be able to help."

"Ok, I'll see if Ron, Hermione, Neville and Ginny want to go. I bet at least Hermione will find it fascinating."

"I haven't seen Ginny much with you guys lately," Remus noted.

Harry shrugged, "Maybe she's hanging out with the first years. Percy forced her to take some Pepperup. Said she looked peaky."

Sirius made a face and Harry took his Pepperup from the table and started moving it to Sirius's mouth but Sirius kept pushing it away.

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"He's just started his second year. Gave us quite a scare last year but he's fine now. You'd be very proud of him. He was very brave. Perfect little Gryffindor, just like you. I see a lot of you in him. There's a lot of his father too. Good parts, not that I am ever going to admit publicly that Potter may have had anything good in him," he chuckled, "But there's a lot of us too, me, Remus, Sirius and a bit of Albus even. I guess that's from being so close to us. When I see something that screams me on him I get scared. I don't want him to be like me. Make the same mistakes I made. Then Remus says that he won't, that you and he wouldn't love me if I was all bad. And maybe he is right, though I hate to admit that Remus might be right on something, or that he and Sirius are actually my friends. Because I think they are. It's surely a sign of the end of times when I admit that Black and Lupin are my friends," he sighed and traced her name with his fingers, "I miss you everyday. Today more than others. I thought I'd never have any joy in life again after you left but then you gave it back to me in the form of a very stubborn little boy and I'll be forever grateful. I don't deserve him. I hope you can forgive what I did. I have no excuses for it... I love you." He left a single rose on her tombstone and left, cloak billowing behind him.

Another figure approached, "You know Lils, Prongs. Snivellus is not all that bad. He's grown on me," Sirius smirked at his friends' tombs.

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"That was interesting," Ron said as the quartet left Nick's party. They were starving and headed back to the Great Hall to see if there was anything left of the Halloween feast. Harry's head suddenly snapped when he heard a cold voice again.

"...rip...tear...kill..."

He stopped moving and listened with all his might. Where was it coming from?

"Do you hear that?" he asked.

"What?" Neville asked

"...so hungry...for so long..."

"That! That voice!"

"Harry, there's no voice," Hermione said trying to calm him but Harry just shushed her and tried to hear more intensely.

"...kill...time to kill..."

The voice was growing fainter and Harry took off following it. The other three took off behind him. It was moving upwards. He kept running until his blood went cold when he heard, *"I smell blood..."*

"It's going to kill someone," he cried.

They kept running and where on the second floor when Hermione cried.

"Look!"

Something was shining on the wall ahead. They approached cautiously and read clearly the foot high words written on the wall.

"THE CHAMBERS OF SECRETS HAS BEEN OPENED. ENEMIES OF THE HEIR, BEWARE."

As they approached they stepped on water that seemed to have flooded the floor. Hermione took a sharp intake of breath as they clearly saw Mrs. Norris, Filch's cat hanging upside down from her tail from one of the torch brackets.

"Is she dead?" Hermione whispered.

Harry inched closer to check but Ron pulled him back.

"Let's get out of here," he hissed.

"We should try to help," Harry said.

"Harry, you're the History teacher's son. You better than anyone should know we should leave," Neville said hurriedly trying to push Harry.

But they were too late. As a rumble reached their ears they saw the crowd from the feast. Before they could do anything students were flooding from all sides and a cry could be heard;

"My cat!"

As Filch hurried to Mrs. Norris, Harry heard Draco Malfoy sneer.

"Enemies of the heir beware. You'll be next Mudbloods."

"Twenty points from Slytherin for foul language Mr. Malfoy," Remus stern voice came.

"You can't do that! You're not a teacher," Malfoy cried.

"You'll find I can," he said shortly as he approached Filch who was hugging a rigid Mrs. Norris.

"Argus, let me see her so we can help," he said gently.

"He did this," Filch said darkly pointing at Harry, "He's always hated her. Since he was a little runt. He killed her."

"She isn't dead Argus," Remus said calmly inspecting Mrs. Norris who was still in Filch's arms, "Let's take her somewhere calmer so we can evaluate her better."

Filch was shaking his head and glaring at Harry, "No he did. I'll kill him-"

"Argus," Dumbledore's voice spoke firmly as he approached Filch and Remus, "Do as Remus says. Let's take her to a calmer place. Remus office is just around the corner. Come."

Apparently Filch didn't dare contradict Dumbledore.

"Mr. Potter Black, Mr. Weasley, Mr. Longbottom and Ms. Granger please accompany us."

They did so and were also followed by Snape, McGonagall, Sirius and for some reason Lockhart. As they entered the office Remus gently laid Mrs. Norris on his desk where he and Dumbledore started a thorough examination of the cat. McGonagall directed Filch to one of the chairs where he started to sob convulsively.

Sirius drew his wand and produced four chairs for the children and stood right next to Harry with a hand on his shoulder and an eye on Filch. Severus stood in a shadowy corner just looking dark and foreboding but Harry could see that he too kept a close eye on Filch.

Lockhart was the only one that seemed unaffected as he cheerily kept citing possible curses that Harry could have used on the cat and how he could have prevented them. Harry could feel his father's hand tightening on his shoulder and was sure Sirius was a second away from cursing Lockhart. Suddenly Lockhart dropped to the floor unconscious. Hermione screamed and McGonagall walked towards him and put a finger on his neck.

"Must have fainted. Poor lad," she said very unconcerned. She left him there. From the corner of his eye Harry saw Severus pocket his wand.

After an eternity Dumbledore raised his head and said, "She is not dead Argus, just petrified. Though I do not know how."

"Ask him. He did it," Filch cried pointing at Harry shakily.

"DID NOT!" Harry yelled and was cut by Sirius.

"My son has no idea how this happened. He doesn't have the knowledge and even if he had he would never do that. Do not accuse him!"

"He hates me. Always has. Since he was a little runt and kept making a mess all around the castle with his grubby hands for me to clean!"

"Okay, so maybe you're not my favorite person in the world but I would never hurt Mrs. Norris just to get back at you!" Harry cried.

"Not helping Harry," Neville whispered nervously.

"You read what he wrote on the wall. He knows I am a squib and that's why he went after my Mrs. Norris. He'll kill all the Muggle-borns next," Filch said hysterically.

"WHAT?" Harry cried.

"Oh, please. Don't be ridiculous Filch. And stop accusing my son or I'll-"

"That's enough Sirius," Remus said sternly, "Argus is nervous and does not know what he is saying."

"Yes, I do," Filch said, "That little runt-"

"Could not have petrified Mr. Norris," Dumbledore said calmly, "He does not have the knowledge to do this Argus. But don't fret. I hear Professor Sprout has a batch of Mandrakes and as soon as they reach full size Severus can brew an antidote and Mrs. Norris will be fine."

"And what about him?" Filch cried pointing at Harry, "I want to see him punished. He was caught in the scene of the crime."

"If I may," came Severus' silky voice. Ron, Hermione and Neville jumped. They had clearly forgotten he was there. "I think maybe Potter was in the wrong place at the wrong time." Harry sighed relieved, "Though, one has to wonder why he and his merry band were not at the feast."

"We were at Nick's Death Day party," Ron cried outraged.

"At a Death Day's party you say?" Severus said skeptically.

"Yes Severus," Remus said pleasantly, "They had Sirius and mine consent to be there."

"And what were you doing in the second floor's corridor," Severus asked.

"We were headed back to the feast when-" Hermione started but Harry cut her.

"We changed our minds and decided to go back to our dorms." He hoped Severus would understand that he couldn't elaborate in present company. Apparently he did because he resumed his usual snarky self.

"That may be but there is still the matter of your suspicious behavior. I recommend suspicion of benefits. Let's say Quidditch perhaps?"

Harry knew Severus was just acting but that still hurt.

"Oh, honestly Severus. Are you so desperate that you think Slytherin's only chance is to deprive Gryffindor of their Seeker?" McGonagall cried and Sirius put a hand in front of his mouth to muffle his laughter.

"I think, Severus, that as there is no proof of Mr. Potter Black's involvement on what happened to Mrs. Norris he shall not be punished," Dumbledore said calmly.

"WHAT? No he can't," Filch cried.

"Innocent until proven guilty Argus," Dumbledore said putting a hand on Filch's back and giddying him out. "Why don't you come with me while Remus takes Mrs. Norris up to the Hospital Wing? I am sure Poppy will be more than happy to take care of her."

Harry was sure she would throw a fit but Remus left with Mrs. Norris nonetheless.

"Mr. Longbottom, Mr. Weasley, Ms. Granger. I'll take you to your dorms. And I'll drop him in his office," McGonagall said with a scowl levitating Lockhart.

"Shouldn't Madam Pomfrey see him?" Hermione fretted.

"He's fine," McGonagall said shortly as they left.

Severus closed the door behind them and put up a Silencing Charm. Sirius turned to Harry and said, "What did you leave out?"

And so Harry told them what he heard.

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"So, there is a voice only that Harry heard saying it was after blood?" Remus said frowning, "That's not much."

"Actually, that may be a clue Remus," Dumbledore said calmly from his seat behind his desk. He had his hands together and was resting his chin on the tips of his index fingers.

"Of what Albus?" Severus asked.

"Something or someone petrified Mrs. Norris. We need to find out what and the fact that only Harry could hear whoever did it talk has to help. What is so special about Harry that made only him hear that voice?"

Severus and Sirius just looked lost but Remus shook his head.

"I know what you're thinking Albus but there is no way. The Basilisk's stare kills, doesn't petrify. Besides, how would a Basilisk go around unnoticed? It's not a small common garden snake. It's huge."

"You think a Basilisk did this?" Sirius asked shocked.

"That would explain why Harry was the only one to hear the voice," Dumbledore said, "And Slytherin was a Parselmouth. It would make sense for his supposed monster to be a snake that only he could control."

"Yes, but Remus has a valid point," Severus said scowling, "Which takes us back to square one."

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"Do they know what's going on?" Hermione asked from her chair in the Common Room.

"No," Harry answered, "I just told dad what I heard and he was going to tell Dumbledore. He told me to tell you guys that we should never be alone. Always walk in groups until they figure this out. Are you okay Ginny?"

Ginny who had been sitting with the four of them while Harry explained what he heard was looking definitely distraught.

"Don't worry Ginny. The teachers will find out what happened in no time," Neville tried to reassure her but that only made her lips tremble and she promptly bolted towards the girls dorms.

"What's up with her?" Ron asked shocked.

Harry shrugged and turning to Neville and asked, "Why did you say I should know why we had to leave?"

"Because of the Chambers of Secrets legend," Neville answered. "You do know the legend?"

Harry and Ron shook their heads and Hermione looked interested.

"I read it a while ago but I think it goes something like this-" Neville started to explain.

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Harry walked slowly biting his lips. He knew this was a bad idea but what was he to do? He agreed with Ron, Neville and Hermione to do the Polyjuice Potion. He just hoped his Uncle never found out what they planned to do.

After a useless talk with Moaning Myrtle and some debate about who would want Squibs and Muggleborns out of Hogwarts, they had decided that Malfoy had something to do with the Chambers of Secrets. Hermione had managed to get Lockhart to sign a permission slip for her to take a book from the Restricted Section and they would be brewing Polyjuice Potion to enter the Slytherin Common Room and

see if Malfoy told his goons something. Harry thought of asking Marcus but he couldn't put the boy in that position.

The problem was they needed the ingredients for the potion and Severus' private store was the only place they would find it. Harry knew his Uncle would notice the stolen ingredients; he just hoped he wouldn't suspect him or he'd be in deep trouble. He had tried to dissuade his friends but they would have none of it.

Sighing Harry gave the gargoyle the password. He went up the revolving staircase and knocked on the door. As he heard his grandfather's voice he entered. Dumbledore smiled from his desk and asked:

"And what brings you here today Harry?"

Harry sat down and started, "Well, I just had class with Lockhart-"

"Professor Lockhart."

"Yeah, him. He was telling us about a spell that he supposedly used to cure a werewolf and I thought that maybe-"

"The *Homorphus Charm* doesn't cure Lycanthropy, Harry," Dumbledore said sadly, "Remus' parents looked into it long ago. It's a very complex and hard charm that few can perform that allows a person to force a Werewolf back to his form but does not take away the curse. He will still transform on the next full moon. All you do is make him human before the moon is down, and since you force it its quite harmful to the werewolf."

"Oh, ok," Harry said disappointed, "I just thought, you know, maybe-"

"You just wanted to help our Uncle. It's natural," Dumbledore smiled. "Now, why don't you tell me all about your holidays and first weeks of term? We did not have any time together since you left in June. Lemon drop?"

Harry smiled a little and taking a Lemon drop he started telling his Grandfather all about the dragon reserve.

A/N- I was looking things up on CoS and remembered that lesson from Lockhart. I thought of skipping it but I couldn't see Harry not considering the possibility. And who better than Dumbledore to explain?

As always; huge thanks to my beta Swaddict1986 who catches all my mistakes and gives me good tips.

Disclaimer: I still don't own Harry Potter. When will I own it?

Chapter 13- When secrets come to light

"Ouch! That really hurt", he thought while hugging his arm close to his chest, *"Where's Aunt Poppy when you need her?"*

"Blimey mate!" Fred beamed, "You caught the Snitch even with that crazy Bludger!"

He nodded but didn't say anything. He was biting his lips and trying not to cry out in pain.

"I want an investigation," bellowed Wood, "That Bludger has been tampered with in a clear attempt to undermine my Seeker!"

"Your Seeker?" George said raising his eyebrow.

"Our Seeker. Gryffindor's, oh, you get me," Wood finished frustrated.

"I think we best take Harry to Madam Pomfrey first," Katie said.

"No need," Alicia said smiling and straightening her hair, "Professor Black is on his way. He'll do that."

Puhlease! He was injured here! The last thing he needed was to see the girls fawning over his dad!

"Excuse me, lads. Excuse me," a cheerful voice came, "Let me have a look at young Harry.

No! Help!

"Ah, yes. This is quite easy to fix," Lockhart beamed and started to wave his wand.

"I'd rather Madam Pomf-" Harry started to say but Lockhart was faster and suddenly the pain was gone.

Actually he felt nothing from his previously broken arm which now resembled a rubber glove. Harry stared at it horrified.

"Oh well. That can happen," Lockhart said, "The import-"

"What can happen?" came Sirius's enraged voice. He took one look at Harry and growled, "What the bloody hell have you done to my son?"

"You see, he had a broken bone, now he doesn't," Lockhart said brightly.

"He doesn't have any bones left in his arms you moron!"

"There's no need to be rude-"

Smack!

Lockhart was suddenly holding a bleeding nose.

"I told you to stay away from my son! Now look what you've done! You've gone and disappeared his arm bones and hurt my hand with your nose," Sirius cried shaking his hand.

Remus held back a laugh and quickly started ushering Harry towards the castle and away from the shocked students. They passed a smirking Severus who quickly schooled back his features into a scowl.

Harry did notice that none of the teacher scolded Sirius, not even McGonagall.

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Harry woke with a start at the sound of a loud crack. He saw Sirius was up and alert as well, pointing his wand at Dobby. *Poor Dobby, always at wand point.*

"Dobby!" Harry exclaimed.

"What do you want here?" Sirius said narrowing his eyes.

Dobby looked miserable, and wringing his ears with bandaged hands he said, "Harry Potter came back to school. Dobby warned and warned and Harry Potter still came. Ah, sir, why didn't Harry Potter go back home when he missed the train?"

"How do yo-" Harry asked but Sirius cut him.

"You sealed the gateway? Do you have any idea how much trouble you caused?"

Dobby nodded miserably, "Dobby punished himself for it but Dobby had to! Harry Potter is not safe at Hogwarts. Dobby watched Harry Potter but Harry Potter said he would just wait for Harry Potter's father to go to school So Dobby is keeping the gateway closed, but Harry Potter came anyway!" he wailed.

Sirius sighed and guided the elf to a chair. He kneeled and tried to reason, "Wouldn't it be better to just tell me what is supposed to happen? Does it have anything to do with what happened to Mrs. Norris?"

"Harry Potter must go home. Dobby thought his Bludger would be enough to make-"

"*You* tampered with that Bludger?" Harry cried, "You almost killed me!"

Sirius made a motion for Harry to be quiet and said calmly, "Dobby, I understand you want to keep Harry safe," Dobby nodded fervently. "I want that too. But for Harry to be safe you need to tell me who is attacking in the name of Salazar Slytherin."

Dobby shook his head, "Dobby can't sir. Dobby is just wanting to keep Harry Potter safe. He means too much for us, to the lowly, to the enslaved. House-elves is being treated like vermin before Harry Potter conquered He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Of course Dobby is still treated like vermin. But for most of us it was a new dawn, a beacon of hope. And now, horrible things are happening. Dobby cannot let Harry Potter stay now that the Chamber of Secrets is to be opened once more."

"So it's not just a legend. It's been opened before?" Harry asked. Sirius cringed, "You knew dad?"

"Hum, yes. We may have discussed this," Sirius said vaguely, "Do you know who is opening it Dobby?"

Dobby was about to hit himself when Sirius stopped him and said again, "Do you Dobby?"

"Dobby can't. Dobby is so sorry," and with a crack he vanished and Sirius stood there in the same position he had been while holding Dobby's arms.

"Dad? What's going on?"

Sirius sighed and ran a hand through his face, "You know about the legend?" Harry nodded. "About fifty years ago it was rumored that the Chamber had been opened. There were attacks on Muggle-borns and one died. The school almost closed. But then someone was caught and expelled after that girl's death and no one else was attacked. I personally don't think they caught the right person. Nor does Dumbledore. I think the real culprit just stopped because it got too risky."

"Who was expelled?"

"You can't tell anyone this Harry," he said very seriously. Harry nodded. Sirius took a big breath and said, "Hagrid."

"What? Hagrid would never-"

"I know that. Dumbledore knows that too. That's why he let Hagrid stay. But you know how things are. Hagrid is a half giant, and someone said it had been him. That's all the Ministry needed to hear," he said darkly as he sat on the bed he had been sleeping before Dobby showed up.

Harry bit his lips, "What if they think it's him again. Or what if they accuse Uncle Moony dad?"

"You see why I want to solve this fast don't you? Not just to stop the attacks. But if someone close-minded at the Ministry decides to take a closer look at the Hogwarts staff... I don't even want to think about it. I'm just glad that only a very few trusted people know about Moony. Not even the whole staff knows it. Dumbledore had wanted them to know but I convinced him to keep it just to the ones that had been Moony's teachers because they had known when he was a student. Teachers like Trewlaney or Sinistra, who started later, don't know."

Suddenly there was a noise, and as Sirius turned they saw Dumbledore backing into the ward carrying one end of what looked like a statue, with McGonagall carrying the other end. Sirius jumped up and joined them, helping them put it on one of the beds. McGonagall went to fetch Madam Pomfrey and Harry had a good view of the statue that was none other than Colin Creevey.

"Is he dead?" he asked in a small voice.

Dumbledore looked at him sadly, "No. I think he is Petrified too."

"He has a camera. Maybe he took a picture of the assailant," Sirius said prying the camera from the rigid fingers. As he opened it they saw the film was melted and fuming.

"What could have done this Albus?" he asked shocked.

At that moment Madam Pomfrey and McGonagall had arrived and the latter asked, "What does this mean?"

"This means the Chamber of Secrets has been opened," Dumbledore said darkly.

"But who would do that?" Madam Pomfrey asked horrified as she examined Colin.

"The question is not who but how?" Dumbledore said. Sirius saw Harry standing there pale and walked to him, "Let's get you back to bed Harry."

"Why was he out at night?"

"We don't know. Only he does," Sirius said gently.

"There was a bunch of grapes next to him," McGonagall said gently, "We think he was trying to sneak a visit to you."

Harry got even paler and Sirius took his face in his hands and made him look at him, "This isn't your fault Harry. You couldn't have predicted what would happen or what Colin would do. Colin shouldn't have been out at night and I want you to promise me you won't be."

Harry nodded, "I promise dad."

"Good. Now go back to bed. Maybe Poppy can give you some Dreamless Sleep," Sirius said looking expectantly at Madam Pomfrey who nodded and rapidly produced a vial of potion.

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The mood in Gryffindor Tower was subdued. Harry told his friends all that happened except the part about Hagrid being expelled. They had even more reasons now to want to see what Malfoy knew and Neville, Ron and Hermione had already started brewing the potion and planning how to steal from Severus' private store. Although Neville did reason that Malfoy's dad couldn't have opened the Chambers as Ron had suggested since he wasn't old enough, but Harry thought that maybe it was his grandfather since the Malfoys had been dark for generations.

Neville had been even more worried than Hermione saying he'd be a target because he was almost a Squib.

"That's not true Nev," Harry argued, "You just lack confidence because your Gran is always comparing you to your dad. I know that can be tough. Sometimes I feel like I'll never measure up to my parents because they were perfect. The only difference is I had Uncle Moony to teach me, and he has a lot of patience and knows how to encourage you."

"Too bad he isn't our teacher instead of Lockhart," Ron muttered, "Then we might actually learn something."

Hermione gave him a dirty look.

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"I know it was them. I just can't prove it or fathom why."

Sirius smirked, "You must regret having taught Harry Occlumency now," he chuckled.

"This isn't funny Black!"

Remus cleared his throat and got the attention of the glaring Potions Masters, "What did they take?"

"Bicorn horn and Boomslang skin."

"And what does that make?" Sirius asked.

"A variety of potions. None of which I see them having the need for."

Remus frowned, "Well, since you can't prove it was them there's nothing you can do. No you can't," he said at Severus' rebellious expression, "If you accuse Harry and it turns out he's innocent he'll never forgive you. You know that. Harry may not be a saint but he doesn't take lightly to being wrongly accused, mostly because of what almost happened to Sirius. Before you do it you need proof. Besides, if it was him, he must have a very good reason to risk your wrath. Harry holds your opinion too highly to risk it for nothing. Let's just give him a chance."

Severus huffed but he had to agree.

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"Let me introduce my assistant, Professor Snape," Lockhart said brightly, "Now don't fret, you'll have your Potions Master in one piece when I'm done."

Harry smirked. He didn't doubt that. Lockhart being in one piece when Uncle Sev was done with him was another thing all together. Harry had been excited at the prospect of a dueling club thinking maybe Professor Flitwick, Uncle Sev, Uncle Moony or his dad would be leading it. No need to say that when he found Lockhart there he was tremendously disappointed. He wasn't really paying attention to Lockhart's words but he couldn't fathom why the idiot was smiling so much. If Uncle Sev had been looking with that gleeful sneer at him he would be running for his life. He decided to pay very close attention because he knew his dad and Uncle Moony would want details, which Harry strongly suspected would find their way to the other teachers as well.

Harry held his laugh at Lockhart's bow. He knew from his dueling lessons that you never bowed like that. Even if you were in a formal duel, you were still dueling and you did not give your opponent such an opening.

"Expelliarmus," was the cry he heard from his Uncle and Lockhart was flying backwards. Harry had to bite his hand to keep from laughing. Severus had been quite gentle for Severus and Lockhart had still looked like a fool.

Hermione was beside him, fretting about Lockhart's health. He heard Ron's cry of "Who cares" and Lockhart's flimsy explanation of how he let Severus take him. Soon after that they were paired up, Severus separating Hermione and Harry and pairing them with Slytherins. Harry knew his Uncle wasn't just doing this to keep his façade, but was doing so because he thought Harry and Hermione could keep Draco Malfoy and Millicent Bulstrode in check. After all, he hadn't separated Ron and Neville. Soon chaos ensued and Lockhart was yelling "I said disarm only!"

Honestly! What had he thought? That they would obey?

Lockhart finally decided to have a demonstration with the students, and suggested Neville and Justin Finch-Fletchey, but Severus suggested Malfoy and Harry. Harry had to wonder what Uncle Sev was up to. They stood on the platform and Harry saw Severus whisper something on Malfoy's ear but wasn't worried. Lockhart tried to give Harry tips but he ignored them. He would use what his family taught him. They bowed, almost imperceptible, and before the shout of three had died on Lockhart's lips Harry had a strong shield up that blocked the curse Malfoy threw at him. When Harry had time to look he saw that what had collided with the shield was a very poisonous snake, and being flung on a shield didn't agree with it at all. It was hissing back at Harry as it prepared to attack.

"Don't move Potter," Uncle Sev said as he walked towards him, "I'll get rid of it."

"Allow me," Lockhart said swishing his wand but all he managed was to make it fly ten feet and land in front of Justin Finch-Fletchey, making it very irritated, fangs exposed, ready to strike. Harry didn't even stop to think when he cried:

"Leave him!"

The snake turned to him and Harry said, *"Don't hurt anyone here."*

"Why?"

"Because I say so," as he finished his sentence he saw the snake disappear. He looked up and saw his Uncle's shocked face. He looked around and saw everyone in the same state until Justin yelled:

"What are you playing at?"

Harry didn't think twice, he bolted from the room and kept running through the castle's halls with no mind to where he was going.

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"Daddy," five-year-old Harry tugged at Sirius sleeve, "Daddy, can we take that snake to Brazil? She's never been there."

Sirius smiled at Harry and said, "Oh, she hasn't? And how would you know?"

"She told me," he said simply and ran to the front of the glass tank that held an enormous python. To Sirius shook Harry started hissing at the snake and then turned back at him, "See, Daddy. She just said she was born here."

When Sirius had decided to take Harry to the zoo for his fifth birthday, learning that his boy was a Parselmouth was not what he had in mind.

"Daddy, can we? Did you hear her?"

That got his attention and he knelt to be eye level with Harry. He sat the boy on his bended knee and tried to explain, "No, I didn't. Only very special people can speak to snakes, Harry."

"Oh."

"Yeah, oh. But you can't tell anyone about this."

"Why?"

Sirius sighed. How to explain this?

"Remember what I told you about Uncle Moony's furry little problem and why no one could know?"

Harry nodded, "Because people are stupid."

Sirius cringed, "Yes, but best not tell Uncle Moony I said that. Or Aunt Minnie for that matter," he added as an afterthought, "People are afraid of what they can't understand, and most people can't understand snake language. Only very few have had that ability and some used it to hurt other people."

"That's not nice," Harry said very seriously crossing his little arms.

"No, but that's why people are afraid of people that can talk to snakes. So we have to keep this a secret, okay?"

Harry nodded and kept his word. No one outside their little family ever knew. Until now.

"Remus found him," Severus said as he approached him in the corridor, "Given the circumstances I think he is the best choice to deal with the issue." Sirius nodded and Severus sighed, "I'm sorry. I never meant for this to happen. That wasn't the spell I told Malfoy to use. I don't know how he knew how to

conjure a snake, and never thought Lockhart would be so dumb as to aggravate it. I just wanted for Harry to kick Malfoy's butt to see if it toned down the little twerp's arrogance."

"It's not your fault," Sirius waved his hand, "You had no way of predicting this outcome. Lucius probably taught Draco that spell. Now, all we can do is damage control."

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In the tallest tower of the castle two figures sat against the wall. The biggest had the smallest in an embrace and was rubbing circles on his back. They sat in a silence for a long time until the smallest figure broke it softly:

"Everyone is going to think I'm Slytherin's heir now."

"Probably," Remus answered softly, "They will shun you and be scared. They will say unkind words but you have to remember that you know they are not true. That your family and friends know that too. And the friends that don't weren't good friends to start with."

Harry nodded and cuddled closer to his Uncle quietly.

"M'sorry. I didn't even think. I just saw the snake threatening Justin and yelled."

Remus kissed Harry's head and smiled, "I know. But I also know that had you had time to think you'd have done the same. And *that's* what makes you special. Not being a Parselmouth."

"Do you think I was a coward to run like that?" Harry asked in a small voice.

"Do you think I'm a coward?" Remus asked and Harry shook his head. "James and Sirius figured out my secret around Christmas of our first year. For months they kept giving me not very subtle hints that I thoroughly and stubbornly choose to ignore. You see, I figured that if I didn't acknowledge that they knew it wouldn't be true. Finally James got fed up and yelled at me that if I thought they'd desert me just because I had a "furry little problem" then I was too stupid and they should desert me for being such a poor friend that thought so badly of them."

Harry looked at him dumbfounded and he continued, "Everyone is allowed to be afraid to face their problems once in a while. Even Gryffindors. But avoiding everyone forever isn't the solution. Sooner or later you'll have to face them, but you won't be alone. Your true friends and family will be by your side. All you have to do is not pull a Moony."

"Pull a Moony."

"That's what your dads called avoiding problems: 'You're pulling a Moony James. Just ask her to marry you. The worst that can happen is she says no.' 'But Padfoot, what if she does? I'll kill myself.'"

Harry chuckled at the voices Remus was doing and Remus smiled, "My work here is done". They stayed up there, Harry in Remus' arms and Remus running a hand through Harry's hair until Remus heard Harry's breath deepen and he knew the boy had fallen asleep. He carried him back to the Marauders' Quarters. Facing the public could wait until tomorrow. Remus just hoped Harry's friends would be as good friends as Sirius and James had been.

A/N- Some of the lines came from "Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets"

I loved all my reviews and thank all of you that take the time to read my story.

Special thanks to my beta Swaddict1986

Disclaimer: I still don't own Harry Potter. When will I own it?

Thanks to my internet provider, which was down the biggest part of the weekend, I wasn't able to read anything or do the researches I needed for work. Therefore, having nothing else to do, I wrote. So, you guys got a chapter earlier. Want the company's name to thank them? They may be wary of phone calls by now, I may have been not too gentle and may have channeled our favorite Potion's Master, just a bit.

Chapter 14- Facing the public

Harry squared his shoulders and entered the Great Hall determinedly ignoring the whispers and looks he was getting. His dad had asked if he wanted to walk to breakfast with him but Harry declined. He was going to face the public by himself and not protected by a teacher's shadow. He walked purposely to where he saw his friends and sat down next to Ron who was staring at him. He turned to Ron and asked with a blank face, "What? Do I have something on my face?"

"Why didn't you ever tell me you were a Parselmouth?" Ron asked in somewhat of a hurt voice.

"So you could run?"

Ron ears went red and he growled, "I would never do that and you should know that. We've been best friends for over three years now. I thought you knew me better than that!"

Harry sighed defeated and pointed to the rest of the Hall, "Look around Ron. Do you really blame me for not wanting this? My dad told me when I was five to keep this a secret and I did. From everyone, even my family. Aunt Andy, Uncle Ted and Tonks don't know. It wasn't just you Ron, I didn't tell *anyone*," he finished slumping his elbows on the table and holding his head on his hands.

Ron deflated and looked around. He glared at the people looking at them. Turning to Harry he said firmly, "Well, I don't care."

Harry smiled and looked nervously at Hermione and Neville who were seated across them.

"Me neither," Neville said at once.

"Judging people by something they can't help is a very stupid thing to do," Hermione said in a no-nonsense way.

Harry smiled a little more. He felt a weight lift from his shoulder. Even if everyone else thought he'd kill them with a stare, he still could count on his friends. He looked at the Head table and saw Remus give him a questioning look. He nodded slightly and Remus smiled and turned to Sirius to say something, just loud enough for Severus to inconspicuously hear.

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Harry didn't like sounding pessimistic, but this was definitely not good. When Herbology had been cancelled because of the snowstorm that made Professor Sprout need to fit socks on the Mandrakes, Harry had decided to go looking for Justin and explain that he had been telling the snake not to attack.

On his way he came across a group of Hufflepuffs, who egged by Ernie MacMillan, had been discussing how Harry was the heir of Slytherin.

"He's a Parselmouth and a Black by adoption. Everyone knows the Blacks have a history of being Dark," Ernie had said and Harry fumed.

"But Professor Black is so nice," Hannah Abbot countered.

"He's just luring us to a false sense of security and I bet he coached Harry," Ernie said.

Harry had cleared his throat and they all had jumped. He glared at them and asked for Justin. They said he was in the Hufflepuff Common room where he was safe. Harry let the jibe pass but when he was leaving he said icily:

"My dad is a war *hero* and one of the best Aurors there was. Alastor Moody himself says that. He was there to arrest the Lestranges with Moody, one of them his own cousin."

He would not let them badmouth Sirius! He left fuming and headed towards the Hufflepuff dormitory to see if he could get someone to call Justin for him and that's when he found them. Lying on the ground as rigid as statue none other than Justin Finch-Fletchley, and floating on top of him smoky and black, completely immobile, Nearly Headless- Nick.

He didn't even have time to run for help when the Hufflepuffs, who apparently had followed him, started yelling, "ATTACK!" and "CAUGHT IN THE ACT!" Harry didn't know what to think. He was breathing fast and didn't even react when Ernie and Zacharias Smith tackled him to the ground and pinned him.

"You are not going anywhere," Ernie said, "Someone call Dumbledore!"

Soon the hall was filled with students and Peeves, who had come to see the commotion, started singing:

"Oh, Potter you rotter, what have you done?

You're killing off students, you think it's good fun-

"What is going on here?" came the Deputy Headmistress stern voice. "Smith, MacMillan, what is the meaning of this?"

"Potter attacked Justin!" Smith cried.

"What? No I didn't!" Harry cried coming out of his stupor.

"Yes he did," Ernie said. "He came looking for Justin and left all angry. Then-

"You offended my father-

"-we followed him and found him all alone here. Mere moments after he had left us to get Justin. So we restrained him."

McGonagall's lips thinned and Harry shivered. That never bode well.

"That's enough MacMillan. Let Potter Black go and you and Smith can take Finch-Fletchley and Sir Nicholas to the Hospital Wing. Potter Black, follow me to the Headmaster's office."

"But I didn't do-

"I said follow me."

Smith and Ernie got off Harry and helped Professor Flitwick, who had come with McGonagall, take the victims upstairs. Harry got up slowly and followed McGonagall with his head bent down and shoulders slumped. Even Aunt Minnie thought he was guilty. That hurt! She knew him better than that.

They walked in silence and entered the office quietly. McGonagall signed for him to seat and he did so.

"I'll call Albus," she said and left.

Harry entwined his hands on his laps and waited.

"What did you do now? I dearly hope you didn't disgrace the Noble name of Black more than your disgraceful father already has," Phineas Nigellus Black said from his portrait on the wall. Harry said nothing. Phineas huffed, "Youth! No manners whatsoever."

"Sorry for making you wait Harry. I was dealing with Hagrid who has a problem with his roosters being killed," Dumbledore said entering the office. He sat on his chair behind his desk, rested his elbows on the arms of the chair, and entwined his hands surveying Harry who was looking at his own clasped hands on his lap.

"Professor McGonagall told me what happened," Dumbledore started.

At this Harry's head shot up and cried, "I didn't do anything!"

"I know."

"I found them that- You know? But Aunt Minnie looked at me like she thought I had done it."

Dumbledore sighed, "Minerva does have a way to make even the most innocent feel guilty. That does not mean she believes you were guilty of anything. She merely wished for you to tell me what you may have seen and to get you away from the other students who were, shall we say, a little irrational."

"Oh," Harry said slowly.

"Now, will you let me know what happened?"

So Harry did. He told Dumbledore about looking for Justin, meeting Ernie and the other Hufflepuffs and finding Justin and Sir Nick.

"What's happening Grandpa? What's doing this?"

Dumbledore sighed, "We have a few theories but all of them seem to have holes in them Harry. I honestly don't know."

Harry was shocked. He always believed that Dumbledore had all the answers in the world. For Harry, to hear that his grandfather didn't know something was truly a desperate situation.

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The whispers only got worse. The Hufflepuffs sent Harry evil looks and walked in groups every time they went past him. Even the ones that had been Harry's friends like Cedric Diggory sent him dubious looks. That really made him feel like scum. He thought those people knew him. And now he was treated like this without a second thought.

At least Ron, Neville, Hermione, Ginny and the twins didn't think he had done anything. Though Ginny kept looking like she was an inch from bursting into tears. The twins made jokes and teased the other students for their stupid beliefs.

"Make way for the Heir of Slytherin. Seriously evil wizard coming through!" was what they shouted while parading in front of Harry like bodyguards parting the crowds.

Harry wasn't the only one having a hard time. History of Magic had become a silent class. Where once before students asked bold questions and teased their teacher, now they were wary of him and looked as if he would attack them at any second. And just like Harry, Sirius was looking forward to a silent castle on Christmas.

Since last year he had gone home, this year it was McGonagall's turn to leave the castle. But most students were going home so he hoped to get a little reprieve of all this stress. Especially since the only Gryffindor students staying were Harry, Neville, Hermione and the Weasleys, he thought it would be quite pleasurable and calm. Of course, before McGonagall left he'd have to hear the whole list of dos and don'ts while he was in charge. Honestly, it was almost like she didn't trust him!

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Once again the big black dog was on the move. He padded his way through Hogwarts halls until he got to the door he wanted to arrive at and touched it. He loved that the fact that silly passwords irked the person inside, so he had to key in who could have access to his personal Quarters, meaning Padfoot could get in. Personally Sirius loved setting passwords. His favorites to this day had been "Sirius Black is God's gift to earth" and "I love Sirius Black". He would wait patiently until Snape had tired of knocking and had to utter those words just to be met by a grinning Sirius Black.

He padded inside the common living area that was just like the one in the Marauders' Quarters and entered the other room where a figure laid sleeping. He jumped on the bed, dropped the parcel he'd been carrying on his mouth on the man's stomach and licked his face. Before he had time to be murdered, he was out of the room and out the Quarter's door speeding towards the Marauders' Quarters.

Inside a very ruffled and disgruntled Severus Snape stalked back to his bed and read the note on the parcel. It read "Happy Christmas Sev! I'll give you half an hour before I wake them up. Hurry." He huffed at the Sev, but opened the parcel and saw a flowing silvery cloak. He grinned. He was going to be there to wake Harry on Christmas morning.

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Harry felt a tickle on his face and swatted it away with his hand. Promptly he made his way back to dreamland. The annoying tickle was back though and he again swatted it away. He turned around in bed, curled more under the blankets and was about to go back to sleep when the tickle came back.

Annoyed he opened his eyes and looked up at the grinning face of his Uncle Sev who was holding a feather.

"Happy Christmas Harry! I think your hyperactive father is waking Remus right now. We should make our way to the living room before he blasts in here and drags us out."

"Happy Christmas Uncle Sev!" Harry grinned happily and hugged his Uncle. This was the first time he had been woken by him on Christmas morning. Even when he spent Christmas in the castle in the past, Severus couldn't afford being seen entering the Marauders' Quarters. Other days could be explained as having to talk to colleagues to maintain his cover but if someone saw him Christmas morning they could get suspicious.

Harry jumped from bed and went to the living room where his grinning dad was seated at the Christmas tree being eyed evilly by Remus. Harry hugged Remus:

"Happy Christmas Uncle Moony!"

"Happy Christmas Harry!" Remus said and just to annoy Sirius, who was already starting to pout, very slowly he tried to flatten Harry's hair and straighten his pajamas.

"Hey! What about me? I am your father!"

Harry made a move towards Sirius but Remus held him close.

"Enough of that Lupin," Severus said in a no nonsense voice batting Remus head; "Black has suffered enough!"

Harry happily bounced to Sirius and hugged him. Sirius hugged him back flopping both of them to the floor and crying Happy Christmas. Soon afterwards they started exchanging gifts and friendly banter. And it was to the sound of laughter that Dumbledore entered the Marauders' Quarters to join their celebration. As he heard Severus laugh at something Sirius said he couldn't help but think how sometimes things can change drastically and some changes are very welcome.

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After breakfast Harry went to the Gryffindor Common Room to exchange gifts with his friends. They had been sad Harry had gone to sleep in his old room but understood that that was a tradition for Harry. That didn't mean he wouldn't see them.

There he was met with the news that the Polyjuice potion was ready and they would turn into Crabbe, Goyle and Millicent Bulstrode, from whom Hermione had already stolen a strand of hair, tonight. Neville would stay as a lookout in case the real Slytherins happened to show up. Even though they had planned to knock Crabbe and Goyle out with a Sleeping Draught and hide them in a closet, and Bulstrode had gone home for the holiday. It was better to be safe than sorry.

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"So..." Sirius paced in front of the three boys seated in the couch in the Gryffindor Common Room, "You three want to convince me that you have no idea whatsoever how Ms. Granger managed to get stuck with a cat's head."

Harry, Ron and Neville nodded. Sirius sighed and rubbed his temple with his finger.

"How come I don't believe that?"

"Because you are a skeptic," Ron braved, "sir," he added for good measure.

Sirius glared at him.

"Madam Pomfrey would have an easier time fixing it if she knew what happened," he said in a low voice.

The boys gulped but did not say anything. Sirius' wrath would be nothing compared to Hermione's if they spilled what they had been up to. Not that it had helped any. Malfoy didn't know anything that they already didn't know; actually he knew less since Harry knew who had been expelled for the Chamber's incident fifty years ago. At least they found out about Malfoy Sr.'s hidden chamber and Ron had already owed his father. That was at least something.

"Nothing to say?"

Silence.

"No confession to make?"

Silence.

Sirius huffed, "Unfortunately I can't punish you without proof even though I know you four were up to something. But rest assured that I will be keeping a very close watch on you," he said bending down to be eyelevel with the three boys who nodded and gulped again. He held his stare longer for effect and then turned and stalked away. A student semi-transfigured into a cat on his watch! Minerva would never let him live this down.

A/N- Short chapter, I know. But this just felt like the place to break it.

I loved all my reviews and thank all of you that take the time to read my story.

Special thanks to my beta Swaddict1986

Disclaimer: I still don't own Harry Potter. When will I own it?

I have had many requests for Minerva's wrath. Now people! How mean of you! Do you really think Minerva would berate poor Sirius like a naughty boy? Of course not, she knows better than that and will patiently wait for the best time to use such a weapon. But you'll have to patiently wait to see that time.

Chapter 15- A very fishy diary

"But if Riddle said," Ron tried to reason.

"It was not Hagrid!" Harry cried agitated. "My dad has already told me that. I just don't know why Riddle thought it was Hagrid."

"Because he was hiding some dangerous creature," Hermione said.

"What do you mean your dad told you? Why didn't you tell us?" Ron asked angry.

Harry sighed. He, Hermione, Ron and Neville were in the common room discussing what Harry found out from a very strange diary that belonged to a boy named Tom M. Riddle. The boys had found the diary in Moaning Myrtle's bathroom, where someone had tried to get rid of it. For weeks Harry had kept the diary in his bag not knowing why.

Today, when he was ambushed by a dwarf dressed as a cupid, one of Lockhart's bright ideas for Valentine's Day, and tried to make a run for it, Harry spilled scarlet ink on all his books. Except Riddle's diary was as clean as it had been before the dwarf had smashed the ink bottle. So, when he was back in his room Harry tried writing in the diary and found out it wrote back. Then Riddle showed him a memory where he had exposed Hagrid as the one that had opened the Chamber of Secrets. In Harry's opinion Riddle got it wrong. Hagrid was known for liking dangerous beasts and probably was hiding something dangerous, but Hagrid would never consciously hurt anyone.

"My dad made me promise not to tell anyone Ron," he said tiredly.

"Since Professor Black knows more about this than us maybe we should show him the diary," Neville said, "I find a diary that talks back to you quite fishy."

Harry looked at him and nodded, "Ok, tomorrow I'll take it to him."

"Why not now?" Hermione asked, "Its still half an hour until curfew."

"Today is my dad's night off. He's probably at the Three Broomsticks charming some unsuspecting witch," Harry said shuddering.

"Harry! I don't need to hear that about a teacher!" Ron cried putting his hands on his ears, "Teachers are not supposed to have social lives. They are just teachers!"

"I know! It's even worst for me. Parents aren't supposed to have social lives either but every now and then I hear dad and Uncle Remus talking about some girlfriend or other. I am telling you, I will need a lot of therapy. It's not going to be cheap!"

Hermione huffed, "You father and Uncle are quite young Harry. It's normal."

Harry looked at her and chuckled, "I know Hermione. I am just teasing. Though Uncle Remus' girlfriend count isn't as high as dad's."

"That's not very responsible of Professor Black. To subject you to-"

"He doesn't. I know about them, but I never met any of them. Dad and Uncle Remus say that they will only introduce a girlfriend when they find *the one*, as they put it. Dad never had anything serious with any woman. Uncle Remus had some but the few he had thought that he could have something more left him when he told them about his secret," Harry said angry, "I definitely don't like *them!*"

"That's not right," Hermione said.

"It's not," Neville said, "But it's hard for people to give up their prejudices. Not many do. You'll find Hermione, that we are a minority."

"When that happens dad always tells Uncle Moony that they weren't good for him anyway and that one day he'll find a great witch that will like him the way he is. I hope he does. Uncle Moony deserves to be happy."

Now that he thought about it he never heard Uncle Sev talking about any witch. Actually, Harry knew for a fact that on his days off Uncle Sev preferred to stay in the castle doing his researches and Potions experiments. Uhm, he'd have to find out why.

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"And the diary was stolen?" Remus asked from his armchair.

Harry nodded from the couch, "I was going to show it to you after class. I left it in my trunk but when we got back to the Gryffindor Tower someone had gone through my trunk, none to gently, and the only thing gone was that diary."

Sirius, who was seated next to Harry, frowned and crossed his arms pensively, "Who did you say the diary belonged to?"

"A Tom Riddle. Do you know him?"

"Never heard of him," Sirius said, "Moony?"

"No," Remus shook his head, "But Albus was already a teacher then. He may know. I never knew which student had told on Hagrid. We only found out why he was expelled now because Albus wanted to warn us."

"But it wasn't him!" Harry cried.

"No," Remus smiled, "Hagrid was hiding an Acromantula that he had gotten as an egg. From what Dumbledore told us Aragog, Hagrid's pet Acromantula, still lives in the Forbidden Forest and has a deal with Hagrid not to attack humans. Acromantulas are very dangerous but they don't petrify their victims."

Harry shivered. He was glad Hagrid was innocent, but honestly, a pet Acromantula?

"Anyway, there is nothing that you and your friends can do now. We'll talk to Albus and see what he knows," Sirius said, "Now, have you given a thought about what electives you'll take next year?"

Harry groaned, "That's all Hermione can talk about. Ron is taking Care of Magical Creatures and Divination. I would like to take the same as him, I like Care of Magical Creatures, but I hate Trelawney. She's been predicting I'll have a horrible death since I was three. Honestly, how thick can you be to scare a little kid like that?"

Sirius and Remus chuckled. The first time Trelawney had scared little Harry by saying he was going to have a horrible accident, Harry had been scared of even getting out of bed. Sirius had not been happy. He had yelled at Trelawney in front of the whole staff and had proceeded to stalk her as Padfoot, since back then she still didn't know about his recently registered Animagus form. She had been a nervous wreck for weeks, seeing her own death everywhere.

"But I don't know what else to take. Hermione is signing up for everything," Sirius frowned at this and made a mental note to talk to Minerva about Hermione.

"Well, Muggle Studies is out since you spend two weeks a year as a Muggle. You don't need it," Remus said, "There is Ancient Runes and Arithmancy left. In your case, I recommend Arithmancy; it's a lot like math and you always enjoyed it. Ancient Runes is basically learning a new language. You also had no problem learning Latin and French when we taught you but you didn't really enjoy it."

Harry nodded pensively. Ron wasn't going to be happy, but Neville was taking Divination too so he wouldn't be alone.

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"Hello Ms. Granger. Come in," Sirius said happily from his desk.

"You wanted to talk to me Professor," she said shyly entering the office. Sirius got up and pulled a chair for her. He sat in the opposite chair and said:

"Professor McGonagall and I have been talking about your elective choices. Now, we both think you are a very bright student and that you could take all of them as you asked for, but we want to think of all the pros and cons of the choice we'll give you. Professor McGonagall will petition for a Time-Turner, do you know what it is?" Hermione shook her head. "It's a device that allows you to go back in time in order to relive a certain period. This way, you'll be able to take the classes that are at the same time. Now, this is very serious, there are many rules that you'll have to follow. Meddling with time can be very dangerous so you will have to be very careful. I know you can do that."

Hermione nodded seriously.

"As your teacher and Deputy Head of House I am presenting you all your options. But I asked Professor McGonagall to be the one to talk to you because I want to give you some advice as your friend's father. It's going to be very stressful to do so, your days will be longer than normal and you'll have a workload bigger than what you are accustomed to. Not that I don't think you can handle the work," he said at her

mutinous face, "But I want you to think carefully. As a teacher I shan't speak ill of my colleagues," he said and paused a bit. He whistled, looked to the side and then winked, "Okay, Professor Black is gone. Now, Harry's dad can tell you that Professor Trewlaney can predict the future as much as Harry hates Quidditch."

"Harry loves Quidditch!"

"My point exactly. You are Muggle-born and therefore Muggle Studies is a little redundant. If what you wanted is to have a Wizards perspectives on Muggles, which is what Harry's mum had wanted when she signed up for the class," he grinned at her nod, "Taking Muggle Studies won't help you because the Muggle Studies teacher is Muggle-born. It's for Wizards and witches to have a better understanding of Muggles, so Dumbledore decided to hire a Muggle-Born. If you want a Wizard's perspective ask Neville or Ron. They can give you a better idea than Professor Burbage. Harry won't help you there because he spends time in the Muggle World and I always made sure he knew about his heritage."

Hermione nodded at his too.

"This leaves you with three electives left. That's one more than what you have to take but it's doable without the Time Turner. It will be stressful and you will still have a bigger workload than your classmates, but as I said I think you can handle it. So what I want you to do is go back to your dorm and think very carefully. If at the end of this school term you still want to take all the electives Professor McGonagall and I will both petition for a Time Turner. But I wanted you to have an informed decision and unfortunately I know that in her zeal to provide you with all you may want, Minerva may have not illustrated all the cons of this plan, just the pros."

"Thank you Professor," Hermione said brightly and left the office with a lot in her mind. Sirius dearly hoped she'd decide against the Time Turner but he wasn't so sure she would. What he was sure was that whatever she decided, he'd be there to help. He hadn't forgotten how Lily had been stressed out in their third year. McGonagall had offered her the same deal and by the end of the year Lily was a wreck, she ended up dropping Divination and Muggle Studies. Even though back then the Divination teacher was better than Trewlaney, Sirius thought that James constantly predicting she'd go out with him had played a big part on her choice.

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He couldn't believe his eyes. Hadn't he been talking to her about her options just yesterday? And yet, as much as he was worried about her, his biggest thought was: thank God Harry wasn't with her. He felt horrible for that. Shouldn't he be worried about Hermione and Ms. Clearwater? He shouldn't be relieved.

"I am too," came a soft voice from behind him. He startled and turned to meet his best friend's gaze.

"You are wondering if it's okay to be relieved that's not Harry, Paddy. I know you. And I feel the same way. It's normal. It doesn't make you horrible. Just human."

Sirius shook his head as to get rid of unpleasant thoughts, "When Madam Pince came to call us about two students being attacked and said one of those students was Hermione my first thought was Harry. How Harry was always with Hermione. How he could be the other student."

"Me too. But he isn't. He's fine. And they will be too. We just need to find out what's going on before something more permanent and horrible happens."

At that moment McGonagall entered the Hospital Wing escorting three nervous looking students. Harry, Neville and Ron entered slowly almost afraid of what they would find. Sirius walked to his students and put a hand on Harry's shoulder and another on Ron's. Remus had done the same for Neville.

"Hermione is going to be fine. Just like the others. It may be hard to see her this way but you have to remember that she is just Petrified. Okay?"

They nodded.

"Before we let you see her we need to ask a few questions so we can understand what is going on," Remus said gently. "They were found near the library and this was on the floor," he said showing them a small circular mirror, "Do you know why?"

The three shook their head.

"Harry heard that voice again," Neville said nervously, "Hermione said she had figured it out and that she had to go to the library. But that's all we know."

Remus looked at Sirius. They would have to go to Dumbledore. What did Hermione figure out?

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Things were definitely going down hill. Security had been tightened. Students didn't go anywhere alone and to top it all Fudge had carted Hagrid to Azkaban and Lucius Malfoy had Dumbledore removed. Harry, Ron and Neville had been there, under the Invisibility Cloak, when that happened because they had wanted to ask Hagrid about Riddle. They didn't have time. Dumbledore left them with a very cryptic message about asking for help and him never really being gone and Hagrid had told them to follow the spiders, which they had no intention of doing since they already knew what they would find.

Harry had asked his father who told him with a grim face that Dumbledore knew who Riddle had been and that if he found that diary again to give it straight to one of them. It was dangerous and they were almost sure it had something to do with how the Chamber of Secrets was being opened. Harry, Neville and Ron decided to keep a close look out for the diary but they didn't get a clue of who may have taken it. At first they thought that it had to be a Gryffindor, but after remembering some of the more bold stories of the Marauders Harry realized that a password wouldn't keep out someone who really wanted to get in Gryffindor Tower. That thought only served to dampen their moods even more.

The only good thing that happened was that the students that previously suspected Harry and Sirius decided that they were innocent. Apparently they thought that Harry would never attack Hermione and Sirius had been suspected only because he was Harry's father. Speaking of Sirius, he, Remus and

Severus had kept an even closer watch on Harry. Students had to be escorted from class to class by a teacher and Harry found it very coincidental that the three managed to be the ones that got the Gryffindor second years the most.

Malfoy was more unbearable than usual now that his father had managed to send away Dumbledore. He kept strutting around the place as if he owned it. In one Potions class he said he was surprised that all the Muggle-borns hadn't already left, except he hadn't been that polite, and was betting the next one would die. It was all Harry and Neville could do to keep Ron from attacking him.

Severus didn't reprimand Malfoy and even indulged him when Malfoy proposed he should apply for Headmaster. But Harry saw the very small, almost imperceptible, twitch of Severus lips that told the people who knew Severus very well that he was holding back from strangling Malfoy by sheer force of will.

One morning, passing through Moaning Myrtle's bathroom, Harry noticed several large spiders scurrying as if they were trying to flee as far away from the bathroom as possible. When he pointed this out to Neville and Ron, Ron promptly took some steps back and begged Harry not to follow Hagrid's advice.

"I wasn't planning to," he said in a low tone so the rest of the class didn't hear, "But he did say follow the spiders and have you noticed how you almost can't find spiders in the castle anymore? It's just weird. Almost like they want to be anywhere but here."

Neville face suddenly enlightened, "You think that the spiders are scared of whatever the monster is?"

"Makes sense," he said looking pensively at the bathroom, "Dad said a girl was killed the last time."

"So?" Ron asked.

"What if she never left? What if the ghost stayed behind?" Harry asked.

"Moaning Myrtle wears Hogwarts robes, so she died as a student," Ron said following Harry's train of thought.

"We need to talk to her," Neville said biting his lips, "It's going to be almost impossible though. How do we ditch our escort?"

Harry bit his lip; he should tell his dad of his suspicions, but then he thought that his dad was the one to tell him about the dead girl, so he must have known about Myrtle. He probably already talked to her. Harry was just going to talk again and maybe catch something they missed. Yes, that was it. No need to worry his dad.

Disclaimer: I still don't own Harry Potter. When will I own it?

Chapter 16- Meet Tom Marvolo Riddle

Talking to Moaning Myrtle was easier said than done. Since the students weren't left alone for a second Harry, Neville and Ron were not able to find a time to slip unnoticed into the girl's bathroom. At least if it had been the boy's bathroom they'd have an excuse. But the girl's?

To add insult to injury, at least in Harry's opinion, the teachers informed them that exams were to start in a week. McGonagall gave them a very strict lecture about the whole point of keeping the school open being for them to get an education, which included exams, and Sirius's asked innocently if they could think of any better way to spend their time than exams. Harry glared at his father and found he wasn't the only one in class doing so. Actually, he could think of many better ways to spend his time.

Since Hermione had been Petrified Harry, Ron and Neville noticed how much they depended on her to make their study schedule and clear out their doubts. Harry decided to make use of the Hogwarts resident tutor but when the three of them stopped by Remus' office to sign up for a session they were disappointed to find they hadn't been the only ones to think that and the schedule was full. Remus promised to tutor them on his free time but that wouldn't be nearly enough time for what they needed. Things were getting desperate.

One good thing that happened was when Professor McGonagall informed them at breakfast that the Mandrakes were finally ready and the Petrified victims would be revived that same night. Ron had been happy, saying that it didn't matter that they hadn't talked to Myrtle, but Harry still had the nagging feeling that Slytherin's Heir was still out there and could still hurt someone badly.

There was also Ginny's strange behavior; she had come to tell them something but Percy had interrupted and said that she had caught him doing something that he didn't want people to know. But Harry frowned at this. He knew Ginny, and if she had dirt on Percy she'd be gleeful not scared and nervous. She had been very skittish lately, especially with Harry and Harry figured she was still embarrassed by that singing dwarf on Valentine, which Harry later on found out had been a prank from Fred and George, but the whole school thought it had been Ginny.

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"How exactly did he get in this mess?" he thought as he felt the effects of the poison, "Oh, yeah! Lockhart!"

Things had been looking better. The Mandrakes were ready and Harry, Ron and Neville had managed to ditch Lockhart on their way to History of Magic. They had planed to talk to Moaning Myrtle but McGonagall had caught them and by thinking very quickly they convinced her they were trying to see Hermione. In the Hospital Wing, they realized Hermione had been holding a piece of paper from a book

and figured out that Slytherin's monster was a Basilisk that was going around through the pipes. And the entrance had to be in Moaning Myrtle's bathroom. They were about to go tell Sirius when McGonagall's voice ordered the students back to their dormitories. There they heard the worst news ever: Ginny had been taken to the Chamber of Secrets. Ron, Neville and Harry decided to tell a teacher, preferably, McGonagall, Sirius, Severus or Remus, about their findings (not that Ron and Neville were too thrilled to include Snape on the list). Unfortunately the first teacher they ran into was Lockhart who was floating a few trunks ahead of him in one of the corridors in a clear escape attempt. Harry didn't think twice and with a shout of "*Expelliarmus*" he disarmed the phony teacher.

"Where are you going sir? Shouldn't you be helping look for Ginny?" he asked icily. Neville and Ron had been pointing their wands at Lockhart too.

"Well, I think the other teachers can handle-"

"You are the Defense teacher!" Neville cried.

"After all you did in your books!" Ron yelled.

"Books can be misleading," Lockhart mumbled.

"You wrote them!" Harry cried.

Lockhart rolled his eyes impatiently, "Honestly, do you really think people would be interested to hear that I only wrote about those feats? They obviously had to think I did them!"

"You mean you stole them?" Neville said incredulously, "What about the people that actually did those things?"

"Nothing a little *Obliviate* doesn't solve," Lockhart scoffed, "Now, if you'll please lend me my wand I'll just do a Memory Charm on you and be on my way."

"You really think we're that dumb?" Ron asked. Lockhart shrugged.

"I don't think so, sir," Harry said evenly, "You see, we figured where the entrance to the Chamber of Secret is and you are going in to get Ginny. Ron and I will take you to the entrance. Neville, can you let my dad and the others in on what is going on?" Neville nodded and left at a run. Ron poked Lockhart with his wand and Lockhart got up grudgingly.

They had gone to the abandoned girl's bathroom and Myrtle had told them that before she died she heard a boy's voice say something in a strange language. When she opened the stall's door she saw a pair of yellow eyes and then she was dead. Harry went to the sink from where Myrtle said she heard the voice and found a scratch in one of the copper taps of a tiny snake. He hissed "*Open*" in Parseltongue and the sink sank to the ground until all you could see was large pipe exposed.

"I guess that's the entrance," Ron said.

"The other teachers should be here any second now. They'll get Ginny back," Harry said confidently.

"I don't think so," Lockhart said from behind them. He was grinning and pointing Ron's wand at them. Ron patted his pockets. How stupid he was? He had put his wand in his pocket when he knelt to inspect the sink!

"Dreadful business, see. The boys tried to face the monster by themselves and were caught by it. It was too late to save the poor girl and the boys lost their minds. So sorry about that. Now Harry, do be a darling and close that entrance so I can *Obliviate* you and we can leave this dreadful place behind."

Harry and Ron were eyeing the wand. They were dangerously close to the pipe but Harry knew he couldn't close the entrance. Not while Ginny was still there.

Lockhart was getting closer and Ron and Harry took another step back. Harry could feel that half of his left foot was in the air.

"*Obl-*" Lockhart started but at the same time Myrtle yelled from behind him:

"You forgot about me!"

Lockhart stumbled and fell forward dragging Ron and Harry with him through the pipe. They fell for what felt like ages. Harry could see other pipes branching off in all directions. Suddenly the pipe leveled out and they were shot out landing with a thud on the damp floor of a dark stone tunnel. Harry looked behind him; Lockhart and Ron had landed a little behind him. Harry hoped Ron would have been able to get his wand back but it was firmly grasped in Lockhart's hand.

"I think this is enough then boys. You had your fun," he said first pointing at Harry, "*Obliviate*".

Harry ducked and raised a shield but instead of seeing the spell Harry heard an explosion and chunks of stone falling down. He coughed on the dust that had risen and when he was finally able to see again there was a wall of rocks where he had previously been.

"Ron!" he cried. Oh, God! What if Ron had been under those rocks? "Ron!"

"I'm here. I'm okay. The ponce isn't," came Ron's muffled voice, "The wand backfired. He got a full blast. He's knocked out."

Harry tried to move some rocks but it was impossible. He was trapped here with no way out and a Basilisk somewhere in this tunnel.

"It will take ages to get this rocks down," Ron said, "I can't get through."

Ginny was somewhere in here. She could still be alive. But for how long? Did they have time to wait for help? He made up his mind.

"Ron, try and move some of these rocks. The teachers that Neville went to fetch should arrive soon and they will be able to help. I'll go look for Ginny. Tell them that! I'll need all the help I can get but we can't wait," he didn't wait for an answer and left. From behind he could hear:

"No, Harry! Wait!"

After that he had followed the tunnel until he found a solid wall with two entwined serpents carved. He hissed "*Open*" and the wall opened as the serpents parted. He entered an enormous chamber with towering stone pillars where more carved serpents rose to support the ceiling. Very carefully Harry entered, expecting the Basilisk to show up any second now. As he surveyed the chamber his heart skipped a beat. Right in the middle of the floor Ginny lay unmoving. He ran to her as fast as he could.

"Ginny! Oh, please Ginny don't be dead!" he begged as he shook her and hugged her close, "Please wake up. We have to leave. Come on Ginny. Please!"

She was limp on his arms. Vibrant Ginny who didn't take any rubbish from her brothers or Harry. Who had grilled Sirius for extra hexes to use on the twins as soon as she noticed he would be more than happy to teach her. Who could get away with more things than Harry and Ron could ever dream of with Remus just by smiling sweetly at him. This wasn't their Ginny, this unmoving doll.

"She won't wake," said a soft voice.

Harry looked up and saw a tall, black-haired boy of around sixteen years old, leaning against one of the pillars watching him. He was strangely blurred around the edges, as though Harry was looking at him through a misted window. But he recognized him nonetheless and instantly stood alert.

"Tom? Tom Riddle?"

Riddle nodded. Harry checked Ginny's breath. It was still there.

"She's still alive. But barely," Riddle said with an expression that could only be called enjoyment.

As Harry turned to look at Riddle he saw the diary he had lost lying opened next to Ginny. He remembered what his dad said about the diary and somehow he knew he had to get rid of the diary and of Riddle.

"What are you? A ghost?"

"A memory," Riddle answered, "Preserved on the pages of a diary for fifty years."

Harry looked suspiciously at him. Something wasn't sitting right with him. Tom seemed very at ease for someone who was in a place where a Basilisk could show up any second now.

"I was very eager to meet you Harry," Tom said walking towards Harry with a hungry look. "For months now I've been wanting to know all about you, and little Ginny was very eager to tell me everything. Of course I had to endure all her silly little troubles, how people would tease her for her second-hand robes and books. How she would never live up to her brothers and her brother's best friend, you. How people would always see her as little Ginny that came to have classes with Harry Potter and never really as a real student. It's very boring. But I was sympathetic, patient. I wrote back kind words. She loved it, *Oh, Tom. No one understands me like you do. I am so glad I have this diary to confide in... It's like having a friend that I can carry in my pocket.*"

Riddle laughed a high cold laugh that sent shivers down Harry's spine. He knew that laugh from his nightmares. He knew that laugh from the end of last year, but it couldn't be.

"If I say it myself, Harry, I have always been able to charm the people I needed. So Ginny poured out her soul to me, and her soul happened to be exactly what I wanted. I grew stronger on a diet of her deepest fears, her darkest secrets. I grew powerful, far more powerful than little Miss. Weasley. Powerful enough to start feeding Miss. Weasley a few of my secrets, to start pouring a little of my soul into her..."

"You did it all!" Harry said through narrowed eyes.

"Oh, in a way I didn't; she did. She opened the Chamber of Secrets, she killed the roosters, she unleashed the serpent that Petrified four students and the Squib's cat," he sighed dignified, "I was merely the conscience behind it all but she executed it all. It's all the same."

"No it's not. Ginny would never do that on her own free will," Harry growled.

Riddle laughed again, "You're right. She did try to fight me when she realized that she didn't remember chunks of time...*'Oh Tom, I thin I am losing my memory. There are rooster feathers on my robes ad I don't know how they got there.'* Eventually she figured she was the one doing all those things and tried to get rid of the diary. And that's when you showed up. Ginny had told me all about you. Oh, how I had wanted to meet you."

"And why is that? Wanted to find out how you got defeated?" Harry asked icily and Riddle laughed.

"You are not as dumb as I first presumed. How did you figure my anagram out?"

"What anagram?"

Riddle used Ginny's wand that was in his hand to write "Tom Marvolo Riddle" in the air. The letters shuffled and formed the words "I am Lord Voldemort". Harry looked at it disdainfully and said:

"Nope, sorry. I don't waste my time with silly child games," at this Riddle fumed. Harry didn't think it completely wise to goad him but he knew help was on the way so he wanted to stall, "I recognized your laugh. It's quite distinguishable."

"Really? Glad to be remembered. But as you said, I want to know how you did it. That is the whole reason we are here, Harry. When Ginny wrote again in the diary I was furious. She saw you with the diary and panicked. She went through your things and stole it back. I had wanted to talk to you more. So, I had to act. I made her attack again in the hopes to drive Dumbledore away," he smirked here, "And I succeeded. Ginny told me how he is like a Grandfather to you. I couldn't have him here protecting you, No, no, no," he shook his finger as if talking to a naughty boy. "The next move was to bring you down here. Do you know a better way than abducting your best friend's baby sister? I counted on the fact that only you can open the Chamber and of course, your Gryffindor foolishness. And I was rewarded. Here you are. Now how did you manage to defeat the greatest Wizard in the world?"

"You are not! Dumbledore is the greatest Wizard in the world!" Harry cried angrily pointing his wand at Riddle.

"Dumbledore! Dumbledore was driven away by the mere memory of me!"

"He's not as gone as you might think," Harry hissed. His mind was working furiously. What could he do? Ghosts weren't affected by spells. Were memories affected? Riddle opened his mouth but froze. Music was coming from somewhere. Music Harry knew. Music he'd heard so many times when he was little and scared and his Grandfather had been taking care of him. Harry looked up and his heart beat more strongly. Fawkes appeared in a burst of flame. Flying low he dropped something on Harry's lap. As he looked down he saw the Sorting Hat. Harry frowned. This was not the time for cryptic messages.

Riddle laughed, "That's what Dumbledore sends his big defender? A bird and an old hat? Do you feel brave Harry Potter? Do you feel safe?"

No, he didn't but he wasn't about to let Riddle know.

Riddle turned serious, "Enough with the chat now. I want to know how you managed to survive my attempts at your life twice. Tell me everything; the longer you talk...the longer you stay alive."

Harry's mind was racing. He could stall and wait for help, but the longer he took, the more life was dwindling from Ginny. Swallowing hard he decided to act. He had his wand and Fawkes. He'd try his chance on a duel. Maybe, with a lot of luck, he could defeat Riddle, who was older and more experienced in the Dark Arts than him. Who was he kidding? He was a goner! But that was Ginny's best chance.

"No one knows exactly what happened, how you lost your powers but what I do know is that it wasn't my doing. It was my common, Muggle-Born mother's doing. She defeated you. Her sacrifice out of love made it impossible for you to kill me. Lord Voldemort was defeated by a Muggle-Born witch, who transformed you into the wreck you are today. Hiding, ugly, foul. Barely living!" he almost yelled in his rage.

Riddle's face contorted but then it turned into an ugly smile.

"So it was luck that saved you. No special power. Just a miscalculation on my part," his smile grew even more twisted, "Now Harry let's see how you fair against Salazar Slytherin's Heir's power." Riddle walked away and stopped between the stone pillars. He looked up into what Harry realized was the stone face of Salazar Slytherin and started hissing.

"Speak to me, Slytherin greatest of the Hogwarts four."

Another password Harry figured. It did take one egocentric megalomaniac to understand the other.

Slytherin's gigantic mouth moved and in horror Harry saw something stirring. Still clutching the Sorting Hat, Harry rose and backed away until he hit the wall. Before he closed his eyes he whispered *Wingardium Leviosa* at Ginny and floated her to a covered corner of the stones where he hoped she wouldn't be a target.

Something huge hit the floor. He could sense the serpent uncoiling as Riddle hissed *"Kill him"*. He began to run blindly hoping to get away. Hand outstretched he tried to feel his way. With the other hand he sent all the damaging curses he knew but he knew they were useless. The Basilisk skin would protect it. He heard hissing and trashing and was suddenly hit by something heavy that flung him towards a wall. Disoriented Harry couldn't help it. He opened his eyes and what he saw made him want to sing in joy. Fawkes had attacked the basilisk's eyes and blood was seeping through them. It was blind, making it safe for Harry to look.

Encouraged by this, Harry started firing more hexes at it knowing they were at least hitting the target. The Basilisk grew more agitated and moved to the direction of the hexes. Harry ran but tripped and had to use the hand holding the hat to break his fall. As he got up again he put the hat on his head to have both his hands free and ran as fast as he could. He was suddenly met by a wall and as he turned he

saw he was cornered. He begged for help to arrive soon but he saw nothing. Instead, Harry felt something hard thud on the top of his head as the hat contracted. He grabbed the hat to pull whatever was in there off and his hand grasped the hilt of Gryffindor's sword. The sword he had seen so many times in his grandfather's office. Almost by instinct Harry held the sword firmly in front of him just in time for the Basilisk to fling itself forward. The sword went through its open mouth and hitting the roof of it. Harry felt blood drench his arm at the same time a searing pain throbbled above his elbow. Suddenly the Basilisk was flung away from him by an invisible force and Harry saw it drop dead several feet away from him. Harry saw one of its fangs had sunk deep in his arm. He slid against the wall, gripped the fang and wrenched it out of his arm. He knew it was too late. He would die. And so would Ginny. As white-hot pain was spreading slowly Harry saw Fawkes fly towards him and he heard Remus's voice crying for him. He wondered, *"How exactly did I get in this mess? Oh, yeah! Lockhart!"*

He felt something drop on his lap and through a foggy vision, he saw Fawkes had brought the diary. He didn't really know how he knew what to do, but he pierced the fang still in his hand through the diary and heard an awful scream somewhere as dark ink splattered off the diary flooding the floor.

"Harry," Remus choked voice came. He felt strong hands lift him and dropped the diary and the fang. "Harry, look at me cub. Please. Don't let go."

"Sorry Uncle Moony. We tried to get you. Lockhart-" he said weakly.

"Sh, it's okay," Remus whispered through tears smoothing Harry's face with a trembling hand.

Blackness was getting near as Harry felt something warm and wet drip on his arm, just where the fang had pierced. Slowly the darkness left and so did the pain. His vision was coming back in focus and Harry could see Remus clearly. He looked at his arm and saw Fawkes crying on it. He smiled. Fawkes saved him.

"Thanks Fawkes. You were brilliant."

The bird gave a happy chirp and flew away to where Ginny was waking up. An army of teachers burst through the entrance and Harry saw Ron run to Ginny and Sirius to him. Remus hugged him closer and rocked back and forth. Sirius joined the hug and the rocking, kissing Harry's head. Harry didn't say anything. He knew this was for Sirius' and Remus' benefit more than his own.

A/N- Some of the dialogs are from "Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets"

I loved all my reviews and thank all of you that take the time to read my story.

Special thanks to my beta Swaddict1986

Disclaimer: I still don't own Harry Potter. When will I own it?

I couldn't believe how many Reviews I got. Over 30. Thank you so much!

Chapter 17- Of brothers

"So, Professor Lupin levitated the Basilisk away from you?"

"Good thing he did too or it probably would have squished me into mush," Harry answered Hermione who was getting an account of everything that happened while she had been Petrified.

"How did he get there before the others?" she asked.

Harry shrugged pensively. He hadn't thought of that. He looked at Ron.

"I dunno. We were all working on opening a passage and suddenly Professor Lupin disappears. Pop, like he just Disapparated."

"You can't Apparate or Disapparate inside of Hogwarts grounds," Hermione said.

"Maybe it didn't count as Hogwarts grounds since it was so deep," Neville reasoned.

"Then why didn't the others Apparate too?" she asked. The boys just shrugged. Hermione huffed and kept asking question after question that they answered patiently.

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He watched the foursome chatter. These were the times when he hated the role he had to play the most. How he had wanted to hold Harry and make sure he was fine just like Sirius and Remus had done. But he couldn't. Not with Weasley, Flitwick and Sprout there with them. He had to maintain his stony face even though he was crumbling inside at the sight of the enormous beast Harry had faced. At the sight of the fang that he knew had pierced his boy. If Fawkes hadn't been there... he didn't even want to think. It was already too late for the antidote that he was carrying; he had brewed it as soon as Albus first voiced his theory, even with the holes later explained by Ms. Granger's theory. He was nothing but a prepared man. But the problem, the reason why Basilisk Venom is so lethal, is because it's antidote has to be taken almost the second the skin is pierced because the venom acts so fast. By the time they arrived at the scene Harry would have been dead. His blood went cold at the thought and he had to look at Harry vividly talking, fine and alive, to calm himself.

After they extricated Gryffindor's sword from the Basilisk and Severus performed a conserving charm on the beast, he would be coming later on to harvest the parts, the five teachers summoned brooms and flew back through the pipes accompanied by Fawkes. Severus had the unpleasant honor of taking an amnesiac Lockhart as his passenger.

As they reached the bathroom where Longbottom was still waiting for them, Moaning Myrtle seemed quite upset that Harry and Remus were still alive. Apparently she wanted company and she had a little crush on the Werewolf since his Hogwarts' days as a student. It was a true mark of how they were

shaken that Sirius did not use the situation to tease his friend; oh, well, he'd remember later. Sprout and Flitwick parted ways with them as they wanted to make sure their respective houses were still in the dorms unlike the three Gryffindor boys. Severus knew he should go too but with the excuse that Remus and Sirius were acting more like distressed parents than teacher he managed to accompany the rest of the group to McGonagall's office. There they found the Weasley parents being comforted by Minerva and to his great surprise and relief, Albus.

The Weasleys, of course, jumped at the sight of their daughter and son. Severus honestly thought they were going to cut the girl's air supply and he wanted to berate them for making all of Harry's hard work and risks for naught. Miraculously, they didn't and the girl was fine, if a little shaken. She had been oddly quiet since they found her, shooting Harry and Ron frightened and... shall he say, guilty looks? Next second he found himself on a line of people hugged and thanked by Molly Weasley for saving her daughter and he honestly could do nothing more than stare at her in shock. From the corner of his eyes he saw Harry's lips twitch but a well-placed glare sobered the boy.

After that came the explanations. Harry explained what happened, how he had gotten in that situation and McGonagall had to put an invisible wall between the Marauders and the oblivious Lockhart. Unfortunately, Severus had been behind that wall too and he knew Minerva had done it on purpose; after all, she and Poppy were the only other people that knew the truth. There had been no way of keeping it from them. Not with the positions they held.

Albus then asked how the Dark Lord had managed to enchant Ginny in opening the Chamber and Severus understood the girl's guilty look and silence. Albus should have been a Slytherin, the sneaky old coot. Harry explained about the diary and Arthur berated his daughter for trusting an inanimate object that could think. Albus then explained about Tom Riddle, the half-blood orphan that had studied at Hogwarts and later on became Lord Voldemort. Severus was stumped; he never knew the Dark Lord was a half-blood, or the heir of Slytherin through his mother's side. For that matter, even though he knew Voldemort had been a Slytherin he had never known his real name. He had fancied himself a new name and dropped his old one. Severus couldn't help but think of the similarities, The Half Blood Prince. No, they were not the same, Severus had something Voldemort never had, love, and more importantly, he still loved. And Severus hadn't been Head Boy. Yes, he knew, stupid analogy, but the Dark Lord Head Boy? Who would have thought?

Albus then asked Minerva to set up a feast and accompany the Weasley clan and Lockhart to the Hospital Wing, where Severus also wanted Harry to go, but, Albus still wanted to talk to Harry. To be honest Severus himself wanted to hear why Albus failed to tell them Riddle was Voldemort when he told them that he thought Riddle was the one that had opened the Chamber the first time, and to be wary of that diary.

"I made a mistake. I never thought it would come to this and didn't think it necessary to worry you. I thought we'd find the diary quietly and dispose of it," Albus had said.

"The information wouldn't have hurt us, Albus," Remus had said evenly, "As a matter of fact it would have made us more aware of what kind of threat we would be facing. We were thinking we were dealing with a particularly sick and cruel former student that may have had descendants that we didn't know about. Not some form of the most feared Wizard of the last Century."

Albus had sighed and looked old, "I can only apologize for my oversight and promise to be more divulging in the future Remus."

"See that you do," Severus had said firmly, "We can't help if we are kept in the dark."

At that precise moment the door had banged open and a furious looking Lucius Malfoy had strode in. Severus had almost jumped, almost, and thanked the gods Lucius hadn't come a second earlier.

"You are back," Lucius had said with narrowed eyes.

"I would say so," Sirius had said looking at Dumbledore as if making sure it was indeed Dumbledore, "Wouldn't you say Remus? Or maybe it's Albus' twin that we didn't know he had."

Lucius glared at Sirius, "The governors suspended him and yet he still sees fit to ignore it and return to Hogwarts."

"Well, you see Lucius," Albus had said smiling serenely, "The Governors seemed to be under the impression-" Severus tuned out the rest of little verbal war between Lucius and Dumbledore where Dumbledore explained how everything happened and that Arthur Weasley had been set up to focus on the house-elf that had accompanied Lucius; Dobby. He could kick himself. That's where he had seen the bloody elf: Malfoy Manor. How many times had he been there to socialize with the Malfoys and had been served by that very same elf?

It was as he heard Harry telling Lucius that he had slipped the diary inside one of Ginny's books during the famous fight at Flourish and Blotts that everything clicked. Stupid! Stupid! Stupid! If he had just remembered the damn elf he would have realized Lucius was behind it from the start. He was in the middle of berating himself when he noticed Remus and Sirius flee after Harry. When he saw Lucius was gone he kicked himself mentally one more time and ran after them. He got there just in time to see Harry shove a stuffed sock on Lucius hand and Lucius ripping the sock to find the diary and dropping said sock on Dobby's hand. Severus had to work very hard not to laugh.

"You'll meet the same sticky end as your parents one of these days. They were meddling fools, too," he had said softly.

Sirius and Remus eyes had hardened and they had positioned themselves in front of Harry.

"Better to be a meddling fool than a groveling idiot," Sirius had hissed.

Lucius had glared furiously at him and turned sharply around calling for Dobby who was still in awed shocked at being freed. When Lucius realized this he tried to attack Harry but before either Marauder could act Dobby had thrown Malfoy back. Without a choice Malfoy turned around and hurried out of sight but not before meeting Severus eyes, who for show cried.

"Ten points from Gryffindor Potter, for insulting your elders," he said, and when Lucius was out of sight and Dobby had vanished after promising not to try and save Harry's life again Severus added quietly, "Fifteen points to Gryffindor for making a Malfoy look like an idiot."

Severus was brought back to the present as he heard Dumbledore welcome Hagrid back and say exams had been cancelled as a treat. He awarded Harry, Weasley and Longbottom points for bravery and Longbottom looked shocked. Honestly, Severus thought Weasley should be awarded more points for his wand backfiring and blasting Lockhart.

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The end of the Summer term had passed in a haze of blazing sunshine. After being assured that they did not blame her at all, Ginny was back to her usual self and was actually starting to make friends with the others in her year. She had been very distraught at the thought of Harry almost dying because of her but Harry assured her that she couldn't have helped it.

One night, during the very last week of term, Harry was woken in the middle of the night by a very distressed house-elf.

"Kreacher," Harry said drowsily, "What happened? Are you okay?"

"Oh, Master Harry inquires about Kreacher when Master Harry is being the one that almost died and left Kreacher all alone," the old elf sobbed.

Harry quickly got out of bed and tried to calm the elf.

"No, don't be sad Kreacher. See, I am all better now."

"Kreacher is sorry, Master Harry," the elf quieted, "Kreacher is needing to ask for Master's help."

"For what?"

"Kreacher is hearing how Master destroyed an object that belonged to He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named and Kreacher is needing Master to do it again."

Harry paled, "Destroy the diary again? Someone fixed it?"

"No, no, Master," Kreacher shook his head and took a golden locket from his pillowcase, "Master Regulus is asking Kreacher to destroy this before he is dying. Poor Master Regulus," the elf sobbed, "But, but Kreacher isn't knowing how to do it. Kreacher tried but nothing is working so Kreacher is hiding this in the Black Manor and when Master Sirius is throwing everything away and breaking his poor mother's heart, Kreacher is saving this, even before Master Harry is asking Kreacher if he is wanting to keep anything. Then Kreacher is saving lots of other Black Heirlooms that heartless Master is throwing away."

Harry let the insults to his father go by; he knew that no matter what, Kreacher and Sirius would never get along. He took the locket in his hand and a shiver went through his spine. There was something not right with this locket. He tried to open it but it wouldn't budge.

"How did Uncle Regulus get this Kreacher?"

Kreacher looked at the other beds and Harry understood. He motioned the elf to get on his bed, closed the curtain and used a privacy spell that his Uncle Sev had invented called *Muffliato*. And then Kreacher told him the most interesting and horrible tale he had ever heard.

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He was fingering the golden locket in his hands. Moony had gone to get Albus and Severus. He choked a sob. Oh, God, Regulus! His baby brother. How he had wronged him. He had been so brave in the end. Sirius had no idea what this was but Regulus had died to make sure it was destroyed, and Sirius would see that it was.

Regulus had been so prim, Sirius' opposite. He had been studious, quiet and pompous, a lot like Percy Weasley. He had drank and believed all that pureblood rubbish that their parents had sprouted and when Sirius had started Hogwarts and become a Gryffindor, made friends with half-bloods, blood-traitors and Muggle-borns Regulus had distanced himself from his brother just like the rest of the family. When Sirius went back home for the holidays Regulus wouldn't talk to him. When Regulus had come to Hogwarts and been sorted into Slytherin he would ignore Sirius in the corridors. And hurt and angry, Sirius would do the same.

When he decided he'd had enough and left the Black Manor to live at the Potters, Sirius didn't even think of Regulus. They had become strangers.

Years later, Sirius got an owl from his brother asking to meet him at the Hog's Head. When he got there he had been shocked. His always prim brother was dishelved and had bags under his eyes. His hands were trembling slightly and he fidgeted at any sound. Sirius had been worried but hadn't known what to do. They had stayed in a silence a long time. Neither knowing what to say to the other. Until Regulus broke the silence.

"You were right Siri," he had said in a hoarse voice. "Maybe one day I'll make you proud." He then got up and walked to Sirius, bending down to hug his brother; and Sirius, not knowing why but feeling he had to, returned the hug fiercely. Regulus than left silently. That was the last time he saw his brother. A few days later he received word of his death.

"You made me very proud Reggie," Sirius whispered in tears.

At the sound of the portrait opening Sirius wiped his tears and looked up at Remus, Albus and Severus who were coming inside. Albus had a grim look on his face as if his deepest fear had been confirmed. They took seats around the coffee table and Albus asked to see the locket. Sirius gave it to him and just watched as Albus inspected it.

With a heavy sigh Albus said, "Just last week I promised to not keep sensible information from you. I shall do so. I have been looking into why Voldemort didn't die when hit by the rebounding killing curse for some time now and I had a theory that Harry confirmed when he brought me the diary. This is another confirmation."

"What is this Albus?" Remus asked warily.

Albus looked at him and heavily said, "A Horcrux."

A/N- Some of the dialogs are from "Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets"

I figured I didn't need to write Regulus tale again. If you want me to, let me know and when I have time

I'll edit this chapter.

Special thanks to my beta Swaddict1986

Disclaimer: I still don't own Harry Potter. When will I own it?

Chapter 17- Of brothers

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Chapter 18- Pieces of soul

The look on the three young teachers could have been described as comical if the situation hadn't been so dire.

"When you say Horcrux you mean-" Severus started.

"A soul container. Lord Voldemort has divided his soul to make himself immortal," Albus said calmly, "You had already told me, Severus, that Voldemort had bragged to his Death Eaters that he had taken measures to become immortal. I researched the methods he could have used together with what I knew of his personality. Tom Riddle didn't like to depend on others so I discarded things that made him dependent such as the Philosopher Stone or other potions. He may have wanted the stone as a temporary method for obtaining a body, but not depend on it. This was the only method I found that would make him rely on no one. I just needed to figure out how many he made and where he may have hidden them. I had already started looking for places. I must confess, I did not foresee young Regulus' help."

"So," Remus asked shakily, "What you mean is he made more than one. He ripped his very own soul more than once?"

Albus nodded gravely.

"How many?" Sirius asked.

"It is my belief that he would have chosen to make seven, as it is the strongest magical number. But I still need to confirm that. I am looking into that. I may need to borrow Harry for that."

"Why?" Remus asked worried.

"Don't fret. It's nothing dangerous. I just want to use Harry's influence to obtain information from a former colleague. As soon as I find him that is. He is thoroughly avoiding my letters."

"So we already have two," Severus said business like, "The diary and the locket."

"Yes," Albus said, "I believe the diary was his first one. I don't think Lucius knew what he was guarding or he wouldn't have been so flippant with it. The diary was also what confirmed my thought of there being more than one. If Voldemort had only one he would have guarded it better."

"Do you have any idea what the others may be?" Sirius asked.

"I have been looking into that since I first suspected it. I tried to find information on what Tom was up to between the years he left school and he started gathering followers to see if I can find clues. I think they must be significant objects, such as this one. Look at this S."

Remus took the locket and gasped, "Slytherin's symbol."

"Yes. Voldemort was very obsessed with his heritage and the founders so I think he may have looked for heirlooms from them. The only heirlooms from Gryffindor are the hat and the sword which are both safe, but I know of a cup from Hufflepuff that went missing and of course, Ravenclaw's famous diadem."

"That went missing when Ravenclaw was still alive," Remus shook his head.

"I know, but we have to keep an open mind. And as for the cup, I managed to collect a memory of an old house elf that worked for a woman called Hepzibah Smith a few years ago. It's from the time when young Tom Riddle worked at Borgin and Burkes. Apparently Hepzibah was the owner of the Hufflepuff cup and if I am not mistaken that very same locket. She showed it to Riddle and not long after she was poisoned. Her house-elf confessed to the crime and was sent to Azkaban," Albus said sadly.

"The house-elf?" Sirius asked incredulous.

Albus nodded grimly, "I believe Voldemort may have Confounded the elf into confessing."

"So we still need to look for four Horcruxes considering the last piece is Voldemort," Severus counted.

"Three," Albus said, "I believe Voldemort chose significant deaths to make them and he had planned to make one the night he killed Harry. As we know he failed, and therefore failed to make his last Horcrux."

"Still, three Horcruxes that can be anywhere," Sirius said, "And we have to destroy this one."

"At least we have an idea of what one is," Remus said, "The cup, is one for sure."

"Gryffindor sword will do it," Albus said, "But we need to open it." He finished frowning.

Severus took the locket and examined it. Grimacing he said, "This is from Slytherin and Voldemort. He must have closed it with a password, just like the chamber. We need Harry."

"I don't want Harry to witness something like that," Sirius said.

"Me neither Padfoot," Remus said, "But it's the only way. We'll be there with him."

"When you say you looked into the Dark Lord's personality what do you mean?" Severus asked trying not to think of what they would have to subject Harry to.

"I had always kept a close watch on young Tom ever since I first met him at the orphanage he lived at. He showed me then that he enjoyed cruelty and liked to be special. But he was a child, he still had a

chance," Severus rolled his eyes at this. Albus and his ever need to give second chances, "I even made my own research into his heritage. That is how I found he was the son of Merope Gaunt. When I first went to fetch him at the orphanage and tell him about Hogwarts, he had been sure his father had been the Wizard. But the Matron had told me his middle name was for his grandfather and that before she died his mother said her name was Merope, so I had other thoughts. Wizards are more known for eccentric names than Muggles. Tom is quite common. But it wasn't until a few years back that I learned of a Marvolo Gaunt that had a daughter named Merope and was a direct descendant from Slytherin. I found a Morfin Gaunt that had been locked in Azkaban some years back and have a memory of his regarding young Riddle. Following the paper trail of Morfin's trials I recently found a former Ministry employee who visited the Gaunts once. He gave me the memory and I was going to look at it right before I was sent away. I have to confess, I still haven't had the time to do it. You are welcome to join me and maybe view the elf's and Morfin's memories too."

"We will," Sirius said, "Let's first dispose of the locket. We should wait until school is off in case something goes wrong; it's just another couple of days. Then we can view the memory before Moony and Harry go to Privet Drive."

The other three nodded and Albus said goodbye and left. He had had his doubts about sharing his findings but he couldn't help the feeling that this journey could be easier if shared.

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Harry was definitely annoyed as he said goodbye to his friends. He knew it sounded stupid but the train rides to and from Hogwarts were part of the fun and Harry always looked forward to them. But his dad said they had something important to do and he and Uncle Moony would be Apparating to Privet Drive from Hogsmead tomorrow. Not that Harry was looking forward to Privet Drive but he wanted to have his last hours of adult-free fun in the train where he could celebrate Gryffindor winning the House Cup a little more.

He didn't know what it was they had to do as Sirius hadn't told him, but he knew Sirius, and he knew that whatever it was, Sirius was not happy at all to include Harry. After the last carriage left Harry walked back to the staff wing dragging his feet. He passed a few ghosts and greeted them. One of them was the Grey Lady, who in Harry's opinion always looked so sad. As he got inside the Marauders' Quarters he found his dad and Uncles ready for him. His dad had Regulus' locket griped firmly in one of his hand and looked like he would be sick any moment now.

Remus walked to him and laid his hand on Harry's shoulder. Harry looked at him and saw he too had a serious expression. "Harry, we are going to destroy this locket just like Kreacher asked you to," he said.

"What is it?" Harry asked.

Remus shared a look with the other two and turned back to Harry, "It's like the diary Harry. It's a piece of Voldemort's soul that he stored in this object."

"Why?"

"Because he's sick," Sirius mumbled.

"Because he was trying to make himself immortal," Severus said grimly, "By dividing his soul and concealing it in an object. It's called a Horcrux. If you split your soul and conceal it in an object outside your body, even if that body is attacked you cannot die because a piece of your soul still remains earthbound and undamaged. That is why the Dark Lord didn't die when he was hit by the killing curse."

"He ripped his soul apart?" Harry asked horrified.

"We believe he divided it in six, tried to divide in seven but wasn't able to," Remus said darkly, "You destroyed one when you destroyed the diary. We believe this is another one and Albus is looking for the rest."

Harry nodded. As a wizard he had known that one's soul was precious, to split it was an awful act. He didn't even know how you did it and to be honest; he didn't want to know. He jumped when he felt another hand on his shoulder and looked up to see his dad's worried face.

"I would have preferred for you not to be privy to any of this Harry," he said heavily, "But we need your help and I don't want you to face anything unprepared."

Harry nodded, "What do you need?"

"We think that only a Parselmouth can open this locket," Severus explained. "We will go to the Room of Requirement and open it there. With Gryffindor's sword we will destroy it."

Harry nodded. He'd been in the Room of Requirement many times when he was little and the weather was bad. The room would turn into a playroom for him and it would seem like he was outside.

His dad hugged him and whispered, "It's going to be fine. We'll be there." Harry nodded as he pressed his head to his dad's chest. His dad rested his chin on Harry's head, and Harry noticed how the top of his head almost reached Sirius shoulders. He guessed he was growing up, and growing up meant things couldn't be kept simple. He knew his friends didn't have to deal with pieces of Dark Lord's souls but he also knew that pretending he was normal would only hinder him.

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"You killed them, you killed them all, James, Lily, Regulus.... They asked you for help and you skirted away, flat out ignored Regulus."

Those words kept running through his mind. How had Voldemort known that? They destroyed the Horcrux; Severus stabbed it with the sword, but not before the image of Voldemort tried to undermine them. Dumbledore said that it was because Sirius had kept the locket close to him. That the piece of Voldemort could sense his fears.

"It wasn't true you know that Paddy."

Sirius looked up. Remus was kneeled in front of the couch where Sirius had been seated for the last hour hunched forward, head on his hands.

"I don't want to leave you like this alone. Maybe we can postpone the Dursleys..."

"No," Sirius said firmly, "We have to renew the protection before the year is up and we are already cutting it close. You go. I'll be fine. I'll be busy. We have to find that town, Little Hagleton was it? And I have an idea about where a Horcrux could be. If what I think goes right maybe we'll have at least another Horcrux destroyed before you come back. Three Horcruxes in less than a month, that's what I call efficiency," he tried to joke.

Remus looked like he had other ideas but nodded. He got up and went to his room to fetch his things. At that same moment Sirius saw Harry come out of his room fighting to close his rucksack. Sirius smiled.

"If you leave the Dumbombs and the Ice Mice behind you'll have a better chance of closing it," he said.

Harry scowled, "How did you know?"

"Saw you packing them yesterday."

"It's just to give Dudley a scare."

"As much as the idea entices me, I think it best not to antagonize your Aunt. The summer before you turn seventeen we'll go out with a blast okay?"

Harry grinned and took out the offending items. He closed his rucksack and went to sit next to Sirius.

"Are you going to be okay dad?"

"Yes, don't worry. How are you?"

Harry shrugged, "Okay I guess. The memories weren't fun, but I understand Grandpa needed a translator. They were kind of sick, all of them. I mean, I kind of feel sorry for Merope but the others."

Harry shivered. "It was scary seeing him again in the Room of Requirement. I kept thinking the Basilisk would show up any second. I was very glad when Uncle Sev stabbed that locket."

"Me too," Sirius said.

Harry hugged him and said quietly, "You did help him dad. You helped Uncle Regulus in the end."

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He exited the building calmly and firmly. In his best aristocratic stalk he walked purposely to the Apparition point in Diagon Alley. If someone saw him in such formal robes they would not recognize him. He was wearing black silk robes under a black velvet cloak with the Black Family crest embroidered on the chest and silver clasps. He was holding a black cane with a silver handle that had the Black crest engraved in it. It was always passed to the head of the family and was the symbol of power in the family. Personally he thought that carrying a cane when you didn't need one was stupid but tradition was tradition.

He reached the Apparition point and turned with a soft pop. The next moment he was in Hogsmead and purposely walked to the Castle Gates. He didn't stop to greet anyone just kept walking until he reached the entrance to the Headmaster's office. He said the password and entered. There he found Severus and Albus and smirked at them. He pulled an object from his cloak and deposited it on the desk.

"Never thought it would be that easy," he said sitting down

"I must confess. I was skeptic when you said you could get one other Horcrux easily but I bow to you Sirius," Albus said smiling.

"As Lord Black I have access to Bellatrix's accounts in case she and her husband are unable to do so. Something Narcissa and Lucius don't have. When they were arrested I personally supervised the team that raided their house and there was nothing there even similar to the cup or that ring that Riddle stole from Morfin Gaunt. Of course we don't know what the other Horcrux is so maybe we could look in the Lestrange Manor again, I think Shackbolt could get me in, but I don't think we will find anything. I doubted that if Bellatrix had anything she was storing for her precious Dark lord she would keep it in the house. She would probably keep it in Gringotts. So I paid them a visit"

"You have to love our archaic system sometimes," Severus smirked. "If the Dark Lord asked Lucius and Regulus help to safe guard two Horcruxes it make sense that he could have asked other Death Eaters and none was as faithful as Bellatrix. I hate to admit it to you Black but that was a stroke of genius."

"So you would admit it to others?" Sirius asked innocently and Severus glared at him "I made it look as if I was just interested in seeing if they had anything dangerous. Goblins don't talk but it's better not to raise suspicions. I also left a replica of the cup that Moony made before he left. It won't hold if Voldemort himself tests it or if an expert looks at it, but at least they won't miss the cup without a closer inspection. Good idea Severus."

"That was actually Regulus idea," Severus said, "From what Kreacher told us."

"What about Little Hangleton?" Sirius asked

"The Ministry registries are lacking in detailed information and unfortunately there are quite a few towns with the same name. That will take some time since we will have to check all of them and we won't have as much time once school starts," Dumbledore said.

"I can start checking these two first weeks now that Harry is at Privet Drive. I am sure I can manage something later," Sirius said.

"I'll help," Severus said.

"No Severus," Dumbledore said, "I am sorry. But I can't risk you being seen looking for the Gaunt's house. If anything happens and Voldemort returns to power before we find all his Horcruxes he cannot have anything against you."

Severus scowled but nodded. He knew Albus was right. But that would hinder their search.

"Now, shall we dispose of this," Albus said nodding at the cup.

"Let me," Sirius said. He had a score to settle with a certain spirit.

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So far the Holidays had been weird. After the two mandatory weeks at the Dursleys Harry went back to Grimmauld Place, except his dad almost immediately carted him off to Spinner's End. Apparently Remus and Sirius would be going around the country looking for the town that Voldemort's parents came from.

They thought that he might have hidden a Horcrux in the old house where the Gaunts lived. They hadn't been lucky so far.

Harry spent the better part of that time with Severus, helping him on his experiments and hearing about his mother. He especially liked when Severus abused Petunia. Apparently she'd been jealous of her sister and that is why she acted the way she did. Harry tried to understand but her comments still hurt.

Now Harry was at the Weasleys. They would be leaving soon for Egypt, as Mr. Weasley had won a prize at work and they were going to visit Bill, so Harry and Ron were enjoying some last hours together. Tomorrow Harry would go back to Grimmauld Place and Ron would leave for his trip.

They had been playing Quidditch with Ginny, Fred and George, two Chasers on each team against a common Keeper, Ron. From the air Harry saw a figure stalk out.

"Harry, get down here, we're going home!"

Harry zoomed down.

"But dad you were supposed to come tomorrow!"

"Change of plans."

"But dad-"

"Grab your things now Harry!" Sirius snapped and Harry goggled. Sirius never snapped at him. He went to fetch his things and came back to the kitchen where Sirius was waiting. They Flooed home where he was engulfed by Remus.

"Thank God you're okay."

"I was just playing Quidditch. What's going on?"

Sirius looked at him grimly, "Kingsley called to let me know. Bellatrix Lestrange and Peter Pettigrew escaped Azkaban."

A/N- Things start to change drastically. Two Horcruxes on one chapter. I hope you don't get too annoyed but I had the feeling that Dumbledore took so long finding the Horcruxes because he was doing it all alone. And I just couldn't help but think that someone would think of Bellatrix even though in the book it was mostly by accident that they found out.

Also, from rereading HBP I came to the conclusion that Dumbledore had to have gotten those memories many years before, the elf was already old when Voldemort was young and Morfin couldn't have been young either so I don't think he would last that long in Azkaban. But I figured that the memory that actually shows the name of the town had to be more of a recent acquirement or Dumbledore would have found the ring earlier.

Ice Mice- I had originally thought to use Acid Pops but Harry only wanted to scare Dudley so I figured having his teeth chatter and squeak was enough. Besides, Dudley would never pass away the chance for sweets.

Issue about Little Hangleton- I looked a map up and only found one place called Hangleton in Britain, but I don't want it to be easy to find so I am taking a poetic license here and pretending that there are more than one Little Hangletons in Britain. I hope I didn't offend anyone by doing so.

Special thanks to my beta Swaddict1986

Disclaimer: I still don't own Harry Potter. When will I own it?

Chapter 18- Pieces of soul

Sirius looked at him grimly, "Kingsley called to let me know. Bellatrix Lestrange and Peter Pettigrew escaped Azkaban."

Chapter 19-The joys of Parenthood

Harry had always thought his dad was a little paranoid when the subject was Harry's safety. Now that paranoia had reached a whole new level. Harry wasn't allowed out of Grimmauld Place. He was never there alone either and the house had gone under the Fidelius Charm with Dumbledore as the Secret Keeper.

No one knew exactly how Bellatrix and Pettigrew had escaped. Pettigrew's cell had been charmed against Animagus Transformation so they quickly ruled that out. Honestly Harry didn't think they'd come after him, but his dad was sure Bellatrix was insane enough to want revenge for her Master's demise.

Uncle Ted and Aunt Andy had moved to Grimmauld Place too. Sirius was afraid Bellatrix might try something on them. Tonks wasn't here because she was living at the Auror Academy where she still had one year of training to undergo. She had been living there since she started. At that time, Sirius explained that most Aurors in training have to live at the Academy unless they have special dispensations like for being married.

She stopped by a few times to see her parents but didn't have time for more than a quick word with them. Harry was sad about that, because since she graduated he had seen her only on Christmas of his first year and missed her a lot. Of course, she was quite acquainted with Hedwig by now since he kept her up to date with his life and she with hers. Apparently she was enjoying the Auror Academy and was best at Concealment and Disguise because she was a Metamorphmagus, and rubbish at Stealth and Tracking because she was dead clumsy. She tripped on her way in one day and fell right in Remus' arms. She blushed so much that even her hair turned Weasley red. Remus of course said nothing, and left quickly because he had to hand one of his articles to his editor. She was very excited because this year she would start field training, though her mother was ever so worried about that with Bellatrix on the run.

Aurors were posted at the Longbottoms' too in case Bellatrix tried to finish what she started all those years ago. The Malfoy and Lestrange Manors had been raided and both had Aurors stationed guarding the place. The Malfoys were being tagged constantly.

Harry noticed how most of the measures taken were because of Bellatrix and not Pettigrew.

On this particular evening they were having dinner when the fire turned green. Sirius was up in a second and had his wand out and pointing at the emerging figure.

"Put that down Sirius. Honestly, no one we don't want could come in here," Andromeda scolded him.

Turning a smile to the guest she said, "Would you like to join us Albus?"

"I would be delighted."

Sirius sat down pouting as Dumbledore took a seat and Twinky the house-elf served him.

"What brings you here Albus?" Remus asked.

"You."

Remus choked and looked at him, "Me," he squeaked.

"Yes, I am here to ask you to accept the Defense Against the Dark Arts position."

"What about my current position?" Remus asked at the same time that Sirius asked:

"What about the curse?"

Dumbledore sighed, "Given the recent events I don't want a stranger at Hogwarts. So, for a year, we will have to go without a tutor. As for the curse, I hope that by making the contract only for a year we will be spared anything drastic happening, since you would leave the position anyway. I hope."

"That's a lot of hoping isn't it?" Ted asked. He may not have been privy to the details of the curse but he knew the job had been jinxed since his time at Hogwarts.

"I have no choice. Security will be tighter and the last thing we need is someone unknown in the castle," Dumbledore said gravely.

Inside Harry was doing summersaults, finally; a decent DADA teacher!

"You are going to accept, right Uncle Moony?" he asked eagerly.

Remus looked at him and at the rest of them. Sirius was practically falling off his chair from nervousness.

"What do you think?" he asked him.

"I don't want anything to happen to you but I agree with Albus."

Remus looked pensively and nodded.

"Me too. I accept."

"Good," Dumbledore said happily, "Now shall we continue eating this marvelous feast?"

Harry smiled happily and saw Twinky blush from where she was bringing more food.

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"Siri," Andromeda said, calmly approaching her cousin who was seated at his desk in his room studying some rolls of parchment.

"Yes," he said looking up.

"Have you realized your son just turned thirteen?"

"Yes. I know how old he is."

Andromeda sighed, "Sirius, I know Uncle Orion wasn't the best father but I happen to know for a fact that Harold Potter included you in a certain talk he had with his son."

"Oh."

"Yes, oh."

"Do I have to?" he whined.

"Yes."

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Harry was finishing his Potions essay. He thought Uncle Sev took extra pleasure in depriving students of summer time. There was a knock on his door and before he could answer Sirius entered looking uneasy. Harry instantly got worried.

"What happened?"

"We need to talk," Sirius said pulling a chair next to Harry's. Harry turned his and faced his father.

"About Bellatrix and Wormtail?"

"I wish."

"Dad?" he asked worriedly.

"Well, you see. Andy-"

"What happened to her? Is she hurt?"

"No."

"Is she sick? Oh my God, she's dying from some horrible illness," he cried a little hysterically.

"NO! Harry! Calm down! Nothing happened to Andy," Sirius tried to sooth him.

"Then why did you scare me like that?" Harry asked angrily putting a hand to his chest.

"You're the one that jumped to disaster," he defended himself, then took a deep breath "Harry, when a man loves a woman. Can't keep his mind on nothing else. He'd trade the world for the good thing he's found, If she is bad, he can't see it. She can do no wrong. Turn his back on his best friend if he put her down"

"Isn't that a Muggle song?"

"Harry, I didn't want to be here but Andy said I had to," Sirius said annoyed.

"Sing?" Harry asked innocently.

"No, talk to you. About, you know?" Sirius asked fidgeting and gesturing widely with his hands.

"No," Harry had a pretty good idea but seeing his father squirm was fun.

"About what happens between two people that are deeply in love." Sirius said slowly entwining his hands in front of his face.

"No idea what you are talking about." You had to give Harry credit for the straight face he was keeping.

"I am talking about, you know Harry, about-" Sirius kept waving his hands as if it would save him. His face was getting a nice red color.

Harry bit a smile, "Sex?"

"How do you know about that?" Sirius asked shocked, he was sure this was the doing of Harry's deviant roommates. Those perverted boys! That Finnegan boy did not look like good influence.

"I'm thirteen."

"Exactly, you are only thirteen. You are way too young!"

"So you didn't know about sex at thirteen?"

"That's neither here nor there."

"So how old do I have to be to talk about sex?"

"I don't know. Thirty," Sirius said with a hopeful face.

"So I can't talk about sex till I am thirty, but I can have it right?"

"NO!" Sirius cried, "Not till you're fifty."

"You mean to tell me you haven't ever had sex," Harry asked with a straight face.

"That's neither here nor there," Sirius said blushing.

"And what about my parents? They were twenty when I was born which means they were nineteen when mom was pregnant."

"They were married," this was not going the way he wanted, Sirius vaguely thought.

"So as long as I am married I can."

"NO! I mean you can only get married at one hundred," his poor, poor innocent baby having to talk about such things.

"You're going up. You said I could have sex at fifty."

"Changed my mind, you have to wait until one hundred and fifty."

On the other side of Harry's bedroom door, Andromeda, Ted and Remus were trying very hard to muffle their laughter. After they heard more of the discussion and a mention of a diagram that Sirius apparently Conjured the door opened and a very ruffled Sirius Black came out. He glared at them.

"One of you could have helped!"

In a very straight voice, Remus said, "That's neither here nor there." Sirius fumed and that just sent them in more fits of laughter again.

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"What?" Harry asked outraged from where he was standing in the middle of the drawing room. He couldn't believe his ears.

"You heard me," Sirius said calmly in front of him.

"But I wanted to meet Ron, Neville and Hermione there!"

"Well I want a very much alive son, so we're sticking with what I want!"

Harry fumed and stormed upstairs, slamming shut the door of his room. Sirius sighed.

"Maybe you are overreacting," Remus said calmly. "Bellatrix and Wormtail wouldn't dare do anything in broad daylight in a crowded Diagon Alley."

"Bellatrix is mental! Completely psychotic, I wouldn't put anything past her," Sirius exclaimed and stalked upstairs too.

That night Harry woke thirsty, but as he was getting up he found his feet being held by something heavy. As he investigated he found that the heavy thing also had fur. He sighed and stroked Padfoot's fur. He knew his dad was just very, very worried, but he was thirteen and didn't enjoy being locked up for his own good.

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"You are so cute when you pout."

The teenager glared at him.

"You remind me of when you were little. I miss those times, back then you did whatever I told you to."

He was met with more glaring. Sirius sighed and watched the road. They had Apparated to the outskirts of Hogsmeade where a Threstal-drawn carriage was waiting for the three of them. Harry was very unhappy about not being allowed on the train, but this time it wasn't just for his safety. The fact that Harry Potter Black would not be on the train was going to be largely publicized. They had come a week early to the castle, so they had time to let everyone know that fact after Harry was already safe at Hogwarts.

Sirius shivered, it was getting cold. Unnaturally cold. It was just as he heard his own voice crying: "*James, no!*" that he realized what was going on. He drew his wand and was about to conjure a Patronus when he heard Remus shout:

"Harry!"

Sirius looked to the side and his heart sank. Harry was sliding down his chair completely unconscious and yet shaking like mad. Sirius didn't think twice.

"*Expecto Patronum!*" he shouted at them same time as Remus and the two Patronuses went running outside. He knelt next to Harry and touched his cheeks. They were clammy and cold.

"Pup, wake up! Come on. Glare at me."

"The Dementors are gone," Remus said kneeling next to him, "We should be up at the school in moments."

"What the bloody hell were they doing here?" Sirius cried angry.

"No idea," Remus said not looking at him, but was instead helping lift Harry to the seat. "I never saw anyone faint from Dementors," he said worried.

"But they couldn't have...I mean, they were nowhere near him," Sirius said worried.

"No, they couldn't. His soul has to be intact," Remus said forcibly. As to prove his point Harry stirred.

"What happened?" he said drowsily, "Who screamed?"

"Harry," Sirius said caressing his forehead. "How are you feeling?"

"Like I have the flu. Who screamed?"

"No one," Remus said hoarsely, "We're almost there. Have some of this," he finished fishing some chocolate off of his pocket.

"You know Moony, your addictions astound me," Sirius teased.

"Then you can have none," Remus said as he put a piece in his own mouth.

"But Moony," he whined.

"What happened?" Harry asked as he ate. The color was coming back to his face.

"Dementors," Sirius grimaced. "I'll have a chat with Albus. What the hell were they doing at the gates?" he finished putting a piece of Honeydukes finest on his mouth.

"Hey! How did you? You pickpocketer!" Remus cried outraged. Sirius blew him a kiss. Remus scowled and crossed his arms.

"Children, behave," Harry teased weakly as he leaned on his dad's shoulder with a slight shudder.

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Remus was calmly putting away his things when he heard the portrait open and bang against the wall not too gently. He knew it wasn't Harry; he had just gone down to the dungeons to see Severus. Remus sighed and went to the living room ready to calm his stormy best friend.

"Nice chat with Albus?" he asked Sirius who was pacing the living room clenching and unclenching his fists.

"Fudge, the *moron*, is the one that stationed the Dementors at the gates."

"Did he stop to think that the children need to go through the gates?" Remus asked bewildered.

"Apparently NOT!" Sirius was fuming. "He could have stationed Aurors, but *no*, that's too rational!"

Remus sighed as he sat on the couch. He watched as Sirius paced some more. Sadly he said, "Do you want to talk about what's really bothering you?"

"Yes, the fact that Fudge is an idiot!"

"Not that! Harry heard Lily!" Remus said exasperated, "You know that!"

Sirius looked at him with such a lost puppy expression that Remus tried to calm himself. "I think we should show him some of our memories of his parents. It's time."

"But Moony! He's too young. He's not ready," Sirius pleaded.

"Do you really want what he heard to be the only memory he has of Lily?" Remus asked Sirius looking straight into his eyes. Pained grey met brown.

"No," Sirius said in a small voice, "But I don't know if I'm ready to see them and not be able to talk to them."

"I don't think we'll ever be," Remus said seriously, "I'll talk to Severus. He knew Lily better when she was younger."

Sirius nodded glumly, "I told Albus about the secret passages and," he flinched, "I'm not letting Harry go on Hogsmeade weekends."

"Sirius."

"She could be there! And anyway he would have to go through the Dementors and I don't want a repeat of that!"

"I understand," Remus said nodding, "But Harry is not going to be happy about that. He's already feeling trapped."

"I know. I was thinking of bribery. Give him something to make up for it."

"What?" Remus asked and narrowed his eyes at his friend's guilty face, "NO!"

"He'll be supervised by me and you."

"No, he's too young. Do you even remember how much strain you and James were put through?"

"I wouldn't let him do the practical, just theory."

"Oh, sorry, I didn't know you were talking about your other son named Harry because this one won't stop just because of a little thing called his health!"

"Moony!" Sirius whined.

"NO!"

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They had been preparing ingredients for the school cabinets for over an hour now. They had already started brewing the Potions Madam Pomfrey would need for the start of term, which were currently cooling.

"So, Uncle Sev. When are you going to teach me how to brew the *Animagus Ostendo* potion?"

"How about never."

"Aw, come on. I know you took it. We could make it a twin project. You and me."

"Have you asked your father's permission?"

"He says I am too young. The hypocrite. He was already training at my age."

"Considering since he went through this at your age he knows how hard and straining it is for such a young body."

Harry pouted.

"If you wait until you are older your body will be more prepared for the magic, and the training will be easier and quicker. Remember your first year when you had that detention in the forest?"

Harry shuddered. Yes he remembered.

"You cast a strong shield then and your body wasn't ready for that kind of magic yet. That's why you passed out. The same applies here."

Harry huffed, "But I could just take the potion and know my form," he whined.

"You could."

"And then we could train together" he prodded.

"I am not that old that I forgot what I said a second ago. Besides I decided not to complete my Transformation."

"But you took the potion!"

"Yes, and decided I have no wish to complete the process," Severus said stonily.

Harry smirked, "Oh, why not? You're a little squirrel?"

"No," Severus answered not looking at the youth.

"Oh, a bug?"

"No, you brat."

"The rumors are true then?" Harry asked.

"What rumors?"

"You *are* the big bat from the dungeons" Harry teased and was met by a very cold glare. "Oh, come on Uncle Sev. Tell me. I won't tell anyone that you're a cockroach!"

"I am not a cockroach!" Severus cried indignantly, "If you must know, I take the form of a black wolf."

Harry couldn't help it. He burst out laughing.

"And you will not, by any means, let your fleabags of a father and Uncle know about this," Severus said sternly.

"But, Uncle Sev," Harry said through chuckles, "You're a fleabag too."

"No, I am not," he huffed.

"I find it quite appropriate," Harry said smiling. Severus huffed and glared. "Face it Uncle Sev, you're a member of the pack!"

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"So you'll let me do the Transformation?" Harry asked suspiciously. Didn't Uncle Sev say just today that he was too young? Wasn't dad always saying that? Why the change of heart?

"Not quite," Sirius said calmly and shot Remus a pleading look. Remus, who was sulking on the couch, arms crossed and a pout on his face, mumbling incoherently, ignored him. "I'll let you do the theory. Brew the potion and study the Transformation. But for the actual training you'll have to wait until your body is more prepared to handle it."

"But-"

"No buts, it's this or nothing. And don't think you can go behind my back; don't forget I know the signs and I'll be looking for them."

Harry pouted but agreed, "Okay."

"I'll ask Severus to teach you the potion. After you know your form you'll have to study its anatomy thoroughly and read about the transformation process."

Harry nodded but asked suspiciously, "This is too easy. What's the catch?"

Sirius sighed and shot Remus another pleading look that was once again ignored, "I can't allow you to join your friends on Hogsmeade weekends."

"WHAT?"

"Sorry, but it's too dangerous and with the Dementors... I just can't Harry. I am sorry."

"So this is bribery?"

"Yes."

Harry was about to blow it but deflated at Sirius pained look.

"Fine," he mumbled. Sirius crossed the distance between them and embraced Harry.

"I'm really sorry pup. If I could I'd let you."

"I know," Harry mumbled.

"I can't lose you Harry. I love you too much."

"Love you too dad."

"Hem, hem," Remus cleared his throat.

"I think Moony is feeling left out," Sirius chuckled. Harry jumped on the couch and threw himself at Remus.

"Love you too, Uncle Moony!"

"Love you cub."

"See everyone is loved," Sirius said happily.

"Yeah," Harry said, "But since I can't go to Hogsmeade, I won't tell you Uncle Sev's Animagus form that I just found out."

"What? Harry, you have to!" Sirius begged.

"No, sorry, can't," he said as he ran to his room.

"But, Harry!" Sirius whined. "He can't do that Moony!"

Remus just laughed.

A/N- Little twist there, hope you liked it. I couldn't see Pettigrew risking his neck for revenge but I could see Bellatrix bulling him into it.

Sirius' talk was inspired by an episode of "Mad About You" which is obviously not mine.

"When a man loves a woman" is not mine either.

Ostendo- show; reveal; make clear, point out, display, exhibit (From an online Latin translator)

Thanks to all my readers and reviewers.

Thanks to my beta Swaddict1986, hope you liked the changes.

Disclaimer: Computer, purse, glasses, shoes, clothes, a few very read books, yeah I'm pretty sure that Harry Potter isn't among the things I own.

A/N- I'd like to thank my reviewers and ask a favor. I had a few reviews with questions that weren't signed. If you have a question please Log in because if you don't I can't answer and I don't answer reviews in Author's notes. Not only it's against the rules but I don't like having to go through three pages of reviews answer before I read a fic, so I don't do it.

Chapter 20- The joys of Unclehood

"NO HARRY! That's Mummy's vase!"

Crash!

James Potter winced. He ran after the toddler that kept zooming away on his toy broomstick and was finally able to pluck him off of the toy and put him on the floor. Harry's bottom lip quivered but quickly stopped as he was handed a stuffed stag.

"You stay here for daddy okay?"

James glared at his best friend who was laughing on the couch of the house's living room and went to the coffee table. He bent down and started scooping up the shards of glass and the flowers.

"You could help."

He was met with more laughter.

"Lily is going to kill me."

"Mummy?" Harry asked scooping a rose with his little hand and handing it to James.

"Yes, Harry. Mummy is going to kill daddy very, very slowly and painfully," he explained picking up the toddler before he could cut himself and sat him next to Sirius. He kissed the boy and said:

"You are very helpful, a lot more than your useless godfather, but stay here okay?"

"Pafoo."

"Yes, Padfoot is grounded for giving you toys that endanger my health."

"Aw, come on Prongs. Harry loves his broom. Don't you pup?" Sirius asked tickling the toddler.

"Fy," Harry giggled.

"See."

James glared at Sirius once more and muttered *Reparo* with his wand. The shards flew together and reconstructed the vase. Sirius came to inspect.

"I don't think it was exactly like that."

"Maybe she won't notice," James said hopefully. Sirius patted his friend's back.

"We could jinx her," said the pale boy laying on the ground of the playground. The red-headed girl next to him smacked his arm.

"We are not going to jinx my sister Severus! I don't want to be expelled after only one year of school!"

The boy scowled, "She deserves it."

"We are not going to jinx her," she said firmly, "Besides, I've already exchanged the sugar pot with salt.

See if anyone likes the cake she was baking."

Severus looked at Lily impressed, "I like how your mind works."

"She called me and you freaks. *No one* calls me and my friends freaks!"

"Do you Lily Marie Evans take James Anthony Potter as your lawfully wedded husband, to love and care for, to cherish and respect, until death do you part?" the minister asked.

"I do," Lily said, her vivid green eyes staring straight at James' hazel ones like no one else mattered.

"Do you James-"

"I do," James answered looking straight at Lily.

"Well, yes, but you have to let me finish!" the minister exclaimed. James smiled sheepishly, "Do you James Anthony Potter take Lily Marie Evans as your lawfully wedded wife, to love and care for, to cherish and respect, until death do you part?"

"I do," he said smiling brightly.

"The rings please," the minister asked.

Sirius who was grinning from ear to ear didn't move. Just stared at the happy couple. Remus nudged him and Peter who was standing next to Remus tried to disguise his laughter in coughs.

"Oh, yes," Sirius said, "Here."

The minister took the rings, glaring at Sirius.

The rest of the ceremony went smoother as they exchanged rings, and James kissed Lily as if there was no tomorrow. Harry watched entranced as they were congratulated by the guests and danced with each other. He never took his eyes off his parents, only seeing them and no one else. His eyes were bright and from next to him Sirius said hoarsely:

"I think that's enough for today. Another day you can see more."

"They loved each other a lot," Harry said looking at Sirius.

"They loved you even more," Sirius said smiling sadly. "Lets go." And they exited the Pensieve.

Harry bounced on his feet as he waited for the carriages to come to the double doors of the Entrance Hall. He saw them coming from the distance and watched as students started to fill the halls, looking for his friends. A familiar drawl came from his left.

"Famous Potter too good for the train again?"

"Shut it Malfoy," Harry hissed.

"Or were you scared of the nasty Dementors," Malfoy said gleefully.

Harry's eyes narrowed, what was he on about? "How was your summer Malfoy. Made friends with the Aurors guarding you?"

Malfoy fumed; apparently being reminded of his deranged fugitive aunt wasn't what he wanted.

"I'd watch out Potter, you won't be around much longer," he hissed.

"Why? Does your Aunty plan to have a family reunion? She'll have a surprise then. She'll never get near Hogwarts with this security."

"She got past them once didn't she?" Malfoy smirked and left, tailed by his goons. Harry stared after him not liking that smirk.

"HARRY!" he heard and turned to see Hermione, Neville and Ron running towards him. He almost choked at the strength of Hermione's hug.

"Hey, guys! How was your holiday? Sorry about Diagon Alley."

"That's fine," Ron said, "Though you missed the Firebolt."

"Oh, no!" Harry cried horrified, "I saw an article. You saw it?"

Ron nodded and proceeded to describe in detail the broom and was showing Harry his new wand as the four entered the Great Hall and sat at Gryffindor table. Harry got to hear all about France from Hermione who had gone there with her parents. He laughed at Ron's tales of the twins trying to shut Percy in a tomb and at Neville's tales about his Great Uncle Algie who was a little touched in the head.

"So what have you done?" Hermione asked him.

"Nothing much," he shrugged, "Haven't been allowed outside have I? I saw some memories of my parents on a Pensieve."

"That's great," Neville said, "Gran showed me some of my parents last year. It's nice to remember them as more- to remember them."

"Yeah, I saw my parents' wedding," Harry quickly said to cover Neville's slip, "I think your folks were there too but I was paying attention to my mum and dad more, so, I'm sorry. But they were happy. In love. It was good but sad, because I could see them but they couldn't talk back."

The conversation quickly ended as Professor McGonagall entered with the First Years. They looked terrified, Harry mused. He supposed he had looked like that too. He remembered how scared he was that the hat would put him in Slytherin and that his dad would hate him. He knew it was silly but he had been scared, what could he do? He didn't mind if he had been a Slytherin but he had wanted to please his dad. They watched as the students were sorted and cheered for the new Gryffindors.

As the last clap died, Harry saw Dumbledore rise.

"Welcome to another year at Hogwarts. I have a few announcements to make and as one is quite serious I think it best to get it out of the way before we get befuddled with our excellent fest. As you are all aware after their search of the Hogwarts Express, our school is presently playing host to the Dementors from Azkaban, who are here on Ministry of Magic business. They are stationed at every entrance to the grounds and while they are with us, I must make it plain that nobody is to leave school

without permission. Dementors are not fooled by tricks or disguises- or even Invisibility Cloaks. It is not in the nature of a Dementor to understand pleadings or excuses. I therefore warn each and every one of you to give them no reason to harm you. I look to the Prefects and Head Boy and Girl, to make sure that no student runs afoul of the Dementors." Dumbledore paused and surveyed the silent Hall to make sure the message sunk in. Harry saw Percy puff in pride at the mention of the Head Boy and stare around impressively.

"On a lighter note," Dumbledore continued, "I am pleased to announce that our former tutor, Professor Lupin, has kindly accepted to act as Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher." At this the hall burst into applause, Harry leading the Gryffindors to applaud standing up. Harry saw his Uncle nod at the students and try to hide a blush.

"Yes, yes, I can see you are all very happy," Dumbledore said loudly over the applause as it died, "Mr. Potter Black, kindly use your chair for sitting."

Harry grinned sheepishly and got off the chair he was standing on and sat down.

"I also regret to inform that Professor Kettleburn, our Care of Magical Creatures teacher, has decided to retire in order to enjoy more time with his remaining limbs. However, it is with great pleasure that I announce that our very own Rubeus Hagrid has accepted to take over the post along with his duties as Gamekeeper."

Once again the Hall was filled with clapping and whistles. As he applauded, Harry saw Hagrid wiping his eyes with an enormous handkerchief as Sirius patted his back.

"Well I think that is all of importance for now. If Mr. Potter Black will kindly once again use his chair for sitting instead of standing we can start the feast," Dumbledore said clapping his hands.

Harry got down from the chair as food appeared. As he served himself he asked Hermione, "The Dementors searched the train?"

"Yes," she answered, "It was horrible. After they left Professor Lupin came to check on us. I didn't even know there were teachers aboard."

"Usually there aren't," Harry answered "but Professor Dumbledore thought it was best if there would be this time for protection. I think they were my dad, Uncle Remus, Professor Sprout and Flitwick. So that's why Malfoy was taunting me," he finished grimacing.

"What do you mean?" Neville asked.

"He asked me if I was scared of the nasty Dementors," Harry growled.

"Wasn't all that brave himself," Ron said, "Fred told me that Malfoy got into their compartment and almost wet himself."

"Still," Harry said annoyed, "That's what everyone is going to think. That I was scared."

"Anyone that has half a brain cell knows that you weren't there for their safety as much as yours. There was a big article on the Prophet saying that Dumbledore himself asked for you to come to Hogwarts by

other means so that Lestrage and Pettigrew would have no reason to attack. They will know that it has nothing to do with the Dementors. You are not afraid of them."

Harry kept quiet. He didn't tell them about what happened in the carriage, and how he was very much not willing to see the Dementors again.

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Harry and Hermione were walking to Transfiguration, discussing what they had learned in Arithmancy, when they were intercepted by two frantic boys.

"Harry, thank God we found you!" Ron cried.

"Why?" Harry asked eyeing them. Neville was shaking and Ron was pale.

"Harry, you have to be careful!" Neville pleaded.

"I am being careful. Dad already forbade me of going to Hogsmeade and I've been locked up the better part of the summer and..."

"Professor Trewloney says you are going to have a horrible death, she saw the Grim on your future Harry!"

"The what?" Hermione asked, but Harry burst out laughing.

"Harry this is serious, the Grim is the omen of death! My Uncle Bilius died twenty-four hour after he saw the Grim!" Ron cried.

"Ron," Harry sighed grasping Ron's shoulder, "Trewloney has been predicting my death since I was three-years-old. According to her I should have keeled over about a thousand times already! Besides, I see a Grim every day! Or haven't you ever met Padfoot?"

"Professor Black said Professor Trewloney is a fraud," Hermione huffed, "I can't believe you two are taking it instead of interesting subjects like Arithmancy or Ancient Runes."

Neville shrugged, "Easy grade." That did not go well with Hermione who huffed once again and stalked away.

"You sure you'll be okay?" Ron asked. Harry nodded and guided his worried friends to Transfiguration. There he met other students' worried gazes and just shook his head.

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As they were leaving the Great Hall after lunch, Harry, Ron, Neville and Hermione were stopped by a grinning Sirius Black.

"So where are you gentlemen and gentlewoman going in this fine day?"

"Harry rolled his eyes at his father, "To Care of Magical Creatures. We want to get there early to give Hagrid all our support!"

Sirius smiled, "Of course. He was so happy to be appointed. Came and told us as soon as we stepped foot in the castle. Was hugging Harry so hard I was afraid he'd crush him!"

Harry blushed, "DAD!"

"What?" Sirius said innocently, "now go, scoot."

The four left and Hermione chuckled at Harry. Harry glared at her. "Oh, come on Harry, that was cute."

"I am not cute," Harry said, "Extremely handsome, yes, but not cute."

"And very modest," Neville said nodding. Ron and Hermione laughed hard.

"What happened to shy Neville?" Harry sighed.

"He became friends with you guys," Neville answered.

"We broke him!" Ron cried with a hand to his heart.

XXXXXX

The quartet was fuming as they went back to the castle after class. Remus looked shocked and stopped them.

"What happened?" he asked.

"Malfoy is a moron!" Hermione cried and Remus got even more worried. Hermione was always so proper.

"He didn't listen to Hagrid and insulted the hippogriff," Ron said angry.

"If Harry hadn't acted fast and jumped on him to get him out of the way, Buckbeak would have hurt him badly," Neville explained.

Remus looked at Harry worried, "WHAT?" he asked.

Harry shrugged and Remus noticed he was holding his arm a little too close to his chest, "I was keeping an eye on him. I saw he wasn't paying attention and I know him. Knew he'd try something to ruin Hagrid's first class and I wasn't going to let that happen. Hagrid is my friend! So, when I saw him insulting Buckbeak I threw him out of the way."

Remus was examining Harry's arm and there was a gash there, "The hippogriff got to you?"

"What?" Hermione asked noticing Harry was hurt for the first time. "Why didn't you say something?"

"So Malfoy's dad can use it against Hagrid. No chance! It's just a scratch!"

Remus grimaced, "Hagrid didn't see this?"

Harry shook his head, "No, I got up fast and he was berating Malfoy and giving him a detention for not paying attention. I didn't want to spoil his first class." Harry begged.

Remus sighed, he knew how much Harry cared for Hagrid and becoming a teacher was a dream come true for Hagrid. "Fine, but next time *tell* someone. Let's go see Poppy."

XXX

"Mr. Potter Black please stay behind," Sirius said as the class left the classroom.

Harry waved to his friends and walked to the teacher's desk.

"Want to tell me why you kept glaring at Remus all through out dinner and breakfast? He was quite hurt when he noticed."

"I wasn't glaring."

"Uh, yes you were. And although I find relief that you glare at someone else other than me I am worried. What did he do to deserve that?"

"He thinks I'm a wuss!" Harry cried his arms flying up.

"Pardon me?" Sirius asked bewildered.

"He thinks I am a coward!"

"No, he doesn't."

"Yes he does."

"Nuh-uh."

"Uh-huh."

Sirius sighed rubbing his eyes. What could have possibly brought this up?

"Harry, I assure you that Moony does not think you are a wuss. Now, tell me why you think that."

"He thinks I can't handle a Boggart," Harry said crossing his arms and scowling.

Sirius blanched. He stared at his son and started laughing. Harry fumed.

"You think that too!"

Sirius sobered up. Okay, laughing probably wasn't the best course of action.

"Harry, no. That's not why I am laughing."

Harry glared at him. There goes not being glared at. Teenagers!

"Moony had already told me he wasn't going to let you face the Boggart, but not because of you not being able to handle it."

Harry raised an eyebrow skeptically and Sirius vaguely thought he had been spending too much time with Severus.

"Yeah, right."

"No, Harry. With everything you've gone through, Remus figured your greatest fear would be Voldemort and he didn't think it wise for Voldemort to materialize during his first class with the third years. Maybe the second but definitely not the first!"

Harry's lip twitched but Sirius saw him fight the laughter valiantly and keep his scowl.

"So, he doesn't think I am a delicate coward?" Harry asked suspiciously.

"No," Sirius said firmly biting back a smile. Poppy had called Harry delicate after Sirius had insisted she check him up when they arrived at Hogwarts and Harry had not been pleased.

"Okay."

"So can Moony come out of the dog house?" Sirius asked grinning.

"Not yet," Harry shrugged, "He deserves it."

"Harry!"

"He could have told me! He embarrassed me by jumping in front of me!"

Oh, a boy's pride!

XXXXXXXXXX

Remus was at the table of the Marauder's Quarters' living room correcting the pop quizzes he had given his fifth and seventh years to assess what they knew, when Sirius came in looking like he knew something Remus didn't. Remus hated that look.

Sirius cheerfully sat on the couch and propped his feet on the coffee table, rested the back of his head on his linked hands and just smiled. Remus narrowed his eyes and glared at the feet. It didn't work; they did not leave the coffee table.

"What?" he asked annoyed.

Sirius smiled, jumped up, walked to Remus fishing something from his pocket and gave it to Remus.

"What's that?" Remus said not taking the offered item.

"A dog biscuit," Sirius said happily, "to keep you fed in the doggy house! Because, oh boy, you'll be there for a *long* time!"

Remus huffed and crossed his arms glaring at Sirius, "What's this about?"

"Well, this, dear old Moony, and you must be getting old to make such a mistake and forget how fragile a thirteen year's old ego is, is about you embarrassing your nephew in front of his *whole* class and thinking he is a, what was the word he used? Oh yes, a wuss!"

"I did no such thing!" Remus cried indignantly.

"Did you or did you not stop Harry from facing that Boggart by jumping in front of him?"

"I..." Remus started but then he closed his mouth. He opened it and then closed it again. Defeated he sighed, "Yes."

Sirius held the biscuit to his face, "Here."

XXXXXXXXXX

In the next Defense Against the Dark Arts lesson, Harry heard once again:

"Mr. Potter Black, please say behind."

Harry did. He crossed his arms defiantly and didn't get up from his desk. As the last student left and Remus approached the desk, his glare intensified. Remus sat on the desk in front of Harry and calmly said:

"I apologize for my, er, lack of tact on dealing with the Boggart situation. I see now that perhaps it would have been wiser to pull you aside and ask you not to face it." Harry just kept glaring. Remus continued, "Now, as penance for that lesson I have not only received the evil glare and cold shoulder for the last four days, but I also had a very bad case of hiccups because somehow a strange potion that made me hiccup soap bubbles ended up *mysteriously* in my pumpkin juice. Now, I know I deserved the glare but honestly, how could I know what Neville's Boggart was? So yes, I may have encouraged him a little and the class may have laughed a little and I may have enjoyed it a little but it wasn't my fault! Could you please have a word with Severus? I don't like being suspicious of my food!"

Harry laughed; he had seen Remus walking around hiccupping and spouting soap bubbles from his mouth. "Serves you right," he said firmly.

Now, Remus was the one glaring. His eyes softened and he said, "I am sorry Harry. I didn't think. I just thought I would stop the exercise before it got to you but then when I realized you were already there and I just reacted. I didn't think it wise for Voldemort to materialize in front of thirteen-year-olds. It's bad enough that you have already faced him twice."

Harry deflated and shrugged, "Okay," he bit his lips, "Uncle Moony." He said quietly.

Remus asked kindly, "What?"

"I thought of Voldemort at first but then... then I remembered the Dementor and... I don't know, I just."

"I'm impressed Harry," Remus said, "That shows that what you fear the most is fear itself. That is very wise."

Harry stood up a little straighter at the praise but then his face fell, "The voice I heard. It was my mom wasn't it? I recognized it from the memories."

Remus sighed and got up. He walked to Harry and crouched down. He took Harry's hand and said, "Yes, I am almost sure. Even if you don't remember what happened consciously, it's still there, and the Dementor's make you relive your worst memories. They suck out every bit of happiness around them. But you have to remember her as you saw her in the memories we showed you okay? As the woman that loved you more than life."

Harry nodded. He rested his head on Remus' shoulder and just stood there while his Uncle ran a hand through his hair.

Still don't own Harry Potter

Chapter 21- Welcome to the pack

Classes started going more smoothly after Harry had a heart-to-heart with his Uncle Sev explaining that Remus was only trying to make Neville comfortable, and honestly, it was his fault Neville was scared to death of him.

"I don't expect you to understand the subtle art of intimidating students so they don't blow up my classroom," Severus had said scowling.

Harry had smiled at that; he knew that apart from keeping up his façade, Severus dealt with dangerous and explosive ingredients. If the students were scared of him they would make fewer mistakes, afraid of his wrath. The important thing was Remus was able to drink his juice without worries once again.

Soon September turned into October, and as October began Harry had also to contend with Quidditch. Oliver would be even more fanatic and desperate than before, since this was his last chance at the Quidditch Cup before he graduated. He was working the team harder than ever and his speeches were getting more emotional.

As October ended, the first Hogsmeade weekend came up which meant Harry would have his first Animagus session. He said goodbye to his friends, handing them a list of sweets he wanted and some money, and went down to the dungeons under his Invisibility Cloak to meet Severus in his private lab where they would start brewing the *Animagus Ostendo* Potion. Sirius had decided to join them for some mysterious reason that Harry quickly figured out when they started working.

"So, Sev, what is your form?" Sirius asked innocently from the bench he was sitting on swinging his legs.

Severus' eyes narrowed at Harry over the cauldron they were working at.

"I didn't tell!" Harry cried raising his arms.

"No, he didn't," Sirius smirked and jumped off the bench. Coming close to Severus he whined and pouted.

"Come on, tell me!"

"The *Animagus Ostendo* potion is a very delicate potion that will take a month to brew," Severus started lecturing Harry and ignoring Sirius, "It is very complex and since it needs to be infused with the magic from the person that will drink it, no one can brew it for you. Which explains why Lupin never tried to become an Animagus," he scoffed. Apparently the Boggart incident wasn't as forgotten as Harry thought. "You will have to come at determined times to add the ingredients. Never forget your cloak," Severus said firmly and Harry nodded.

"A bunny? A cute little fluffy bunny," Sirius ventured.

"This Potion will take you to a meditative state that will show you your form."

"I'll find out anyway," Sirius said.

"Oh, will you? Pray tell, how?" Severus smirked.

"Didn't Albus tell you?" Sirius smiled and rocked happily on the balls of his feet with his hands crossed behind his back, "He wants you to complete the transformation with Harry. He thinks that will help you if you ever find yourself in a sticky situation."

Harry swore the temperature dropped as Severus glare intensified.

"Well, I won't!" he scowled crossing his arms.

"Uh, I think you will." Sirius smirked.

"No I won't."

"And who is telling Albus that? Because I won't."

Severus scowled and turned to the cauldron. He started barking instructions that Harry followed without a comment before his Uncle decided to throw him in the cauldron.

"It's a good advantage to have Severus," Sirius said seriously. Not a hint of mischief in his voice, "Especially if no one knows. You hold a dangerous position. You have to use every advantage you can get your hands on. I don't understand why you are fighting this so much."

"One would think you are worried about my well being," Severus sneered.

"Then one would be right," Sirius said with a straight face. Severus stared at him stunned. "I don't care if you don't want to, you will do this. I already lost too many family members and I won't lose any others just because you are throwing a hissy fit!" Sirius said forcibly and stormed out of the room, banging the door shut.

"Did he just call me his family?" Severus asked faintly.

Harry smirked and nudged Severus, "Told you you were part of the pack!"

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The rest of the day went smoothly after Sirius' grand exit. Harry spent most of the day preparing ingredients and adding them to the potion according to Severus' instructions. They stopped for lunch that Kreacher brought to them and ate in the lab so they didn't have to go out and raise suspicion. Harry had just added the last ingredient for the day and put a stasis charm on the potion when there was a knock on the door. Severus opened it and in came a smiling Remus Lupin.

"I came for my potion," he said pleasantly.

Severus stalked away to another cauldron that had been a little far away from Harry's, filled a goblet and handed it to Remus scowling. With a smile, Remus drank it all and shuddered.

"Disgusting as always" he said also pleasantly handing back the goblet, "So, care to tell me why I was stuck with a moody thirty-three years old teenager?"

"Because you have no taste in friends," Severus sneered.

Harry laughed, "Dad got angry at Uncle Sev."

"Oh, yes. I know. I heard all about it. I am here for the other side of the story. Care to tell me why you are so averse to becoming an Animagus? Worms are very misunderstood animals."

"I am not a worm," Severus cried.

"Then what?" Remus asked calmly in that way Harry knew so well from when he had misbehaved and Remus wanted him to confess. He saw Severus squirm and Remus just keep watching calmly as if he had nowhere to go. His Uncle's methods were quite efficient, as they made you feel guilty and spill your darkest secrets. Once, when he was eight, Harry even confessed to having had some of Remus's stash of chocolate before dinner when Remus had been interrogating him about placing water balloons on the staff room's door. Remus hadn't even known about the chocolate yet!

Harry stifled his laugh with his fist as Severus mumbled something.

"Didn't catch that," Remus said.

"I am a bloody wolf," Severus hissed.

"See, that wasn't hard. Didn't hurt," Remus said happily, "Now, you can stop being childish and act your age and start the rest of the training."

Severus mumbled and scowled, Harry just laughed, but he knew that his Uncle had, grudgingly, agreed to become an Animagus too and he was happy about that. Just like his dad said, Severus could use all the advantages he could get his hands on.

"Oh, and Severus, welcome to the pack," Remus chuckled as he left for safer areas.

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For once, Harry had a wonderful time on Halloween. His time in the lab served to take his and Severus minds off the date and he knew that while Sirius had been ranting about Severus he and Remus couldn't have had too much time to brood either. He was walking back to the Gryffindor Tower where Ron, Neville and Hermione would have brought back many sweets and stories from Hogsmeade. He honestly should have known better.

As he was approaching the tower someone grabbed him from behind and put a hand to his mouth. A hand that was missing a finger. Harry's mind went in overdrive and he started kicking and trashing the best he could. He tried to reach for his wand in his pocket but Pettigrew had him in a firm grip and his arms were pinned.

"Stop fighting you little wretch. Bella is waiting for us," came the squeaky voice from behind him. Pettigrew was trying to get Harry in a passage behind a painting when Harry was finally able to move his mouth enough to bite him.

Pettigrew yelped and loosened the grip and that was enough for Harry to reach his wand. Harry cried the Stinging Hex and Pettigrew fell back with another yelp as Harry scrambled away.

"You filthy little-" Pettigrew was hissing but his head snapped up as a familiar voice cried.

"Harry!"

"Seems our party has been crashed. See you later Harry," Pettigrew sneered and transformed. Harry scrambled trying to catch the rat but Wormtail was faster and disappeared in a corner.

"Harry, what happened?" asked an out of breath Remus.

"He transformed Uncle Moony!" Harry cried desperately looking at the dark corners.

"Who?" Remus asked, finally reaching Harry and helping him up.

"Pettigrew."

Remus breath hitched and he positioned himself in front of Harry, wand drawn and ready.

"Lets go back to the staff wing. I have to put up the alert," he said ushering Harry, his eyes scanning every corridor, every corner.

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"The castle is locked and we searched it completely. No sign of Pettigrew," Severus told Sirius grimly.

Sirius nodded twisting his hands nervously, "He isn't stupid enough to linger."

"Harry?"

"Sleeping in his room, I gave him a calming draught after I had Kreacher bring him dinner. I never thought I'd say this but poor Kreacher, he was a nervous wreck, sobbing about Master Harry getting hurt. Where's Moony?"

Severus nodded, "Gryffindor Tower. He said he wanted to talk to the Weasley twins about something."

"Probably the map. Should have thought of that before," Sirius said as he paced looking like he wanted to kick himself.

"What?"

"Wait for Moony to get here and we'll show you," Sirius said as he sat on the couch and hid his face on his hands. "How the bloody hell did he get in?" he cried. "We closed every passage we knew of!"

Severus plopped next to him in a very un-Snape-like fashion, "He's a bloody rat. It's easy to go unnoticed."

"But we spelled the passages to recognize him. We spelled the gates. We put a freaking line through the whole border of the bloody Forbidden Forest to recognize him! How did he get through?" Sirius asked, compulsively rubbing his eyes.

"I don't know," Severus whispered defeated. "If Remus hadn't shown up... I can't even think about it."

"He put a good fight from what he said," Sirius said softly.

"But he's thirteen! Pettigrew is a grown Wizard that has run along with the Dark Lord. Who knows what he learned, what Bellatrix taught him these months?"

Both heads snapped up as the portrait opened to let in a tired Remus holding an old parchment.

"With the compliments of the Weasley Twins," he said grimly. Sirius perked up and Remus shook his head, "No where to be found. I've checked it. He's definitely out of Hogwarts grounds."

"What's that?" Severus asked and Remus explained to him all about the Marauders' Map as he sat on the armchair.

"And the Weasley twins handed this to a teacher willingly?" Severus asked skeptically.

Remus smiled, "They may goof around but they can be serious when needed. Besides I had to promise on my Marauder honor that this would not be used to tail students. They said to pass it on to Harry once this is over. Apparently they think it's his right as a Marauder heir."

"Please don't," Severus begged, but by the glint in the other two men's eyes he knew that it was a lost cause.

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He sat on the bed next to his son and watched him sleep in silent vigil. Asleep and without his glasses on, he looked even younger than his thirteen years. Sirius ran a hand through Harry's hair. He sighed and rested his head on the bed's headboard. Why couldn't they have peace? Why did every year have to hold something dangerous? Why did Pettigrew enter the castle? That was easy. Bellatrix wanted Harry. Peter would never risk his neck in a place full of people that wanted to catch him. Oh, no! Sirius knew that was all Bellatrix. And that's what scared him, because there was no stopping her when she wanted something.

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Rumors of how Pettigrew had managed to get in were spreading like fireworks. Some said he Apparated, which Hermione was quick to quote that according to "Hogwarts, a History" you couldn't do. Some said he had entered through a secret passage, which Harry knew that, unless Pettigrew knew of a passage that dad and Uncle Moony didn't, and that was very unlikely, he couldn't have.

When he went back to Gryffindor Tower on Monday he had been assaulted by his housemates for details. Ginny and Hermione had been quite nervous and were fussing over him in a very annoying fashion. He already had three parents for that, because who was he kidding? Uncle Sev acted as much as a parent as his dad and Uncle Moony.

Security had been tightened, and Harry was once again under orders to go nowhere alone. The teachers were patrolling the Halls in groups and therefore they had more patrolling nights.

Hermione had asked Professor McGonagall to allow Crookshanks, the part Kneazel cat she got for her birthday, to roam the castle. Surprisingly, McGonagall allowed it and Hermione said that if Pettigrew was in his rat form Crookshanks had a better chance than Mrs. Norris to identify him for what he was. Apparently Kneazels were highly intelligent animals, which Remus was quick to confirm.

Harry almost had a heart attack when Professor McGonagall suggested him not practicing Quidditch but after quite a bit of begging from his part and conceding to have a teacher on the pitch with them, she gave up such an atrocious idea. This actually turned out fairly well since his dad volunteered a lot and gave tips to the team from when he had been a Beater. Of course, Harry, Fred, George and Oliver could have done without the giggling the girls on the team were doing.

As the weather worsened and the winds blew, their luck did so too. After training consistently according to the Slytherin's flaws, Oliver Wood gave them the grim news that they would be playing Hufflepuff for

the first game instead. Apparently the Slytherins were claiming that their Seeker was still too traumatized about his near death experience in Hagrid's class.

"Near death experience!" Harry cried. "The moron insults a Hippogriff and gets *me* injured and he is the one traumatized?"

"They just don't want to play in this weather so Malfoy is faking it. Up until now he wasn't playing the traumatized boy!" Fred cried.

Oliver had quite a nervous fit when he tried to talk about the Hufflepuff team and the girls kept giggling about Cedric Diggory. He kept saying they weren't taking anything seriously. It had taken a good while and Sirius coming down and rubbing the boy's back, for him to calm down.

"See, no need to get all worked up just because of a game," he said in the end and. That phrase undid all his good work as Wood hyperventilated again.

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The drawing room was as sumptuous as the rest of the Mansion. Severus snorted mentally as he took a sip of his wine. Lucius always did like to show off. He didn't remember this many proofs of wealth when Lucius' father was the head of the family. Albino peacocks, honestly!

Lady Malfoy was just sitting next to her husband, as formal as ever.

"What a delicious surprise Severus," Lucius drawled, "What brings you here today?"

"Thought I'd catch up with old friends," Severus said with an indifferent mask.

"It is always a pleasure," Narcissa said pleasantly. "You don't visit often enough."

'Actually, I visit too much in my opinion. Never would be better,' Severus thought.

"I apologize for my shortcomings but life at Hogwarts is quite demanding. Dumbledore is always very perceptive of my comings and goings. It's quite hard to evade him," Severus said evenly.

"Yes, the old fool can be bothersome," Lucius sneered.

"How is Draco, Severus?" Narcissa asked. "He regards you highly."

Severus smiled falsely, "He is a very bright child," *compared to Crabbe and Goyle*, "He is on his way to follow his father's footsteps." *Unfortunately.*

"That pleases me greatly my friend," Lucius said almost proudly.

Severus took another sip of wine and rested his arm on the armchair calmly. "You may rest assured that young Draco is thriving and that I personally see to his safety in these troubled times," he said deliberately observing the couple's reactions attentively, "Not that he is in any danger, now is he?"

There, now he had to wait for them to take the bait.

A/N- According to the Calendar 31 of October of 1993 was a Sunday.

But also according to the calendar the 1st of September and 30th of October were full moon. So I am going to keep to JKR's calendar instead.

Thanks to all my readers and reviewers.

Thanks to my beta Swaddict1986.

Chapter 21- Welcome to the pack

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Chapter 22- An overdue apology

Students scrambled as the dark figure stalked the halls. They certainly did not want to be in his way when he was in such a bad mood. Now, one may say he is always in a foul mood but the students of Hogwarts had learned to discern between foul and fouler. And this was definitely fouler.

He barked the password to the gargoyle and ascended the rotating stairs. He entered the office and glared at the assembled men, especially at the twinkly-eyed one. Without a word he sat in the free chair in front of the headmaster's desk.

"I take it you were not lucky in your endeavor Severus," Dumbledore said calmly.

Severus glared, "They know nothing. Bellatrix hasn't contacted them. Not that they said it outright but Lucius is a poor Occlumens and so is Narcissa. If they had any inkling to where Bellatrix is or what she has been planning I would have found out."

Sirius grimaced, "Great. There goes our best lead."

Albus sighed and rested his chin on the tips of his entwined hands' fingers, "I honestly never expected them to. Bellatrix values Voldemort more than her family. I expect she believes Lucius and Narcissa traitors for not going to Azkaban for their master."

Remus, Sirius and Severus nodded, understanding the underlying message. If Voldemort ever came back and Bellatrix was still at large, she would be one of the first to suspect Severus and promptly try to convince her master that he was a traitor. A lot more than Harry's safety from a lunatic rested on her capture.

"Can you ask the goblins for information on withdrawals from the Lestrage Vault?" Remus asked Sirius. Sirius shook his head, "No, the Goblins don't recognize the Ministry's position whether someone is a convict or not. If they are dead or incapacitated in some other way I can have access to their vault, but only then. Azkaban counts as incapacitated as would being in a coma. But now that she is out, my access is denied and she can withdraw whenever she feels like it."

"Good thing we didn't dawdle with the cup then," Severus said his lips frowning.

"It was very providential that Sirius acted promptly or else we'd be in a pickle," Albus said.

Severus rolled his eyes; a pickle, trust Albus to understate the problem.

"But our problem is," Remus said firmly, bringing them back, "that Bellatrix has a lot of resources, which makes finding her and Pettigrew more difficult."

"She has access to the vaults but she can't very well walk through Diagon Alley and into Gringotts," Sirius said. "And the Mansion and any other property the Lestranges had are being monitored so she'll have some difficulty with that as well."

"Thank God for small favors," Severus grimaced. They were still at the same point they were before and the Aurors weren't any better off.

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"You have to see the wolf in all details. Forget about everything else."

Severus kept his eyes closed. He was seated in the middle of the floor in the Marauder's Quarter. Legs crossed. Supposedly trying to enter a meditative state.

"Can you picture it? Can you see it the way you saw it in your dream?"

"Yes," he hissed scowling.

"You have to be the wolf now."

That he couldn't take. He opened his eyes and raised an annoyed eyebrow at Sirius who had been pacing around him and was now in front of him.

"Be the wolf?"

"Yes, when you see the wolf in your mind you have to think of it as you and not as a different animal. You are seeing yourself."

"Wasn't I supposed to do this with Harry?"

"No, I said Dumbledore wanted you to start the training when I told him about Harry," another raised eyebrow, "Okay, so maybe in my glee I phrased it wrongly. The point is Harry will only start the training next year at the earliest. I'd rather it be later but I know I won't be able to stall him longer. And we can't waste a year when you are already ready for the next step. We don't know when Voldemort will be back; could be ten years from now or it could be tomorrow. Now close your eyes."

Severus did so and Sirius started telling him once again to see the wolf, be the wolf. It only lasted a couple of minutes before Severus opened his eyes again and cried out:

"This is ridiculous."

Sirius sighed and sat in front of Severus in the same position he was in.

"I am sorry."

"You should be. This is utterly-"

"I am sorry. I never intended for you to go. Not only would I not put you in such a danger, but I wouldn't put Moony in that position. I never thought you'd do what I told you. You hated me. You never did anything I told you before. I have no idea why you decided to take my advice for the first time ever

that night. I know I am not guiltless. I should never had taken the chance you would listen, but I honestly did not think you would."

Severus just stared at him bewildered; why the hell was he bringing this up now?

"It haunts me to this day what could have happened if James hadn't saved you. It haunts me that I was careless with your life and Moony's secret. It haunts me that when I saw you crossing the grounds I was paralyzed and couldn't move, that it took James to act and save your life because of how scared I was. It haunts me that you almost died. That James almost died to save you and that Moony almost died because had he bitten you they would have executed him. I know you think I wasn't punished because I wasn't expelled and sent to Azkaban but the only reason I wasn't was because if Dumbledore had expelled me and called the Aurors they would have taken Moony too. But I was punished. I spent the rest of the year in detention, and not your normal detention either. Half of it was hard manual labor and half was studying all the laws involving werewolf regulation so I could understand how stupid my mistake had been. And I did. I had nightmares of them taking Moony away every night and sometimes I still do. James, Remus and Peter didn't talk to me for two whole months. I was alone in that Tower, in that dormitory, until the day I came back shaking and sobbing and begged Remus for forgiveness. Told him he could do whatever he wanted to me. That he had the right to kill me if he wanted to, because that's what I almost did to him."

That was news Severus. He never thought about what would have happened to Remus, just that Black had gone free.

"I have no excuse for what I did and I don't expect you to forgive me. I never have forgiven myself. But I do expect you not to give up a good weapon because of me."

Severus had to admit, to himself at least, that he was touched. He hadn't exactly forgiven Sirius, but he had learned to look past it to be his friend. He surely hadn't ever expected an apology. And if he thought about it, he had let it pass because he knew he had made a bigger mistake. One that, if Sirius, Remus and Harry ever found out, they would hate him forever. He knew what it was like to act without thinking of the consequences. Just like he had only wanted to please his so called master and never thought that he would go hunting for a child, and that child would end up being Harry, Sirius had thought he wouldn't take his advice. And he almost hadn't; after all, Sirius was his enemy, but curiosity won. To hear Sirius say he was sorry for endangering him was, well, he didn't exactly know how to name it. But it was good. But he was Severus Snape after all and Severus Snape does not get mushy.

"You think too highly of yourself. This has nothing to do with you and everything to do with me not wanting to catch fleas from you and the wolf."

Sirius rolled his eyes and smiled, "Okay Sev. If you say so. Now close your eyes."

Severus complied.

"Be the wolf. It's your fur, your eyes, your muzzle. Feel the fur. Think of how being in four legs must feel like."

And they kept at that for ours, Severus with his eyes closed, picturing everything as Sirius instructed. Nothing happened that day but according to Sirius that was normal. That as he felt more comfortable with his forms he would start transfiguring parts of his body until he managed to transform his whole body.

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The weather was getting worse and the Gryffindor Quidditch team was starting to dread tomorrow's game. Not as much as they dreaded meeting their Captain in the corridors of Hogwarts between classes though. Harry was contemplating going around with his Invisibility Cloak on.

"He's a nightmare. Like I don't know how Cedric plays. I've known him since I was eight!" Harry complained to Ron as they waited in the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom for their teacher. As if on cue the doors burst open and in came a smiling Sirius Black.

"Good morning class!" he said cheerily ignoring the shocked stares he was receiving. He sat on the teacher's desk and taking the roll started.

"Brown, Lav- Yes Mr. Thomas?"

"I don't mean any disrespect sir, but, are you sure you entered the right classroom?"

Sirius smiled, "Of course."

"Brown. L- Ms. Patil?"

"It's just that this is Defense Against the Dark Arts sir."

"I know, Br- Mr. Finnigan?"

"Where's Professor Lupin?"

"Oh, Remus," Sirius waved his hand dismissively and Harry rolled his eyes, "He's a little under the weather and I'm filling in. Brown, Lav- Ms. Granger?"

"What are your qualifications sir?"

"Pardon me," Sirius asked his jaw dropping, "Qualifications?"

"Yes sir," Hermione said in that no nonsense tone she had, "What makes you qualified to teach this class."

"Did you ask Professor Lupin for his qualifications?" Sirius asked defensively. Harry thought he'd crack a rib from holding his laughter.

"No, but Professor Lupin tutored most of the students in Defense during the Lockhart fiasco didn't he? So we already knew he was good. We know you are a good History teacher but that doesn't necessarily mean you are a good Defense teacher. If telling stories and good looks makes you good at Defense, Professor Lockhart would have been the best," she rationalized.

Harry quickly shoved his hand on his mouth as a laugh escaped and Sirius glared at him.

Sirius gaped and opened and closed his mouth like a fish. He turned red and said through gritted teeth, "As explained in my last History class during the lecture about the Fall of Voldemort," and just as it

happened many times in said class everyone but Harry flinched, "I along with James Potter, Frank and Alice Longbottom, Hestia Jones, Fabian and Gideon Prewett and Kingsley Shacklebolt, was in the youngest group of Aurors ever. Back then they had condensed the training to one year because they needed us on the field. I am a war veteran and I was Alastor Moody's protégé."

The students were once again looking at Sirius in awe and some stole glances at Neville. After the History class, many students had asked Neville about his parents' achievements. Sirius had refrained from telling them their fate at the Lestranges' and Barty Crouch Jr's hand but, he had made a point of letting everyone know they were war heroes. Harry, knowing what had happened since it had been a Black that was responsible for their fate, rescued Neville from the curious students and ushered Neville to their next class, telling everyone to "sod off". Used to Harry's short temper whenever anyone gaped and stared at him, no one took offense and they were able to leave.

"Just checking sir, with our previous experiences we have to be careful," Hermione finished brightly.

Sirius grunted and taking the roll a little forcibly he started, "Brown, Lav-, yes Mr. Potter Black," he hissed through gritted teeth.

"Sir, is that the same Alastor Moody that booby traps his dustbins?" Harry asked innocently. That was it; the class, that had been valiantly holding their laughter, let it go.

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He wiped tears of laughter, "Oh, I'm going to have to see that in a Pensieve."

"He did manage to get us under control and we had a great dueling lesson. Nothing like Lockhart's. When he announced it, Hermione started lecturing him on how we were supposed to start on Hinkypunks."

"Nah, I knew Sirius isn't an expert on Dark Creatures. I authorized him to go outside the curriculum or else that would be one embarrassing class. Besides it's good for them to see an experienced dueler at work. Did you duel him?" Remus asked.

"Yes," Harry scowled, "And he didn't go easy either. Made me lose in front of everybody."

"Never try to make fun of a Marauder," Remus ruffled Harry's hair.

Harry stole a piece of apple from the tray on Remus's bed.

"S' rotten luck that the full moon was yesterday instead of today. You wouldn't have had to miss class then."

"Don't talk with your mouth full," Remus chided, "Missing class isn't the best. I hope no one puts the date and moon together. But if the moon had been today I'd miss your game tomorrow."

Harry grinned and then groaned as he looked out the window at the stormy weather.

"We're going to drown."

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Harry's prediction had been right. They were drowning. Remus had a hard time seeing the players and he was nice and dry in the teacher's box. There was nothing like a roof and water repelling charms. He

expected Harry had no idea where the Snitch was. Wood had asked to talk to his team and he had seen Hermione run towards them. Harry seemed to have a better game afterwards but they were still out there and the weather was getting worse by the second. This was getting dangerous. He saw a lightning frighteningly close to Harry, and had his wand out. From the corner of his eye he saw he wasn't the only teacher to do so.

Suddenly Harry soared up and Remus saw a yellow blur soaring close to him.

"Come on Harry," he said under his breath. Cedric was getting near and the weather was getting colder. The day was getting darker.

A loud howl.

"Daddy, Mummy, help!"

"They're dead Remus, James and Lily were killed!"

Remus looked down and was horrified. A hundred Dementors were gliding towards the pitch, towards the children. He concentrated on the feeling he had when his friends told him they wouldn't desert him and his was one of many shouts next to him of:

"Expecto Patronum!"

As half a dozen Patronuses chased the Dementors away, a familiar bone chilling shiver ran through Remus and he looked up. His heart skipped a beat as he saw Harry plummeting down towards the ground. The loud gasp he let out alerted Sirius and Severus just in time to see Dumbledore raise his wand. Harry's fall slowed down and the three young teachers ran down to the pitch to meet the boy. As he was touching the last step, he saw Dumbledore stop Severus with just a hand. Severus nodded imperceptively and stayed behind. Remus knew that must have cost him an awful lot but he kept on going. He had to make sure Harry was fine. They reached Harry and Remus had to restrain both himself and Sirius from touching the unconscious boy. He looked so pale and still. Harry was never still. Sirius conjured a stretcher and put Harry in a body-bind while Remus floated him on the stretcher. As he and Sirius floated an unconscious Harry towards the hospital wing, he distantly heard Dumbledore's furious orders to the teacher to secure the children and make sure no one was hurt.

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"Thanks Filius," Sirius took the bundle from the diminutive Professor's arm grimacing.

"There's no way of repairing it. I tried, but the Whomping Willow got it good. You know how that tree is," Flitwick said sadly. Sirius winced. He knew the Whomping Willow very personally. "Poor lad. He loves his broom."

"He does," Sirius sighed. "Thanks again."

Flitwick nodded and left the Hospital Wing as Remus entered.

"The other kids want to see Harry. I told them I'd let them know when he's up. Is that what I think it is?"

"Yes," Sirius said grimly opening the bundle and showing the broom splinters to Remus.

"Oh my," Remus winced, "That's not going to go overly well."

A grunt from the bed caught their attention, and Sirius dumped the bundle on another bed and quickly ran to his son's bedside.

"Come on pup. It's okay. It's over," he coaxed gently running a hand through Harry's hair.

"What happened?" Harry croaked as he awakened.

"You fell of your broom," Remus answered giving Harry a glass of water.

Harry who was propped on his elbows in the process of sitting on the bed raised an eyebrow.

"Really Uncle Moony?"

"Yes," Remus said positioning a pillow and fluffing it nervously.

"And here I thought I had decided to jump."

Sirius bit his lips to keep from laughing while helping adjust the pillows.

Remus glared at the two black haired people in the room and drawled, "I see you are feeling better."

"I am a bit sore," Harry said taking the glass of water, "Why were the Dementors on the field. Weren't they supposed to stay out of the grounds?"

Remus sat on the chair as Sirius sat on the bed.

"Yes," Remus said grimly, "But I guess the crowd watching the match was just too much of a temptation for them to just pass."

Harry fidgeted with his glass looking at his lap and biting his lips.

"Harry," Sirius said softly, "It's okay. Albus dealt with them. He was furious. He said he was going to stop by later on to see you. Sev is going to come too. Poor guy, he was so worried but couldn't do anything. He is tending to his Slytherins now. A few of the younger ones were quite shaken up."

Harry nodded and looked up, straight at Remus, "I want to learn how to fight them. When you taught me about them you said that the only defense was the Patronus Charm. I want to learn."

"Harry," Remus started tiredly.

"Don't say I'm too young! I have to know! What if they come again and you're not there? Then what?"

Remus bit his lip and shared a nervous glance with Sirius. Sirius nodded.

"Fine," Remus said reluctantly. "But you have to listen to me. And I'm only doing this because the Dementors have a worst effect on you than on others."

Harry smiled but his smile faltered, "Is that because-"

"Because you have horrors in your past that your classmates can't even imagine," Sirius said looking straight into Harry's green eyes. "It has nothing to do with how strong you are." And he held his son's gaze until he was satisfied Harry understood.

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Madam Pomfrey insisted that Harry stay in the Hospital Wing the whole weekend, which Harry thought was an overreaction if he ever saw one. He had visits from his friends and from the Quidditch team. Wood had been very depressed from losing the match but assured Harry he didn't blame him. Harry felt horrible nonetheless and vowed to learn the Patronus Charm quickly; he couldn't afford to lose another match. He also assured Wood that his dad had promised him another broom for Christmas. Harry had been devastated at his broom's fate. He loved it, it had been his first real broom. Not a child's broom or a school broom that he used but his. And it had been his eleventh birthday's present. For a wizard, eleven was almost as important as seventeen.

Cedric Diggory also stopped by to make sure he was fine and said he tried to return the Snitch.

"I didn't see you Harry. I'm sorry. I only saw you had fallen when you were almost at the ground and I had the Snitch."

"It's okay. You won fair and square," Harry said.

Cedric bit his lip, "I'm sorry for last year. It's just, everyone was so scared. But I should have known better. I've known you since you were little and you helped me escape Filch that time in first year when you showed me that secret passage. I should have known better."

Harry stared at him with a stony expression, "Yes you should," he wasn't going to pretend he hadn't been hurt because he had. "But that's all over now and my Uncle says it's no use dwelling on mistakes. We have to learn from them and move on." He extended a hand to Cedric, "Still friends."

Cedric smiled and shook Harry's hand.

"Still friends."

Harry was also visited by his Uncle Sev, who came under the pretense of taking Potions to Poppy, and was lectured on the utter uselessness, evils, and dangers of Quidditch. When Harry pointed out that for someone who bet Professor McGonagall every year and always bragged about the shiny Cup in his office, his Uncle was saying an awful lot against the game, Severus feigned deafness.

Another visit he got was from Dumbledore, who assured Harry that the Dementors would not be coming to the grounds again. Harry and Dumbledore talked a lot about what Harry heard when the Dementors came near. Just like Remus, Dumbledore told Harry he should focus on remembering the woman that loved him.

"And remember Harry, the ones that love us never truly leave us," he had said and Harry smiled and told him:

"That's true for you too Grandpa."

Dumbledore had looked at him bewildered and Harry explained.

"Your parents and sister. They are watching over you too, right? They are always with you."

Dumbledore smiled, "I hope so." He said softly kissing Harry's forehead before he left

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As usual big thanks to everyone that takes the time to read and even bigger thanks to those who review.

Special thanks to my lovely beta Swaddict1986.

Don't own Harry Potter. Oh, great, now I have to go off and cry because I stopped deluding myself.

Chapter 23- Truly your parents' son

Harry *really* hated Draco Malfoy. With a passion. There was no one in this world he'd like to throttle more than the blonde git, with his blonde face and his blonde sneer and his blonde arrogance and his blonde cronies... okay, the cronies weren't blonde. But Harry hated everything about Draco Malfoy.

"Just ignore him," Hermione kept saying. But it was hard. Malfoy kept taunting Harry by doing impressions of his fall. Harry wanted to hex him so badly.

After the next Defense lesson Harry stayed behind and went straight to the teacher's desk. Remus looked up at the eager face and sighed.

"We'll start your extra Patronus classes after the holidays, okay cub?"

"But-"

"I am a little behind on the grading," Remus said, pointing at the essays he had just taken out. "Unless you prefer to start on the next Hogsmeade weekend, I just thought it was when you would drink the potion."

"No, no, that's okay. After the holidays it is," Harry hastily said and ran out of the classroom before Remus could say anything else. In his hurry he failed to see the satisfied smirk on Remus' face as he shook his head saying:

"So easy."

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Classes proceeded as usual. Potions was still the most hated, and History and Defense were neck to neck in the favorite run. Sirius was a little put out about this; he had been on the favorite list for too long and was not losing his position very sportsmanly. He pouted a lot, which made Harry laugh. His dad could be such a baby, but then again he wasn't the only weird one, his Uncle Sev was actually proud of his being the most hated class.

As the end of term neared, the last Hogsmeade weekend reached them. And Harry once again handed his friends money and lists of things to buy.

"But be careful Ron," he said for the millionth time in a whisper, "She can't see you."

Ron and Neville rolled their eyes, "We know that Harry," Neville said.

"So did you ask her to buy our presents?" Ron asked.

"Who says I'm getting you two any presents?" Harry asked innocently.

"Of course you are," Ron waved his hand dismissively, "So what are they?"

Harry was saved from answering by Hermione arriving in the Common room.

"Ready?" she asked Neville and Ron. Both boys nodded.

"Are you sure you'll be fine Harry?" she asked.

"I'll be fine Hermione," he answered rolling his eyes. "I'll spend the day with dad and Uncle Moony," which wasn't exactly a lie. He was going to spend the day at the Marauder's Quarters. Uncle Sev was going to bring the potion there because there was no way of knowing exactly how long Harry's trance would take, so they didn't want to risk someone looking for Severus in his private lab and finding Harry there. Harry was wondering how he could make his friends leave without seeming too eager to get rid of them, when Hermione nodded and solved the problem for him.

"So, let's go then. I have tons of things to do. And I want to stop at the bookshop."

"Obviously," Ron groaned as he and Neville had to almost run after her.

Harry sat on the couch and waited. He was hammering his leg and looking at his watch every ten seconds. After about a minute, which Harry swore was actually two hours, he started huffing. Five more minutes and the portrait finally opened to reveal his grinning father.

"Hey there pup. I'm not late am I?" he asked innocently. Harry glared and started pushing his father out as Sirius waved to the other students in the room. They started walking towards the staff wing. Well Harry was almost running but kept having to come back or stop to wait for Sirius.

"DAD!"

"What? Such a beautiful day. We should stop and enjoy the scenery."

Harry huffed and crossed his arms. He got behind Sirius and started pushing.

"I don't see what the rush is all about," Sirius said biting back a smile.

After what seemed to Harry like hours, but again wasn't more than five minutes, they finally arrived at the Marauders' Quarters where Severus and Remus were waiting and a smoking goblet sat on the coffee table. Harry ran to the goblet and sat on the couch in front of it, impatient to take the potion, and didn't take his eyes off it.

"Hello to you too Harry," Remus said.

Harry waved not looking at them, "Hi."

Severus rolled his eyes. He got up from his chair, went to Harry and motioned for him to get up and sit on a cushion that was on the floor.

"Sit there in the same position I taught you to be in when you meditate," he said.

Harry complied and sat cross-legged. He had learned to meditate as a method to clear his mind when Severus taught him Occlumency. Harry had a lot of secrets to keep, especially concerning Severus and Remus, and they couldn't afford someone using Legilimancy on Harry without him knowing.

Sirius brought the goblet over to them and Harry took it reverently.

Sirius took a deep breath and started, "There will be no foolish wand waving or silly incantations- what?" he asked innocently at Severus' glare and the others' chuckles, "I've always wanted to say that. Oh, all right," he huffed and pouted.

"You have to drink it all. You'll enter a meditative state from which you will come out once you've seen the form you'll take. Understood?" Severus instructed.

Harry nodded. He swallowed the whole potion, shuddering from the awful taste. Before he could even put the goblet down he was in his own world. Eyes closed and completely out of it.

Sirius bent down and scoped the goblet. He waved a hand in front of Harry. Not even a twitch.

"Now we wait," he said.

"What do you think he is going to be?" Remus asked from his chair. Sirius shrugged but Severus smirked.

"I have a guess."

"What?" Sirius asked.

"You'll just have to wait," he said as he sat down on the couch.

"What do you know that I don't?" Sirius asked with his eyes narrowed.

Severus just smiled at him.

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He was running in the woods. Looking down he saw slender legs and hooves. No way! He couldn't could he? He started running again. He had to find a way to see his whole body. He finally spotted a pond and ran towards it. He looked in and jumped. Yes! He was! Just like his dad! A stag. He looked closely. He was a light brown, almost cream color, and on his forehead there was a small patch of lighter fur in the form of his lightning bolt scar. He looked closer and jumped. His eyes were green. Weird. Stags' eyes weren't green. Well what could he do? He looked around at the woods and smirked inwardly- he was going to have fun!

He was about to run when he felt a pull. Oh, no! No, no, no, no, no. He fought the pull but it got stronger as he felt his surroundings dissolving. He opened his eyes and found three armchairs facing him. He scowled and crossed his arms.

"Welcome back Harry," Remus said smiling.

Harry scowled more, "I was having fun."

"Did you see your form?" Sirius asked and he nodded, "Then the potion has performed its duty and the meditative state ended. Even if you wanted to stay there and have fun."

Harry pouted.

"So?" Severus asked impatiently.

Harry decided to flatten the creases of his robes.

Sirius started tapping his foot impatiently and Harry considered going for a glass of water.

"Come on, tell us!" Sirius cried.

"A stag," Harry said proudly. "Just like my dad."

"Really?" Sirius asked gobsmacked leaning forward and resting his elbow on his knees.

Severus smiled triumphantly and Sirius narrowed his eyes at him. "You knew? How?"

"Quite simply actually," Severus said brushing invisible lint from his robes.

"Care to enlighten us?" Remus asked.

Harry sat up straighter to listen.

"There are many factors that influence the Animagus form one takes. One is character. Stags are noble creatures, which Harry is and, as much as I hate to admit it, Potter was too. Another factor is genetics. Harry's chance of being in the stag family was greater seeing as his father's Animagus form was a stag and his mother's a doe."

Harry was surprised at this. He hadn't known his mother was a doe.

"I never knew Lily took the potion," Remus said.

"She didn't," Severus said shortly.

"Then how do you know her form?" Sirius asked.

"I just do," he said and didn't offer any more explanation.

Sirius opened his mouth but Remus cut in sending him a significant look that said "drop it":

"Now, you get to do the part I know you won't like Harry. You have to study your animal. You have to know a stag's physiology inside out and then you have to study the process of the transformation. So, to start you will hand an essay describing, in details, a stag."

Harry huffed, "How long?" he whined.

"As long as it takes for you to describe everything a stag has and how its body works. You have to understand it. It has to be second nature to you," Severus explained.

"But you are already training," Harry pouted.

"Yes, but I had already studied the form and the transfiguration in depth," Severus sneered.

"How come?" Remus asked curiously, "If you had no interest in going through with it, why learn about the wolf's physiology?"

"Cause you know Uncle Sev! Can't let an opportunity to hit the books pass," Harry smirked and Remus chuckled but Sirius did not miss Harry's wink at Severus.

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"Sooooo," Sirius said bent over the desk, his face getting closer to Severus', "Care to tell me what that was all about?"

"I have no idea what you are talking about, now please, you are invading my personal space," Severus said pushing Sirius out of the way and getting up from his chair. He walked to the shelf and started ruffling through ingredients.

"I am talking about you studying the wolf's physiology before you knew about your form," Sirius said calmly as he sat on the desk.

Severus opened a jar and sniffed, "I may have needed to know it," he said casually.

"Why?"

"None of your business."

"Aw, come on, tell me," Sirius whined.

Severus smirked, "You'll just have to live with the torture of wanting to know and not being able to."

"You can't do that!"

"Watch me."

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"You could go home. See your family," Sirius said, "We are staying anyway. I don't want to risk the trip."

McGonagall raised one eyebrow, "And how many students will I find Transfigured into animals this time?"

"One time! That happened only one time!"

McGonagall surveyed him from her chair at the staff room and Sirius squirmed like a first year in trouble.

She had her lips pursed in a thin line and just kept staring at him.

"I'm just trying to do something nice here, you know. It's not a crime," Sirius said defensively but he was actually trying to remember if that was a crime.

"Fine," she finally said, "I do want to see my daughter and grandchildren. But you better not let anything happen to my Gryffindors, Mr. Black."

Sirius gulped and nodded vigorously. He completely ignored Flitwick, Sprout, Remus, Vector and Hagrid who were snickering behind him. Sirius glared at Remus when he had the gall to point out that the only Gryffindor staying was Harry.

"And I am not so sure he can manage Harry," McGonagall snorted.

"Hey!"

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Christmas morning dawned bright and not so early. As usual Harry was woken by a very slobbery lick.

"Happy Christmas dad!"

He got up and went to the living room where he found Remus and Severus already sitting and talking.

He hugged and greeted each with a Happy Christmas.

"Thank you for leaving your cloak for me last night Harry," Severus said glaring at the Animagus that had just Transformed back with a pop, "It prevented me from being woken up at ungodly hours."

Harry frowned and looked at the clock. His eyes went wide.

"It's ten o'clock already! How did you manage?"

Sirius scowled and mumbled something. Remus and Severus smirked.

"Lets just say I was provided by a certain someone with a strong sleeping draught that ended up in your dad's cup," Remus said calmly.

"Knew I should have suspected something when Moony decided to offer me hot chocolate before bed,"

Sirius huffed.

"Thanks Uncle Sev!" Harry said happily, hugging Severus. Sirius glared at him.

"Everyone is against me!"

They just ignored Sirius and started exchanging gifts. As they unwrapped and thanked their senders Harry let out an awed gasp.

"Dad!"

"Yes, son," Sirius said calmly as he watched Harry reverently finish unwrapping and examining his gift.

"It's a Firebolt!" Harry said in awe.

"I sure hope so or else I was duped," Sirius chuckled, "Umph!" he grunted as he was tackled to the floor.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you!"

"You're welcome. It's from Moony and Sev too," Sirius said.

Severus did not move fast enough and he was soon on the same position Sirius had been. After thanking him profusely Harry repeated the process with Remus who didn't even try to move.

"Can I have a go now, please?" Harry begged.

"Lets finish exchanging gifts first then we can go after lunch," Remus said calmly to the fidgeting teenager.

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"Okay!" Sirius shouted, "My turn now!"

The blur that was Harry just kept zooming and diving.

"I wanna have a go!" Sirius yelled again casting after a *Sonorus* on his throat.

"Sorry Padfoot. But I don't think he wants to stop," Remus said patting Sirius' back.

"But I wanna have a go!" Sirius whined.

"Wow. Is that a Firebolt?" came a voice from behind the pair. They turned and Remus said faintly:

"Nymphadora, don't startle us like that!"

"Sorry," she grinned sheepishly. "Mum and dad are inside. Since you weren't coming home we decided to come here for Christmas tea!"

"Harry! Come down! Ted, Andy and Nymphadora are here!" Sirius yelled through another *Sonorus* Charm.

"Don't call me Nymphadora!" Tonks hissed.

"Moony called you Nymphadora and you didn't say anything," Sirius pouted.

Tonks blushed and mumbled, "He can."

Sirius grinned gleefully and had an evil glint in his eyes as he looked at Remus who was oblivious to what was going on as he watched Harry landing. Tonks glared at Sirius narrowing her eyes. Sirius grin just got wider.

Harry ran to the trio and, panting, hugged Tonks.

"Happy Christmas Tonks! Did you see what I got?"

"Yes," she said almost drooling as she inspected the broom Harry handed her, "Can I have a go?"

"Sure."

"After tea," Sirius said and then he added, "And after me."

Tonks took a parcel from her cloak. She handed it to Harry and said, "Now this is no Firebolt but I heard what happened with Pettigrew and thought you could use one."

Harry grinned at her and unwrapped the gift. "Wow, Tonks. Thanks." He said, hugging her again. She helped him put the dragon hide wand holster on his arm.

"So if something like that happens again, you don't have your wand in your pocket where you can't reach it," she explained. "See, you just have to flick your wrist and the wand is Summoned to your hand." She demonstrated with her own wand holster. "It's standard Auror wear. I don't know how your old man didn't think of getting you one."

"Hey!"

"Must be old age," Harry sighed.

"Old age? You, you,-"

"Definitely old age. A few years back he would already have a comeback," Tonks smirked.

"Detention! Both of you!" Sirius cried.

"Sirius, I am not a student any more," Tonks smiled calmly at him.

"And it's the holidays. You can't give me detention," Harry smirked as he and Tonks entwined their arms and set off to the castle.

Sirius fumed after them, "Stop laughing Moony!"

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A/N- My understanding from the books is that a Patronus form reflects the animal representative of something positive in your life. A protector. Harry's was a stag because his father was his protector so his Patronus takes the form of his dad's Animagus form. Tonks' was a werewolf because that's Lupin's animal form. So I figured Snape's is a doe because that would be Lily's Animagus form if she had been one and he knows that.

I have read theories that say that Snape's was a doe because that was Lily's Patronus and Harry says that in book 7, but in book 3 Lupin says that a Patronus is unique to the wizard that conjures it, meaning no two people can have the same Patronus. I don't know if JKR said something in an interview about this but I only consider Canon what is in the books, anything she didn't put in the book is up for interpretation because it's impossible to keep track of all her interviews. And nowhere in the books it says that Lily's Patronus was a doe apart from Harry saying it to Voldemort, and how did he know? Who told him? I think he had to guess. I even double checked this information in the HP Lexicon.

So, in my opinion there had to be another explanation. Maybe there wasn't, maybe she just made a mistake and forgot to mention that Lily's Patronus was a doe and that two people could have the same Patronus. But mistake or not, the fact is she didn't, and that leaves me wide open to interpret it the way I want. So my interpretation of the reason why Lily is represented by a doe is as follows: Snape wouldn't

think as Lily being a doe because she was the stag's wife. For one, up until book 3 he didn't know James was an Animagus. Second, would he really visualize her as James' wife?

So that leaves her Animagus form. She didn't become one, but had she; she would have been a doe.

This is the theory I am using here.

I know Lupin was ill on Christmas but in my story thanks to years of Wolfsbane Remus just needs one morning to rest and I tried to see when the Full Moon would fall by JKR calendar and it was around the second of January. So just pretend that even if the Full Moon was around that time it was not on the 24th meaning Remus was fine.

I don't own Harry Potter.

Chapter 24- Facing your fears

Christmas tea was very enjoyable. Harry told his Aunt and Uncle about almost everything he'd done, bar a special extra-curricular activity of his, and in turn Tonks updated them on the goings of the outside world, which weren't much. Even though posters of Bellatrix Lestrange and Peter Pettigrew were everywhere people were going about their business normally. Apparently the whole wizarding world was under the impression that the escaped convicts were after Harry and therefore only the immediate area surrounding Harry was in danger. And since the news of the Minister stationing Dementors in Hogsmeade and Hogwarts had been highly publicized, they were fairly certain the convicts would be caught soon.

Apparently that was a misconception, according to Tonks; the Aurors had no more idea where the two Death Eaters could be hiding than any other civilian. Even though Pettigrew had been at Hogwarts with Wizarding ways of travel, they could be anywhere. Apparently Dumbledore had asked to expand the Apparition wards to Hogsmeade or at least put an alarm system in, but Fudge refused by saying the Dementors were more than enough.

Sirius was frustrated, and not only with Bellatrix-Pettigrew issue. He had managed to have Remus and Tonks sitting next to each other and noticed the affectionate looks his baby cousin was sending his best friend, but the stubborn werewolf was completely oblivious. Moony had always been clueless about women wanting him. He was so convinced they would hate him for his furry little problem that he never noticed anything. Usually it took Sirius to give him not so discreet pushes in the right direction. But this time things were tricky; this was his baby cousin after all. He couldn't be overly open, this required finesse. He had to encourage a long lasting relationship, since any fling could be disastrous to interfamily relations, and at the same time instill the fear of the gods in Remus that if he hurt his baby cousin there would be dire consequences. He was almost her Uncle after all!

But there was no denying little Nymphadora was perfect for Remus. Just like Lily had been the opposite of James and had helped him mature, Tonks was the opposite of Remus. She was lively and outgoing in contrast to his ever calm and proper. He needed her to get him out of his shell. And, best of all, she was one of the people that already knew about his condition, so one less hurdle was in the way.

After tea, and after both Tonks and Sirius flew on the Firebolt, Harry and Remus (Sirius claimed he was behind on his grading and had to start as soon as possible) accompanied the three Tonks to the Headmaster's office, where the Floo would be open to Grimmauld Place just this time so the Tonks' wouldn't have to Apparate. As they entered, they were met by the Headmaster and a very sour Potions Master with his usual scowl right in place.

"Oh, do cheer up Severus, it's Christmas," Andromeda said patting Severus' cheek, to his horror. "You were always a sullen child."

Harry had to bite back his snicker. Andromeda had been Head Girl the year his parents, Sirius, Remus and Severus started school. and since she had been a Slytherin she had been responsible for the Slytherin first years. Severus never lived it down. She always treated him like the little first year she had to watch over. Andromeda had married Ted right after school and had had Tonks just a year afterwards. It was hard to remember that she was only seven years older than his dad and Uncles, especially given her tendencies to treat them as children.

"Goodbye Professors," Tonks said her lips twitching, "And Happy Christmas." She yelled as she Flooed away.

As Ted, the last of them Flooed away, Severus turned to Harry, "Wipe that smirk from your face young man!"

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"That's, that's-"

"Yes," Harry said calmly as he handed Oliver his new broom in the middle of the Common Room.

Oliver fell to his knees and ran a reverent hand over the Firebolt. His eyes were shining with unshed tears of joy.

"The Cup is ours," he whispered.

"Can I have a go Harry?" Ron asked not taking his eyes of the broom.

"Of course," Harry said, "Next practice we'll go early and I'll let you try it."

Oliver eyed Ron suspiciously and held the broom close to his chest, "What if you break it?"

Harry rolled his eyes and said firmly, "You won't break it Ron. I trust you. Besides dad and Tonks already tried it and it's still in one piece, isn't it Oliver? If you want you can have a go too."

Oliver's eyes went wide and he had a goofy smile on him. It fell though as he said seriously, "Did you solve the Dementor problem Harry?"

"Yes, I have my first anti-Dementor lesson scheduled for Thursday."

"Good," Oliver said dreamily once again.

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Harry waited for Remus in the History of Magic classroom. As he was lighting the lamps, he saw his dad and Uncle come in floating a large packing case. He looked at it curious.

"What's that?"

"Another Boggart," Sirius said grimly positioning the case in the middle of the class while Remus waved his wand, causing the chairs and desks to move against the walls, "For the record, I want to state that I am very much against this."

Remus, who looked like he agreed with Sirius but had decided to go against his better judgment, explained, "This is the closest we could get to a real Dementor. It's not going to be the same; a Dementor will be worse. Normally I would just have you practice the Patronus Charm but since there is a good chance that you will have to face a Dementor sometime in the future, I don't want it to have to be the first time you try the charm."

Harry didn't understand, wasn't it enough to succeed at the charm?

Remus continued his lecture mode, "You see Harry, the key to a strong Patronus is to concentrate on a very powerful happy memory. The happier the memory the stronger the Patronus. That's the tricky part, you see. It's easy to remember something happy in a normal environment, but when the Dementors are dragging up your worst memories, it's hard to remember anything happy. That's why I want you to practice with the Boggart. To condition yourself to think of something happy as soon as you start feeling the Dementors."

Harry nodded seriously.

"The Patronus is a protector," Sirius continued, "It takes the form of an animal that represents something positive in your life. Something that makes you feel safe. The Patronus is the embodiment of what the Dementors feed off; happy memories and good feelings. This way the Dementor will be feeding off the Patronus instead of you, protecting you."

"To cast a Patronus," Remus continued, "You have to concentrate with all your might on a happy memory and say the incantation '*Expecto Patronum*'."

Running through his head for a happy memory, Harry concentrated on the first time his dad let him on a broom by himself and repeated the incantation under his breath and gave a little start when a silver wisp of gas came out of his wand.

"Did you see that?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes," Sirius said proudly, positioning himself behind Harry. "Are you ready?" At Harry's nod Sirius nodded to Remus who flicked his wand from behind the case.

The case opened and a Dementor rose from the box. At once Harry started fiercely crying, "*Expecto Patronum*" but nothing happened. The darkness was getting nearer, the room was getting colder and Harry began to hear his mother's screams.

"Not Harry! Not Harry! Please, I'll do anything-"

"Stand aside – stand aside girl-"

"Harry!"

Harry opened his eyes and met Remus worried brown ones. He was seated on the floor, propped against Sirius' chest, who was nervously running his hand through Harry's hair in an attempt to both wake him and calm himself.

"Sorry," he muttered sitting up and feeling cold sweat trickling behind his glasses.

"It's not your fault," Remus said handing him a piece of chocolate. Harry munched on the chocolate under his guardians' watchful gazes.

"He told her to stand aside," he mumbled, "Why would he do that?"

"What?" Sirius asked in a husky voice.

"Voldemort. He said 'Stand aside- stand aside girl'. But she didn't. She didn't have to die. Why did she?" he asked them, looking in Sirius' eyes.

Sirius put a hand on his shoulder and another on his cheek, "Because she loved you Harry. She could have never let anything happen to you."

"But-"

"No buts Harry. They loved you and that's why they protected you with their lives. We would too," Remus said. "That's their and ours decisions, you have no say in this." Harry nodded jerkily not meeting their eyes as he took another bite of the chocolate.

"As for why Voldemort would want to spare her," Sirius said, "I honestly have no idea. She was Muggleborn. She was what he hated. I truly don't understand. Maybe he didn't think she was worth the trouble... but then again, when did Voldemort have any trouble killing?"

Harry was really confused by this. He always knew his parents had died trying to protect him and, according to Dumbledore, his mother's sacrifice is what had protected him. But hadn't his father died to protect him too? Didn't his sacrifice count? Other parents have died and tried to save their children; why did their sacrifice not count? Those were questions he always had but the fact that Voldemort wanted to kill him and not his mum was new. Why was that? What was so interesting in a little baby to make the most feared wizard alive want to kill him? He always assumed he had been collateral damage when Voldemort came after his parents.

"If you don't want to continue, we more than unders-" Remus started but was cut off by Harry getting up and pointing his wand at the case.

"I'm ready for another round."

Sirius and Remus sighed deeply and positioned themselves the same as before, Remus opening the case, Sirius ready to catch Harry, and neither in the direct path of the Boggart. Harry thought hard once again and decided that the feeling of receiving his first Hogwarts Letter and becoming an official student would do. Remus opened the case, once again the Dementor rose and Harry cried with all his might:

"Expecto Patronum! Expecto Patronum!"

As the darkness surrounded him once again, he heard a voice he recognized as James Potter's crying:

"Lily, take Harry and go! It's him! Go! Run! I'll hold him off-"

"Harry. Harry...wake up pup," Sirius coaxed as he rubbed Harry's cheek.

Harry opened his eyes and saw his dad was holding him again while Remus was once again kneeled next to both of them. Harry held Sirius and buried his face in Sirius' chest.

"Pup, what's wrong?" Sirius asked worried rubbing Harry's back. Harry remained silent, his face hidden where Sirius and Remus couldn't see the tears that were running down his cheeks.

"Pup?" Sirius asked softly pressing his face against Harry's hair.

"He tried to hold him off while mum and I fled," Harry mumbled on Sirius robes. "Dad tried to give us time to run."

Two sharp intakes of breath let Harry know they had both heard him. It was a long while before any of them moved again and Harry insisted he wanted one last go. He said he wasn't thinking happy enough and he couldn't afford to lose another game. Remus went to the case grumbling about how only a Potter could want to learn a ridiculously advanced spell for Quidditch. Harry searched for one of his happiest memories and decided that Christmas morning of his second year would do. His first Christmas morning with both his Uncles and his dad. Once again the Dementor rose.

"EXPECTO PATRONUM!"

The screaming started again, except this time it sounded like it was coming from a badly tuned radio. Harry could still see and saw the Dementor's progress halt as a silver shadow burst out of Harry's wand and hovered between him and the Dementor. Harry's legs felt like water but he was still on his feet.

"Riddikulus!" Remus roared, and in no time he had the Boggart back in the case.

"Well done Harry!" Sirius said, helping Harry who was all sweaty and shaky to a chair. Remus came over and handed chocolate around with a big smile on his face.

"It didn't have a form though," Harry mumbled.

"It was a lot more than we expected for your first lesson Harry," Remus said sitting next to him.

"Can I-"

"No," Sirius said forcibly, "That was already one try more than we wanted to allow. You have to recover from this. Next week we'll try again."

"Next week!" Harry cried, "Why not tomorrow?"

"Harry," Remus started patiently cutting Sirius off, who looked like he was going to lose his patience, "This lesson is quite draining. You can feel that even if you don't want to admit it. If we do it more than once a week you'll get sick. No, it's this or nothing, remember you promised to listen to me," he finished sternly when Harry looked like he was going to protest.

"Okay," Harry mumbled, munching his chocolate and giving the adults rebellious looks.

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"So, how did it go? Is he okay? You didn't over exert him did you?"

"Dear God Severus," Sirius said faintly, "Do you want to give us heart attacks?"

Severus had been waiting for Sirius and Remus at the Marauders' Quarters, and when he heard the portrait opening he swiftly positioned himself behind it, being the first thing Sirius saw.

"Well?" he asked impatiently.

"He's fine. No we didn't let him over exert himself even though he very much wanted to," Sirius huffed as he dropped on the couch. Remus and Severus sat on the armchairs more sedately.

"Did he hear her again?" Severus asked softly.

"Yes," Remus said rubbing his temple, "And James too." He frowned and then said, "Harry heard Voldemort."

"WHAT?"

"Well, he was there," Sirius said impatiently.

"Harry said Voldemort told Lily to stand aside," Remus continued with a confused expression, "Do you know why he would do that?"

Severus definitely looked uncomfortable, "How do you expect me to fathom what was going through the mind of that lunatic?"

"You knew him better than us," Sirius shrugged.

"Maybe he wasn't interested in Lily and Potter," Severus said in a low tone, "Maybe they were just in the way."

"Voldemort killed for fun," Sirius rolled his eyes, "Them being in the way would be just more fun for him. And that's another thing; Dumbledore told us Voldemort had been after Harry. But why? Why waste his time and energy on a baby? How could a one-year-old pose such a threat to him?"

"How am I supposed to know? Ask Dumbledore!" Severus said angrily and stalked away, slamming the portrait shut.

"What's got into him?" Sirius asked bewildered.

"He loved Lily you dolt," Remus said rolling his eyes, "This can't be a pleasant subject."

"Aw, come on Moony. There was never anything between them more than friendship."

"Not on Lily's side no. But anyone could see Severus loved her," At Sirius incredulous look Remus asked, "What's Severus' Patronus, Sirius?"

"A doe," Sirius said and enlightened he added, "That's how he knew Lily's Animagus. She's his Patronus."

"Good to know you're not that dense," Remus smirked.

'That dense! Look who's talking, Mr. Oblivious to a certain Metamorphmagus in love!'

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As the weeks went by, Harry had Anti-Dementor lessons, Quidditch practice, normal classes, his Animagus research that he had to do without his friends finding out, much to Sirius' delight since that meant that it took Harry longer, and off course, time to run around with his friends.

The adults weren't having a simple life either; apart from normal classes and grading, Sirius and Remus had Anti-Dementor classes with Harry which were draining for them too since they also felt the effects of the Dementors, and Sirius had Animagus training with Severus who was getting highly frustrated. Until

now he had only been able to Transfigure some of his skin into fur, and not that much of it as it was sparse and thin.

"You have to believe you can do it Sev," Sirius said sighing. "It's like any other kind of magic. You know you can, so you do."

"Yes, I know, be the damn wolf," Severus grunted, "It's not that simple, you know?"

"I know," Sirius said as he sat in front of Severus on the floor, "I've been there. And it's like I said, you have to believe you can do it. I am not saying you say 'Oh, right. I can do this.' And puft, you're done. It's deeper. It's inside you that you have to believe and *want* this."

"You think I don't want-" Severus started but Remus, who had been in the room grading essays the whole time, said calmly as he stepped towards the duo.

"Sirius, why don't you stop for today?"

"But Moony-"

"Why don't you go have a nice shower? You're exhausted too. Let me and Severus chat."

Sirius huffed but obeyed. He got up and stalked to his room. Remus motioned for Severus to sit on one of the armchairs and took the other, resting his elbows on his knees.

"Are you afraid of your wolf?" Remus asked bluntly.

"I am not afraid of anything," Severus blistered.

"Fine," Remus said calmly, "But it would be perfectly understandable considering your first encounter to a creature similar to a real wolf. I would be terrified of getting near another. I would be even more terrified of becoming one."

"Sirius said you didn't talk to him for two months," Severus asked as if he wasn't all that interested, but he didn't fool Remus.

"No, I didn't. To be honest, for a while I believed I'd never be able to look at him again much less be his friend."

"Why did you then? Forgive him, I mean?"

Remus breathed slowly and leaned back in the chair. With a pensive expression he said, "One night, after his detention, Sirius came back to the dorm. I was alone. I don't remember what James and Peter were doing, but I remember Sirius. He was pale and shaking. I looked at him for the first time in two months and saw that those months hadn't been gentle to him. He had the look of someone who had lost a lot of weight in a short period of time, which he did. Sirius, who could stuff his face with the whole welcoming feast and still have space for more hadn't eaten properly in all that time. I found out later that McGonagall had to force him to eat with the threat of spoon-feeding him in the middle of the Great Hall. He had bags under his eyes that told me he had many sleepless nights, which I had already known about. In those two months, Sirius made a point of going to bed only when he knew we were already asleep and waking up before everybody so as to not impose. He walked to me and handed me his wand. He said *"You can drag it on; I'll deserve it but please be swift."* I stared at him confused. I had no idea

what he was going on about and of course asked him what the bloody hell he meant. He looked at me in the eyes and simply said, "*You can kill me.*"

Severus paled; he had thought Sirius had been exaggerating when he said he told Remus he could kill him.

"My reaction exactly. I got angry. Said he had to stop being a bloody idiot and he crumbled, he was crying and saying that he almost killed me so I had the right to kill him. I was shocked and scared; how could he break down like that? Sirius was always so proud, so strong, never letting anything get to him. Not his family's cruel remarks, not the other Gryffindors saying he didn't belong in our house and telling him to go back to Slytherin. That's a big part of his animosity towards you; Slytherin represents his family and all they did to hurt him. I believe the first time you met you said you wanted to be in Slytherin didn't you?" at Severus' nod Remus continued, "There, with the simplicity and naivety that only eleven year olds can have, Sirius decided you were like them and therefore the enemy. James was jealous of you, because of Lily. But Sirius, Sirius projected in you all his hurt and hate towards the Blacks. It's neither right nor fair, but it's what he did. But I digress, I saw strong, proud Sirius in a way I never thought possible; broken. And it tore my heart to see him like that. I had already, rationally, realized Sirius hadn't done it on purpose, he had done it on the spur of the moment in anger, and believed you wouldn't go."

Severus nodded, "I may have goaded him. Fine, I made fun of you being sick all the time," Severus conceded in a huff.

Remus nodded, "Sirius is hot headed and very protective of those he loves. But especially, he rarely thinks things through before he does them. The biggest example of all is going after Peter that November morning. But the fact stands that I was still fifteen and hurt, and even though I had realized he didn't do it on purpose shortly after the incident, I still kept my anger, and Peter and James did so too in loyalty to me, but I didn't realize how much I hurt Sirius until that moment. And it was then that I realized how much he meant to me, how much they all meant. He was my brother, and nothing hurt me more than seeing him in pain like that. I didn't forget nor forgive what he did. I can't, he risked all our lives. But I forgave *him*. No one is perfect, we all make mistakes, and sometimes, to be able to still be with the people we love, we have to look past those mistakes and go on with life."

Severus nodded stiffly. Remus surveyed him calmly. After a period of silence Remus said, "With the Wolfsbane you so kindly provide, I am perfectly safe. You can come one night and stay with us. You just have to wait until I transform to make sure the potion worked. Once we're sure, Sirius can open the door for you. Maybe this will help you get over your fears."

"I've seen you transformed. The night Quirrell took Harry."

"That night you were so worried about Harry that I am pretty sure that the fact that you were in the same room as a werewolf didn't even completely register. This time you will come perfectly aware of where and with whom you'll be."

"Well, hum, that could be, hum useful," Severus said, "Academically speaking of course."

"Of course," Remus said rolling his eyes.

Thanks for your reviews and big thanks to my beta.

I don't own Harry Potter. No wait, that's not true. I own seven copies of Harry Potter Books, does that count? No! Ah! Pity, then, I guess I was right and I don't own Harry Potter.

Chapter 25- What makes me feel safe

Harry flopped in one of the armchairs in the Common Room dejectedly. Ron and Neville looked up from their chess game, and without looking up from her homework, Hermione asked:

"What has you so gloom Harry?"

"It's useless!" Harry cried, "I can't produce a decent Patronus!"

That made her look up. She crossed her arms on top of her homework and calmly said, "Harry, the Patronus Charm is seventh year material. Many wizards have trouble with that charm even after they are qualified. It's absolutely understandable that a thirteen year old wouldn't have mastered it after a few lessons."

"But what if the Dementors come to the game Hermione? We can't afford to lose!" Harry cried and Ron nodded at this. To everyone's surprise Neville was the one that responded:

"In our first year Professor Flitwick pulled me aside because I was having trouble with the levitation charm, and said I had to believe I could do it. That half the work of mastering a spell is believing you are able to do it. If you think you will fail, your magic won't focus. Maybe that's your problem; everyone is saying you can't because you are so young and unconsciously you are blocking your magic."

Harry shrugged but looked pensive, "Dad's been telling my Uncle the same thing on a project they have. Maybe you're right."

"Oh, what are Professors Black and Lupin working on?" Hermione asked exited.

Harry mentally kicked himself but if nothing else he was a Marauder's son, "Oh, a Transfiguration my Uncle can't grasp. Dad's great with Transfiguration but that's not exactly my Uncle's specialty, so it's nothing much." That seemed to satisfy Hermione and Harry felt very proud of himself. He managed to answer truthfully without actually answering. So what if she thought he was talking about Uncle Moony and not Uncle Sev? That's not his fault. Now he had to concentrate on tomorrow's game and hope there would be no Dementors.

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"That's my boy!" Wood kept yelling, as Harry was being group hugged by his team.

"Well done team!" came his dad's exited voice from behind, "Very well done!"

Harry turned to see his smiling dad and Uncle Moony joining the Gryffindors that were celebrating in the middle of the Quidditch pitch. Harry disentangled himself from the others and ran towards them. They had weird looks on their faces and their eyes were a little bright.

"Did you see?" Harry cried hugging his dad, "I did it!"

"Yes, we did," Sirius said a little hoarsely.

"I didn't even feel the Dementors!"

"Yes, er, about that," Remus said awkwardly, "They weren't actually Dementors."

"What?" Harry asked.

"Minerva and Severus are dealing with them right now," Sirius explained, "Severus is not a happy camper."

"What? What were they?"

Remus bit his lip, "Malfoy, Crabbe, Goyle and Montague were disguised as Dementors and your Patronus startled them. They were a little tangled in some robes, last we saw."

Harry's eyes went dreamy at the visualization of the foursome.

"Harry!" Fred yelled, "Come on! Party time!"

"Just a sec!" he yelled back and turned towards Sirius and Remus, "What was my form? I couldn't see it."

"Why don't you come by tomorrow and you can cast it again," Remus said, "You'll be surprised."

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"Slytherins are cunning, they are resourceful, but above of all Slytherins are subtle!" Severus said in a very low and dangerous whisper as he towered over his four students in his office, "Please do enlighten me on how what you did was subtle!"

Malfoy, Crabbe, Goyle and Montague, who were standing one in a row, hands clasped behind their backs and looking at the floor, wisely said nothing.

"Do you realize that since you were caught in front of the whole school I have no alternative but to punish you?"

Severus was satisfied to see a slight tremble run through all four of them. How could they disgrace their House like this?

"Do you realize that the whole school will say that Slytherin is so desperate, that Slytherin thinks their chances against Potter are so slim, that they have to so openly cheat to win?"

Gulps were heard.

"What do you think your parents will say when they hear that you were so blunt?" he especially stopped in front of Malfoy. When the boy raised his head, his eyes were wide on his paler-than-usual face. Severus was satisfied to see that the boy knew Lucius, master of cunning and subtlety, would not be happy.

"You all have detention with Professor McGonagall, and I will not save you from it nor can I give back the points taken. You will earn them back."

The four nodded vigorously.

"Now get out of my sight!"

The four ran as fast as their dignity allowed them. As the door shut Severus dropped on his chair and rubbed the bridge of his nose. Slytherin would be the laughing stock of the whole school. He wanted to

make those four scrub cauldrons for the rest of their lives for embarrassing the House like that. As if they weren't viewed badly by the rest of the world already! It was at times like these that he hated not being able to really scold them like he wanted to. He knew that not all Slytherins were cheaters. But thanks to people like those four, their bad reputation just continued each year. He couldn't wait for the day that he could shed his spy role. Slytherin wouldn't know what hit them; he would make sure the House would stop paying for the acts of few of them. He couldn't wait to put Malfoy in his place; maybe he could even save the boy from Lucius' influence.

His only consolation today was Harry's Patronus. Now that made his day! It was a good thing there was no one there or they would have had a heart attack at the sight of Severus Snape smiling.

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Harry said goodbye to his friends after breakfast and followed Sirius and Remus to their quarters. The remaining three of the quartet were quite sleepy and Harry was doubtful they actually registered what he said. He was tired too, as the party lasted until very late, but he wanted to see his form. To his surprise, Severus was waiting at the Marauder's Quarters. Harry figured he must have a training lesson. "This time we won't use the Boggart Harry," Remus said smiling. Harry looked weirdly at him, he could swear his Uncle was bouncing. That usually was his dad's specialty.

"Go on," Severus prompted.

Harry closed his eyes and remembered the feeling of wining and of casting the perfect Patronus from yesterday.

"Expecto Patronum!"

He opened his eyes and they widened at the form that came out his wand. There in the middle of the room was a silver Wolf-dog trotting around. Harry frowned.

"What?" Sirius asked crestfallen.

"Didn't you say the Patronus was the animal representation of something positive in your life, something that makes you feel safe?" Harry asked and Sirius nodded with a hurt expression.

"I don't know any Wolf-dogs," Harry said lost.

At this Sirius' hurt look turned to a grin and he chuckled, "No you don't."

Remus took pity and explained, smiling, "The Wolf-dog, Harry, is a hybrid of the dog and the wolf. I think your soul couldn't decide between us and just mixed them up. See, the dog and wolf Animagi and the werewolf."

"Ah," Harry said nodding and smiling, "That makes sense. You three have always protected me and you're my all Patronus. Yeah, I like that. Umph-" he finished as his dad crushed him in a hug. Remus soon joined and to Harry's surprise and delight so did Severus.

Harry chuckled when Severus noticed what he had done and jumped out of the group hug as if burnt and with all the dignity he could muster said while patting Harry's head, "Well done indeed Harry. A very impressive bit of magic."

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Time seemed to speed up again and before he could blink it was the night of the full moon. Severus walked purposefully to the Marauder's Quarters.

"I am not scared. I have no reason whatsoever to be scared of anything. I have complete trust in my brewing abilities," he kept chanting in his head as he approached the portrait. He stopped in front of it and took a deep breath. He raised his hand to knock and stood there frozen. He lowered his hand then raised it again. He was about to turn on his heels when the portrait opened and Sirius stood there smiling.

"Come in Sev, he's already transformed and it's fine."

Severus fidgeted a bit but didn't move.

Sirius looked at him sympathetically and said, "You know what? I'll just leave this open and you can come in whenever you feel like."

Sirius walked back inside, and from his spot Severus saw him sit at the table and start grading essays. He didn't see Moony anywhere. He took a tentative step, then another, and in a rush he went in, closed the door, and shut his eyes.

After a while he opened them and saw that Sirius was just ignoring him. He looked around and saw the werewolf curled in a rug in front of the fire. Moony was looking at him and Severus froze. Moony seemed to notice and just rested his head on his paws and surveyed the fire.

Sirius got up and walked towards Moony. He sat on his knees and started rubbing Moony's ears. The werewolf made a content sound, "He likes it," Sirius said looking at Severus, "Do you want to try? See, it's safe."

Severus walked cautiously towards the pair. He got down on one knee, ready to bolt if he needed to, but kept his hands to himself.

"Here Sev. He won't hurt you."

Severus reached out a trembling hand and touched Moony's head before quickly withdrawing the hand. He noticed that besides not commenting on this uncharacteristic display from him, Sirius was also holding the werewolf in a way that he could keep him back if necessary. Rationally, Severus knew there was no need for that. Remus was in control and therefore wouldn't lunge, but he was grateful for Sirius' thoughtfulness. He reached forward once again and this time he kept his hand a little longer before he pulled it away.

Moony stretched and Severus gave a little start but didn't move. Sirius once again scratched behind Moony's ear and Moony made the delighted sound again.

"Such a good boy," Sirius cooed, "You're one big puppy aren't you? Yes you are."

Moony glared at Sirius as if asking, "Who are you calling a puppy?" and Severus couldn't help but snort.

The evening went on calmly as slowly Severus felt more confident and started examining the werewolf more closely.

XXXXXXXX

"Where are we Grandpa?" Harry asked as he and Dumbledore made their way through a small village.

"We are visiting a former colleague of mine." Dumbledore answered smiling at Harry, and winking he added, "I think he'll like you."

Harry nodded and kept walking. He tugged at the collar of his semi-formal bottle green robe. He had no idea why he was here, and honestly he would rather be using this time researching his Animagus form and the transformation. Today was a Hogsmeade weekend but Harry's plan of hitting the library while the others were at the village had been thwarted by Dumbledore asking Sirius if he could take Harry for an outing. Sirius had been reluctant but even he had to agree that as psychotic as she may be, Bellatrix wouldn't dare take on Albus Dumbledore.

They reached a very good-looking two-story house, and with a wave of his wand Dumbledore opened the gate.

"Stop fidgeting with your attire Harry," Dumbledore chided as they walked towards the door. Harry scowled; as well as the semi-formal dress robe, he was wearing a velvet black cloak with both the Black and Potter family crests. This was what he usually wore for formal functions and there was nothing Harry hated more than formal functions. He would rather spend a nice afternoon chatting with Draco Malfoy than attend a formal function.

The door opened to reveal an enormously fat old man that said in a delighted voice, "Albus, what a surprise."

"Really Horace? I am surprised myself since you are the one that specified the time after you so kindly decided to finally answer my many letters," Dumbledore said pleasantly as he ushered Harry inside the house.

"Oh, well," Horace stuttered, "Do come in."

As he looked around, Harry could see that this Horace person liked his comforts. The living room they had just entered had a nice fire lit and was furnished with nice, very comfortable looking squishy armchairs.

"Harry," Dumbledore said resting an arm on Harry's shoulder, "This is Horace Slughorn-"

"Former Potions Master and Head of Slytherin at Hogwarts," Harry finished. He knew that because his Uncle Sev had taken the post Slughorn vacated with his retirement, and because many of the Marauders tales revolved around their classes, so Harry knew all the names of the teachers they had.

"I see the lad knows me, being Lily's boy and all," Slughorn said pleased. "You do have her eyes."

"So I've been told," everyone always told him that, Severus especially. He said that that was they were what he loved most about Harry's features. He liked to be able to look in Harry's eyes and see his best friend again. Usually when strangers said it, it annoyed him to no end, like he wasn't a person on his own. He was either James and Lily's son or The Boy Who Lived. But when his dad or his Uncles said something like that, he let them. If he could give them a little of their friends back, who was he to stop that? But from the way his Granfather's eyes twinkled at this remark, and he made that little smirk that he disguised in a benign smile, Harry knew this was exactly what Dumbledore wanted to explore, so he let it be.

"She was one of my favorites. Not that I played favorites," Slughorn amended eyeing Dumbledore, "But she was really brilliant. Could have been a Potions Mistress if she wanted to. She and Severus Snape were the best students that year, in many years I'd wager. They were always paired together, up to their OWLs too. Something happened afterwards though because they never paired again. At least that was good for the other students who had a chance to have great partners."

Harry frowned. He knew that Severus and Lily had a falling out, but he always assumed that was because she started dating his dad. But according to Sirius and Remus that only happened on their seventh year. Slughorn motioned for them to sit and asked:

"So Albus, what brings you here?"

"You know what," Dumbledore said calmly, "I need that memory."

"I already gave it to you last year."

"Yes, but this time I would need an unadulterated version," was the calm reply.

Harry saw Slughorn fidget, "That wasn't adulterated."

Dumbledore just gave Slughorn a look that clearly stated, "You don't fool me." And Harry just watched Slughorn squirm more. Harry was starting to have an inkling as to what this was about.

"I have nothing else to give you Albus."

Dumbledore sighed, "Then I am sorry to say I wasted my time. I should take Harry to his appointment then," Harry was pretty sure he had no other appointments. "Would you terribly mind if I use your bathroom. It's such a long trek we have to embark on."

"Not at all. First door on the left."

Harry watched his grandfather leave, but had no idea how he would convince this man to give him what Dumbledore needed. He glanced at Slughorn and looked around. There were many pictures and cards in the mantelpiece. His Uncle Sev had said Slughorn had liked to collect favorite students, to mold them so he could be a behind the scenes kind of guy. He had liked Lily. She held promise of being a brilliant Potions Mistress and Slughorn had wanted to be the one to get her there. But he said that most of all Slughorn had liked flattery.

"I heard you were the one that helped Democles Belby develop the Wolfsbane Potion," he suddenly said. Severus had mentioned that Belby had been on what Slughorn had called the Slug Club.

"Oh, no," Slughorn's said in false modesty, "Belby is brilliant. I merely instructed him in school."

"Yes, but my Uncle says that what we learn at Hogwarts is the foundation of whatever we achieve afterwards. So you basically guided him."

"Oh, did he?" Slughorn flushed, "Your Uncle you say? I didn't know James or Lily had brothers."

"Remus Lupin; he's not blood related to my parents but it's the same."

"Oh, yes. Lupin. Quite a brilliant boy too, but in defense and charms. Poor lad didn't belong in a Potions lab though. He was responsible for many of my best cauldrons melting. He would know about the Wolfsbane wouldn't he?"

Harry nodded but let Slughorn talk, like he felt the man enjoyed.

"He was always around your dad. Another one of your dad's main pals was Sirius Black. Now he could have been brilliant at Potions if he hadn't spent half his time goofing off in school. Gryffindor, just like your parents. Shame too; I got his brother but would have liked the set."

Harry didn't like Slughorn's way of talking but let it slide.

"He's my dad, I mean, adoptive father. They both raised me."

"Oh, didn't know that," he said eyeing the crests on Harry's cloak hungrily. "Bet he molded you into one little Gryffindor," at Harry's sheepish smile he said, "Thought so. Not that you'd need molding; never knew a bigger Gryffindor than your mum. She wasn't afraid to tell anyone off, no matter who they were. Cheeky little bugger," he smiled softly and then his smile faded, "I don't suppose you remember her much."

"No," Harry said, "I saw some memories and pictures, but that's all. She was quite pretty."

"Beautiful, had half the boys at Hogwarts pining for her," Slughorn said with a sad smile.

"I remember how she died though," Harry didn't know why he was telling this stranger this but something told him he had to, "Because of the Dementors that are at Hogwarts, I've heard her. Voldemort," Slughorn almost jumped off his chair at the name, "hadn't wanted to kill her but she didn't move when he told her to. She died to save me." Slughorn's eyes were misty and Harry went on, "Professor Dumbledore doesn't believe Voldemort," another violent flinch from Slughorn, "is truly gone. And whatever he is asking from you could help him make sure my mother's sacrifice wasn't in vain. Could help him make sure no other promises in Potions are robbed of their chance at brilliance."

At this exact moment Dumbledore came back as if he had just been waiting for his cue to enter. Harry saw Slughorn cough a little to disguise his watery eyes.

"Bad weather Horace? You should have that checked," Dumbledore said in a concerned voice.

"No, just got something stuck in my throat. Are you leaving?"

"Yes, we should go. As I said, Harry has an appointment. Shall we Harry?"

Harry got up at once and turned to Slughorn extending a hand, "A pleasure to meet you Professor."

"My pleasure boy. Do feel free to come by some other time," Slughorn said as he shook Harry's hand.

"Will do, sir," Harry said and followed Dumbledore out. When they were already out the door and almost at the gate Slughorn called:

"Albus wait," he conjured a vial, and touching the tip of his wand to his forehead, he took a silvery strand that Harry knew to be a memory and put in the vial. He handed it to Dumbledore and whispered:

"I was just trying to inform a student, I never thought he would -- I didn't know..." he said distraught.

"I never thought you did Horace," Dumbledore said calmly, "We all make mistakes. Thank you." With a smile Dumbledore led Harry away. When they were out of Slughorn's range of hearing, he said to Harry.

"You are truly your father's son Harry."

"Why? What did my first dad do?"

"Who said I was talking of James?" he said and Harry grinned.

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A/N- So, now you know why I chose Harry's and Severus Animagus forms. I thought that Prongs being Harry's Patronus didn't apply to this story and at the same time I thought he wouldn't be able to choose from one of his "parents" so I wanted it to be a representation of the three of them. I still wanted Harry to have something that made him connect with James and I thought that his Animagus form could do that.

I exchanged Flint for Montague because Harry is friends with Flint here.

Thank you very much all of you that click here and read this and special thanks for those who take the time to review. I can't respond to all of you personally but I appreciate each and every one of your comments.

Big thanks to SWaddict1986 for correcting my mistakes and giving me tips.

I don't own Harry Potter.

Chapter 26- In which Severus scowls

"So, what did you think of Slughorn?" Sirius asked.

He and Harry were slumped on the couch in the Marauder's Quarters. They, with Severus, Remus and Dumbledore, had just watched the memory Slughorn gave to Dumbledore. It wasn't that the memory told them anything new; most of it Dumbledore had already figured out, but it confirmed their theories. Voldemort had indeed chosen to make seven Horcruxes, since seven is the strongest magical number and he most probably made Marvolo's ring a Horcrux, since he was wearing it in the memory.

Harry shrugged, "I'm not his greatest fan but I don't know him enough to dislike him. I didn't like the way he talked about you and Uncle Regulus, like the two of you were objects. He said he would have 'liked to have the set'."

Sirius laughed, "That sounds like old Sluggy. He's not that bad, he just likes to surround himself with important people, and the Blacks were very important. I am guessing that's why Albus wanted you in your formal attire. He wanted Slughorn to be very interested in you. Mind you, being The Boy Who Lived would have been more than enough, but add that to being a Black and a Potter and you skyrocketed in his opinion."

Harry grunted, he hated the shallowness of people sometime.

"He had his little club of favorites. Reggie, Cissy, Andy and Bellatrix were of course in it, being Blacks. In our year he had Severus and Lily. Not so much for their background since Lily was Muggleborn and Severus was a disgraced Prince, but for their promise. That's one thing he does know how to see; promise. He tried getting me and James but we couldn't be bothered, especially since Slughorn hadn't shown a slice of interest in Moony, even though Moony was the best student in our year in most classes. He knew he was brilliant but he also knew that, as a werewolf, Moony would never have the chances to get very high, so he dismissed him. That didn't sit well with me and Prongs."

Harry scowled; he definitely liked Slughorn less and less by each word.

"I know it's shallow Harry, but it's not that he is a bad guy or prejudiced. I don't think he gave a damn that Moony is a werewolf, but he knew that Wizarding Society does and therefore he acted in his best interest. He is a Slytherin after all, and unfortunately associating with Moony wasn't in his best interest. Even if he acts and looks shallow, deep down Sluggy is okay. He brewed all kinds of special healing balms for the aftermath of the full moon, even though Dumbledore didn't ask him to. He went beyond his responsibility of brewing the standard potions for the Hospital Wing, Even though he didn't advertise it like he did other things, he still did care."

Harry shrugged. Okay, maybe the guy wasn't *that* bad. He looked at his watch and groaned, "I have to go to the library. If I'm lucky I can still cram half an hour of research."

"Or you could just relax. Enjoy the day," Sirius prompted.

"No, thank you dad. I'm going," he said patting Sirius' knees and running off. As he left, Harry shook his head at Sirius' pout, his dad would do anything to postpone his transformation as much as he could.

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"What's this Hermione?" Ron asked from his spot at the table during breakfast. Neville gave him a look that clearly said, "Like you don't know." But honestly, Ron liked to be positive and hope that one year Hermione would forget.

"Your study schedule for finals Ronald," Hermione answered in her no nonsense voice as she passed Harry and Neville theirs.

"In yours Harry, I put time for you to study whatever you've been studying with Professors Black and Lupin."

"What?" Harry squeaked.

"Oh, come on Harry. The whole year you haven't been even slightly rebellious about Hogsmeade. It's obvious that you are otherwise engaged." Neville rolled his eyes.

"We don't mind Harry. Everyone has stuff they do with their family and not necessarily tell their friends. It's normal. Besides, knowing Professor Lupin it probably involves a lot of books," Ron shuddered.

Harry grinned at Hermione's outraged look, "There is nothing wrong with books Ron!"

"It's just a family tradition," Harry said apologetically, "But I can't tell anyone. I'm sorry. The second I'm allowed, you'll be the first to know."

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As the weeks went by and the end of term approached, Severus made some progress with his Animagus form. He had managed to turn all of his skin into fur.

"Well done!" Sirius beamed.

"I still have a lot to go," Severus grumbled but Sirius wasn't discouraged.

"You'll get there."

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"Now team, I want you to go out there tomorrow and win!" Sirius told the assembled Quidditch team on their last training session before the final, "I have a big bet with Professor Snape and can't wait to take the cup from his grubby hands!" he finished with a faraway look.

"Hem, hem," Harry cleared his throat, "You aren't supposed to bet with other teachers sir, much less tell us about it."

Sirius looked at Harry shocked and then at the rest of the sweaty team, "All the teachers bet! You know that!"

"We do sir," Angelina said diplomatic, "But you're not supposed to tell us. You're supposed to pretend you don't."

"But then you won't know what's at stake here! I've been losing bets to that man for years! I *need* to win!" Sirius cried and Oliver patted him sympathetically.

"I understand you sir!"

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Another foul occurred and Severus cringed. Great, this way they were just supporting the gossip that happened after the fake Dementors disaster. Sirius was bouncing next to him. He was so sure he was going to win that bet, oh but he wouldn't. Severus made it clear to his team he wanted a win, especially after what Malfoy did. They needed to improve their House's name.

And what was Malfoy doing? He kept tailing Harry instead of looking for the Snitch. Severus knew Harry had no intention of going after the Snitch before his team had the necessary advantage in points to win the Cup. He wanted to stop the game and make Malfoy go after the Snitch, but *noooo*, the Heads of House weren't allowed to do that. That was just for the captain. Stupid rule. Severus had to be tortured as Malfoy did nothing, and even *worse*, Harry was duping him to keep him from the Snitch! *Get the stupid Snitch boy! Stop the game now while we still can win the cup!*

"YOU CHEATING SCUM!" Severus heard Lee Jordan bellow and he had to agree. He would have to have some words with Flint. The boy usually went for a rougher approach but never out right cheated like this. He sorely suspected Malfoy must have had something to do with this. Unfortunately, Malfoy got a lot of what he wanted because no Slytherin was stupid of going against Lucius Malfoy's son. Flint was no different than the others and, just as Severus personally knew, must know that sometimes in order to survive he had to go against his better judgment. Severus looked up at the score and cringed. He hoped Malfoy was able to turn Harry's game on him now and give his teammates time to score.

Oh, no, oh, no. Please no!

"YES!" Sirius roared and Severus rubbed his ear.

"No need to make me deaf Black!"

"I believe you owe me some money Severus," Sirius said brightly extending his hand.

"Me too," Minerva said sobbing and hugging Remus in a very uncharacteristic display from behind him.

Severus scowled. He scowled as he handed them the money. He scowled as he handed Albus the cup and Albus had to force it out of his grip. He scowled as Albus handed the Quidditch Cup to Minerva in front of the whole school. He scowled as the Cup was passed to each member of the Gryffindor team. He scowled as Sirius snickered about Harry blushing when a Ravenclaw girl congratulated him, and he scowled even more when he saw Sirius hug the Cup to his chest and shake his head when Minerva tried to pry it from him to take it to her office.

"It's in the Head of House's office that it's supposed to stay Sirius," she scolded.

"But I am deputy!" he wined.

"Yes, and I am Head. Now give it here."

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"Ron, Trewlaney is one big fraud!" Harry said.

"I know Harry, but this was weird. She went all rigid, eyes unfocused and started talking in a different voice. What if she was making a real prediction?"

"What did she say?" Hermione asked from Ron's left. The three of them plus Neville were walking back to Gryffindor Tower after their last exam of term.

"IT WILL HAPPEN TONIGHT. THE DARK LORD LIES ALONE AND FRIENDLESS, ABANDONED BY HIS FOLLOWERS. HIS SERVANTS HAVE BEEN CHAINED THESE TWELVE YEARS. TONIGHT, BEFORE MIDNIGHT... THE SERVANTS WILL BREAK FREE AND SET OUT TO REJOIN THEIR MASTER. THE DARK LORD WILL RISE AGAIN WITH HIS SERVANTS' AID ...TONIGHT... BEFORE MIDNIGHT...THE SERVANTS...WILL SET OUT...TO REJOIN...THEIR MASTER...."

"Do you think it has anything to do with Lestrage and Pettigrew?" Neville asked frowning. "They've been chained for twelve years."

"But they escaped almost a year ago," Harry said, "And she said they'll set out to look for their master tonight."

"Maybe that means they'll give up on catching you?" Hermione said rightly.

"The only time they tried anything was on Halloween. I bet they already gave up," Harry said but the others looked skeptical. "Okay, I'll let Dumbledore know. Are you happy now?"

That seemed to appease them. Suddenly Harry looked around and said, "Aren't we going to the Tower? This isn't the way."

"No, we're going to see Professor McGonagall first," Hermione said flatly, "I have to talk to her."

The boys snickered, remembering what Hermione's Boggart in their DADA final had been. It took his Uncle a good twenty minutes to assure Hermione she had not failed everything.

Harry at least decided it was worth the detour since he just told Professor McGonagall about Trewlaney and she would tell Dumbledore. Her lips had pursed and Harry knew what she thought of Trewlaney but Harry had plans for the rest of the afternoon and didn't want to have to go chase his grandfather, wherever he was. Besides, he didn't put much stock on Trewlaney either.

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Harry heard a loud crack and turned.

"Hi there Kreacher. What's up?" he asked from his bed.

Kreacher was holding a goblet in one of his hands and twisting his little pillow case with the other.

"Kreacher is bringing Master some juice."

"Thanks," Harry said taking the juice and resting it on the nightstand, "You didn't have to." Harry surveyed Kreacher. He was very nervous, twisting his hands and looking at everything but Harry.

"Master please be careful. Kreacher is liking Master Harry. Kreacher is not wanting anything bad to happen to Master Harry."

Harry got off the bed and kneeled down. He put a hand on Kreacher's shoulder, "Relax. Nothing is going to happen. Nothing has happened since Halloween and that was just a scare. I'm safe."

Kreacher looked like he wanted to say something but instead he started hitting his head.

"Hey, stop that Kreacher. What have I said about punishing yourself? You know what? I think you're stressed out. Why don't you take the rest of the day and tomorrow off to rest?"

Kreacher lunged at Harry hugging him and sobbing, "Oh, Master Harry is so good and Kreacher is being a bad elf!"

"No, hey. You're a good elf," Harry said patting Kreacher's back and looked confused at Ron and Dean, who were staring at the display. The two boys didn't seem to know how to help.

"Kreacher, go rest okay," Harry said quietly, "A lot."

With a last sob the little elf disappeared.

"That is one mental elf," Ron said.

"I don't know why he's stranger than usual," Harry looked worried. "I'll talk to dad later." He said, taking a sip from his juice.

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Hours later, Harry was having a hard time keeping his eyes opened as he read. He wanted to finish this passage. He had already given his dad the essay but he wanted to make sure there was no reason for Sirius to say he needed to study more.

"We're going to the Great Hall for dinner, wanna come?" Ron asked.

Harry shook his head as he yawned, "No, gotta finish my reading," he pointed at his disguised book.

"Yuck, Potions!" Dean cried. "Harry, finals are over!"

Harry just shrugged and Dean, Seamus, Neville and Ron left. Harry continued reading but he blinked more and more as the minutes went by. The words were getting blurrier and the pillow he was propped against was getting softer; and in no time Harry was lost in dreamland.

A soft pop was heard and with a smirk a squeaky voice said, "Now, where do you keep your father's cloak Harry?"

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A/N- I know. Short chapter. But honestly, who could resist that cliffhanger?

Loved all my reviews.

Thanks to SWaddict1986 as usual for betaing.

Some people asked me how I viewed the werewolf and to me Moony looks just like a regular wolf with some minor differences that only an expert would know how to tell. Actually if you want to see how I view Moony, I have a little picture of a werewolf cub in my profile and he would be the adult version of that one there.

I don't own this.

Some of you figured out some didn't but here you have the answer to Kreacher's loyalties:

Chapter 26- In which Severus scowls

Harry just shrugged. Dean, Seamus, Neville and Ron left. Harry continued reading but he blinked more and more each time. The words were getting blurrier and blurrier. The pillow he was propped against was getting softer and softer and in no time Harry was lost in dreamland.

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Chapter 27- Be the wolf

When Remus came out of his room, he paused and frowned. Sirius was seated at the couch. One arm was resting on his knee and the other was propped up by his elbow, resting on the other knee. His face was resting on his fist and he was staring dejectedly at a stack of parchments.

"Padfoot, what's wrong?" Remus asked sitting next to Sirius worried.

"Harry's essay," Sirius mumbled.

"That bad?" Remus winced.

"No," Sirius cried desperately, "It's perfect! How could he do this to me?"

Remus really tried to sympathize as he saw his friend's pained face, but he just couldn't resist.

"That's awful Paddy. The nerve of handing you a perfect essay. Kids nowadays have no respect whatsoever. No consideration. Cheeky little bugger!"

"This isn't funny Moony," Sirius hissed glaring, "What am I going to do now?"

Remus sighed and ran a hand through his hair, "It's the last week of term and afterwards he's not allowed to do magic. It would be pointless to start now. So tell him he'll have to wait until September."

"And then?"

"And then Paddy you can't postpone anymore. Sorry," he said sympathetically.

Sirius slumped back on the couch miserably. Remus chuckled lightly. Sirius looked at his friend when he heard the chuckle morph into a swear. He followed Remus' gaze and the blood drained from his face.

They both set off on a run.

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Harry opened his eyes blearily. He felt a hard surface against his back. As his vision focused he saw a woman smiling at him. He shivered; this was no warm smile. This smile sent creeps down Harry's spine.

It looked so wrong. He recognized the face. She looked so much like Aunt Andy, but where Aunt Andy's features radiated warmth she radiated evil.

"So nice of you to join us Harry," she said sweetly as she ran the tip of a wand down his face. Harry was horrified to see that it was the tip of his wand.

"How rude of me. I didn't introduce myself properly did I? I am your Auntie Bellatrix. I am sure daddy Blood traitor must have told you all about me," she said getting up from her kneeling position. Harry looked around. He was in a dust covered and very battered room with furniture that looked like it had been chewed. A distant memory from the Marauder's tales came up, and Harry knew where he was. He tried to get up but Bellatrix swiftly pointed his wand at him.

"Na, na, Harry. Don't move."

He stopped mid motion, already propped up by his elbows.

"You must be wondering why I haven't killed you yet," Bellatrix said as if talking to a small child she was helping, "Don't fret. I will. But first I want to take you to my Lord so he can have his revenge. And of course, I want to have a little fun, *Crucio*."

His bones were on fire; he had never experienced so much pain, not even at the end of his first year. His eyes were rolling back and he was biting his lips so to not cry out, he wouldn't give her the satisfaction. After what seemed to be an eternity, as suddenly as the pain came it stopped.

"It won't do to break you completely," Bellatrix said with a pout, "You know Harry. Your daddy should have given Kreacher clothes," she laughed evilly. "You see, Kreacher didn't want to obey me. Nope he did not. But he is bound by his magic to obey me because I am a Black. Of course," she said tilting her head, "I couldn't make him hurt you directly. The magic doesn't allow a house-elf to directly harm his master. But I was able to summon him and order Kreacher to get a certain rat inside the castle on Halloween and inside Gryffindor Tower today." A strangled squeak was heard and Harry saw for the first time a balding, rat-faced man trying to squeeze himself against the wall. "See, I provided Kreacher with a pumpkin juice laced with a mild sleeping draught and ordered him to give it to you. But most importantly, I ordered him right in the beginning not to tell anyone about my orders or give them hints. He didn't have a choice. And now, thanks to him and that nice shining cloak you have, Peter was able to get you here with no one finding out. Isn't it perfect Harry? Just the three of us."

Harry was trembling with a mixture of the after effects of the Cruciatus Curse and rage. He saw that Pettigrew was clutching his Invisibility Cloak, his dad's Invisibility Cloak. "Take your traitor paws off my dad's cloak," he hissed.

"No, no, no, Harry. You don't get to make demands here. Maybe another dose will teach you, *Crucio*," Bellatrix said in a singsong voice.

"Bella," Harry heard Pettigrew squeak from afar. The sounds were somewhat muffled by the intense pain Harry was in. "We shouldn't linger. Someone might come."

Bellatrix lifted the curse and looked annoyed at Pettigrew, "No one will come Peter. They don't know we're here."

"I wouldn't be so sure cousin," came an icy drawl while another voice shouted:

"Expelliarmus."

Caught off-guard Bellatrix lost Harry's wand. From his place on the floor, Harry saw Sirius with his wand digging in Pettigrew's cheek and Remus, who had two wands, right in front of Bellatrix, who didn't seem like she was going to give up just because she was unarmed. They were circling each other and Bellatrix foolishly lunged at Remus when he cried *"Incarcerous."*

Ropes wound around her and she fell on the floor. Sirius had considerably done the same to Peter and hissed angrily at him as he put the Invisibility Cloak in his pocket.

"You disgust me Peter. You were once as important to me as James and Remus. I would have died for you. But you broke that. You threw that away and for what?"

"I was scared," Pettigrew sobbed.

"We all were," Remus said dryly. He kneeled next to where Harry was trying to get up and helped him. Harry couldn't seem to stop shaking slightly.

"We'll get you to Poppy. She'll give you something for the after effects of the curse," he said gently. Harry nodded.

Sirius came to them, never shifting his gaze from the prisoners, "You okay pup?" he softly kissed Harry's head. Harry wasn't, but it wasn't the time or place to dawdle so he nodded.

"We should levitate them. It'll be safer," Remus said.

"They're quiet," Harry noted.

"Bella can get annoyingly chatty," Sirius said patting Bellatrix's cheek. She was floating mid air in a horizontal position, and if looks could kill Sirius would be dead right now. "So I silenced them."

They set back to the castle through the passageway.

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The portrait door was banged open and Severus stalked in with all his fury.

"Lupin! How could you be so irresponsible!" he started to yell, but the Marauder's Quarters was empty. He swore furiously. "Where are you wolf?" he hissed as he banged the goblet he was carrying on the coffee table, "I am not your house-elf."

He was about to curse again, when his eyes landed on the wall. There, pinned and active as it had been all year since the twins gave it to Remus, was the Marauder's Map. Except there were two bright red dots that shouldn't have been there. Severus' heart dropped. Remus had charmed the map to show Bellatrix and Pettigrew in red so they could be spotted easily. He walked closer to the map and saw they were in the tunnel that led to the Shrieking Shack coming towards Hogwarts with Harry, Sirius and-- oh no-- Remus!

Severus looked outside and swore. He bolted out the door while sending a silver doe from his wand, and ran as fast as he could towards the Entrance Hall. He passed shocked students that weren't used to see him run. He sprinted towards his goal that never seemed to get any closer. He finally got out the castle doors and ran towards the Whomping Willow.

As he got closer his blood froze. He could see from the distance two bodies that had been floating drop to the ground. He saw Harry frozen on the spot and heard Sirius' cry of "Run Harry!" But there was no way Harry would be fast enough, because Severus also saw that Remus was almost completely transformed.

Severus kept running towards them and chanting in his head:

"Come on you can do this! You have to! You can't leave Sirius to hold Moony alone! Be the bloody wolf!"

He felt his skin tingle but it wasn't happening fast enough.

"Do you want Harry dead?" he screamed in his thought "You can do this!"

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Harry didn't want to leave Sirius alone but he knew Sirius had a better chance than he did. He started to scramble away but his legs were weak. His dad had helped him most of the way. There was no way he would be able to run fast enough but he had to try. Remus wouldn't forgive himself if he hurt Harry. That was one of the reasons that even with the Wolfsbane he never allowed Harry near him.

Harry was about to run when he saw Bellatrix getting ready to run too. Crap! Remus spell must have been canceled once he transformed, and she got free. She was grabbing the wand Remus had dropped and was freeing Pettigrew.

"*Expelliarmus!*" Harry cried and the wand flew out of her hand and into Harry's, but it was too late. Pettigrew transformed and was out of sight. Bellatrix smiled at Harry when they heard a loud growl. Moony and Padfoot were fighting. Padfoot was trying to keep Moony away from the humans but Moony was stronger.

"I think we're both going to die today Harry," she said pleasantly. She didn't seem scared as long as Harry died too.

Suddenly a completely black wolf joined the fight. Moony was being subdued by the two black canines. They were able to start backing Moony away from Harry and Bellatrix, and towards the lake.

"Guess not," Harry hissed pointing his wand at her. He knew he had to get out of here. What if Moony got free? But he couldn't let her escape. What was the spell Remus said, ah "*Incarcerous.*" But nothing happened and Bellatrix laughed.

"Forgot the wand movement Harry." She started to run away and Harry ran after her sending the hexes he knew. But it was dark and his arm was still shaking from the Cruciatus Curse making his aim almost non-existent. He heard her hiss after he sent a blistering hex but that wasn't enough to make her stop running. But Harry suddenly stopped pursuing her when he heard whines coming from the lake. Whines

that came from animals in pain. Harry didn't know what to do, if he went he could meet Moony there, but his dad and Uncle Sev could be badly injured. He took the Gryffindor way and ran towards the lake. He was panting with the effort of making his sore limbs obey him and it took him a while to realize that he was feeling colder.

He looked around and his heart dropped. Dementors. At least a hundred of them. Harry tried to run faster and he spotted the two he was looking for as they transformed back into humans. But they weren't moving. They were too injured to do so. Desperate, Harry dropped next to their lying forms and pointed his wand at the Dementors.

He could do this. He did it already. He started hearing his mother's cries but shook his head. No, he couldn't think of that. He conjured every happy memory he had. Goofing around with his friends, his Uncle Remus reading to him when he was little, rides in his dad's flying bike. Uncle Sev teaching him potions in his private lab and saying how proud he was. His grandfather sneaking him sweets. He mostly remembered how he felt safe and loved by them all and how he would not let them be hurt.

"EXPECTO PATRONUM!"

The silver Wolf-dog erupted from his wand and ran towards the approaching Dementors. It started driving them away and was trotting around him and the two fallen shapes in a protective way as the Dementors started backing out. Retreating into darkness. Harry kept urging his Patronus but the darkness was starting to overcome him. His injuries were painstakingly making their presence known and when Harry couldn't see any more Dementors his head fell on Severus' chest.

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Harry woke up to the sound of hushed conversation.

"How is he?" he heard his grandfather ask.

"Sore. He had some bruises and lacerations that I had to fix. He is a little more worse for wear than Sirius and Severus, but just as with them I fixed that already. He'll need rest. It's been more than a decade since he transformed without the potion. He wasn't used to it, naturally. But he'll recover physically," Poppy answered.

Harry stayed quiet in his bed and he could almost see his grandfather's sad face, "Poor boy. He always feared this. And the others?"

"Severus and Sirius had gashes that were results from the fight. They had lost a considerable amount of blood but I already gave them Blood Replenishing Potions and they should be fine once they wake up. Harry was the one I was most worried about. He had signs of the Cruciatus Curse being performed on him twice. That is enough to make any grown wizard need plenty of rest. But have it put on a growing boy! It was a miracle Harry was able to walk after that. I gave him potions to counter act the effects. I was worried it could leave lasting damage since he is so young, but thank God Harry is strong. On top of

that he was magically exhausted. It's a good thing that classes are over because he should refrain from performing any kind of magic for a couple of weeks at least."

"Understandable. He drove all those Dementors away by himself after being injured. I reached them as soon as I could after receiving Severus' message but by then all I saw was Harry's Patronus fading."

"And the Dementors?" Poppy asked crossed.

"Gone," Dumbledore answered, "Cornelius couldn't refuse once those Dementors attacked a child and two teachers, and let the convicts escape *again*. I'll let them rest."

As he heard the footsteps fade Harry looked around. His dad and Uncle Sev were in deep sleeps in the two beds next to him. A little farther there was another bed, but Harry could see from the shaking shoulders that the person on it was not asleep, even though he had his back to Harry. Harry got up gingerly, since he was still very sore, and walked towards the bed. As he went around it, he saw that the man on the bed was hiding under the blankets, with only his brown hair showing. Harry sat on the bed beside him, startling him. Brown pained eyes met green as the blanket came off his face. Harry softly kissed Remus' forehead and hugged him, mindful of his Uncle's injuries.

"It's okay Uncle Moony. Shh, everything worked out okay. Everything will be fine."

"I almost bit you," Remus whispered as if scared to even ponder the thought.

"But you didn't," Harry said firmly, "And if you had it wouldn't have been your fault. You had no control."

Remus shook his head and Harry held him close. The roles were reversed and this time Harry comforted Remus as he wept into Harry's chest.

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Sirius opened his eyes and looked around. Hospital Wing, just great! He hated being here. As the events of the previous night came to mind, he sat up quickly.

"Stay down Mr. Black," Madam Pomfrey's stern voice said. "I may have healed your cuts and scrapes but you are ordered to bed rest."

Sirius looked around and saw Severus in the bed next to him, being poked by the matron. He couldn't see Harry though, and was about to get hysterical when he spotted a faraway bed where Harry and Remus seemed to be asleep in a very awkward position. Harry was seated propped against the headboard and Remus was resting against Harry's chest.

"They will be fine. I put a cushioning charm on the headboard. I thought of moving Harry but that would wake them and God knows they both need to rest," Pomfrey said.

"What happened last night? I remember chasing Moony with help from a black wolf. That was you right Severus?"

"Yes," Severus answered, "I thought he was going to overpower us. I had never fought a werewolf before. I remember him running away. Then I remember turning back into a human and feeling cold. That's the last thing I remember."

"Me too," Sirius said and looked expectantly at Poppy. She sighed and related the rest of the night's event.

"And this morning Albus went into the forest to look for Remus," she finished.

"I am going to kill him!" Severus cried at the same time that Sirius cried:

"He'll be grounded for the rest of his life!"

"Keep your voices down!" Pomfrey said sternly, "If you wake those two I'll be the one doing the killings here."

"He could have died Poppy!" Sirius said in a lower distressed tone.

"And you two *would* have died, or worse, if Harry hadn't done something, Sirius!" she said sternly,

"Albus himself says he would have been too late."

Severus huffed and scowled crossing his arms, "He should have ran to safety like Sirius told him to, and left us to fend for ourselves. *We* are the adults here."

"Oh, stop that Severus!" She said annoyed, "Yes, he should, but you should know by now that Harry would never do that. And it's not like he goes looking for this kind of trouble. There is no need to ground him forever."

Sirius huffed too. Poppy said nothing else while she finished her examination. Once she left them alone,

Sirius said tapping his chin with his finger:

"Blackie."

"Excuse me?" Severus asked.

"Your nickname; Blackie."

Severus raised one eyebrow and hissed, "I will not be called *Blackie*."

"Sorry, you don't get to choose your nickname. Or do you really think Moony chose his, huh? Prongs, Wormtail. Need I say more? Nope, and unfortunately for you, my nickname was chosen last, Prongs and Moony got to choose twice and I didn't get to choose any, it was so unfair. And I've been waiting almost twenty years for revenge, Blackie."

Severus scowled and glared but Sirius just smiled.

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A/N- I know you wanted to know how they escaped Azkaban but don't fret, I'll tell you. Eventually.

I had to reread the passage at the last book where Harry defeats Voldemort and it says "the wand flew toward the master it wouldn't kill." So I figured Bellatrix wouldn't have been able to kill Harry with his own wand since he was still the Master. He wasn't exactly disarmed, he was drugged and then Pettigrew stole the wand. That's not winning it. But I think she could hurt him, hence the Cruciatius. She didn't know she couldn't kill him though.

If you are interested to know; in my twisted head James chose: Moony and Padfoot, and Remus: Prongs and Wormtail. I didn't want to ruin any of the nicknames by having Peter choose them. Silly, I know.

Thanks you all for reading and reviewing.

Humongous thanks to SWaddict1986 for betaing so quickly.

I don't own any of this!

Chapter 28- Letting them go

Sirius yawned and stretched. He was rubbing the remains of sleep from his eyes when he opened the door of his room and stopped. What was Moony up to?

Remus was systematically packing his books in boxes.

"Huh, Moony. I know you love your books and all but you have copies of most of them at home. Why are you packing them for the holidays?"

"I am not packing for the holidays," Remus said without stopping what he was doing. "I'm resigning."

"WHAT?" Sirius yelled, "Why the bloody hell would you do something so humongously stupid like that?"

Remus stopped mid motion of putting a book in one of the boxes and looked at Sirius sadly, "You know why."

"No, I don't. Please enlighten me. And what do you intend to do? Be cooped up at Grimmauld Place all year long while we're here?"

Remus bit his lip, and without meeting Sirius's eyes stated, "I'm actually moving. There's that cottage my parents left me. I'll be moving in there."

Sirius furiously stalked to where Remus was and yanked the book from his hand. Then as he started taking books from one of the boxes he hissed, "I will not allow you to abandon me and Harry."

"Sirius," Remus said tiredly, "I have to go. It's for the best."

"For the best!" Sirius cried, "Exactly how is you running away for the best?"

"I almost bit him!" Remus yelled losing his composure, "I can't risk it again!"

"That," Sirius said through gritted teeth while walking to Remus, stopping only inches from his face and poking his chest with an index finger, "was an accident that won't happen again."

"How can you be so sure? What if I forget my potion again?" Remus cried desperately.

"You won't. You never have before. This was a fluke. There were extenuating circumstances," Sirius waved widely.

"That doesn't make me less dangerous. I can't risk Harry and the rest of the students like that. One mistake again and I could bite someone!"

"You won't," said a new voice from the door.

Sirius and Remus turned abruptly to see Severus entering the portrait hole and closing it.

"God Severus, can you please make noise when you walk?" Sirius said faintly.

Severus smirked at Sirius, then turning to Remus he said, "Dumbledore told me you handed in your letter of resignation. He also said he burned it."

"Severus," Remus started.

"Apparently he has someone for the DADA post next year and wants you back tutoring," he continued as if Remus hadn't said anything.

"I can't-"

"You can wait until September to make your final decision," Severus said.

"What difference would it make?" Remus asked tiredly.

Severus motioned for them to take seats. Sirius sat at once. If Severus managed to crack Remus' thick skull, he was all for it. Remus sat slumped and Severus sat calmly.

"For quite a few years now I have been developing a new potion. It took me quite a while since all the contacts I made had to be made under disguise, and quietly too; it wouldn't do for a known Death Eater to be searching for a cure to Lycanthropy. It's not what we are supposedly interested in," Severus started and the Marauders' jaws fell.

"You mean you found-" Sirius stuttered but Severus cut him off with a grim shake of his head.

"Not yet. But I managed to tweak the Wolfsbane to make it permanent. I've just finished it last week. Unfortunately it was late for testing on the last full moon since Remus had already started his monthly dose when I finally got it to work," Severus finished bitterly.

"What do you mean permanent?" Remus asked cautiously.

"I mean that you only have to take it once. Well not exactly once, you have to take the seven doses in the week prior to the full moon, but after that the effects are permanent and you won't have to take it again. On the following full moons you should be able to keep your mind without having to take the potion. Of course, I need to test it. Make sure my changes didn't make the original potion ineffective, and of course that it works on the next full moon. So I was going to ask you if you consent to being locked in a cage for the next two full moons."

Remus looked between shocked and ecstatic, "Severus. That is huge! That means never having to worry again. Never depending on being able to have access to the potion!"

"I know that. I just hoped I had finished this before Pettigrew and Lestrage escaped. That whole situation could have been avoided."

"It's not your fault," Remus looked ashamed.

"Neither is it yours," Severus said sternly, "So stop wallowing in self-pity."

Sirius looked like he could kiss Severus and Severus continued to explain:

"It also has a numbing effect so the transformation will feel just like when an Animagus changes forms and it shouldn't put any strain on you anymore. I hope it doesn't. It should take away any recovery time you needed before."

"How long have you been working on this?" Sirius asked.

"Roughly about eight years," Sirius and Remus looked impressed, "As I said, it took longer than it would have because I couldn't freely contact potions experts to exchange theories. Sometimes someone else can have an insight on something you missed. For instance, when I talked to Belby I had to use Polyjuice so he wouldn't recognize me. I mostly had to get through all the walls I hit on my own, with a little help from Albus now and then. Even Harry gave me some insight a few times," Severus smirked proudly.

"Harry knew?" Sirius asked shocked.

"Oh, yes. He found out when he was eight, and he and Albus have helped me with more than just insights," Severus smirked again at Sirius.

"You're The Pro-Werewolf Association?" Sirius asked in a shocked whisper.

"The what?" Remus asked.

"When Harry was eight he came to me very seriously with a bunch of very official looking parchments, asking if he could contribute money to The Pro-Werewolf Association, who was a new group researching a cure. Everything looked in order and I asked Albus if he knew about them and he confirmed they were a very respectable group. From then on Harry has been contributing a monthly sum from his Potter vaults. You, you three duped me!"

"Yes we did," Severus said satisfied, "The Pro-Werewolf Association has funding from Albus, myself and Harry. That is how we were able to by ingredients, special cauldrons, as I melted quite a few, books, Polyjuice ingredients and of course trips around the world to talk to potions experts that might help without making a noticeable dent on any of the three accounts. Not that it would much since they are all pretty full, but I didn't want Harry depleting his vaults and he was adamant about helping. The Pro-Werewolf Association also provides a cover. Harry, Albus and I are the founders but when the potion comes out it will be in the Association's name and not mine. The owners are not disclosed so we don't risk my position."

Sirius pouted and crossed his arms as he slumped on his chair. Remus shook his head at their antics. This was very well thought out.

"Not that I am not grateful but why did you dedicate so much time into his?" he asked.

Severus looked at him as if considering his response, "To be honest? I was scared shitless of you."

Remus looked shocked.

"Not of you in human form but of the fact that you spent the night as a werewolf in the same place as Harry. Oh, I know rationally that even without the potion you would not be able to get through the wards you two put on the doors. And that at Grimmauld Place, even without wards, you wouldn't be able to get through that steel door in your basement, but fear isn't rational. And I couldn't bear the thought of losing Harry. I had decided when Lily died that I would be lonely until the day I died. That there was nothing left for me, but Harry proved me wrong, and I just couldn't lose that. I kept picturing his small body mauled by a werewolf." Remus shivered at this. He had the same fears, "I couldn't help it. Later on, especially more recently it has been for you too Remus, but not when I started. When I started I barely tolerated the both of you."

"Reasonable," Remus said.

"How are you going to release the potion?" Sirius asked.

Severus rested his chin on the tip of his thumb that was propped up by the elbow resting on the arm of his chair, "It's tricky. I don't want to make the brewing instructions public. The Wolfsbane is a very

complicated potion that requires a very expert Potion's Master to brew. That make's it harder for werewolves that choose to attack, like Fenrir Greyback, to get their hands on it. He already is dangerous and has more control over what he does than others. How he manages to bite the children and take them without killing them I could never know. But imagine him with total control. It would be a disaster. Even he could manage to find someone to brew him the potion once if everyone knows it."

Sirius and Remus shivered; that was a scary thought.

"We thought that they could come to us to get it. This way we would have some control, and know who takes it. But that is dangerous; what if the Ministry decides to make some kind of registry?"

"They would love that," Remus said bitterly, "I know Dolores Umbridge has a few very nasty laws up for voting. Albus says she doesn't have enough votes, but I'm sure that if what happened here had been known to more than just us she would."

"Yes, Albus is trying to find if there is a way to protect the Association's register from the Ministry so that they can't force us to show it. I think this way more werewolves will come forward too. Also we don't want to advertise to the general public what the Association has planned. Just let the rumor go through the underground. Let the werewolves know."

"I know a few choice people I could let know from my contacts in the war," Remus said, "They could make sure word gets around."

"We'll let the public know a new potion has been developed that renders werewolves harmless, well not exactly harmless but tamed forever, but not the recipe. We think that maybe with time, people may get less suspicious of werewolves if they know they are tame."

"That will take more than a potion Severus," Remus said bitterly.

"Probably. But it's a start," Sirius said happily.

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"But Andy-" Sirius said.

"No buts Siri," Andy's head said from the fireplace. "I am not living my life in fear of my lunatic sister. I miss my house and we are going back."

Sirius huffed and crossed his arms.

"After her narrow escape, she must be long gone Siri. Even Bella isn't that nuts to stick around."

"Albus thinks they went after Voldemort," he grunted.

"I agree. And as much as that is a daunting thought, I think you can loosen security. We are going back home and *you* could let your son have a little fun."

Sirius huffed again "I already agreed he can go back in the train. Remus will be with him and we are sending Filius and Pomona too."

"Good," Andromeda said pleased, "Relax Sirius or you'll get wrinkles." Sirius jumped and looked at a big mirror they had on top of the fireplace. He examined his face worriedly.

"I was kidding Sirius!"

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"You kids had a nice term?" Mrs. Weasley asked as she hugged her brood and then hugged Harry, Hermione and Neville for good measure.

"Yes, Mrs. Weasley. Thank you," Harry said happily as Mrs. Weasley examined him.

"Are you sure you are well? I was ever so worried when I heard."

"Yes, Mrs. Weasley. Madam Pomfrey fixed me real quick."

Even though no one knew about Remus transforming, the whole school found out about Pettigrew kidnapping Harry and he and Bellatrix escaping while the Dementors almost attacked Harry and two teachers, who they all assumed were Sirius and Remus. The general belief was that by attacking them the Dementors aided the convicts escape.

Poor Kreacher had been inconsolable and Harry tried to reassure him that he didn't blame him; he understood the house-elf laws. In order for nothing like that to happen again, Sirius ordered Kreacher not to take orders from Bellatrix, Narcissa, Lucius or Draco. Since he was the Lord of the family, and therefore the most important Master, the magic would recognize that order even though the others were Blacks too. Sirius wanted to kick himself for not doing that sooner. He had once again tried to give the elf clothes but the bawling that followed that request almost left him deaf.

Harry had been smothered by his worried friends after the ordeal. He was still a little sore and tired so he didn't complain much about them getting him stuff while he slept most of the last days of term off.

Hermione was greeting her parents and Neville his grandmother when Remus stepped behind Harry and said shortly:

"We have to go."

"Okay. Just a sec," Harry said.

He turned to his friends and said seriously, "Don't forget to write. We have to make plans for the Quidditch Cup. Dad said he was getting tickets."

Neville looked at his Grandmother and sighed, "I don't think Gran will let me go."

"Oh, I think she will," Harry said mischievously. "Never underestimate Sirius Black."

Harry was tapped on the shoulder and looked to see his Uncle's impatient face.

"Yeah, okay, gotta go."

Choruses of "Bye, Harry" and "Goodbye Professor Lupin" were heard.

Remus grunted a goodbye and they left.

"What's up with him?" Harry heard Ron ask.

He looked at his Uncle, and with his index finger and thumb, tried pushing his Uncle's lips to form a smile. His hand was swatted away.

They walked to the empty alley as usual and Apparated from there to the shadowy corner of Privet Drive, and walked to Number Four. Petunia opened the door.

"You're back," she sneered.

"Believe me if I never saw your face again it would be too soon," Remus said and Petunia blanched.

He ushered Harry up the stairs and Harry led the way to their room.

Remus looked around and sneered.

"Very Spartan."

"You know, Uncle Moony is usually a little more cheery," Harry said sitting on the bed.

"Umph," Remus huffed as his features started morphing into Severus'. "One more second and we would have been too late."

At that exact moment the door burst opened and in came a righteously angry Petunia, "Now listen here. You can't talk to me like- YOU!" she shrieked.

Severus looked at her with disdain, "Yes, me. Lupin is otherwise engaged and could not come. As you noticed, for your benefit I used Polyjuice to mimic his looks while outside so your neighbors won't talk."

It was actually for Severus' benefit but there was no need to let her know that. "But I refuse to do so in here."

"The deal was with Lupin," she shrieked.

"He can't come," Severus said in his low whisper, "Would you rather have Black here?"

Petunia looked like she was choosing between two horrible evils and finally hissed, "No, but stay in here, you awful boy," she finished twitching her nose in disgust.

"I haven't been a boy for a very long time *Tuney*," Severus smirked.

"Don't call me that!" she hissed.

"Fine, why don't you go bake," he said shooing her with his hands.

"It was you! I knew it!" she cried as Severus closed the door on her face.

Harry was trying to muffle his laughter with the thin pillow.

"Always hated her," Severus said and huffed. "This is going to be hell."

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Meanwhile, Sirius, Remus and Albus were walking down a country lane bordered by high hedgerows. They were all wearing Muggle attire, and while Remus and Sirius were wearing normal jeans, shirts and trainers, Albus was wearing a rather vivid and old-fashioned purple velvet suit. Sirius had been very good and not commented at all on Albus' suit. Which said a lot about how serious the mission was.

If anyone looked at them, they would think they were walking to some type of business meeting since Remus had hanging from his shoulders one of those tubes that architects use to transport blueprints. They kept walking until they entered a gap in the hedge, leading to a narrow dirt track bordered by higher and wilder hedgerows.

The threesome discreetly had their wands out as soon as they were out of view. As they walked on purposefully, they quickly came in view of what could only be described as the ruins of a house. It wasn't that it had been blown up like the Potter's house had, but it was obvious nobody had lived here in

decades. The house had that abandoned look; the walls were mossy and almost all of the tiles had fallen off the roof. Spider webs could be seen everywhere and all it took to open the door was a little nudge of Sirius' foot for the rotten wood to budge.

They slowly and alertly entered what looked to be a kitchen and living room combined. The layer of dust was thick and as they stepped in the house, the flying dust was illuminated by the vast amount of sun light that entered through the almost non-existent roof.

"There seems to be only three rooms," Albus said in a low tone pointing to two doors that led from the main room.

"Good," Remus nodded, "Then it won't take long to search. The faster we're out of here the better. I don't like this place."

"I'll keep guard," Sirius knowing this was Albus and Remus's territory.

They all separated. Sirius stood at the entrance door in a position to see both inside and out while Albus and Remus each went through one door. They started chanting detection spells as they slowly swept every inch of each room. After over an hour they both met in the main room.

"It has to be in this one," Remus said. "There were no concealing charms in my room but I could detect some nearby."

Albus nodded, "The same here. I had already thought that. Even in a miserable shack like this one Tom would go for grandeur and choose the main room. But we had to sweep everything in any case. Shall I start at one end and you the other and we meet in the middle?"

Remus nodded and they once again started. They reminded Sirius of something he saw in a Muggle telly once, where the Muggles were looking for metal in the desert with a weird contraption that had a stick with a disk at the bottom. Their movements were similar, anyway.

Again, it took almost an hour of their sweeping, and as they were nearing each other, a blue light surrounded the armchair that was by the fireplace and Sirius recognized it to be the one Morfin Gaunt had been sitting when he talked to his nephew. Figures!

The light was encapsulating both armchair and the fireplace and as Albus and Remus slowly approached while chanting louder, the blue light got smaller and smaller until it was only surrounding one of the bricks that surrounded the fireplace. Sirius approached them.

"It must come out," he said. "It must be loose. Should we take it out?"

"Not yet," Albus said. "First we have to cancel the protection charms," and Sirius saw that as Albus waved his wand around the brick, the blue light changed colors a few times.

"This will take time Padfoot," Remus grimaced. You better keep guard again."

Sirius nodded and resumed his post as Remus and Albus started chanting again.

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"Does he know what you did?" Petunia asked from the door.

Severus, who had been reading at the desk, turned around and raised one eyebrow. Harry was taking a shower and he hoped he came back soon.

"Because I do," she said calmly entering the room.

"What you think you know and what you actually do are two completely different things," he drawled.

"Oh, I heard her crying to our mother," she said looking pleased, "Mum asked why you hadn't been around that summer and she broke. Told her all about you calling her a Mudblood," Severus blood turned to ice. His worst memory being flaunted like that by Petunia of all people was the last thing he wanted, and yet, he wanted to hear what Lily said. "She said she forgave you for that, she loved you like a brother and wanted to still be your friend, but she couldn't condone what you were turning into," Petunia smiled evilly, "Does Harry know that you are a servant of the man that killed his parents?"

Severus inhaled sharply, he had loved Lily more than as a brother but to know that she never stopped loving him even after all he did was a small comfort to his everlasting torture. If he had only been less bitter towards his abusive father and, in turn, to all Muggles. If he had only turned away from Malfoy, Mulciber and Avery's influences and chosen her. Away from his revenge against the one he thought inferior to him, but that had always overpowered him. But as much as he loved her he didn't. Deep down he knew he couldn't have both; she was Muggle-born and they were against her kind, but he had wanted them both. He hadn't understood that life wasn't about getting revenge, not then nor even after. Afterwards, he had just changed targets; Voldemort became his revenge target. It wasn't until he came to have his very weird little family that his fight became a fight to protect them and not to get even.

"Yes he does," he answered icily; "He knows I once served the man that wanted to kill all Muggles and Muggle-borns." He let that sink in, the fact that he wasn't denying being a Death Eater. Petunia paled and Severus smirked; yes, he can be very dangerous and she better not forget it. "But he also knows I don't anymore."

"And he believes you?" she hissed.

"Yes," he said simply. To anyone else this would be dangerous information to disclose but he knew that Petunia wouldn't repeat a word of this to anyone. She wouldn't admit so much knowledge of the Wizarding World, not even under torture. That's why Severus could be himself inside. The Dursley's fear of what the neighbors would think would keep them quiet.

"Well," she said scowling, "I don't. And you better stay away from my family. I will be bringing yours and the fr- boy's," she amended at a steely glare from Severus, "food here."

"You expect us to spend two weeks inside this room?" Severus asked dryly.

"You can use whatever you used to get here to go outside, but inside this house, this room and the guest restroom are all you can use. Do not dare use the family's bathroom; I don't want you contaminating it," and she stalked away. She almost bumped into Harry on her way out.

"Sorry about that Uncle Sev," Harry said entering and closing the door, "I forgot to tell you the bathroom rule. She never lets us use the family's and I guess she drowns the guest's with disinfectant once we

leave. Must torch it a little too, just to be on the safe side," he tried joking but Severus saw that this treatment hurt Harry, and it reminded him of Lily's tears at her sister's harsh words. He hated Petunia even more. How that woman could make two people he love hurt so much was beyond him.

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After a few more hours Albus finally said:

"It's done."

Sirius once again joined them and looked worriedly at his companions. They were sweaty and pale.

"Shouldn't you rest?" he asked.

Remus shook his head, "We have to finish this soon," he looked at Albus and bit his lip. "Sirius and I can manage Albus. Why don't you sit on that chair a little?"

"I will pretend you didn't just call me old Remus and continue our work."

Sirius chuckled and Remus glared at him. With a flick of his wand Sirius removed the brick from the wall and, as expected, the brick was thinner than the others and Marvolo's ring rested in the hollow of the wall. Sirius tried levitating the ring but it didn't work.

"It must be protected against summoning and therefore levitating too," Remus said.

Albus slowly reached his hand out and took the ring. Nothing happened. He looked at it almost transfixed, like he was seeing something beyond the ring. His fingers moved of their own accord, but he was stopped by a hand.

"I don't think that is a good idea Albus," Remus said. "We don't know what could happen if you put it on Best to dispose of it fast. Put it in the floor while I get the sword."

As he said this, Remus reached for his tube and unscrewed the top off. From inside he took Gryffindor's sword. Albus watched as if in slow motion. Sirius and Remus didn't realize what they had in front of them. They probably always thought the Resurrection Stone, as all the Deathly Hallows, was just a legend. But Albus knew better. He possessed one of them, the Elder Wand. And he knew Harry's cloak was another. But this was the one he coveted the most. He looked at the ring, at the Resurrection Stone once more and saw his sister and parents. He so wanted to ask for forgiveness. A distant voice came:

"It's not your fault grandpa. You tried to stop it. You made a bad decision. Uncle Moony said that that doesn't make you bad."

"Your parents and sister. They are watching over you too, right? They are always with you."

"Albus?" Sirius prompted.

Albus looked at Sirius' worried face. Sirius, who had grown so much. Who had overcome his upbringing and who had to live with the pain of knowing his suggestion aided Voldemort. He remembered Severus' guilt of knowing he sent Voldemort after the love of his life. They could only hope that they were forgiven and so could he. Albus nodded and set the ring on the floor. There would be a time to see his deceased family when he departed for the next great adventure, but that time was not today. He

watched as Remus stabbed it with all his might, cracking the stone right in the middle. Cracking Albus' chance of seeing his sister and parents again. He just hoped Harry was right.

A/N- Thank you so much for reading and reviewing and huge thanks to my beta.

I checked my bank account today and I am pretty sure it wouldn't be so depleted if I owned Harry Potter so I guess I don't.

Chapter 29- Dreams and Progress

After making sure they left the Gaunt's house exactly as they found it, with a replica of the ring in the wall's hollow and protection enchantments back on the wall. Remus, Albus and Sirius set back to Hogwarts. They had a lot to prepare for the coming school year and it's special activities. Sirius was not particularly happy with some, or more specifically one of the guests they would be hosting during the year, but there was little he could do about it. The most he could do was help improve the protection wards on the castle before he went back to Grimmauld Place. This was good because as they worked they got their minds away from the coming full moon in three weeks. That would be the potion's first test and they were worried. The next two months would be anguishing.

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Severus woke up suddenly and it took a moment to realize why. The bed was shaking.

"What the hell?" he murmured. He looked up. The light coming from the street lamp was enough to see well, if not enough to bother. He saw that the mattress lump was moving and the wire net that held it was squeaking. He got up in a huff, "Harry! Will you stay still?" he said angrily.

When he looked on the top bed though he stopped. Harry wasn't awake. He was sleeping and by the way he was trashing, he was having one hell of a nightmare. He gently shook Harry, "Harry, wake up?" But nothing happened so he tried more forcefully. Still Harry wouldn't wake up. This worried Severus, as Harry was not a hard person to wake. He was actually a light sleeper, a consequence of living with a prankster and having to avoid waking up purple or some other ridiculous way.

Severus turned the light on and hurried back to the bed. Harry was still trashing and moaning. Severus couldn't make exactly the words but it was in the neighborhood of "run" and "he'll kill you". If that wasn't enough to make Severus want to wake Harry, what he saw on Harry's face was. Harry was sweating and pale; his brows were knitted as if in pain but what scared Severus was his forehead. In contrast to his pale skin, his lightning bolt scar was light red instead of the normal white as if inflamed. The last time it had been like that was in Harry's first year right after his encounter with Voldemort.

Severus started shaking Harry harder, "Harry, wake up. Come on. Wake up!"

It was a good extra five minutes before Harry bolted upright, almost hitting his head on the low ceiling if Severus hadn't stopped him, and crying "No!" He was pressing his hands to his forehead and breathing hard. Severus gently laid him back down and tried to pry Harry's hands from his forehead. He rubbed Harry's forehead to try and ease where he thought Harry had been in pain.

"Harry, does it hurt?" he asked gently.

Harry nodded and whispered, "He killed him."

"Who killed who?"

"Voldemort, he killed the old Muggle."

Severus inhaled sharply but didn't stop massaging Harry's forehead. As his fingers passed over Harry's scar, he saw it was once again white. It was as if nothing had ever happened and he had imagined it's inflamed state.

"You were having a nightmare Harry, is all. I tried to wake you but wasn't able to. Do you want to talk about it?"

Harry shook his head but Severus pressed.

"It can help. Come on. Come lie on my bed," he said motioning for Harry to get down. Harry did so. He didn't even use the little ladder on the foot of the bunk bed. He didn't use it to get on the bed either. Harry was tall enough to get on the bed by just propelling himself up with a foot on the bottom bed. Harry lay down on Severus bed and Severus put a pillow on his lap so Harry could rest his head on it as he laid on his side facing the opposite wall.

"Tell me your dream," he said as he carted his fingers thorough Harry's hair to calm him.

"There was Voldemort, and Bellatrix, and Wormtail. They were somewhere that I've never seen. A room somewhere; it looked unlivid, dusty but rich. You could see it was big and had a huge fireplace, and the furniture was old and dusty but you could see it was expensive... They were talking... they were talking about..." here Harry bit his lips and Severus had to prompt him a little.

"About?"

"About getting me for something, using me for something, I don't know what."

Severus hand paused for one second before he continued his ministrations, "Go on."

"Wormtail asked if they could use someone else but Voldemort said no, that he wanted me for reasons he had already explained. Bellatrix mocked Wormtail, said he was a coward, he was scared. Then they talked about someone, Voldemort called him his faithful servant, that didn't sit well with Bellatrix. She said she was his most faithful servant and she would be delighted to do his bidding. Voldemort said that he needed her there to take care of him since Wormtail would have another job."

"Did he say what?"

"No," Harry shook his head, "He just said something about a curse and his faithful servant at Hogwarts and I'd be his. That's when a big snake came in the room and Voldemort said she told him there was a Muggle outside the room spying on them. I think he called the snake Nagini, or something. Then...then he killed the old man... he just killed him like he was nothing."

"Sh, it's okay. It was just a dream, Harry, don't worry. I just want to ask you if you remember anything else?"

"Yeah, whatever they are doing they are waiting for the Quidditch World Cup to be over because of the security and..."

"And?"

"There was someone else they killed, a Bertha Jorkins. Apparently Bellatrix and Wormtail brought her to Voldemort and that's how he found out what he needed for his plan."

Harry turned to lie on his back, and scared green eyes met worried black. "Do you really think it was a dream Uncle Sev? Because my scar hurt and the last time that happened Voldemort was near me but he can't be-"

"He can't come to Privet Drive Harry. The wards won't allow him, or any witch or wizard that means you harm, in," Severus said. He was silent for a moment and pondered what to say; he didn't want to scare Harry but he wanted the boy on his guard. He breathed slowly and said, while tracing Harry's scar with a finger, "There isn't much information on cursed scars, especially since before you no one ever survived the killing curse. I never heard of a scar that hurts years after it's closed. But from your experience in your first year we know there is some connection between you and the Dark Lord."

Harry shivered and Severus had to agree; he didn't like Harry having any connection with the Dark Lord either. He frowned.

"Did you see the Dark Lord?" Severus asked.

Harry shook his head, "No, he was hidden by the back of the chair he was in. He had to be smaller than it though. Do you think he has a body back? I mean, he has to, to hold a wand."

"If he needs constant care he may not have a strong body, just something in between. So he probably isn't possessing someone or sharing like he did with Quirrell," Severus said. "Where were you? How did you see all this?"

"I wasn't anywhere. I just saw it. Like in a movie, when you see the screen. If I had to put myself somewhere, I'd say next to the Muggle guy. Up until when the snake came. Then I was able to see the room better instead of just through the crack."

"There's a chance the snake was next to the Muggle all the time right?" Harry nodded. "So you could be following Nagini and not the Muggle."

"Yes, what are you thinking?"

"I don't know. This sounds like you were seeing a memory or something. But you mastered Occlumency and I trust you to keep your shield up all the time."

"I do," Harry said defensively.

"I know, and that's what worries me. You shouldn't be having any dreams of being in someone else's head, much less the Dark Lord's. This shouldn't be happening. This makes no sense. "

"It's probably just a dream then," Harry said.

"Probably, but we better not dismiss it. I'll talk to Albus and the others. See what they think. Is your scar still hurting?" Severus asked and Harry shook his head. Severus nodded, "You better go back to sleep. We still have two more days of torture to endure before we can run for freedom."

Harry turned on his side again grinning, "So melodramatic Uncle Sev. It hasn't been that bad. At least we haven't had to endure Uncle Vernon's speeches and we've been outside."

"Humph," Severus grunted running his fingers through Harry's hair until he could hear the even breathing that meant he was sleeping. He slowly rolled the sleeve of his pajama shirt up and stared at his left arm.

It had always been there- a white mark that stood out a little from the rest of his skin, like a scar. But as he stared at the Dark Mark now he saw with a sinking heart that it was darker, more leaning towards grey than white. Not much, just a little that only someone that had stared at it so many times as he did would have recognized. This was no ordinary dream.

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"So, you three will spend the night in the basement?" Harry asked his dad and Uncles.

"Yes," Remus answered. "The steel door and the wards will be able to keep me inside in case the potion is ineffective."

Harry looked at him and at the other two. He bit his lips, "But it's small. I mean, not small but compared to the woods or something it is. It's roughly the same size of that room in the Shrieking Shack. What if the potion doesn't work and Moony attacks Blackie and Padfoot?"

Severus cringed at his new nickname. Biting his lips Sirius answered, "The last time we were the ones attacking Moony. Werewolves don't usually attack other animals, since they are not their prey. Their prey is humans, and as long as we don't attack the most that will happen is a little rough housing and that will serve from keeping him from biting himself. Besides, that will only happen if the potion doesn't work. Don't you trust Severus' abilities?"

Harry looked at Severus apologetically, "I do. But I am allowed to be worried."

"Of course you are cub," Remus said. "Now, you are to stay in your room at all times. Don't come near the basement okay? The door and wards should hold but there is no need to tempt Moony with your scent." Harry nodded vigorously.

"We also want you to keep your broom and cloak ready," Severus said, "Just in case everything else fails. If you hear the door breaking don't, I repeat don't wait to see what's happening. Fly out of the window and go to Andromeda's house. Understood?" he finished sternly and Harry knew this was because he hadn't obeyed those same orders of running away in June.

"Yes sir."

"Good," Sirius nodded.

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With a loud clank, Sirius closed the steel door. The basement was almost bare. Usually there was a table, chairs and a couch for them to sleep on, but since tonight they didn't know if Moony would go wild they took everything out that could hurt him and left only the rug. If he went wild it would serve for chewing. If not, it would serve for them to sleep on.

Remus had an old robe on; he always refused to be naked during the transformations. Usually, with the potion working, after he transformed Sirius would just help him disentangle himself from the robe. When

it didn't work he would rip it off himself. Before the Wolfsbane potion was created, Remus had a robe that had been magically mended so many times he didn't even remember how it looked when it was new.

"You both should transform," Remus said from where he was standing. With two soft pops, where previously Severus and Sirius had been standing, there was a big black dog with grey eyes and a black wolf with black eyes. Remus stepped closer and kneeled as he ran a hand through Blackie's fur, admiring the wolf, "You are magnificent you know that Blackie? Such a handsome wolf. You could lose yourself in the night; no one would see you."

Blackie gave a small bark and stood a little straighter as if he was posing for one of those dog shows. Padfoot dropped on the floor and hid his face in his paws.

"He's just jealous," Remus said to the wolf as he got up and went to the side. "You two better stay back until I transform," he finished as he sat down on the floor.

Padfoot and Blackie sat where they were, just surveying Remus. Less than twenty minutes later there was a soft pop and where Remus had been stood the brown werewolf known as Moony. It was quite a site, a werewolf wearing a robe. He didn't move and Padfoot came forward. He stood between Moony and Blackie and nodded to Blackie. With another pop, Blackie turned into Severus. He stood rigid; this was the part they hadn't told Harry about, why they had opted for the room instead of the cage. In the cage Moony would be alone; here they could get a human closer and test if Remus was in control. They decided on Severus because Padfoot had more experience in keeping Moony away, so he would be able to give Severus more time to transform back. But Moony made no move, and both Severus and Padfoot went closer, Padfoot always staying between Severus and Moony. Still Moony made no move. As they slowly walked forward, Moony lay on the floor as if bored and saying, "Get on with it already."

Finally after what seemed like hours they reached Moony and Severus asked, "Remus, can you understand me?"

Moony looked up and nodded.

Severus grinned, "Okay. I need to ask you some questions. They may sound stupid but I have to see how much of your mind you've kept."

Moony nodded. Severus took his wand out and conjured a big white piece of cardboard with numbers and pictures on the floor.

"Let me help you out of those robes," Severus said but Moony shook his head. "No, you don't want out? But you're stepping on the sleeves and hem."

Moony butted his head against Severus wand hand, "Oh fine, I understand." With a swish of his wand the sleeves of the robe shortened until they showed just a little of Moony's front paws and the hem of his robes also came up. Severus conjured a very thin cloth belt that could be split with a look, to hold the robes around the middle so it looked like Moony was wearing a skirt.

"Now, show me how much does twenty three plus fifty four make?"

Moony trotted on the cardboard and put his paw on top of a huge seventy seven.

"Good," Severus praised as he ticked something from a parchment he had taken from his pocket, "Now show me Hogwarts." At this Moony trotted to a picture of Hogwarts. This went on for a long while and as Sirius got bored he transformed back and conjured a comfy armchair to sit.

When they were finished, Sirius enlarged the chair to a couch and Moony hopped on next to him and rested his head on Sirius' lap as the man rubbed behind his ear. Severus sat on the couch too and was scribbling furiously.

"It worked, right?"

"We still need to do the test next full moon but the alterations I made seem to have worked. At least from what I remember of the two transformations I witnessed," Severus said eyeing Sirius for confirmation.

"Oh, yes. It never was this smooth even with the Wolfsbane. When he transformed you could see the limbs changing. It was a lot less painful than without the potion, because they didn't seem to crack as they changed but there was still a little strain, which is why he needed to rest the next morning. It was never like the Animagus Transformation, where one second there's Remus and pop, next second Moony. He used to get tangled in the robes from the squirming he did as he transformed too. I guess that he likes being able to keep his clothes on, he was always shy about being naked when he transforms back," Moony nodded at this, "Silly Moony," Sirius chuckled as he rubbed his friend's ears.

"Did it hurt?" Severus asked Moony and Moony shook his head. "I'll need a more detailed explanation of how it felt but for now that will do.

"How did you figure how to do that?" Sirius asked.

"By studying the Animagus transformation and the physiology of the wolf and werewolf. I figured I could replicate the effects with a potion. The transformation will occur no matter what, so I just needed to make it swifter, easier. That was actually the last thing I figured out how to do, and it was thanks to spending that night with Moony. The books on werewolves are not very thorough. They have a few of the major differences between the wolf and the werewolf but it was that night that I could see the smaller details for myself. Could make the scans."

"I thought those scans were weird with you waving your wand like that but figured you were just checking he was really harmless."

Severus smirked, "I knew you wouldn't think different. I never wanted to say anything to you in case I failed. It was bad enough I was risking disappointing Harry, but he had found my research one day he was looking for parchment to color at Spinner's End. I wouldn't have told him otherwise."

"Well, Congratulations Severus Snape, you did it!" Sirius beamed proudly.

Severus smiled, yes he did. This was one potion he could be proud of.

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"So?" Harry asked excited, during the breakfast that Remus had prepared. It was the first time in his life that he had seen his Uncle Moony up and about so early in the morning after the full moon.

"So what?" Remus asked as he put a plate of pancakes in front of Harry.

"Did it work?" Harry asked.

"Yes," Severus said stifling a yawn from his spot at the table. "All the changes seemed to have worked. We still need to see if they will be permanent during the next full moon, but the results of last night were satisfactory. Thank you," he said as Remus put a mug of hot coffee in front of him. "You still have to describe how you felt as you transformed into the werewolf and back."

"I didn't," Remus said smiling. At Severus' questioning look he elaborated, "I felt nothing. Usually I feel my limbs changing but this was like... like blinking. As Sirius said last night, one second I was me, and then the next I was Moony."

Severus nodded, satisfied, "Then it's what I was going for. Just like the Animagus Transformation."

"Yes, it was the best thing ever! Thank you Severus!" Remus said grinning widely. He was still wearing the same robes as the previous night, which had been enlarged back to their previous state. He would have to think of a better way to stay dressed. When he transformed back the thin belt Severus conjured broke as Severus had intended and Remus looked like he was wearing one of those Muggle very short dresses. *It was better than being naked though*, he thought to himself. Maybe he could use knee length shorts with an elastic band on the waist and a T-shirt. Yes, that would probably work and there would be no need to resize them; all he had to do is tuck the shirt inside the shorts. He could even have his wand in a pocket, so this way he would have his wand with him once he transformed back. *That was brilliant Mr. Moony!* His thoughts were broken by a loud snore from the table.

Harry patted Sirius' cheek to try and wake him. Sirius just swatted the hand away and kept on sleeping, slumped on the table. Although Remus had gone to sleep, Severus and Sirius had to stay awake all night to make sure Remus kept control of his mind in his werewolf form all night long. If the potion had worn off, the scent of humans would have woken him on a rage.

Remus sat happily at the table and as he sipped his tea he said innocently to Harry, "I don't know why they are so tired. I slept like a baby." Harry laughed as Severus glared. The power of the glare was ruined by a yawn.

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"I have no interest in Quidditch whatsoever Sirius. I only watch Harry's matches because they are Harry's matches," Remus told Sirius calmly from his seat in the drawing room. He didn't even bother raising his eyes from the article he was writing.

"But I need help with the boys. You are going to leave me alone with two teenagers? That's cruel!" Sirius whined. He was standing in front of Remus, quite annoyed with the other's lack of interest.

"Arthur will be managing seven plus Hermione I think you can manage two, Sirius."

"Arthur has to manage four plus Hermione. Charlie and Bill are adults and Percy has been an adult since he was born. And they are going to help. That's almost one adult per teenager."

"Yes, but he has the twins. They are worth a hundred."

"But Moony. What about International Cooperation, uh? That's what the whole Triwizard Tournament is about."

"What does that have to do with me going to the Quidditch World Cup?"

"There will be a bunch of foreign witches and wizards for you to practice all those languages you are so fond of. Bulgaria is playing. When was the last time you spoke Bulgarian?"

"Been a while," Remus said thoughtfully. He finally looked at Sirius' begging face and conceded, "Fine, I'll go."

Sirius launched himself at Remus hugging him fiercely.

"You won't regret it Moony!"

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Sirius, Remus, Tonks, Harry and Neville had Portkeyed to the Quidditch World Cup early in the morning from an alley in London. Sirius had managed to convince Mrs. Longbottom to let Neville go, using the fact that there would be three adults looking out for the boys, one being an Auror and one a former Auror. Personally, he thought that what swayed the old woman was Remus' presence and not his and Tonks.

"I thought I would be doing security," Tonks said as she waved happily to an Auror on duty. "All the juniors are stationed. Can't believe I get to be in the top box!" she squealed.

"That, dear cousin, is what you get for having such a charming cousin with good connections," Sirius said, throwing his arms around her shoulder.

"What did you do?"

"Lets just say Kingsley owed me a favor."

They finally spotted the Weasleys and Hermione trying to put up a tent. Harry, Neville and Tonks ran towards them.

"Charlie, Bill!" Harry called. "Didn't know you'd be here."

"Hey there, shorty!" Charlie said. "Not so short any more though," he scowled as he shook Harry's hand.

"Smuggled any Dragons lately?"

"Charlie, shh," Ginny said frantically eyeing Arthur. "Do you want dad to hear?"

Charlie just laughed as he hugged Tonks, "So how is the big bad Auror?"

"Oh, you know. Well enough," Tonks sighed eyeing Remus. Charlie followed her gaze and smirked. She elbowed him. "I would shut up if I were you or I'll tell this lot here some interesting tales about our Hogwarts days."

"What tales?" Ginny asked eagerly.

"No tales," Charlie said frantically. "Tonks, don't do that!" The Auror just smirked.

"Arthur," Remus asked as he shook the man's hand. "Need any help?"

"Oh, yes," Arthur said, obviously confused. "We are supposed to do this the Muggle way, but it's very complicated. Hermione is helping but the poor girl doesn't seem to make any sense."

They all looked at Hermione who was looking quite frustrated as she tried to explain something to Ron.

"Remus and Tonks can help you while the boys and I put up our tent. We used to go camping with Ted and Andy when Harry was little, and being Muggleborn Ted always insisted to do it the Muggle way. I am handing you experts here. Come on boys, we're just in the next plot," Sirius said.

Remus went to join Hermione and Ron with a skipping and very happy pink haired Auror while Sirius and the two boys started unfolding their tent a little further away.

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After they had managed to erect the three tents, the two groups divided to inspect their own. As Remus, Tonks, Neville, Harry and Sirius looked around the inside of their tent they saw what resembled a small kitchenette with one room with two bunk beds. Sirius looked quite satisfied, but Remus wasn't of the same opinion.

"There's only one room," Remus pointed out.

"So?" Sirius asked.

"And four beds."

"Yes."

"We have five people," Remus said slowly.

"Guess someone will have to share," Sirius said happily, "Harry and Neville, you'll get the top beds since you two are lighter. I get that one and that leaves--"

"Hello," came Arthur's voice. "Nice space." He said looking around.

"We seem to be one bed short," Remus said.

"Oh, my," Arthur said. "I think the girls have one spare bed in their tent. I am sure Nymphadora can share with them."

Poor Arthur failed to see the two death glares he was receiving.

A/N- I moved the dream on the timeline because I wanted Severus to be the one there.

When do I ever not love all the reviews I get? Thank you all for reading and for reviewing.

Thanks to my beta SWaddict1986

Chapter 29- Dreams and Progress

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Chapter 30- A Blast from the past

"Wouldn't have helped anyway, with you three in the room too," she huffed.

"Dora, Dora, Dora. Of course it would. It would spike his interest. Do you know nothing of advertising? Give him a sample, enough to tease but not satisfy. You'd be sleeping there, next to him. He would notice you but not be able to do anything because of us. But that would entice him and it would keep popping in his mind when he least expects it to. Your scent, your warmth, the way your body curves. Oh, if you could have turned and hugged him in your sleep, that would have been just perfect. Then after days, weeks, of torment he would just have to act on it. You see? It was fool proof, but *nooooo*, Arthur just had to ruin it!"

They were walking towards the stadium. Sirius and Tonks were ahead and they could hear Remus, Bill and Arthur explaining the charms on the stadium to the awed kids behind.

"Besides, your make him jealous technique won't work. Not with Moony. He'll just think you deserve better than him."

"I was not trying to make him jealous!"

"Yeah, right. That's why you hugged Charlie like that and you two were doing all the giggling. If I didn't know better I'd think you two were together," Sirius snorted.

"Hum, Siri, hate to break it to you, but Charlie is like my brother and he has been with Natasha for two years now," she said in a low whisper.

Sirius head turned sharply to look at her, "Natasha?"

"Yep, she works with him, but keep it down and don't say anything. His family doesn't know."

"Why?"

"His mom is always bugging him and Bill for grandchildren but he doesn't want to settle down just yet,"

Tonks shrugged

"Yes and you two better stop this gossip before one of the kids hears you and tells mum!" Charlie hissed from behind.

"We were just chatting," Sirius said smirking. "Wait you said kids?"

"Dad and Bill know. It's just mum I haven't got the guts to tell."

From the corner of his eyes, Sirius saw one Mr. Remus "Moony" Lupin watching the trio as he talked to the kids with a frown. With a wicked thought, Sirius put one arm around Tonks and the other around Charlie, "You know Dora, maybe your technique wasn't all that farfetched after all."

"Huh?" Tonks mumbled.

"Don't you worry your pretty little head. Let Uncle Sirius deal with this."

He was met with worried looks from Tonks and Charlie but just led the way towards the Top Box.

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"Why do people always think that foreign means deaf?" Remus whispered to Sirius, annoyed as they left the stadium. If it wasn't enough that they had been joined in the Top Box by the unpleasant as usual Malfoys, their beloved Minister of Magic had made a fool of himself by shouting to the Bulgarian Minister the whole time until Remus took pity on everyone's ears and offered to translate. Fudge had grudgingly accepted.

"What did you two laugh about?" Sirius asked.

Remus smirked and said, "Oh, well, it just so happens that the Bulgarian Minister does speak English."

"Then why did he let Fudge yell like that?"

"He thought it was funny and I have to agree. He almost let it slip at the end though; he was about to make a comment in English but I gave him a nudge just in time and Fudge didn't hear. He must still be making a fool of himself somewhere," Remus said wistfully.

"Sometimes you are just evil, Moony. Evil," Sirius laughed. He sobered quickly though. "I am just glad Crouch didn't show up. Bad enough we had to endure his presence and be polite to him at the camp site."

"Sirius, don't you think it's time to let the past go?"

"He was about to chuck me in Azkaban for life without a trial Moony! If you hadn't bothered Dumbledore so much about me being innocent, I'd be there right now."

Remus looked at his friend and sighed, "I know. But it's no good to make powerful enemies Sirius."

"That's why I behaved myself when he and Bagman showed up at the campsite."

"Barely," Remus raised an eyebrow. It had been all he could do to keep Sirius from hexing Crouch. Sirius had scowled at the man the whole time and just grunted if he was spoken to.

"Besides it was cruel of him to make that poor elf be there, keeping his seat when she was afraid of heights, and not even bother to show up!" Sirius cried.

"That *was* weird," Remus frowned. "Why do it?"

"Probably because some rule said he had to be there so he sent a representative," Sirius scorned. "And instead, he was making sure no one was having more than the Ministry approved amount of fun."

Remus rolled his eyes at this comment and looked ahead. The kids were in a very excited discussion with Bill, Charlie, Arthur and Tonks about why Viktor Krum, the Bulgarian Seeker, decided to catch the Snitch when the Irish team was more than one hundred and fifty points ahead. Remus frowned when he saw Charlie say something and Tonks push him playfully. He cleared his throat and commented nonchalantly:

"So, Tonks and Charlie are quite friendly."

"They always have been, best friends since school you know," Sirius said, and since he was keeping his eyes on the young couple, Remus missed Sirius twitching lips.

"Yes, of course. More than natural. To be expected actually," Remus muttered. "But he's all the way in Romania, it must be hard to keep in touch."

"Probably," Sirius said calmly, "Why the interest Moony?"

"No interest. I am just worried about Tonks; I mean she's family. Practically your niece. Yes, that's it. It's an Unclely worry. Don't want to see her hurt," Remus said firmly, nodding his head as if to convince himself.

Sirius patted his friend's shoulder and said, "I am sure Charlie would never hurt her. I trust him completely."

Remus head snapped and looked at Sirius with wide eyes, "You do?"

"Of course," Sirius said firmly, "I trust Charlie will always make sure Tonks is happy."

"Oh," Remus said quietly, "If you do, then it's fine. Of course," he mumbled eyeing the couple again.

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"When did our fun turn into a battlefield?" Sirius asked himself as he dodged yet another curse. *"At least they seem to be keeping away from the Unforgivables. I bet my dear cousin is among them."*

Sirius was worried. There weren't that many Death Eaters, less than a dozen, but they were levitating the campsite manager's poor Muggle family. If they took the Death Eaters down before someone was able to help the family, they would be dropped and they could break their necks. And with all the fires they started, the crowd had panicked.

"Sirius, watch out!" he heard Bill cry and he ducked. The tent next to him got hit and when Sirius looked up he saw a big hole in the tent's solid wood wall.

"Good thing I ducked!"

Sirius was getting up when he looked down and saw that his hands, still sprawled on the ground, were green. *"Oh, no. Not green!"* he thought desperately. He looked up to see why everyone seemed to be screaming even more than before, and was faced with the green glow of the Dark Mark against the skies. His heart fell and his blood froze.

He saw the masked Death Eaters Disaparate and quickly joined the yells of *"Wingardium Leviosa"* that were directed towards the Muggle family. He ran towards them as they were softly put on the ground.

"Are they hurt?" he asked.

"Don't seem to be," Hestia Jones, Auror and former Order Member whom Sirius hadn't seen in a while, answered. "We'll deal with them."

"What about the Dark Mark?" he asked frantically as he looked around. He saw Bill among the ones helping the Muggles, Percy was next to him but he couldn't see Remus, Tonks, Arthur or Charlie anywhere. And the Mark came from the forest, from where he had sent the kids. "Who was killed?"

"There doesn't seem to be anyone gravely wounded," Arthur said, out of breath and running towards them. He was a little scraped but otherwise seemed fine. "Crouch and Diggory are getting a group of Ministry officials together to go to the point where we think the Mark was conjured from. Kingsley asked to call you. He said since you are just on extended leave and not disconnected, you can come as another Auror. He doesn't want to take any of the Aurors on duty away from the campsite in case the Death Eaters come back."

Sirius nodded and followed Arthur, scanning the crowd for a sign of the three other missing fighters, "Arthur have you seen the others?"

"Yes, Charlie and Remus are helping put out some fires. Now that they are not hurling curses anymore it should be easier. Tonks is helping a few injured; she had a nasty gash herself but Remus healed her," Arthur looked at Sirius sympathetically and said, "They're fine. They are not hurt and the kids will be safe too. We just have to find the one that sent that Mark up and then we can get everyone and be out of here."

Sirius nodded nervously. He should be used to this. He was an Auror after all, but it had been so long since they had been in the middle of such chaos. They reached the rest of the group. Sirius nodded to them. He recognized Amos Diggory, Head of the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures and Cedric Diggory's father; Crouch of course, who was now Head of the Department of International Magical Cooperation after being demoted from Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement; and Kingsley Shacklebolt. There were a few faces Sirius remembered from his time as an Auror and some he'd never met. Together the group mounted to twenty wizards and witches.

"Shacklebolt seems to think you'd be of use," Crouch said as if he highly disagreed. Sirius just glared at him but said nothing. He wanted to be in the group, catch the Death Eater that was in the forest and get the kids. "You better follow the rules Black! None of that bravado you used to show when you were an active Auror."

"Yes sir," he said through gritted teeth.

"We reached the conclusion that the caster had to be here," Kingsley said in his deep voice as he pointed at a spot on a map of the woods, "We will all Apparate there in the same circle we are now on the count of three and send a stunning hex immediately. If he or she is still there, we should catch the culprit in the crossfire."

Everyone nodded and Kingsley started counting. They all Disappeared at the sound of three, and when they appeared in the forest no one wasted any time and shouted "Stupefy!" at the same time. Sirius blood froze as he heard a familiar voice cry; "DUCK!"

"STOP!" Sirius and Arthur yelled together. But the chaos continued. Arthur again yelled, "STOP! That's my son!" but it was only when Sirius sent a tickling charm at Crouch that they stopped. Sirius lifted the charm and ran towards Neville, Ron, Hermione and Harry, whom were sprawled on the ground, face down.

"Are you kids all right?" he asked shakily as he helped Harry and Neville up. Arthur was doing the same for Ron and Hermione.

"Where are the others?" Arthur asked.

"We got separated," Harry answered. "I'm fine dad. That's okay. Dad!"

But Sirius was having none of it. He was examining Harry for injuries and the boy was blushing at the attention.

"BLACK!" Crouch cried, "What do you think you were doing attacking me like that? I should arrest you."

"Fortunately, you can't. It's not in your job description anymore," Sirius said as he turned to face him and Crouch's glare intensified, "No one was stopping. I figured if they heard you of all people laugh they would. We would have hurt the children otherwise and you don't want to hurt innocent children do you Mr. Crouch?"

"Innocent," Crouch said coldly, "We'll see about that. Which of you conjured it?"

"What?" Harry spluttered and Sirius had to agree.

"We didn't do anything!" Ron cried.

"Don't lie to me," Crouch said, pointing his wand at Harry's face, "You've been discovered at the scene of the crime."

Sirius shoved Crouch's wand away and stood in front of the children, "Don't point your wand at my son. They said they didn't do it and they didn't."

A witch from in a woolen dressing-gown tried to appease them, "Barty, Barty, they are kids, they would never have been able to-"

"He's been raised by Black," Crouch said sounding mad and pointing his wand at Harry again. "I can only imagine what he was taught."

"I don't teach my son how to conjure the Dark Mark," Sirius hissed, "And unlike you Mr. Crouch, I am always quite aware of what my son is learning."

Sharp gasps were heard from the assembled witches and wizards and Arthur decided to cut this dangerous exchange quickly as Crouch's eyes narrowed.

"Where did the Dark Mark come from?"

Neville pointed a shaking hand at the trees behind them and said, "Over there."

"We heard someone there," Hermione explained, "They shouted something- an incantation..."

"Oh, stood over there did they? Shouted an incantation? You seem to be well informed about how the Dark Mark is conjured," Crouch turned to Hermione with wide eyes.

Sirius couldn't take it and rolling his eyes said, "Yes, imagine that! Only a genius would realize that to conjure something you need an incantation. Surely proves that Hermione, a *Muggle-born* fourteen-year-old, is well versed on the Death Eater's way of life. Too bad they wouldn't actually welcome her with open arms."

As Sirius and Crouch continued their glaring contest, Sirius staying protectively between Crouch and the kids, the other witches and wizards raised their wands and pointed them in the direction of the woods that Neville had pointed to. They squinted and two of them decided to go inside on the grounds that their Stunners would have caught anyone hiding there. Sirius had his wand ready and kept an eye on Crouch and the other on where Kingsley and Diggory had disappeared in the woods.

"Found someone. We got them good. Unconscious, blimey," Diggory's voice called out and soon after he came out cradling a small form, followed by an alert Kingsley.

"Who? Who do you have?" Crouch asked but his face went white when they came into view.

Sirius eyes glinted as he turned to Crouch, "Isn't that Winky? Your house-elf, Barty?"

But Crouch wasn't listening he mumbled, "This can't be," and practically ran to where Diggory and Kingsley had come from.

"There's no one else there Barty," Kingsley cried.

But Crouch didn't seem to have heard him. They could hear rustling as if he was moving leaves as he pushed bushes aside.

"Bit embarrassing," Diggory said.

"Dad," Harry started but Sirius quickly shushed him. Better let everyone forget the kids were there.

"Come off it Amos," Mr. Weasley said, "You can't seriously think it was the elf. The Dark Mark requires a wand."

"And she had one," Diggory said pulling out a wand from his pocket and waving it around, "Found it right next to her."

"My wand!" Neville cried.

Diggory's head snapped up as Crouch came back white faced and empty handed.

"What?" Diggory asked coldly and Neville trembled.

"I dropped it sir," Neville said quietly.

"Are you saying that you conjured the Dark Mark and dropped this wand?" Diggory asked.

"Of course he is not saying that Amos. Come on, this is Neville Longbottom. I am sure Barty remembers his parents. He wouldn't do that," Sirius snapped and Diggory seemed to look ashamed and Crouch was, well Crouch was looking quite weird. He had lost that manic look and seemed quite lost. Sirius turned to Neville, "When did you realize your wand was lost?"

"When we got in the woods. Harry, Ron and Hermione had their wands out and I went to look for mine, but I only had the Omniculars Harry bought for everyone. The wand was gone. Can I have it back? It was my dad's and Gran will kill me if I lose it."

So Neville used Frank's wand. That explained a lot. Sirius would have to have a chat with Mrs. Longbottom about getting him his own wand. He turned to Diggory and asked:

"Is that enough for you Amos? The boy lost his wand."

Diggory seemed to think that it was enough and focused on the house-elf. "So this elf found a wand and decided to have some fun. Scare everyone. Well that's a clear violation of the Code of Wand Use. *No non-human creature is permitted to carry or use a wand.*"

At that same moment another pop was heard and Ludo Bagman, Head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports, appeared panting:

"The Dark Mark!" he said nervously, "Who did it? Did you catch them? Barty what's going on? Barty where have you been? Why weren't you at the match?"

"Good question," Sirius prompted looking at Crouch.

Crouch snapped his head at Sirius and seemed to regain some control, "We are not here to investigate my whereabouts, Mr. Black. Amos, if you could please let me deal with Winky personally."

"I can give the boy his wand back and not press charges on Winky about carrying it," Diggory said uncomfortably, "But we have to question her about the Mark," he finished putting the little elf down on the ground. "*Enervate*"

What followed next was a classic case of how cruel wizards could be to house-elves. Granted, Sirius had never liked Kreacher, but that had more to do with Kreacher adoring Sirius' mother than him being a house-elf. He had always treated Twinky with respect; she had her own room and days off and so did Kreacher. The only reason they weren't free or paid was because they didn't want to be. But this, this was horrible. Diggory kept treating Winky like she was beneath him. Questioning the elf like she had conjured the Mark. Poor Hermione had tried to defend the elf, but to no avail. Even after the kids stated that the voice they heard had to be a human's voice, Diggory insisted on Winky's guilt and used Prior Incantatem on Neville's wand. Diggory had been delighted when the echo of the Dark Mark came out the wand and insisted it proved Winky was the culprit. It took Crouch's outrage about Diggory accusing Neville and himself in order for Diggory to start backing off and Arthur, ever the calm one, was able to be reasonable and get the story from Winky. She had found the wand in the woods from where Arthur concluded that whoever conjured the Dark Mark, using Neville's wand to escape incrimination, disappeared and dropped the wand.

Even though Winky was proven innocent, Crouch threatened her with clothes for disobeying his orders of staying in the tent. Hermione had been horrified, and to be honest Sirius was too. The poor elf was frightened, who could blame her for running? Apparently Crouch. Sirius had wanted to say something, and probably sensing it, Arthur started ushering their group back to the tents saying the others would be

worried. That sparked Sirius' interest; he hadn't seen Remus and Tonks with his own eyes yet. Keeping Harry and Neville very close he walked back to the campsite. Poor Neville, if Mrs. Longbottom didn't allow him out of her sight before, he wouldn't have a chance now. Sirius wasn't paying much attention to Hermione's tirade against the way Winky was treated. He just wanted to get to the tents.

After they left the woods and extricated themselves from a crowd that wanted to know what happened they managed to reach one of the Weasley's tents from where Charlie's head was poking out and calling for them. Inside they found Remus, Tonks, Percy, Bill, Fred, George and Ginny seated at the kitchen table.

"Uncle Moony!" Harry cried and ran to Remus' fierce embrace. Sirius joined them as Arthur went to his brood. Putting one hand on Remus' shoulder and another on Tonks', Sirius asked, "Are you hurt?"

"No," Remus shook his head as he pulled Sirius into the hug. "We were worried. I didn't know where you were. Fred, George and Ginny came back alone and Mundungus Fletcher said he saw you dodge a Reductor Curse-"

"I ducked," Sirius stopped his friend's babbling, "I'm fine. The kids aren't hurt. You all don't look seriously injured," he finished as he took notice of Bill holding a bed sheet to his bleeding arm and Percy's bloody nose, Arthur was already helping take care of them, as well as Remus' scratches, which looked as if he had rolled on sharp twigs, which he probably did. Tonks looked unhurt and Sirius remembered Arthur saying Remus healed her.

"Kids, why don't you make some tea and I'll just take Remus to the bathroom to heal these scratches," Sirius said as he ushered his distressed friend to the bathroom. He started waving his wand around while Remus kept babbling and running his shaking hands through his thick brown hair.

"Who conjured it?" Remus asked.

"We don't know yet. They Disappeared."

"It was like before...like I was back in our years in the Order and we got a call of some attack somewhere and set off to help and I didn't know where you, James, Lily and Peter were. If you were being reckless, you and James were always reckless, you weren't reckless today right?" Sirius shook his head but Remus didn't seem to realize and he continued, "Then I saw the Dark Mark and I didn't see you or Harry, and Harry was in the woods and the Dark Mark was coming from-"

"Me too Moony," Sirius said, squeezing his friend's shoulder with both hands and looking into his pained eyes, "I was scared too."

Remus was always the calm one no matter what the situation, except in the aftermath of a battle. During the battle he was focused and even a leader, which you would have never said in school since he had been more of a follower. But after the battle, when the rush of the adrenaline was gone, you wouldn't recognize him. He was a nervous wreck and would only calm down when he made sure all his loved ones had come out unhurt, and they weren't always. He was right; Sirius and James had been quite reckless and more than once had ended up in St. Mungo's because they did something foolish in a

battle that could have been avoided. Sirius didn't blame Remus for worrying. They stayed there in the bathroom until Sirius was sure Remus had calmed down enough. Then they joined the rest of the discussion that was going on in the kitchen about what happened.

Sirius noticed that even though they were all seated around the table not leaving any gaps, the two groups had been divided in Weasleys and Blacks with Hermione and Neville in the middle, being claimed by both sides. Sirius understood Arthur's need to have his children around him. Harry was seated between Sirius and Remus while Tonks was seated on Remus' other side.

The kids were adamant about wanting to understand about the Dark Mark. Arthur had been ready to dismiss the subject on the grounds of them being too young, but staring at Harry and Neville, two children marked by the war since they were babies, Sirius decided they were old enough. Arthur wasn't too pleased with Sirius but Sirius suspected that had more to do with Molly's reaction to her children knowing about it than his reluctance to tell them. Sirius noticed Ron, Fred, George and Ginny hadn't even known what the Dark Mark was. While Harry didn't know details, he did have a general idea of what happened, and he certainly knew what the Dark Mark looked like since he had seen a faded version of it on Severus' arm. Sirius noticed Neville didn't seem as ignorant as the Weasley children either and assumed that Mrs. Longbottom must have told him more than just what had happened to Frank and Alice; in the woods Neville seemed to know exactly whose father Barty Crouch was.

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As they opened the front door of Grimmauld Place they were once again met by a frantic Severus Snape. "Is anyone hurt?" he asked as he checked Harry.

"No," Sirius answered tiredly as he went into the drawing room, dropped his rucksack on the floor and slumped on the couch. They had stayed up late discussing what happened and had gotten up at the first signs of light to catch one of the first Portkeys. They had all Apparated Neville home where Sirius and Remus apologized profusely to Mrs. Longbottom. Sirius had worried she wouldn't let Neville out of her sight ever again, but after she had certified herself that Neville was fine she had seemed quite proud of him for standing up for the little house-elf with his friends. Sirius had used the opportunity to suggest that maybe it would be a good idea for Neville to have a new wand as well as his father's so he wasn't caught without one again. He also suggested a wand holster like Harry's and the woman seemed to agree with him. At school Sirius would tell Neville to favor the new wand but there was no need to tell Mrs. Longbottom that.

After that they had all accompanied Tonks to her parents' instead of her flat. Sirius knew that by now Andromeda would have read the Daily Prophet and would be worried sick about her only daughter.

"Did you read the paper?" Remus asked as he too sat on the couch next to Sirius.

"No," Severus said bitterly, "I was called to an urgent meeting at Lucius' this morning. They are all panicked. They have no idea who sent the Dark Mark up. Crabbe suggested Bellatrix or Pettigrew but Narcissa said, and I agree, that they wouldn't have been crazy enough to go voluntarily to a place swarming with Aurors."

"So Malfoy and Crabbe were in the crowd?" Sirius asked scowling.

"And Nott, Narcissa, Goyle and Avery," Severus added as he and Harry took the other two seats.

"Too bad we can't do anything with that information," Remus said as he looked at Harry and added, "Why don't you go sleep some more cub?"

Harry looked like he didn't want to go, but Remus gave him The Look and Harry went away. He was leaving the room when Sirius said:

"There were almost a dozen, there had to have been more than the ones you mentioned."

"Probably some of their wives. Goyle has a son that is of age so maybe he was there too; you know, a nice father-son activity," Severus answered grimly.

When Remus was sure Harry had gone upstairs he turned to Severus and asked:

"Are their Marks getting darker too?"

Severus nodded

"Great," Sirius said rubbing his face, "What does Albus think about this?"

"He thinks that Harry's dream was more than a dream. There is also the fact that Bertha Jorkins seemed to have gone on vacation and never came back," Severus answered.

"Yeah, Arthur mentioned her yesterday to Bagman. Bagman dismissed it as her having a bad memory and probably getting lost, but the Bertha Jorkins we knew from school had a great memory," Sirius answered.

"We haven't seen her since the war ended," Remus said cautiously, "Maybe something happened to her. A spell gone wrong."

"You believe she's only lost?" Severus asked skeptically.

"No, I believe we need to keep our eyes open," Remus answered, "Especially with the Triwizard Tournament being hosted at Hogwarts."

Severus and Sirius nodded grimly, none of them realizing Harry had never gone up the stairs.

A/N- I have to confess, Remus translating for the Bulgarian Minister was inspired by "Trials of a Champion" by Ksomm814, but unlike her I am evil, and let Fudge continue making a fool of himself even after the game.

As always thank you all for reading and reviewing and special thanks to my beta.

I don't own Harry Potter.

Chapter 30- A Blast from the past

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Chapter 31- Planning and Reacting

"I see that the last test of the potion was successful," Albus said pleasantly from behind his desk as he watched Remus, Sirius and Severus take the seats in front of it. It was early, the morning after the full moon and the young men had just Flooked in.

"Yes," Severus said. "The changes were permanent. Now we need to set up the Pro-Werewolf Association's Headquarters and find three volunteers to test the potion for the Ministry's approval. I expect that, between bureaucracy and preparing the building, we should be up and running by January."

"Congratulations Severus. I always knew you would be successful," Albus beamed and Severus, to the shock of everyone in the room, blushed.

"Thank you Albus."

"Well, let's start talking practicality here. Sirius, you offered one of the Black estates, have you chosen one?" Albus asked.

"Yes, I think nothing would have made mother happier than to know one of the Black estates is being used to help werewolves," Sirius said biting back a smile, "I made sure to tell her."

"I expect she was ecstatic," Albus chuckled and Sirius grinned dreamily.

"I trust it is not one of the more known ones," Remus said, "It wouldn't do for people to start asking why you would have such an interest in this cause as to donate a whole estate."

"No, it's not. It's one that father bought as an investment and didn't flaunt. I didn't even know we owned it until I went through the list of everything I inherited. It's a Manor in quite a secluded area here in Scotland, which is perfect since our guests wouldn't want to be seen coming and going. I was thinking we could also make Portkeys; give them a way to contact someone in the Association without others knowing, and this someone hands them a Portkey that takes them directly inside the house. Since we will have to register the house, this way no one will be seen coming in and out, and the Ministry can't have a spy waiting to out the Werewolves."

"That is a good idea. Can your contacts make sure they know how to get in touch Remus?" Severus asked.

"Sure," Remus nodded.

"We have the building and the way for them to get there decided, what about who is going to work there?" Sirius asked.

"Volunteers," Albus explained, "I will be lending some of Hogwarts' house-elves to keep the place in order, but technically the house will only be used the seven days preceding the full moon when our guests need to be there to take the potion and make sure there is no adverse reaction. So we only need people in the house that week. I have already spoken to some people and they are quite interested in volunteering."

"Who?" Remus asked.

"Mostly former Order members, but there are some that weren't in the Order before. Lets see, from the Order we have, Kingsley Shacklebolt, Hestia Jones, Emmeline Vance, Dedalus Diggle, Sturgis Podmore and Minerva, who offered to keep the Association's finances in order, she's good with that, believe me. Then there are some that weren't in the Order, like Ted and Andromeda Tonks who offered their legal services, young Nymphadora who seemed quite interested and eager, Filius, Pomona and Molly and Arthur too. Poppy offered her services as a healer. I had thought of asking Alastor but I am afraid he is a little, shall we say, intense and will scare our guests," Albus explained.

Sirius and Remus chuckled and Severus snorted.

"How many safe rooms can be built in the Manor for the transformations?" Remus asked Sirius.

"About twenty," Sirius said pensively.

"So we will need ten batches of potion a month since ten of those rooms will be used by the returning werewolves," Severus calculated. "What did you find about the whole registry business Albus?"

"I have been talking to Ted and Andromeda, and according to them the Ministry can force any Institution to show their documents at any given time," Albus said.

Sirius slumped on his chair, "What will we do then?"

"Quite simple actually. Andromeda suggested that the Association not keep a registry," Albus said.

"But Albus," Remus started.

"The Association will provide the Permanent Wolfsbane for anyone interested. Whoever is interested will have to consent to be questioned about their intentions with Veritaserum," Albus explained.

"Is that legal?" Severus asked.

"According to Andromeda, if the questioned party consents, yes."

"So what, we question everyone and if they say they intend to hurt someone, they don't get the potion?" Remus asked.

"Yes." Dumbledore answered.

"What if they find a way around the Veritaserum?" Severus asked concerned.

Albus smiled, "Ah, as Andromeda suggested, the Association won't have a registry but there is no problem if, let's say, I have a ... how would I call it... a personal journal about the people that come and go in the Association."

"A personal journal?" Remus grinned.

"According to Andromeda, the Ministry may request the documents of any legal Institution, but unless they have reason to believe someone is involved in a crime or some sort of illegal activity and can prove it enough to get a warrant, any person personal affects are quite out of the Ministry's reach, no matter where they work or, in our case, volunteer. Besides, there is no way of them knowing if we have said journal."

"So we keep an unofficial registry," Sirius smiled, "What if someone talks?"

"That is why I hand picked the people I was asking to volunteer," Albus said calmly, "They are either members of the Order that I trust or people that would have been in the Order if they hadn't had small children at the time, like the Tonks' and the Weasleys. Filius and Pomona weren't active Members, but they were unofficially a part of the Order."

"People that would have known Severus is our spy anyway, you mean?" Sirius asked knowingly.

"Yes," Albus said. "Severus will be using his alias to deal with any problem that may occur, but there is always the chance of a volunteer having to contact him for some emergency and I can't have just anyone know he is involved."

"Alias?" Remus asked.

"During my research I used an alias to contact other Potions Masters," Severus explained, "I used Polyjuice to look like a Muggle that lives near my house and created a new identity for me. Sean Evans is a home-schooled Potions Master whose only reference was Albus Dumbledore."

"Quite a good reference if I say so myself," Albus said.

Severus rolled his eyes and continued, "As Remus well knows, the use of aliases in the academic world is common. If- when I can shed my role as a spy, I can come out and let the world know that Sean Evans and Severus Snape are the same person. I have documentation in my vaults to prove so."

"That was smart of you Severus," Remus said with a knowing glint in his eyes, "The Ministry will probably want a Potions Master's name with the potion, not only the Association to approve it, even if they consent not to disclose said name."

"Yes, but there is another matter I've been thinking about," Severus said seriously, "I was able to create this potion by adjusting a previous discovery. Someone else could find something new from my potion and who knows, get a cure. So it's a little selfish to keep the formula completely to ourselves. I understand the need not to advertise the formula but we could let it be known that if any Potions Master or healer is interested, they can come to the Association. If they consent to a binding oath not to disclose the formula, and that they will only use it for further research and not to brew it for anyone, they will have access to it and to Sean Evans for discussions."

Albus nodded thoughtfully, "I had thought of that and I think your solution is satisfactory. That also is related to another problem I had been thinking of, which is of course the matter that we don't want to restrict the Permanent Wolfsbane to Britain. Right now we will work on opening the Association, but I am making contacts abroad to know if there are people interested to do the same in other countries. I, of

course, want to make sure they will take the same precautions as us and we can either provide the potion or can have their brewers swear an oath too."

"Maybe at first provide and once we are certain of their intentions we can delegate," Severus pondered.

"This would put a big strain on you Severus," Sirius stated.

"Actually it wouldn't." Severus smirked. "You are very good at Potions Sirius, completely capable of following instructions. Ms. Tonks, even though she is a walking disaster, is a very good Potions brewer too. And I know she can be trusted with this. I don't trust Harry yet to do it alone, but he can assist us and I am confident that in a couple of years he would be quite capable on his own. The same goes for Ms. Granger, but unfortunately as of now she is too young to be in the Order and therefore know my loyalties, but in the future, she is a good candidate. Albus, too is a good Potions brewer, as is Poppy, and if I am not mistaken Ms. Vance was decent too. She was a couple of years behind us wasn't she? If all of you help me, we could brew quite a bit. Besides, there will be a maximum of ten doses a month for the Association in Britain, and the other countries will have a maximum too. It's not like any of us will be able to host hundreds at a time."

"The werewolf community of Great Britain isn't more than three hundred, I'd wager," Remus said, "Since the potion is permanent afterwards, it means they wouldn't have to come back. In about two, two and a half years we should be able to reach them all. After that it would slow down to only the newly bitten, and that doesn't happen every month, and with most of the werewolves tame that number should decrease too."

"You can't forget Greyback has followers, Remus, which means not all of those three hundred will qualify." Albus said sadly and Remus nodded grimly.

"I think we should prioritize," Severus said, "Children and adults that have just been bitten should go first. They haven't had all that experience with the transformation and if we can minimize their suffering it's less likely for them to turn to Greyback."

"I hate to agree, but Severus is right. Someone who is already used to the transformation will be able to endure a few more and be more patient than someone who has just been bitten," Remus said.

"Maybe we could separate, you know like how the Muggles have separate lines at the supermarket for the elderly, so they can go first?" Sirius tried to explain, "We can separate vacancies. We have ten spots per month. We make three unofficial waiting lists of who is interested in the potion. In one we put the children, in the other recently bitten and in the last one those who have dealt with the problem longer; maybe we could have one for the elderly too. I mean, they deserve it. So we separate spots in order of arrival on the lists. We have two spots dedicated to recently bitten, two for the elderly, three for children, and three for the rest. If any of the special ones aren't filled they automatically go to the rest. " Remus nodded, "I think that would work. The packs actually value their children and elderly so they will not object to them having special treatment. They may object for the recently bitten but I think we can negotiate that."

"How does the Ministry's approval of the potion work?" Sirius asked.

"As I said before, the Ministry requires three test subjects. The Potion will be submitted by the Association, and therefore they won't require any formal documents of the brewer, but they may require a name. Then the Potion is tested in a previously selected place, which could be Headquarters of the Association if we ask for it, with three Ministry agents. Which means that during two full moons the three subjects will have to transform there and be tested. The Ministry may ask for three to make sure this works and it was not just a fluke. Once they are satisfied with the Potion's formula they give it the seal of approval. If it's a disclosed formula it goes to the public registry; if not it goes to a sealed archive and the examiners have to swear a binding oath not to disclose it until the holder of the rights to the Potion dies," Severus explained.

"Said rights can be passed as inheritance so the potion formula can be locked forever. Since Severus' formula will be owned by an Institution and not a person, the rights will pass along with the Institution. A copy of the formula will also be stored in mine, Harry's and Severus' vaults, just in case," Albus added. "Good," Sirius said pleased, "So I'll get someone started on the Manor to build at least three safe rooms for the test. I know that the Ministry can get annoying and slow with their approvals so we can build the rest while we wait for their answer."

"I think that's all we need for today," Albus said happily, "I'll talk to Ted, Andromeda and Minerva, and start on the bureaucratic details. Remus, do you think you can find the test subjects?"

"As long as there is some kind of protection against the Ministry keeping tabs on them, yes," Remus said.

"The whole procedure is witnessed only by the three examiners. They will be Unspeakables and are required by the binding oath not to reveal anything they learn at the tests, even the subjects' identities," Severus explained.

"Then I will have three people ready for the next full moon," Remus said.

"Good, that's that and we're all done here," Sirius said happily. "Hum, Albus, I need to talk to you about another subject."

"Yes, Sirius."

"I want Harry to have extra Defense lessons again on top of his Animagus training. With all this that's happened, I would feel calmer if he knows how to defend himself even more."

"Alastor will be teaching DADA this year; I am sure he will be more than pleased to resume-" Albus started but Sirius cut him off.

"I have enormous respect for Mad-Eye but I want Severus to teach Harry," Sirius said and Severus head snapped towards him.

"What?" he asked.

"I want Harry to learn to fight off Death Eaters, Severus. And you know how they think, how they act. Mad-Eye was the best Auror out there but he does not think like a Death Eater. At one time you did and

it's no use pretending you didn't when that can benefit us. I know you don't anymore, I don't mean to offend you," Sirius explained.

"You are not offending me. You are right. I was one and I know how they think even if I don't agree with them anymore."

"Good, but unfortunately Alastor doesn't know how close to Harry you are, so he needs to be kept out of the loop," Remus said.

"I'm not complaining," Severus said and Albus shook his head. Severus and Alastor Moody would never get along."

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"So Professors Black and Lupin are worried about your dream and there is going to be a tournament at Hogwarts?" Neville asked.

As soon as they got on the Hogwarts Express, Ron, Neville, Hermione and Harry secured themselves a compartment and Harry told them what he had heard about the Triwizard Tournament and his dream.

"Do they think Trelawney's prediction has anything to do with your dream?" Ron asked and Hermione snorted.

"They didn't say, but I don't think it matters. I mean, if it wasn't just a dream, Pettigrew and Bellatrix are already with Voldemort. The prediction has been fulfilled," Harry said.

"What's this Tournament about anyway?" Ron asked.

"Dunno," Harry shrugged, "I couldn't ask or they'd know I eavesdropped. Dad doesn't like eavesdropping especially because he usually tells me stuff that parents wouldn't so if he isn't telling it's because he *really* doesn't want me to hear."

"Honestly, don't you ever read *Hogwarts a History*? The Triwizard Tournament is a tournament between-"
"and what followed was a very long lecture about all the Tournaments Hogwarts had hosted. All in all the boys surmised that three schools were involved and people had died.

"But why would they be worried? I mean if they are reinstating it they have to have solved the death toll issue right?" Neville asked.

"Durmstrang has a bad reputation involving Dark Arts. Maybe they are worried about that," Ron said.

"With the schools coming, this faithful servant could be one of the guests," Hermione said. "That's probably why they are worried. Do be careful Harry."

"I always am!" Harry said and the other three looked at him skeptically.

"What? The things that have happened were not my fault!" he cried indignantly.

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"This is going to be one interesting year," Harry thought while fluffing his pillow. The welcoming feast sure was interesting. Between Dumbledore's announcement of the Triwizard Tournament, to which Harry and his friends put up properly surprised faces, and the arrival of their new Defense Against the Dark

Arts teacher, his dad's former boss, Alastor Mad-Eye Moody, all the students were extremely excited and had been chatting until late in the night. Moody had made his dramatic entrance, and if Harry knew Moody, he would bet he had waited for that thunder to crash to walk inside at the best time to scare the students. Ron had mentioned that earlier in the day his dad had to deal with some issue about Moody attacking some Muggle police officers with his booby trapped dustbins, which Harry could believe.

He also noticed that his Uncle Sev was not one tiny bit happy with Moody's appearance. Harry knew they didn't get along because Moody didn't believe his Uncle had really left the Death Eaters; he had heard him numerous times going on about how there is no such thing as an ex-Death Eater. Well, Harry knew of two, Regulus and Severus, and he wasn't about to let Moody change his mind; of course he couldn't quite tell him that. The Horcruxes were a secret and Severus' closeness to Harry was not known to people even in the Order. They had to keep up appearances. Severus didn't trust all the Order members, often using Pettigrew as an example. Because of that he often played a part for them too, by not letting them be sure of his loyalties, making it look possible for him to actually be a spy of Voldemort's in Dumbledore's Order instead of the other way around. He said that this way his position wouldn't be compromised. And though even Severus admitted Moody would die before joining Voldemort, he didn't like the man and counted him out of his own inner circle, never letting anything slip in front of him.

Then there was the Tournament, and Harry was glad for the age limit. He didn't want to be in the Tournament but knew that because he was the Boy-Who-Lived people would expect it from him just as Malfoy had mentioned in the train. He was very surprised when he came in their compartment taunting them, and they all knew what he was talking about!

Sure, eternal glory was tempting but Harry had enough near death experiences to last him a lifetime and he expected he would have more if Voldemort ever came back. He shuddered at the thought. His dad had approached him before he took him to the platform and told him about his extra defense lessons as well as Animagus training. For the first time, Sirius wasn't postponing the training and Harry understood his dad was worried that the time that he would need any advantage he could get was getting closer. Harry would be doing the extra lessons twice a week, Tuesdays and Thursdays, after dinner. When Harry said that he usually had Quidditch practice during those times, Sirius told him not to worry and now Harry knew why. Quidditch had been canceled. Sirius had even authorized Harry to tell his friends he would be doing extra Defense training because of the recent events that happened: Bellatrix kidnapping him and the World Cup.

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"McGonagall wasn't very happy," Remus said dryly from his chair, "And I'm guessing Albus won't be either. He'll be getting an owl from Lucius Malfoy soon, if not a personal visit."

"But you must confess that it must have been funny," Sirius said wiping away tears from laughter, "The stuck up little twerp could use a little humiliation to bring himself down a notch or two."

"Yes," Remus said annoyed, "But a teacher acts through detentions and taking away points not Transfiguration and most certainly does not bounce a student like that. I honestly thought Mad-Eye had more sense than that."

Sirius stopped laughing, "Yeah, I guess you are right. I wasn't thinking about that point of view. I would have never done that to a student, and I've given Malfoy his fair share of detentions, not that it has worked any. He always acts like I am going to get sacked for daring to do so."

"I think if he lost his little prince status in Slytherin it would work better. All the other students have to contend with their Heads of Houses when they get any detention, but Severus can only pat him on the head and award him points to make up for the ones he's lost. I know that grates Severus, but there's nothing we can do now. The best we can hope is that he'll eventually start learning," Remus sighed.

"Speaking of Severus, someone has to talk to him. The students are already complaining to us about his fouler-than-normal mood," Sirius frowned.

"I think someone should talk to Moody. He's the one that keeps acting like he's going to arrest Severus at any second."

"Agreed. I'll have a chat with him," Sirius nodded.

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The students all scurried out of the way, shocked. This was not the teacher they were used seeing stalk through the halls, glowering like he was now. He banged the door to the staff room open and every teacher inside jumped. He went straight to the one he was looking for, who was standing next to the table with the tea.

"What the bloody hell were you thinking Mad-Eye?" Sirius growled.

"You're going to have to be more specific than that sonny," Moody grunted.

"Sirius," McGonagall started reproachfully, while approaching the duo.

"I'm talking about you performing Unforgivables in front of a bunch of fourteen-year-olds!" Sirius hissed.

"What?" McGonagall asked appalled.

"They are old enough, and need to know what's out there waiting for them," Moody grunted.

"There was no need to perform the curses to let them know what's out there. My son did not need to see the Killing Curse performed. Neville Longbottom did not need to witness the Cruciatus Curse--"

"Both of them have more right to know what those curses do than others," Moody growled.

"They know," Remus said firmly, "Make no mistake, they know. But there was no need for them to see it."

"I believe in a practical approach and there was a time when you did too Black. I showed them the curses in the exact same way I showed you," Moody said righteously.

"When I was eighteen and training to be an Auror. What's gotten into you Alastor?" Sirius cried.

"I ask the same to you Sirius," Moody grunted, "There was a time when you were one of the best Aurors out there and acted as such. There was a time when you did not defend the enemy," and at this his

magical eye focused directly on Severus who was inconspicuously watching the scene as he leaned against the wall. At this he straightened and stalked out.

"I already told you. Albus trusts Severus and you should too, but I think Albus won't very much like your way of teaching," Sirius hissed.

"He authorized it," Moody said grinning victoriously.

"Did he now?" Sirius narrowed his eyes. "Then I shall have a word with him," and he stalked out followed by Remus.

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"Unforgivables Albus!" Severus barked, "How could you authorize that?"

"I didn't," Dumbledore said, raising his hands at the fuming young men in front of him. He had quite a scare when the three of them barged in his office like they were about to face Voldemort himself.

"So Mad-Eye lied," Sirius sneered.

"No, he didn't," Dumbledore rushed to explain at the glares he received, "Alastor's condition for accepting the position was that I would not interfere with his classes or the way he taught. I had to accept. I need him here because of Karkaroff."

"I can keep a better eye on Karkaroff than Moody," Severus drawled.

"Yes, you can. And I am counting on that. But Alastor can intimidate him into behaving and you, Severus, can not do that," Albus said sadly.

"Well, we don't want him performing Unforgivables in front of Harry," Remus said firmly.

"And yet you want Harry to learn to defend himself from Death Eaters," Albus countered.

"Knowing and seeing are completely different things," Sirius said in a low tone. "He doesn't need to see the curses to know what the Death Eaters can do. I never wanted Harry to see them in his life. I have already failed to protect him from one of the Unforgivables last year. He could have done without the other two and the same with Neville Longbottom, Susan Bones and all the other children in this school who lost family to those curses."

"I'll talk to Alastor, but I can not interfere," Albus sighed, "I am sorry but I would rather have the children shaken up by seeing those curses performed on spiders than on them."

"Karkaroff wouldn't dare-" Remus said.

"Do you want to risk it?" Albus cut him off, "He could be the one Voldemort was talking about in Harry's dream."

That efficiently shut up the three men.

A/N- I was not the first to think of making Andromeda and Ted Tonks lawyers. The first time I read it was in "All at Once" from Aurilia.

Thanks you all for taking your time to read my work and for reviewing.

Thanks SWaddict1986 for betaing!

I do not own Harry Potter.

Chapter 32- Handling Hermione

"Please Professor you have to talk to her," Ron begged and Neville and Harry folded their hands and made their best puppy eyes. Remus looked at the pleading teenagers and bit back a smile:

"What seems to be the problem?" he asked.

"She's gone mental!" Harry cried. "She wants to start a revolution or something to free all the House-elves in the world and worst of all, she wants us to wear this," he finished waving a badge that said SPEW on it.

"And she wants us to get more people to wear them," Neville explained.

"And when Ron reminded her that Neville and I have House-elves at home she just went nuts. I even tried explaining that we tried to free them but they wouldn't have it, but she just said we didn't talk to them right. She wants to talk to Kreacher herself. Can you imagine that? Kreacher is going to have another fit!" Harry cried.

"Please Professor Lupin, you have to help us!" Ron begged again.

"Fine, I'll talk to Ms. Granger. I think I may have a better way to focus her good intentions," Remus answered his eyes shining with mirth.

"Thank you!" the three boys sighed relieved.

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"So, you understand how this works?" Sirius asked Hermione. He and Remus had called the girl to Sirius' office for a chat. She nodded.

"This organization works with volunteers and you are asking me to be one," she said.

"Yes," Remus answered. "You are a very smart witch and very diligent and organized. We have two lawyers volunteering. But since, they are volunteers they can't dedicate all their time towards this. Usually the Tonks' have interns in their law office that do their research for them, but since they can't force the interns to volunteer they need someone to do the research for them. And you can do that from Hogwarts. They will send you the books that you wouldn't find in the library here."

"I am good at research," Hermione said, her eyes shining.

"We know," Sirius beamed. "That is why we called you. The PWA is starting small. The organization's first objective is to administer a new potion that has just been developed to the werewolf community. This potion is now on the Ministry approval phase. But that's not the only reason for the Association. We estimate that in about two and a half years we will have reached all the werewolves in Britain and therefore we could expand our efforts into gaining new rights for them."

"You see, we expect that once the general Wizarding community gets used to the fact that werewolves are tamed during the full moon, we would have more support in trying to change peoples minds about

them. But this has to be done slowly because this is a prejudice very much ingrained in many minds and lives. If we start too aggressively, we will get nowhere because people will get defensive. We have to do this smoothly. Do you understand what I am getting to?" Remus asked her.

"Yes," she said, "People don't like changes and if they don't realize things are changing we have a better chance than if we try to force an abrupt change."

"Exactly!" Sirius smiled at her.

"Now, would you like to join our cause and help Andromeda and Ted in whatever they need? You may learn a lot about our laws while you do the research for them."

She nodded eagerly, already thinking about what she could learn and apply to SPEW. The Professors were right; the way she was going about this was all wrong and that was why she was already facing so much resistance. She needed to be subtle, oh Merlin, she needed to be Slytherin.

A very gleeful grin appeared on her face and Sirius and Remus smirked approvingly. *Oh, to teach them so young!* They thought.

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"So how did they take it?" Neville asked curiously when Harry entered the Common Room.

Harry sat next to Ron, who was finishing making up his Divination homework and looked up eagerly.

"Yes, students are still talking about Professor Black's reaction to Moody showing us the curses. Word is his yells could be heard all the way in the dungeons. They should have closed the door, you know?"

Harry looked guilty, bit his lip and said, "I think Uncle Moony and Dad took it quite calmly."

"What did you do?" Hermione asked suspiciously from behind a huge stack of very heavy looking books.

Harry fidgeted a little and bit his lip, "Well I had to tell them. They would hear from someone else and then I'd just be in trouble. And I knew they'd over react soldopedthemwithacalmingdraughtbeforeIsaidanything," he finished very quickly.

"Didn't catch that," Hermione said raising her eyebrow.

Harry sighed and said slowly, "I doped them with a calming draught before I said anything about Moody putting us under the Imperius curse," and as an afterthought he added, "and left before the draught's effects wore off. Hermione! They should know better than accept tea I prepare!" he finished defensively at Hermione's disapproving look. Inwardly Harry winced. Sirius and Remus hadn't been alone. Harry had gone to meet them for their extra lesson, which consisted of his first Animagus training, finally! Up until now he had been brushing up in dueling. Severus was there too and he would not take kindly to being doped. But in all honesty Harry thought he deserved it; "Be the stag," what kind of teaching was that and why had his dad snickered every time Severus said that?

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"I don't know if I'll hex Moody first or ground Harry. What kind of son drugs his own father?"

"Your son," Severus offered helpfully. Sirius stopped his pacing and glared at the Potions Master who was very calmly seated in an armchair. Too calmly, in his opinion. And he wasn't the only one.

"Are you two still under the effects of the calming draught?" he hissed.

"No," Remus answered calmly.

Severus rolled his eyes and answered curtly, "There is nothing we can do about Moody. He has free reign and we can't stop him. As much as I hate that he put children under the Imperius Curse, at least we learned something important and useful."

"Yeah," Sirius laughed bitterly, "And what would that be?"

"Harry can throw it off," Remus answered. "He managed to throw it off entirely by the end of the class and that is an advantage that I very much like to know he has."

Sirius stopped pacing and looked at them pensively. He huffed a little for show but sat down and said reluctantly, "Fine, you're right."

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After the last student left, Sirius closed the door to his classroom and cast a privacy spell. He walked back to his desk taking one of the students' chairs and motioned Harry to sit. He put his chair in front of him and started seriously:

"I asked you to stay behind, Harry, because I want to talk to you about the schools that are coming next Friday."

Harry nodded. He was finally going to know why they were so worried about the Tournament.

"Durmstrang's Headmaster, Igor Karkaroff, was a convicted Death Eater," Sirius said bluntly.

"One of the ones that pleaded Imperius?"

"No, he named people and was able to make a deal to get out. One of the people he named was Severus."

"Is that why Uncle Sev is in such a bad mood? I was thinking it was because he lost the chance to poison us with the schools' arrivals cutting his class short."

Sirius chuckled and swatted Harry's knee playfully, "I'm serious here. And don't even think about it!" he warned as Harry opened his mouth. "I don't trust Karkaroff, he may not be liked in the Death Eater's circle for naming them, and the others think he would be scared of Voldemort, but I think scared people can be dangerous. Especially if they have no loyalty to anyone, as Karkaroff proved. I want you to be very careful around him."

Harry nodded.

"This also means Severus will have to be extra careful because Karkaroff will probably be keeping an eye on him. So from now on we will meet for our extra lessons in the Room of Requirement. Severus won't be able to come to the Marauder's Quarters so frequently. You are going to use your cloak to get there

and the Map. If you ever see Karkaroff or Moody near the Room when you have to get in, go back to the dorm and let me know through the two way mirror. "

"Why Moody?"

"Moody doesn't know about us and Severus. He has never trusted Severus and probably never will. I trust Moody, but if he thinks Severus may be getting to you... there is no telling what kind of action he may decide to take. The only times Severus has been to the Marauder's Quarters since Moody arrived was for your lessons. We have met in Albus' office all the other times."

"But dad, if I am wearing my cloak-"

"Moody's eye can see through your cloak, Harry. It can see through walls too, normally, except Hogwarts' walls are protected and it doesn't work here. So if you are already in the Room that's okay but outside he will know you're there and all he has to do is wait to see who comes out after you. Now in hindsight we think we should have met in the Room of Requirement from the start, but we only thought of it now because after you left us last time, doped I might add, when Severus exited he ran into Moody and we had to come up with an excuse about him coming to complain about your behavior."

Harry nodded and kept a very innocent face. Sirius didn't look like he was going to punish him for the whole calming draught episode and he didn't want to give him an excuse to do so.

"Next class will be on Monday instead of Tuesday because Tuesday is the full moon and Severus and I will be at the Association with the Ministry's examiners for the first round of tests."

"They are already testing?" Harry asked eagerly.

"Yes, you wouldn't believe the amount of paperwork necessary. Two months! Two months to start the testing! Unbelievable! And they are demanding three full moons. So it's October, November and December before they give their approval and Andy estimates at least another month before the final paperwork is ready. Honestly. We had hoped to start the year with the first batch but it looks like we won't open until February."

"Uncle Sev is going as Sean Evans right?" Harry asked worried.

"Of course. Don't worry about that. Moony already got three volunteers for the test and Albus, Dora, Minerva and Ted will be there to help. The contractors worked faster than I thought and they already have eight safe rooms, just like our basement, ready for the werewolves. The house will be ready before the approval. Minerva and I will be there as the only Animagi since Sev can't reveal he is one. But everything should work fine. We will have cages inside the safe room for the testing so the examiners can approach."

"And will the volunteers get to wear Moony fashion?" Harry asked innocently and Sirius laughed. They had been making fun of Remus since the second full moon because of his whole T-shirt and shorts style, saying he should start his own designer line. He had just ignored them.

"Yes, they will," Sirius said more seriously, "It gives them back a little dignity."

"I know. But what kind of Marauders would we be if we didn't make fun of Uncle Moony?"

"Preposterous!"

"He won't be there right?"

"No, I know the Ministry examiners are oath bound to keep a secret but I don't want to take the chance of anyone outing Moony. I know the volunteers are taking a great risk and I admire them for that."

"Uncle Moony also took a great risk testing the potion first," Harry defended.

"I am not saying different Harry. But it's no use him being there since he already has taken the potion without their presence. Better not risk it for nothing."

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That Tuesday night, Harry tiptoed through the corridors under his Invisibility Cloak and with the aid of the Marauder's Map that his father had handed him before term started. If he was honest with himself he was a tad nervous. Okay, very nervous, but it was understandable considering the last time he had been face to face with the creature he was looking for. Very carefully he reached his destination and started dismantling the wards on the portrait door. It was a good thing he always paid attention to how the wards were put up and down. As he entered carefully he saw the werewolf laying on a rug in the middle of the living room. He couldn't help but smile; Moony was so cute dressed in a green T-shirt and khaki shorts. As soon as he entered, the werewolf's head snapped up.

Harry took off his now useless cloak and closed the portrait door behind him. He walked calmly towards the wolf, "I didn't know you could give someone The Look as Moony," he tried joking but Moony was not faltering in his stern gaze.

Harry sat next to him and sighed, "I knew you'd be safe Uncle Moony," he patted Moony's head. "And I wanted you to know that. I wanted to show you, that you are safe and you won't hurt me, and I know that. But most importantly I never want you to think I am scared of you."

Moony gave a little whine and rested his head on Harry's lap. When Albus came to check if Remus needed something in the middle of the night, he found Harry sleeping on the floor using a snoring werewolf as pillow and couldn't help but smile and let them be.

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"Severus, you seem to be avoiding me," the man said as he approached the Potions Master in the hall.

Severus narrowed his eyes and sneered, "Why ever would I, Igor? Oh, wait. Can it possibly be because you named me among a few others of our colleagues just to save your skin?"

"Yes, and if memory doesn't fail me Dumbledore vouched for you as a spy for their side," Karkaroff said in a low tone.

Severus smirked, "Dumbledore is a very trusting man Igor. He believes in second chances."

"So you haven't?" Karkaroff asked interested.

"What I have or haven't done Igor," Severus said in almost a whisper coming very close to Karkaroff, "is not something I discuss in such an open space and most certainly not in present company."

Karkaroff glared, and by the rapid intake of breath and the reddening of his skin, Severus knew he had interpreted it as a jibe to his loyalty and it had struck a nerve. At that exact moment, another figure approached them from behind Karkaroff and startled him by asking:

"Having a nice reunion?"

Karkaroff turned abruptly and glared at Sirius but his eyes darted dubiously to Severus before he said, "I got lost and was asking Professor Snape for directions."

"Oh, if you want I would be delighted to escort you to your ship," Sirius drawled icily.

"No need. I think I can find my way now," Karkaroff said tightly, "Severus," he gave a small nod and left.

"Snape," Sirius bit out as he too stalked away their eyes meeting briefly.

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"Do you think Karkaroff suspects Severus?" Remus asked once Sirius arrived at the Marauders' Quarters.

"He'd be an idiot if he didn't. But I think Sev managed to keep him intrigued," Sirius answered slumping in the couch, "I'm knackered."

Remus smiled at his friends, "It was quite a night. I wonder who'll put their name in the Goblet."

"Diggory for sure, I've heard the students talking. I know the twins will try and I can't wait to see how Albus' protection works," Sirius smirked, his eyes sparkling.

"I am just glad Harry won't be participating. We have enough worries without having him facing dangerous tasks," Remus sighed.

"Here, here."

In Gryffindor Tower Harry was thinking the same thing as his dormmates discussed ways of getting around Dumbledore's age line.

A/N- My usual thanks to all my readers and reviewers and to my beta.

Chapter 32- Handling Hermione

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Chapter33- Unpleasant consequences

Severus was thirty-four years old, definitely not old enough to start having hearing problems. So why the bloody hell had he just heard Albus read Harry's name and why did a fourth name get spit out from that bloody Goblet of Fire anyway? He glanced at Harry as Albus called his name once again and saw Granger pushing him forward. He'd never seen him so lost. He looked like he was three again and had just seen Peeves for the first time in his life. Harry walked slowly and made eye contact with Albus, Sirius, Remus and Severus as if begging them to tell him this was a joke. As Harry went through the same door the other champions had gone through all hell broke lose.

The students' cries calling him a cheater grew deafening. Karkaroff and Maxime rounded Dumbledore demanding explanations and Sirius and Remus were not far behind.

"SILENCE!" Albus roared. "Students please return to your Common Rooms, ship or carriage."

The students seemed ready for a mutiny, but Albus Dumbledore was not someone you went against, so they promptly followed his orders. As the last student left, Albus turned to the teachers.

"Madam Maxime, Professor Karkaroff, Mr. Crouch, Mr. Bagman; we have champions to instruct and a mystery to solve. Shall we join them?"

Maxime and Karkaroff seemed ready to jump on Dumbledore but nodded curtly. Bagman on the other hand was bouncing like a school child and sprinted ahead.

"Sirius, Remus, I believe you have the right to come with us," and so they did. And Minerva, Severus and Moody followed them. As they entered the room they found the other three champions surrounding Bagman who was beaming as he told them that Harry was also one. As she spotted them, Fleur Delacour quickly rounded on her headmistress as Sirius and Remus went to Harry, Remus standing behind him and resting his hands on Harry's shoulders in a reassuring manner.

"Madam Maxime! Zey are saying zat zis little boy is to compete also!"

Even in his disbelief at what was happening, Severus smirked inwardly at Harry's scowl at Fleur. She shouldn't have called him little. Harry never liked that.

"What is ze meaning of zis, Dumbly-door?" Madame Maxime asked imperiously.

"I'd rather like to know that myself Dumbledore!" Karkaroff spat, "Two Hogwarts champions? I don't remember anyone telling me that the hosting school is allowed two champions- or have I not read the rules carefully enough?"

Oh, I bet you did! Severus thought. He was surveying Karkaroff carefully for any signs that he had been the one to put Harry's name in, because Severus knew as well as Sirius and Remus that Harry would have and could have never done it. Harry wouldn't want the attention that being a champion would bring him. Severus eyed Harry who was watching the exchange, his face white as a sheet, his eyes sometimes darting towards his father as if pleading for him to get him out of this mess. Sirius looked livid, ready to murder someone.

"Hogwarts cannot have two champions. It is most unjust," Maxime said.

"We were under the impression your Age Line would keep out younger contestants Dumbledore. Otherwise we, of course, would have brought along a wider selection of candidates, from our own schools," Karkaroff said with a steely smile in place and his gaze colder than ever.

Severus hated this; he knew what he had to do, but he hated it nonetheless. He wanted nothing more than to be next to Harry comforting him but instead he said, "It's no one's fault but Potter's, Karkaroff. Don't go blaming Dumbledore for Potter's determination to break rules. He has been crossing lines since he was a small boy and has always been indulged by his so called parents-"

"Thank you Severus," Dumbledore, thankfully, cut him off firmly. Severus glared at Harry and saw him flinch. He hoped that in his heart Harry knew that Severus never meant a word of that, but he couldn't skip such an opportunity to let Karkaroff and Moody see he hated Harry and the Marauders with their own eyes- or ears. He was thankful for Sirius telling Moody to back off because Dumbledore vouched for Severus, but that raised suspicion. Suspicion that had to be squashed.

Albus turned to Harry and asked firmly if Harry had put his name in the Goblet of Fire or had an older student do it for him. Harry answered negatively to both questions and what followed were disbelieving and outraged cries from Maxime, Karkaroff and Fleur Delacour. At this, Maxime said Dumbledore could have made a mistake and McGonagall became indignant. Severus agreed that Albus would not have made a mistake but kept silent just observing.

Karkaroff turned to Bagman and Crouch to see if they could get Harry out and Severus dared to hope. Crouch soon crushed that hope.

"We must follow the rules and the rules state clearly that those people whose names come out of the Goblet of Fire must compete in the Tournament."

"Well I won't allow it!" Sirius cried angry. "My son did not enter and he is underage. I don't allow him to compete."

"This is a magically binding contract Mr. Black," Crouch said, and Severus noticed it lacked his usual distaste for Sirius. "Your son has to compete despite your wishes or he will face the consequences of breaking the contract. You know as well as I do that they are not pretty."

Sirius fumed but backed off. Breaking a magical binding contract meant loss of magic in mild contracts or death in Unbreakable Vows and Severus would bet anything that the Goblet of Fire constituted an Unbreakable Vow.

"Quite convenient if you ask me," Moody grunted staring with both eyes at Karkaroff.

"And why would that be?" Karkaroff spluttered.

"It's obvious isn't it? The Boy-Who-Lived has to compete in a highly dangerous tournament with tasks designed for Wizards older and more experience than him," Sirius barked. "Someone put my son's name in that Goblet in the hopes of him dying in one of those tasks and I have a very likely suspect."

Karkaroff blistered but then laughed, "I see Moody has been teaching his paranoia to his protégés."

"No student could have bypassed Albus' protection and hoodwinked the Goblet into thinking there was a fourth school competing. I am guessing that's how they submitted Potter's name to make sure he was the only one in his category," Moody growled.

"You seem to have given this a great deal of thought, Moody," Karkaroff spat and Moody gave him a very eerie smile, "and a very ingenious theory it is, though I heard you recently got it in your head that one of your birthday presents was a basilisk's egg, and smashed it to bits before realizing it was a carriage clock. So you'll understand if we don't take you entirely seriously..."

"Actually, I do," Sirius said coldly. "I think it's quite a probable theory." Karkaroff glared at Sirius, "And as you ought to remember, it was Alastor's and mine jobs to think the way dark wizards do."

"How this situation arose," Dumbledore said, cutting the boiling tension firmly, "I do not know but it seems we have no choice but to accept it."

Severus did have to admire Dumbledore's way of making grown men feel like naughty schoolchildren. After stopping their fight and hearing Madame Maxime make one last attempt to complain, Bagman and Crouch gave the champions their instructions and Maxime and Karkaroff both pulled their champions away. Dumbledore allowed Cedric and Harry to go back to their dorms but Sirius led Harry towards the Marauder's Quarter, trading a very quick glance with Severus. Severus managed to look insulted at a glare from Moody and stalked out immediately after the Marauders had left and going through a hidden passageway, he went to meet them at their Quarters.

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"I am going to die!" Harry cried nervously. He was pacing the Marauder's Quarters when Severus got there, twisting his hands compulsively. Severus walked up to him and stopped him, holding his arms and looking him in the eyes.

"No you won't. We won't let you and we will prepare you."

"But teachers are not allowed to help," he said in a small voice.

"So what?" Sirius said firmly. "The magical contract with the Goblet is about you having to compete, it doesn't say you can't have help. That was a rule added after the Goblet was created when the cheating

was getting to a point where the teachers were practically competing for the students. Besides, just to be on the safe side we can just not help you directly with the Tournament. We will keep your training as usual. If it helps you, all the better."

"But you can get into trouble," Harry said worried.

"You are worth the trouble Harry," Remus said firmly squeezing Harry's shoulder. "Besides, do you really think Karkaroff and Maxime won't help their champions?"

Harry shook his head.

"We'll get you through this Harry," Severus promised him and Harry nodded miserably.

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Harry was in a bad mood as he entered the Great Hall for lunch. If the whispering wasn't enough, the row he had with Ron the previous night when he went back to the Gryffindor Tower was. He couldn't believe Ron thought he put his name in the Goblet of Fire. How could he? They had been best friends since they were nine. Ron was his first friend his own age; he was his Padfoot! He always thought they would be friends forever. Hermione said he was jealous. Well he could go and compete in this bloody Tournament if he wanted to! He had gone as far as to say that it was why Harry had been having extra defense lessons.

"No, you moron! It's because people keep trying to kill me!" Harry had yelled back. A little overdramatic, yes, but Ron deserved it.

At least Neville and Hermione didn't think he had entered his name. They had taken Harry out to the grounds for breakfast and they had stayed there talking. They had also stayed with Harry as he wrote a huge letter to his Aunt Andy and Uncle Ted to make sure there was no way out of this, and took it up to the owlery where he gave it to Hedwig.

All the students, except for most of the Gryffindors, were glaring at him. Harry did his best to ignore them as he sat chewing his tasteless lunch. A tap on his shoulder distracted him and when he looked back to see who wanted him he suppressed a groan. Great! There was someone that would be highly pissed off at him.

"Yes Cedric."

Cedric Diggory stood straight and in a clear voice he stated, "I believe you."

"What?" Harry spluttered as the Hall went quiet.

"You said you didn't put your name in the Goblet and I believe you. I've known you for six years and I already made the mistake of suspecting you once before. I won't repeat it. So I wanted you to know that I have no hard feelings and I wish you luck."

Harry stared at him, mouth wide open and could barely just stammer a "Thank you." Cedric smiled and left to join the Hufflepuffs.

"Well," Hermione said pleased. "That's good. Maybe that will help other people understand too."

Harry quickly glanced at Ron who was looking straight ahead and talking to Seamus and Dean, ignoring him completely. He sighed.

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Cedric saying he believed Harry had left him with a great feeling that didn't last long. Ted and Andy's answer just confirmed he had no way out and to add insult to injury, most of the rest of the school did not agree with Cedric, with the exception of most Gryffindors and a couple of loners from the other houses. The Hufflepuffs were angry because Harry had stolen their champion's glory, the Ravenclaws thought he had cheated as an attention seeking ploy and the Slytherins were being just downright nasty, led of course by Draco Malfoy. Even the ones that usually just kept quiet so as to not anger the Malfoy heir seemed to think that this time Harry deserved it. It was almost like the whole Heir of Slytherin debacle in his second year, except this time he didn't have Ron by his side, and that hurt more than the whole school's hatred.

Harry couldn't stand the glares from the rest of the school nor the cheers from Gryffindor. He was so nervous about the tasks ahead and the fact that someone wanted him dead and was well on their way to getting it, that he couldn't understand how the rest of the school failed to see it. Because of this, Harry, Hermione and Neville had taken sanctuary in the Marauder's Quarters, choosing to spend most of their free time there with either homework or just lazing around.

It was something that was worrying Sirius and Remus immensely. Not that they didn't enjoy their company, and they had to admit that the kids weren't bothering them since they mostly studied, which in its own way was troubling and a clear sign that something was amiss. Shy Neville would always go with the flow, which was usually a balance between Harry and Ron's boyish laziness and carefree-ness and Hermione's study compulsion. The fact that Hermione's compulsion was winning just brought attention to the missing piece of the quartet. Harry without Ron did not have enough leverage or will to win over Hermione.

Remus knew all this was happening because of the bloody Goblet of Fire spitting Harry's name out. Ron should be with them, speculating what the tasks would be, what the champions would do and then the four of them would seat in the bleachers, with sweets and popcorn, watching what the champions would do. But no, instead of that, Ron wasn't talking to Harry, Hermione and Neville weren't talking to Ron and Harry was miserable and going to face unimaginable dangers that made Remus shudder every time he thought about it. He had maintained a calm front when everyone was panicking. It wouldn't help if everyone lost their head, but truth be told he had wanted to yell at Bagman for being so cheery about his cub getting thrown into this, rip Crouch in pieces for not letting Harry out and feed Karkaroff to the giant squid for...well, for being Karkaroff.

Remus smiled as he watched the three friends study and was reminded of his school days. It was the similar, he balanced over Sirius and James' craziness, reminding them to study and at the same time they brought him out of his shell. He smiled at the bittersweet memories and couldn't help but hope this

group would be different as he already expected it to be. Yes, Neville was shy and usually went with the flow, but unlike Peter who had never established his personality, Neville was being brought out of his shell by his friends and was more than just a tag along, asserting his views when he felt they were right. He was also getting more and more praises from his teachers since he had started using his own wand, which reinforced Sirius' theory about Neville's performance problems originating from using Frank's wand and his Grandmother's less than stellar compliments. With a little encouragement, Neville would get very far. And he was getting it, he was getting the recognition he deserved. Remus never once had thought of asking Peter for help in something like Hermione and Harry were doing now with Neville. Hermione may be the brightest witch of her age, but there was no beating Neville in Herbology and apparently they knew it because Neville was practically giving them a whole lecture on the subject.

"Where did you find that Neville?" Remus heard Hermione ask. "There was no mention of it in the textbook."

"It was in the book Professor Moody lent me. Apparently Professor Sprout told him I was good at Herbology," Neville answered.

"At least Professor Sprout still likes you," Harry mumbled.

"Oh, Harry. I'm sure you are exaggerating," Hermione said and Remus frowned. What was that about?

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"Pomona, can I have a word with you?"

"Oh, yes Remus," she answered. "Let me just finish this."

As she finished patting the dirt around one of her plants, Professor Sprout looked up and met Remus' eyes with a smiling face.

Calmly Remus asked, "Pomona, how long have you known Harry?"

"Why, since he was born and Lily brought him here to meet the entire faculty. That girl always thought of Hogwarts and her teachers as home and family," she said fondly.

"And he has been living here since he was three, right?"

"Yes," she said a little uncomfortably.

"Playing in your greenhouses and running around the staff room. You could say you know him well can't you?"

"Yes," she was looking definitely ashamed now.

"And would the boy you saw grow up put his name in that Goblet?" he asked evenly.

"No," she mumbled in a small voice.

"Then could you please stop acting as if he did? He already has the whole school against him; he doesn't need to see the people he always considered his extended family doing so too."

"I'm sure he didn't even notice," she tried defending herself.

"That's not what I heard. And I have seen more of Harry now than when he wasn't yet a Hogwarts student, and I tutored him as well as lived with him."

Sprout fidgeted a little and with an embarrassed smile she said weakly, "Sorry, I was just angry. I mean, Cedric being the champion... We never get recognition, and then Harry..."

"I know," Remus said calmly, "But you are the adult here. If your House sees their Head acting this way, why should they act any different? Cedric has more right than anyone to be angry and he isn't. I am not asking you to support Harry instead of Cedric. I would never do that. I am just asking for you not to antagonize Harry. Just let him be. The students are actively being nasty to him and you are just encouraging them with your attitude."

"I'll make it up to him Remus. I am sorry," she said sadly.

"Thank you," he smiled and left the greenhouse.

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"Last time I checked Ms. Skeeter," Sirius drawled icily, his tall form blocking most of the light coming in the broom cupboard, where Harry and Rita Skeeter were, "my son is underage and therefore you may *not* interview him *without* my consent. Not to mention an adult hauling a fourteen-year-old boy into a broom cupboard can be very frowned upon."

Rita Skeeter, reporter for the Daily Prophet, all in all a nasty person that liked to imply only the bad things about people, apparently did not like when the favor was returned. She bristled uncomfortably before she put on a fake smile and purred, "I was just talking to young Harry. But maybe we could do a small family piece: The champion that was raised by the convict. Was it your influence that drove young Harry to this life of rule breaking?"

Sirius' eyes narrowed and through gritted teeth he hissed, "I was never convicted of anything seeing as I was innocent and therefore acquitted. If I recall correctly you were at my trial Ms. Skeeter, is your memory failing you?"

"No, not at all Mr. Black," she smiled and turned to Harry, "Harry, is it your adoptive father's lack of attention that makes you seek it so badly?"

"He gives me plenty attention," Harry cried indignantly.

"Does he? Would you say your parents would be comfortable with you being raised by Mr. Black and Mr. Lupin and their dubious relationship?"

"Dubious," Sirius spluttered.

"Dad and Uncle Remus are not a couple," Harry cried angry, "And even if they were I don't think my parents would have any problems with it."

"So you are saying that Mr. Black denies Mr. Lupin any stability in their relationship?" she asked her eyes glinting.

"No-" Harry cried at the same time that Sirius barked:

"Enough! Harry, get out here and *you*," he spit out to Skeeter, "Do not try talking to my son alone again." And he ushered Harry rather forcibly towards the room where the other champions were waiting for the weighing of the wands.

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"But honey," Remus whined. "I need the stability."

"I don't find this amusing Moony," Sirius growled from his armchair where he was scowling with his arms crossed.

"Many students came today to ask me why I put up with such an uncaring partner," Remus said straight faced. He was glared at. "Minerva also told me that there were many desolate female students crying about the injustice of the world in the corridors. Very disturbingly, I had some male students wink at me and tell me that if I ever had enough of you, I should contact them. And not just seventh years, there was a second year too. I had to remind them that student-teacher relationships are a big no-no."

Sirius mumbled something.

"What?"

"Me too. Can you believe some of them gave me evil glares and I heard them muttering 'Poor Professor Lupin'," Sirius said a little clearer. Then he hissed, "I am going to sue Skeeter and the Daily Prophet for all they are worth." And he glared at the paper that had been thrown at the coffee table.

Severus had been delighted at reading it out loud at the staff table that morning at breakfast. He of course read the whole thing in tone of scorn; after all Moody and Karkaroff were there, but Remus and Sirius who knew Severus' acting knew that even if the part he was reading about Harry still crying at night for his parents, his romantic relationship with Hermione and his definitely bad role models was an act, when he read:

"After thirteen years of dedicating his love and life to Sirius Black, poor Remus Lupin is still denied the stability of a legal bond. Black apparently likes to be free to frolic around, but enjoys having Remus at his beck and call."

He was not acting at all. Sirius had wanted to smack the smirk right off Severus' face in front of the entire Great Hall.

"Next time," Remus said knowingly. "You'll learn to tread calmly when Rita Skeeter is involved and definitely not lose your temper."

Sirius glared even more but his glare was interrupted when he was startled by the portrait door banging open.

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A/N- Some of the dialog comes from "Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire"

Thank you to all my lovely readers and reviewers.

Big thanks to SWaddict1986, who even swamped with work ad school managed to squeeze some time to beta this.

Not mine. Nothing is mine. I am going off to cry now.

Chapter33- Unpleasant consequences

Sirius glared even more but his glare was interrupted when he was startled by the portrait door banging open.

Chapter 34- Dealing with trouble

Remus re-entered the Marauder's living room in a rush and approached the couch where he handed a distraught Severus a glass of water.

"Here Sev, drink this," he said soothingly but the man didn't move.

Sirius, who was kneeling in front of the couch, took the glass and put it in one of Severus' hands.

"Drink up Sev. You'll feel better," Sirius prodded but Severus just kept gasping and mumbling, his face as white as a sheet:

"Burns...fire...dead."

Sirius and Remus exchanged worried looks and Remus said firmly, "Sev, drink it. I've dosed it with a calming draught."

"Dragons!" Severus cried and made the other two jump in surprise. "Dragons. Big. Huge. Deadly. Dangerous. Deadly. Burning. Dragons!"

"Okay," Sirius said slowly, putting the glass down on the coffee table. "Dragons are dangerous. We know that."

"NO!" Severus cried, grabbing Sirius' robes with his fists and shaking him desperately. "That's the first task. Dragons!"

"What?" Remus squeaked as he slumped on the coffee table, shocked. Sirius had stopped trying to free himself and was staring incredulously at Severus.

"Albus just came, after Weasley's and Harry's detention, to ask me to brew extra burn salve and venom antidote for Poppy because they are bringing four huge, dangerous, vicious, deadly dragons!" Severus spluttered.

"Four?" Sirius asked in a small voice and Severus nodded.

"Four."

"One for each Champion," Remus looked horrified. "Do they have to fight them?"

Severus shook his head, "No, Albus said they have to get past them. They asked for nestling mothers," he said miserably.

"NESTLING MOTHERS!" Sirius cried.

"They're the worse kind," Remus whispered.

The three men did not know what to do or say. They stayed in that immobile shocked position for a long time before they could finally start thinking about how to act.

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"Did someone see you Saturday night?" Sirius asked.

"No, I am sorry. I was just shocked, I didn't even think that someone might see me," Severus said as they waited for Harry and Remus in the Room of Requirement for Harry's training session.

Sirius nodded and looked determined at the door, "We still have eight days before first task. Plenty of time to get him ready."

"How are we going to do this? We can't outright tell him. That goes against the rule!" Severus said worriedly.

"Sev, you're a Slytherin. Act like one. We have to play to Harry's strength. What is he best at?"

"He's good at Defense. He's also pretty good at Potions. He could try to hex the Dragon's eyes, but he would need a clear shot."

"Okay, forget what I said. You are obviously having trouble thinking. What would you say James usually got praised for?"

Severus scowled, "His Quidditch abilities but that won't help Ha- Oh!"

"Yes. Now he only needs the means to get his broom. Filius told me he is having trouble with the Summoning Charm, which considering all the stress he has had lately is not so surprising. So that is what we will focus on today. We will practice his Summoning Charm until he can Summon the whole damn castle if he needs to."

"He still won't know he has to face a dragon!" Severus cried exasperated. "And we can't tell him, thanks to bloody Karkaroff!"

That had been a low blow. Karkaroff had demanded that the Hogwarts' teachers, especially Remus and Sirius, take a binding oath to not reveal what the tasks were, unless given consent from Bagman or Crouch and unless the other champions had the same privilege.

Sirius sighed and looked annoyed, "Severus, I know that. But you are forgetting one tiny little detail of the oath Karkaroff demanded."

"What?" Severus snapped.

"He named all the teachers when he asked for the oaths didn't he?"

"Yes," Severus answered annoyed.

"In his arrogance he forgot one, one who is quite fascinated with Dragons."

Severus smiled. Yes, all they had to do was suggest to Hagrid that he should show Harry the Dragons. Maybe let it slip that Harry wouldn't even know what was expected of him in front of Hagrid.

"You know Sirius, you would have been a great Slytherin," he drawled.

"Yeah, the Hat thought so too. I disagreed," Sirius smirked and Severus looked appalled at having been so close to sharing a dormitory with Sirius.

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Severus' heart clenched when he saw one of the spikes of the Hungarian Horntail graze Harry's shoulder. Beside him in the teacher's box, Remus and Sirius were practically hysterical. Remus had practically shredded the hat he had in his hands and Sirius was almost biting out flesh from his fingers. He wished he could demonstrate his fears as freely, but no, he couldn't. And Bloody Karkaroff insisted on sitting next to him as if they were the oldest of friends. They had never been; even when Severus was a loyal Death Eater, he couldn't stand Karkaroff.

At least Harry had been forewarned. Sirius had managed to comment near Hagrid that Harry didn't have a clue about the Dragons and how worried he was about Harry facing them for the first time on the day of the Task. They had made Harry practice the Summoning Charm until he had it perfect reminding him that it served to get you what you needed, and they had exhaustedly reminded Harry what a great flier he was. It paid off; Hagrid showed Harry the Dragons and Harry did exactly what they wanted and had Summoned his Firebolt at the start of the Task.

Severus also knew for a fact that Harry had warned Diggory. Such a Gryffindor act, Severus snorted. He did admire it, but he would never have leveled the field like that. Diggory had entered willingly, and yes, Fleur and Krum were warned by Maxime and Karkaroff, but that was something Diggory should have known and prepared for. That was the problem with Hufflepuffs and Gryffindors, Severus thought, most of them played fair and didn't realize other people wouldn't necessarily do it.

In the supposed name of interest, and in Severus' opinion sadomasochism, a few teachers, including him and the two Marauders, had gone to see the dragons before the task too. He had listened to Charlie Weasley explain all the ways those vicious creatures could kill his boy. He had scowled at him, not that Weasley knew why. He wasn't the only one; Remus had been far from his usual polite self and had scowled and grunted at Weasley the entire time as well. Severus found himself curious to know what the boy had done to incur the werewolf's wrath.

Severus held his breath as Harry soared down towards the eggs and grabbed the golden one and went soaring back up over the stands. He wanted to jump and yell and smile like Sirius and Remus were doing, but he had to keep the sneer on his face. His eyes met theirs though and they knew what he was feeling.

He watched as Harry flew down after the Dragon Keepers subdued the Horntail and was met by Remus, Sirius, Minerva, Hagrid and Moody. He envied them as Harry was hugged by Remus and Sirius, and Sirius hauled him towards the medical tent. After a while he came back out, followed by Neville Longbottom and Ron Weasley, and Severus glared at the latter. Until this morning he had been giving Harry the cold shoulder and now they were best friends again? Humph. He wasn't that forgiving. Oh, no. He had been especially nasty to Weasley during the detention he and Harry had for fighting with Malfoy. He had given him the slimiest job and even though Harry's job seemed horrible too, Severus knew that

since, unlike Weasley, Harry actually had experience in preparing potion ingredients for the students, he knew how to cut the flobberworms in the best and quickest way.

He looked at the marks the judges gave and wanted to throttle Karkaroff, *Four*, when he gave his champion a ten after he had squashed half his eggs. *"Harry was the best one out there, you idiot! And no, I am not being biased, this is a very objective opinion here!"* Great, now he was arguing with himself. He needed to get a life.

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"Bye Natasha," Sirius waved happily to a pretty brunette dragon handler.

"You do realize that you shouldn't be flirting on school grounds in front of the whole student body don't you?" Remus asked his friend as they left the stadium that had been erected for the first task.

"Who's flirting here?" Sirius asked. "I merely made a new friend. Natasha is a very nice girl."

"Yeah, right," Remus snorted.

"So," Sirius asked innocently, "What did Charlie do to you?"

Remus eyes narrowed and he scowled, "Nothing."

"Didn't seem like nothing. You gave Severus a run for his money on the icy treatment."

"Well, he was being very nonchalant about the danger Harry was in," Remus said firmly.

"No he wasn't. He seemed quite worried actually," Sirius said smirking. "Is there some other reason you all of a sudden hate Charlie?"

"No there isn't," Remus snapped with an expression that said 'don't be ridiculous.'

"Right," Sirius said slowly. "Because if there was, you know it's just a question of acting."

"I don't know what you are talking about," Remus scowled even more.

"Of course you don't," Sirius said supportively. "I am just saying that maybe if you acted, you'd be very well surprised."

"Sirius, I think you should slow down on the Firewhisky on your night out. It's obviously affecting your brain."

Sirius just snorted and shook his head.

xxxxxxx

"Come again?" Harry asked bewildered.

"The champions have to open the dance," McGonagall said in a no-nonsense tone from her desk. She had asked Harry to stay behind, and had informed him that he needed a date for the Yule Ball, and that he had responsibilities.

"I don't dance," Harry said with wide eyes.

"I am sure Remus and Sirius taught you how to dance."

"No, they taught me how to hex, how to duck, how to play pranks and fly; there was no dancing in my lessons!"

"But you've always attended Ministry functions and your father educated you on the pureblood ways," she said firmly.

"The children aren't expected to dance," Harry said. "And dad had more pressing priorities than dancing."

"Well," she said a little uncomfortable. "Then I am sure you will remedy that. Now move along, you have classes."

Harry left the room in a state of shock and kept shooting bewildered glances at McGonagall until he was through the door.

"Harry, are you okay mate?" Ron asked. Neville, Hermione and him had stayed outside waiting for him.

"I have to dance!" Harry cried horrified.

"What?" Neville asked.

"Of course you do," Hermione huffed. "The Champions open the dance."

"There's a dance?" Ron asked in the same state of shock as Harry.

"It's called a Ball for a reason Ron," she answered annoyed.

"I can't dance," Neville squeaked.

"Me neither," Ron said looking worried and Harry nodded.

"Well, then I guess you three better hurry and learn how to then," she said smirking and almost skipped away as she left the three boys horrified.

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That night at dinner, Sirius approached Harry at the Gryffindor Table with a grim face.

"Harry, I need a favor from you," he said gesturing for Harry to follow him.

Harry nodded, waved goodbye to his friends and followed Sirius out of the Hall and down the stairway that led to the kitchens.

"Hum, dad I have already had dinner."

"I know. There is a situation in the kitchen that needs your attention. We have tried to solve it by ourselves but we just gave up!" Sirius cried helplessly and Harry nodded solemnly. What could have happened that only he could help? Help, Harry slapped his forehead, he almost forgot!

"Harry?" Sirius asked worried.

"I forgot to tell you dad. Bagman was acting weird at the first task. He offered to help me, you know, give me advice. Said I was the underdog and no one would know. I said I had it covered."

Sirius frowned, "Strange. Did he offer anyone else help?"

"I don't think so," Harry shook his head as Sirius tickled the pear in the portrait that led to the kitchens.

"I'll try to find out more then," Sirius said as they entered and Harry had a first glance at the situation.

Two house-elves were playing tug war with one of Harry's robe.

"I is cleaning Harry Potter's clothes!" one said and Harry did a double take. It was Dobby.

"No you is not. I is Master Harry Potter *Black's* elf and I is always taking care of Master Harry!" Kreacher cried.

"They've been at this for a couple of weeks already, ever since Dobby arrived. Every time there is something related to you they fight over who has the right to do it. I tried explaining to Dobby that Kreacher had always taken care of your needs here at Hogwarts, but it didn't work," Sirius sighed.

Harry approached the two elves and crouched down, holding his hand up in a peace gesture. "Dobby. Kreacher," he called but the little elves were still fighting. He called a little louder and Kreacher let go of the robe immediately and turned to Harry, sending Dobby tumbling backwards.

"Dobby," Harry cried. "Are you hurt?"

"No, Harry Potter sir. Dobby is fine. Dobby is honored Harry Potter is concerned and Dobby is taking very good care of Harry Potter's needs," Dobby finished clutching the robe and glaring at Kreacher.

"Master Harry sir, please tell *Dobby*," Kreacher spat the name as if it were an insult, "That Kreacher is Master Harry's elf."

Harry sighed and nodded, "You see Dobby. Kreacher is right," Dobby's big green eyes started to water and his lips trembled and Harry rushed. "Kreacher has been the family elf since before I was born and always took good care of me. But that doesn't mean that you can't do anything for me. You see, Hogwarts is my home. So if you are helping the other elves take care of the castle and the other students you are taking care of my needs too, even if you are not taking care of me directly. You see?"

Kreacher looked smug and bowed to Harry as he left, taking Harry's robe from Dobby. Dobby was nodding a little too dejectedly for Harry's taste though. Harry looked at Sirius but he just shrugged helplessly. Then Harry smiled and said more confidently, "Dobby. You know my friend Neville Longbottom?" Dobby nodded, "Well, he is one of my best friends and he is always working in the greenhouse and is always getting dirt and stuff like that on his clothes. So he needs special attention with his clothes. If you could please take care of his clothes exclusively you would be doing me a huge favor, 'cause then I wouldn't have to hear Nev always go on about how his Gran is going to kill him."

Dobby's eyes brightened and he said eagerly, "Harry Potter is needing for Dobby to take care of his Longy."

"Definitely," Harry said relieved. "And if you have time, only if you have time you can take care of Ron Weasley's and Her- Ron Weasley, just his and Neville's stuff. They are my best friends and it would be like taking care of me."

"Dobby is taking care of Harry Potter's Longy and his Wheezy, Dobby is," Dobby nodded solemnly.

Harry grinned and Sirius gave him the thumbs up. He sat down at one of the four tables in the kitchen and asked the little elf, "Now Dobby, how is it you ended up here at Hogwarts?"

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Harry entered the Common Room happily and flopped down on an armchair.

"Okay, say it," Neville said. "What have you done that has made you so smug?"

"Well, apart from averting a crisis," he said slowly pointing to himself, "I solved our problem," he finished gesturing to Ron and Neville.

"What problem and how?" Ron asked.

"I asked my dad for dancing lessons," he smirked. "So, this weekend be prepared because Messers Moony and Padfoot will teach us all they know."

Neville and Ron brightened at this and Hermione asked, "What crisis did you avert?"

Harry looked up and said, "You'll never guess." And he told them all about Dobby and Winky coming to Hogwarts, leaving the whole Kreacher-Dobby issue out. Hermione would frown upon his solution, and Ron would view it as charity and not Harry trying to keep the elf happy. That was mainly the reason he had chosen Neville as the primary target of the elf's help, he just added Ron to keep Dobby occupied and therefore happy. He also told them that Winky wasn't doing all that well with being free even though she had a place to work. She had been very distressed when he told her Mr. Crouch wasn't looking that well either, and kept repeating that she kept her Master's secrets and that Mr. Bagman was a bad wizard.

"Dad was really interested in that because I had just told him about Bagman trying to cheat for me, but Winky wouldn't spill what she knew. Dad said that maybe it was because Bagman had been on trial for treachery, apparently he passed some Death Eater named Rockwood information, but dad reckons he did that because he was stupid not evil. He said he didn't know the bloke was a Death Eater. Dad wanted to know if Winky knew something else that he didn't. No luck there."

Hermione frowned, "Bagman was in a perfect position to put your name in that Goblet. But if he wanted you dead, why would he try to help you?"

"To avert suspicion maybe?" Neville said.

"Maybe," Hermione frowned pensively.

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After two whole days of stepping on each other's and Remus and Sirius' feet every second of their free time, Ron, Harry and Neville were ready to dance. Okay, they were no Baryshnikov, but at least they weren't stepping on anyone's toes anymore. Remus clapped his hands, and smiling said, "I don't think you'll be too shabby at all boys. You still have some time to practice more anyway. Your dates will be well impressed."

The three boys' eyes widened and they spluttered, "Dates?"

Xxx

As usual, loooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooveeeeeeeed all my reviews.

Thank you for reading.

Huge thanks to SWaddict1986, she is still managing to squeeze my chapters on her cramped schedule, no idea how she does it, but I am forever thankful.

Not mine.

Chapter 35- The fine art of dating

"Well, first Harry you have to ask the parents' consent to court the young lady. Then you must visit her, always in the parents' presence mind you. Maybe, if you are lucky, after a month or two they will allow you to hold hands."

He definitely didn't have a month or two, the Yule Ball was right around the corner.

"You have to flirt with all of them. Let them know you could have the girl you want, or else they'll think they own you. You have to make it clear that it's a privilege for one of them to be chosen." He couldn't get one, how would he get all of them? "And don't forget, no talking, thinking or having sex before you are two hundred. I'll allow holding hands now." Well, at least his dad and grandfather were on the same page.

"It's useless. It takes years, and then some Quidditch player comes strutting along like he owns the place and gets her," somehow Harry thought his Uncle was not talking about the Yule Ball.

"I am guessing you had some contradictory advice," Remus said, hiding a smile behind his hand. He was sitting in an armchair in his office, leaning forward, his elbow propping his head up.

Harry scowled at him from the chair in front of him and cried, "Just a bit! They make no sense whatsoever! I am never asking, dad, grandpa and Uncle Sev advice again! Never!"

"No need to be so radical," Remus said. "What do you want to know?"

"How do I ask a girl out?"

"Do you have someone in mind?"

Harry shrugged, "Cho is cute." He offered.

Remus nodded, "Yes, she is. But do you know her?"

"Not really, no," Harry said. "Just from the corridors."

"If you were Ron or Neville, I'd say there would be no problem in taking someone you don't know well. Because the Ball will be just that; a Ball. But you are a champion Harry. You will have to open the dance. You will be in constant scrutiny. It's not a good idea to add to your nerves by taking someone you are not comfortable with."

"So, I should ask a girl I know," Harry said.

"That is what I would do," Remus smiled.

Harry nodded pensively then looked at Remus and asked with a lopsided smile, "And who are you taking Uncle Moony?"

Remus gave a little start and straightened, putting on a very serious face and answered, "I am faculty Harry. I won't be taking anyone."

"But if you could?" Harry prompted.

"That is none of your business."

"Are you blushing Uncle Moony?"

"Go do your homework you little prat."

"Aw!"

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"So I was thinking," Harry said as he fidgeted with his school bag, "We've known each other since we were little."

"Yes," the pretty red-haired nodded.

"And you've always been nice to me. Even during that whole Heir of Slytherin debacle and my name coming out of the Goblet, you were one of the few people that didn't say anything nasty or give me evil looks."

"It wasn't your fault," she blushed. "And you were always nice with me too. I always remember when I was seven and we were at that fundraiser at the Ministry. You kicked Malfoy because he was making fun of me."

"Yeah," Harry said fondly. "Got grounded for that and everything, but it was so worth it. Well, anyway. I was thinking, that since we've known each other for so long, maybe you wouldn't mind too horribly being my date for the Yule Ball?" he finished hopeful.

"Oh, Harry," she smiled widely. "I'd love to."

Harry grinned, "Okay then. Do you want me to meet you at your dorm or at the Entrance Hall?"

"I expect the Entrance Hall is better," she said smiling.

"Great," he said and turned to go back to his class. He looked back as he was leaving and waved,

"Thanks Susan!"

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"Well done son," Sirius praised as he helped Harry turn his hooves back into hands and feet.

Harry shrugged, wiping his sweaty forehead with the sleeve of his robes, "I thought by now I'd have something more."

Sirius directed Harry to one of the couches that had just appeared, "It took Severus almost a whole year to master his form, and he is a grown adult whose magic fully matured."

"Yeah, but Uncle Sev was undermining himself because he was afraid. Uncle Moony said he would have mastered it by Christmas if he hadn't."

"Again Harry, he is an adult. It's not by chance that we only start teaching children at eleven, or why the more complex magic is only taught after sixth year. As your body grows so does your magic and you are capable of handling more complex magic. Look how tired these sessions make you," Sirius pointed at Harry who was slumped on the couch, quite pale, "Severus never got that tired no matter how long he kept at it. It's logical that you will take longer while your magic adjusts, but once you master it, it will

come to you as naturally as breathing. Don't be so hard on yourself. You are way ahead of where your dad and I were at your age."

"I thought I did it faster because you helped me. You had to research how to do it," Harry said puzzled.

"Puhlease," Sirius snorted. "We had Moony doing the research. How long do you think that took? Two seconds, three if we want to exaggerate. No, what took longer was the transformation; it took us almost two years. You've been at it for less than four months and already managed to transform your hooves. James only managed that after about a year. Sure we were not Occlumens, that helps to get in the meditative state, but still you are quite powerful little Prongs," he finished, ruffling Harry's hair.

"My nickname will *not* be little Prongs, dad!" Harry warned with a scowl.

"Of course not, I am sure I can come up with something more embarrassing," Sirius smirked and then asked nonchalantly. "Any luck with your egg?"

Harry's face fell, "No, I can't understand what all that wailing is. Can't you tell me dad?"

"No, not directly I can't, because of the oath," Sirius said grimly. "But I can tell you this; sometimes you can only understand sounds in their natural habitat."

Harry stared blankly at Sirius, "What kind of crappy lead is that?" he asked.

Sirius shrugged, "Think about it," and as Harry yawned he added, "To bed with you."

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Harry was shaking his golden egg to see if he could get any clue from it in the Gryffindor Common Room. He had already tried deciphering what the wailing was but had no luck. He tried muffling it with a pillow to see if the sound changed. Nothing. Apparently that wasn't the wailing's natural habitat. Puft, how would he know what the wailing's natural habitat was? So he had resorted to shaking it. Hermione was looking at him weirdly as if saying, "Boys, how stupid can they get?"

"If you know something, please do help," he said irritated.

"I don't. But I don't think shaking it will help!" she said annoyed.

Harry glared at her and kept shaking the egg. He stopped as he saw the back of the portrait open and Neville lead in a shaking Ron. Harry instantly dropped the egg and ran towards his friends helping Ron to a chair.

"What happened?" he asked.

"He just asked Fleur Delacour to the ball," Neville said. Harry winced, yeah a seventeen-year old champion would not say yes to a fourth year.

"I don't know what made me do it," Ron cried. "I knew she wouldn't go with me. But she was just passing and then I kind of blurted it out."

"She is part Veela. She said so at the Wand Weighing. So maybe that's why it happened," Harry offered, rubbing his friend's back. "It's okay. There are still plenty of girls for you to ask."

"Yeah, there are," Ron said. "And it's not like you two have dates yet." Neville and Harry looked uncomfortable and fidgeted a little, "What? You do? How?"

"Well, I asked Susan Bones. Uncle Moony said I should go with someone I knew and a bunch of girls I've never talked to before were asking me just because I am a champion. I've known Susan since we were young and she's always been nice. She was one of the few Hufflepuffs that didn't blame me for Justin being Petrified or said I was stealing Cedric's glory. So I asked her."

Ron turned to Neville, "I figured the same. Go with someone I know, and well, she is very popular in her year and nice, you know. With the being a nice person. I promise I'll be a perfect gentleman," he said worried.

"Who did you ask Neville and why would I care if you were a gentleman or a git?" Ron asked bewildered. Hermione snorted as Neville looked nervous and didn't want to answer, "He asked Ginny. I was there when he did."

"Ginny," Ron leapt up, his face red, "My baby sister. Why didn't you ask Hermione instead of Ginny? She's a girl and your friend!"

"Because, Hermione is like a sister to me," Neville said looking apologetically to Hermione. "Sorry, I don't mean anything bad, it would just be weird. And Ginny is so nice."

"But she is my sister!" Ron growled angrily.

"And you should be glad she is going with someone that will respect her instead of some random prat you don't know," Hermione snapped at him and Ron deflated. He looked at her, and then said:

"Say Hermione, since you are you know, a girl. And here we are. The two of us without a date, why don't we go together?"

Now, Harry may be no expert with girls, but even he knew that wouldn't sit well. Hermione's lips pursed and she looked furious as she hissed:

"It just so happens, *Ronald*, that someone else figured I am a girl before you did," and she stalked away. Ron looked shocked but then shrugged.

"She's lying, she's just angry, though I don't really know why."

Neville and Harry shook their heads and Neville offered, "I know Parvati hasn't been asked yet Ron. She might want to go with you. But I would hurry before someone else asks her."

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"AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!"

Sirius bolted upright and scrambled out of the bed hurriedly, trying to disentangle himself from the covers. He ran out of the room, wand ready, not even exchanging glances with Remus, and kicked Harry's door open. They both had their wands trained on... Dobby!

Sirius let his wand arm drop and said annoyed, "We need to stop meeting this way Dobby."

The poor elf was twisting his hands around a small package, "Dobby is wanting to give Harry Potter his present sirs. Dobby is not meaning to scare anyone."

"That's fine Dobby," Remus smiled kindly.

"Yeah, just don't wake me like that again," Harry said rubbing the sleep out of his eyes, "Prod me or something. What time is it?"

"It's early, Dobby managed to beat even Sirius this year," Remus chuckled and Sirius huffed.

"Can Dobby give his present now?"

"Yes, but wait just a sec," Harry said, scrambling off the bed and going to his closet. He took a small package from inside. "I was going to stop by later to give you and Kreacher your presents like I do every year. So next year you know you don't have to scare the life out of me, okay?"

Dobby nodded, his green eyes round, "Harry Potter sir is being too good," he said taking his package and handing Harry one, which turned out to be a pair of mismatched socks.

"Do you like it Dobby? I got it in Hogsmead," Harry asked as Dobby put on a small jumper Harry had gotten him. "You said you wanted to get one."

"Harry Potter is being very good. Thank you sir."

"It was Uncle Remus' idea," Harry blushed.

"Thank you Professor sir, you is being very kind," Dobby turned to Remus and he was blushing too.

"That's fine Dobby. You're welcome," Remus said patting Dobby's head.

"Hey, what about me?" Sirius cried, pouting.

"You is being very good too sir. Dobby is not meaning to forget you sir. Dobby is sorry," Dobby said distressed.

"Don't mind him Dobby," Harry waved. "He's just being a prat."

"Hey, I am your father!"

"Which means Harry really knows you," Remus said flatly. "Now Dobby, if you'll excuse us, we have some Christmas traditions of our own."

"Yes sir, thank you sirs," and with that the little elf Disapparated with a crack, and Harry and Sirius joined Remus under the tree. This year Severus wasn't there, they couldn't risk it, but Harry would sneak out later to give him his gift under the Invisibility Cloak.

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After breakfast, Harry had gone up to Gryffindor Tower to say Happy Christmas to his friends and after spending most of the morning there, they decided to go outside. Harry seized this opportunity to go and meet Severus, saying he would fetch his dad and Uncle, to which Fred and George were ecstatic-- a snow fight with the Marauders! As soon as he was out the door Harry got under his Cloak. He began to walk towards the dungeons, but when he was in front of the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy he heard the tale tell *clunk, clunk* of Moody's wooden leg. Harry panicked. Moody would see him. He would see the gift he was carrying. It was a rare Potions book and maybe he would realize for whom it was.

Harry hurriedly begged the Room of Requirement for a place to hide his gift. As soon as the door opened, he scrambled inside and found himself in a room the size of a large Cathedral. Its high windows were sending shafts of light upon what looked like a city with towering walls, built of what Harry knew must be objects hidden by generations of Hogwarts inhabitants. Harry hurried forwards into one of the many alleyways between all the hidden treasures until he stopped in front of a large cupboard that looked as if it had acid thrown at its blistered surface. He opened the door and noticed it had already been used as a hiding place for something in a cage. Its occupant long-since dead, and the skeleton had five legs. Harry stuffed the package behind the cage and slammed the cupboard's door. To mark the spot so he could find it again, he extricated from the clutter a chipped bust of an ugly looking warlock from the top of a nearby crate. Then to make it really distinctive, he fetched a tiara that was lying nearby. He was about to put the tiara on the bust when he stopped dead. He turned it around, examining it closely and saw the inscription "Wit beyond measure is man's greatest treasure." He had seen it before during the many times he had been inside the Ravenclaw Common Room when he was younger and had been 'helping' Professor Flitwick. That tiara looked exactly like the diadem on Ravenclaw's statue. Harry's breath hitched. Was it this simple? Could this be Ravenclaw's diadem, hidden here of all places, so unprotected? It couldn't possibly be, but then Harry thought, if the rumors were correct there was someone that could tell him if this was Ravenclaw's lost diadem.

In a change of heart Harry decided to risk it, he opened the cupboard and took his package out. He unwrapped the book, Uncle Sev would understand, and wrapped the diadem instead. It wouldn't do for someone to see him with it. Harry hid the book again, he'd come back for it later, and stuffing the diadem in his pocket, he got under his cloak again. His heart beating fast as he left the Room of Requirement and went straight to the Marauder's Quarters. He didn't want to take any chances of someone getting that diadem.

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"That's what I call one hell of a Christmas gift," Sirius said pleased as he relaxed in one of Albus' comfy armchairs.

After Harry arrived babbling about a hidden room with a bunch of lost things, they finally managed to calm him down enough to explain and Harry showed them what he thought was Ravenclaw's diadem. They scanned the supposed diadem, and it did give out the same aura as the previous Horcruxes, but they wanted to make sure that it really was a Horcrux. So after joining Albus and Severus in Albus' office, Albus summoned the Grey Lady. It turned out the rumors were correct and the Grey Lady was a descendant of Ravenclaw, more specifically her daughter. The poor ghost told her tale, after some prodding from Albus asking to help in the quest to defeat Voldemort, and now Sirius understood why she always looked so miserable. But most importantly, she told them about another boy that seemed sympathetic to her tragedy, none other than Tom Riddle. Albus recalled a time when Riddle came for an interview for the Defense Against the Dark Arts post, and coincidentally after Riddle was denied the post,

Albus never managed to keep a teacher of that class for more than a year. Riddle could have easily used the opportunity to hide the diadem-turned-Horcrux in a place where it would be lost and overlooked. And it almost was if not for, as Minerva would say, sheer dumb luck.

After the Grey Lady confirmed that it was indeed her mother's diadem, Albus asked her to tell no one about this, as she was bound to serve him as Hogwarts Headmaster, and left asking them to make sure no one fought over it again. Albus fetched Gryffindor's sword and handed it to Harry who just looked at it.

"You found it Harry, it's only fair you are the one who destroys it," so Harry did, stabbing the diadem right down the middle cracking it, and with that, all the Horcruxes were gone. Sirius thought they could breathe easily now as he sat down, but he missed Albus' worried frown.

Before Sirius, Remus and Harry left to join the other students on the grounds, Harry turned to Severus and asked:

"You'll look for your book then Uncle Sev? I left a card inside it, so you'll know you have the right one."

"Of course I will, but it's best you don't get caught with such a book. And thank you. I've always wanted it."

Harry smiled sheepishly and hugged Severus, "Happy Christmas Uncle Sev."

"Happy Christmas Harry."

Harry then hugged Albus and this time Sirius did notice that Albus' tone was strained as he said "Happy Christmas" and he held on to Harry just a little longer than usual. Sirius frowned, but then shrugged it off as nerves because of the Horcruxes and the Tournament.

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The afternoon had been fun. Remus and Sirius had ended up organizing the snow fight in two large groups as the Gryffindors were joined by a few students from the other Houses. Even some teachers joined, such as Vector, Sinistra, Flitwick and Sprout. The team that Remus led won, causing Sirius to sulk the rest of the afternoon. Harry had tried to cheer his dad up by saying Remus had an unfair advantage because he had chosen Fred and George to be in his team but that only served for Sirius to cry:

"Marauders wannabes are not better than a true Marauder."

"But dad, Uncle Moony is a Marauder!" he tried reasoning, but Sirius just huffed.

Neville and Ron had joined their dates in the Common Room and Harry had left earlier to meet his in the Entrance Hall. Harry was pleased that Parvati had agreed to go with Ron, and even more pleased that Mrs. Weasley had decided to buy new dress robes for her children instead of the usual second hand ones. Ron was already nervous enough, and Harry knew that nowadays the Weasleys had more money than before Mrs. Weasley started working. So even if things were still tight with so many kids, they could afford some luxury now and then.

A tap on his shoulder caught Harry's attention and he turned and smiled.

"You look beautiful Susan," he said, kissing her hand. He'd seen his dad charm women of all ages that way. Even McGonagall blushed when Sirius decided to be all gentlemanly towards her.

"Thank you," she said blushing. Her usual straight red hair was curled, most of it pulled back in a tight ponytail, with some loose locks surrounding her face, and she had on a pale yellow robe of some light floaty material.

Harry extended his arm and she hooked hers through it. He guided her to where McGonagall was calling the champions, and when his gaze left his date to look at the others, he did a double take. Hermione was Victor Krum's date, and she looked completely different with her sleek and shiny hair twisted in an elegant knot at the back of her head and robes made of a floaty periwinkle-blue material. She was definitely not the bookworm he was used to seeing.

"Hermione, you look good," he said.

She blushed and said, "Thanks Harry."

Harry looked at Krum seriously and said, "You better take good care of her Krum, or you'll have to contend with me, Nev, Ron and," he smiled evilly motioning with his head to where Sirius was guiding the students in, "my dad and Uncle."

Krum looked at Sirius and gulped, apparently he had heard of the Marauder's fame, "Don't worry Potter." "Potter Black."

"Potter Black, sorry. Don't worry. I have nothing but the best intentions towards Hermowninny."

"Good," Harry smiled and Hermione smiled back at him.

Harry and Susan greeted Cedric and Cho Chang, and also exchanged pleasantries with Fleur and Roger Davies. Davies had eyed Harry a little nervously, which Harry couldn't believe.

"I didn't know you spoke French," Susan said as they waited for the rest of the students to arrive.

"Dad and Uncle Remus taught me. Uncle Remus knows a bunch of languages and he thinks it's important to know more than one. I figured it would be nice to greet Fleur in her native language, as she always seems like she is having such a horrible time here and missing home," he shrugged.

"She is a little stuck up," Susan whispered and Harry chuckled nodding. "I don't think Ron is too happy either," she said a little worried as Ron passed the champions with Parvati without looking at them, and with what looked like a scowl. Harry frowned worried at that.

Once everyone was seated, McGonagall told the champions to get in line in pairs and follow her. As they entered the Hall, everyone applauded them and Harry was a little uncomfortable, but at the same time was pleased to see that Susan wasn't all that chuffed with the attention. He had chosen wisely. They approached a large round table at the top of the Great Hall, where the judges were sitting. Harry nodded to Professors Dumbledore and Karkaroff, Madame Maxime, Ludo Bagman and he did another double take when he saw Mr. Crouch's seat was being occupied by Percy Weasley.

Susan sat next to Percy, and Harry next to her. He couldn't help it, he had to ask, "What are you doing here Percy?"

"Mr. Crouch is ill so he sent me to represent him since I've been promoted to his personal assistant," Percy said as if he was announcing he was king of England.

"Oh, that's nice," Susan said pleasantly, but she and Harry exchanged looks and bit their lips.

Percy was about to start talking when someone came behind him and said, "Hey there Percy. Why don't you go sit with your brothers?"

"I am Mr. Crouch's assistant," he started but he was cut off.

"Of course you are, and one heck of a good one. It's just, I don't think I can keep the twins in check, and they were talking about spiking something or another and you know, I've always respected how they just obey you without a second's thought. I mean," he looked like he was looking for the right words, "That's just *beautiful*."

Percy puffed his chest out and said, "Of course Professor. It will be my pleasure to make sure they don't embarrass the school," and he left allowing a smiling Sirius to take his place.

Harry narrowed his eyes at his dad but Sirius was unfazed, "So Ms. Bones, how has your night been?" he asked.

"Very nice thank you, Professor and yours?"

As dinner unfolded, Harry tried really hard to pay attention to the other people at the table talking and not on his father telling Susan one embarrassing childhood story after another. When Sirius got to the time when Harry chased a toy snitch around the castle naked, Harry wondered if he could drown himself in his goblet of butterbeer.

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"Nice setup," said a voice from behind him, and Remus smiled widely as the witch took the seat next to him. Her hair was black and in a tight knot tonight, but there were a few light gold strands that made it look like it was glittering. She had black flowing robes that outlined her body.

"Nymphadora, what brings you here?"

"Professor Dumbledore asked for more security," she shrugged. "But I'm the only Auror here. Go figure, the man is barmy."

"Well, at least you get to have a nice time," he said, "And will you grant an old man the pleasure of being seen dancing in such beautiful company?"

She smiled and said, "Of course. I'll make sure to save a dance for Professor Dumbledore."

"I was talking about me."

"You're hardly old Remus."

"Compared to you I am."

"Compared to anyone you are still quite young and handsome," she smiled and he blushed.

"You'll have to stop that Ms. Tonks," McGonagall said smirking behind her wine glass, "Or poor Remus will melt from the heat in his face."

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Those dancing lessons paid off, Harry thought as he waltzed around with Susan. This was really good and he was enjoying himself. They had chatted non-stop about many things while dancing. He was pleased to know she was a Quidditch nut like himself. She didn't play, she said she was horrible at it, but she loved to watch it. They were twirling around, and had to stop abruptly when a pair of hands holding two bottles of butterbeer appeared in front of their faces.

"Thirsty?" Sirius asked innocently.

Harry glared at him, "Don't you have anywhere else to be dad?" he asked through gritted teeth.

Sirius shrugged, "Well, I saw you here dancing and thought, hum, the kids must be thirsty. Oh, hi Moony. What are you doing? Moony!" Sirius cried as he was dragged away to Harry's pleasure.

"Leave the kids alone Sirius," they heard Remus scold.

"I guess Professor Black isn't taking the idea of you with a date very well," Susan chuckled.

"At least you can find the humor in it," Harry rolled his eyes, exasperated. "If it was up to dad, I'd still be in diapers being carried around."

She laughed and Harry shook his head. They continued dancing until Susan said, "I think Professor Black has found another target."

Harry looked to where she was pointing and saw Sirius pulling the butterbeer trick on Hermione and Krum. Remus had to intervene again and dragged Sirius to a chair in the corner. He was saying something they didn't hear and shaking his finger at Sirius, who was looking mutinous. Remus left and joined a laughing Tonks in the middle of the dance floor.

"Who's that dancing with Professor Lupin?" Susan asked.

"Oh, that's my cousin Nymphadora Tonks," Harry answered. "But don't call her Nymphadora or she'll skin you alive."

"They make a nice couple," she smiled.

"What?" Harry asked, looking at Tonks and Remus who were dancing and laughing. "Nah, they are just friends."

"They may be, but I bet she wouldn't mind being more," Susan said knowingly.

"You think?" Harry frowned, still looking at them. "Uncle Moony and Tonks?" Harry shook his head and decided to turn back to his own date with a smile.

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Sirius was sulking in a chair, arms crossed and mumbling, "Leave the kids alone," he mocked. "My poor baby and that, that, *woman*. I bet she's a gold digger just waiting to take advantage of his innocence. I know what I'm talk-" he stopped as Severus stalked in and quickly shot him a significant look. He got up and walked to the refreshment table calmly, keeping an eye on Severus who had stopped next to Dumbledore. After Severus and Dumbledore talked, which no one would have assumed to be anything of importance, Severus inconspicuously left the Great Hall. Sirius shot one last menacing glare to where

Harry and Susan were dancing and laughing, and another to Krum, that boy better watch out, he was way too old for Hermione. Of course, he couldn't use that argument with Moony when he was trying to get him and Tonks together, but it was different. Why couldn't Hermione have come with Ron or Neville? Ginny was with Neville; there was no worries there. He huffed for good measure and stalked out of the Hall. Great, no one would think twice about it.

He walked calmly back to his quarters and sure enough, when he opened the portrait door Severus was there.

"What gives?" Sirius asked.

"Karkaroff cornered me again. He's worried, scared. I told him to flee if he wants to, but that I'll stay at Hogwarts."

Sirius nodded seriously and sat down, "Do you think he will?"

"I don't know," Severus exhaled as he too took a seat. "I told Albus and he just twinkled as usual," he finished annoyed.

"I think we better keep an eye on him," Sirius said grimly. "I'm not yet sure he isn't the one that put Harry's name in the Goblet."

"He wouldn't be this scared if he had," Severus reasoned.

"You know better than anyone that he could be faking it," Sirius pointed out. "And if he's not, then it makes me more worried. Cornered animals are very dangerous, Severus."

Severus nodded grimly.

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"Next time there's a ball, ask me before someone else does, and not as a last resort!" Hermione shrieked and stalked up to her dorm.

Ron gaped at her and turned to Neville, Harry and Ginny, who had all witnessed the end of the fight, spluttering, "Well, that just proves – completely missed the point-" and he too went up to his dorm at a more sedated pace.

"What point did she miss?" Harry asked the others, bewildered.

"Ron has been mumbling all night about Hermione consorting with the enemy," Neville explained. "But I don't think she was. If Viktor is nice there is no problem with her going out with him."

"He's jealous, that's the problem," Ginny huffed. "She's right though, he should have asked her first. Poor Parvati ended up having a horrible time until she ditched Ron for a Beauxbatons' boy." She eyed Harry and asked, "You seemed to have a nice time, didn't even remember us lowly mortals."

Harry's face fell and he mumbled, "I'm sorry," ducking his head.

"Oh, Harry," she shoved him. "I'm teasing you. I'm glad you had fun. We didn't hang around Ron after the dance started either, and had a lot of fun didn't we Neville? I never imagined you could dance so well."

Neville blushed, "Yeah, I loved the time we had. Thanks."

She kissed his cheek, waved at Harry and said happily, "Good night to you two."

"So you had fun?" Neville asked.

"Tons, especially after Uncle Moony dragged dad away. What else happened that I missed?"

"Nothing much. Dinner was spent between hearing Ron mumble, and Percy talk about his new job and scold the twins because they were plotting about how to talk to Bagman. They tried but didn't have much success."

"Why?"

"Beats me," Neville shrugged.

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He opened the portrait door quietly and took his shoes off to prevent making any noise. He tiptoed to his bedroom in the dark, and was touching the doorknob when the lights went on, and he jumped as Sirius said with a smirk:

"Coming in late aren't we?"

"Sirius, hum, why us- er. I was overseeing that all the students were back in their dorms. Yes, that's it!" Remus said pleased with himself.

"Oh, were you?" Sirius asked innocently. "Because when I left, most of the students had already left. There were only a few loner couples still dancing, and you and my dear cousin were one of those couples."

"We were?" Remus asked fidgeting with his shoes. "Didn't notice."

"Had a good time?" Sirius asked cheekily.

"Of course. It's always nice to dance and chat with a friend."

"And..."

"And nothing Sirius. Wipe that smirk off your face and get your mind out of the gutter. Nymphadora is a lady and we are just friends. Besides I am way too old for her-"

"Puft, what's thirteen years when you live to be two hundred?" Sirius shrugged.

"I am amazed at you Sirius. You were all over the kids tonight, and here you are trying to encourage some, some... fling, between me and your baby cousin."

"I am not encouraging *just* a fling here, Moony," Sirius said waving his hand. "I am trying to encourage something much deeper. So, did something much deeper happen?" he asked eagerly.

Remus straightened up huffing, and in a very dignified voice he said, "I am a perfect gentleman Sirius. We only danced and talked, and afterwards I escorted Ms. Tonks to the Apparition point."

"No good night kiss?"

"Sirius!"

"Aw."

Remus huffed once again and opened his door. He stalked in and banged the door shut. Sirius pouted but smiled again, bouncing on his feet when the door opened waiting eagerly for the juicy details.

"I heard Diggory telling Harry to take a bath with his egg. I think Harry understood it better than our vague hints, because he said he would at the first opportunity and thanked Diggory."

"Good," Sirius exhaled deeply.

"Good night," Remus said shutting the door, and Sirius raised his finger at the door:

"But Moony!"

That got him no answer whatsoever.

A/N- Runs and hides. Waves white flag and begs: Please don't kill me. They are only fourteen! There's lots of space for growing up and romance yet!!

I hope you liked my pairing, though I must say that among the many requests I never got this one.

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

Thanks SWaddict1986 for betaing!!

Really not mine.

Chapter 36- Snake in Lion's fur

Harry quickly scanned the Marauder's Map as he made his way back to the Gryffindor Common Room from the Prefect's bathroom. It had taken him a few days to get the right time when he could go and not risk being interrupted by a Prefect. He had decided to wait for classes to start again and go very late at night during the week. This way he was guaranteed that no one would be using their Prefect status to be out late.

So, on the first day of classes, Harry sneaked out late at night with his Invisibility Cloak and the Marauder's Map. He was awfully tired but he wanted to get this clue done once and forever. It had been a stressful day; during his first class he received very unpleasant news. Somehow Rita Skeeter had found out Hagrid was a half-giant. Harry had always known of course, his dad had told him when he was little and explained that it went into the "do not tell people" category, just like his being a Parselmouth and Uncle Moony's furry little problem. But now it was out in the world, and Hagrid had shut himself in his cabin and refused to open it for anyone. Even Remus and Sirius had tried and had no luck. Harry didn't know how Skeeter found out and Ron told them that maybe she overheard Hagrid and Madame Maxime talking. Apparently Ron had been on the grounds and heard them, but he decided to keep it to himself, until now. But he was sure he had not seen Skeeter, and Harry knew for a fact that Dumbledore had forbidden her to come onto the grounds. But she must have found a way, and she had milked her information for all it was worth. Even stupid Malfoy had given an interview talking about his near death experience with a Hippogriff, only to be saved by Harry. Harry could bet that getting Hagrid into trouble was the only thing that was able to make Malfoy paint Harry in a good light. Skeeter must have loved it because she kept on going on about "how dangerous Hagrid was maiming our dear Boy-Who-Lived". Harry wanted to puke.

In the Prefect's bathroom, he did as Cedric told him and submerged himself with the egg. Finally being able to hear the poem that the egg held, he realized, with some disturbing help from Moaning Myrtle, that something important to him would be taken to the bottom of the lake and he would only have an hour to retrieve it. All he had to do now is figure how to breathe underwater. Easier said than done. At least he still had almost two months to do that.

No wonder Uncle Sev had started making him practice spells nonverbally. He wouldn't be able to cast them properly underwater. *Speaking of Uncle Sev*, Harry looked at the map and sighed in relief; his dot was secure in his bedroom in the staff wing. Harry knew he had a good reason to be out in the corridors after curfew, but Uncle Sev would not take kindly to it. He would say Harry could have done it some other safer way. Now that he had already done it he thought he probably could have gone to the Room of Requirement and asked for a pool, but how does the saying go? Hindsight is twenty-twenty.

Harry moved along, checking the map again; *good no one in my path*. Some ghost on the floor below. Filch going around the dungeon and... What?

What was Mr. Crouch doing in Severus' office? Wasn't he sick? Why was he here and roaming around Severus' office of all places at one in the morning? But sure enough, the dot labeled Bartemius Crouch was in the Potions Master's office.

Harry bit his lip, very tempted to go check it out for himself, but if catching him out at this time would send Severus and his dad in a fit and earn him Uncle Moony's Look, checking what someone his dad and Uncle hated was doing sneaking into Hogwarts would probably amass to being grounded and not let out of their sight for the rest of his life. So Harry did the smart thing and went straight back to Gryffindor Tower. Tomorrow, during his extra class, he would tell his Uncle.

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"And you were just taking a look at the map at one in the morning out of curiosity?" Severus asked Harry with a raised eyebrow.

"Well, not exactly," Harry said slowly but then quickly tried turning the table. "But that's beside the point, Uncle Sev. What matters is what was Crouch doing there?"

Sirius sat down on one of the chairs that had appeared in the Room of Requirement after their training session and frowned, "He's right. You said yourself this morning that someone broke into your office, and now we know who. But why?"

"Because Crouch is desperate to get back in the game," Severus snorted sitting down. "I bet all he wants is to catch a Death Eater red-handed and deliver him to the Ministry, getting his old position back."

"He was supposedly too ill to come to the Ball and not two weeks later he is well enough to sneak into Hogwarts? And how did he? Albus still keeps the passages we showed him shut and security tight since Bellatrix and Pettigrew haven't been caught yet," Remus said worried. "How did he get in without us knowing?"

"Was something missing from your office Severus?" Sirius asked.

"Yes," Severus said. "Nothing important. I don't keep anything important there, but some potions ingredients were missing. Boomslang skin."

"With Bicorn horn added to that you have the Polyjuice Potion," Harry said under his breath. When he felt three glares on him he added sheepishly, "Or so I've heard."

Sirius sighed and rubbed his temple, "I think we just found out what happened to Ms. Granger on Christmas two years ago."

"And why, pray tell, would four twelve-year-olds brew Polyjuice Potion?" Severus asked in a low and dangerous tone.

Harry gulped and squeaked out, "We thought maybe Malfoy knew something about the Chamber of Secrets and so we took Crabbe and Goyle's places. He didn't though."

"I should give you all detention and take about two hundred points from Gryffindor," Severus growled, and then he said gritting his teeth, "Unfortunately I would have to say how I came about this information and I can't, now can I?"

Harry shook his head and Sirius whispered, "Besides, deep down he is proud you brewed such a difficult Potion at the age of twelve."

"Hermione did most of the brewing, I helped a little though."

"Back to the subject at hand," Remus said. "Why would Crouch be brewing Polyjuice?"

Severus looked at him blankly and frowned shrugging. Sirius on the other hand leapt up and started pacing.

"Can't be...no they were together at Halloween ...what if it wasn't Crouch ...but then he had to have escaped somehow...makes sense."

"Sorry dad, but it doesn't," Harry said bewildered and was glad to see he wasn't the only one who looked confused.

"You have the map with you now, right Harry?" Sirius asked extending his hand. Harry nodded and retrieved it from his pocket, handing it to Sirius.

"I solemnly swear I am up to no good," and the other three watched as Sirius scanned the map and said grimly, "I knew something was off with him."

"With who?" Remus asked as he joined Sirius. Harry and Severus were just behind them, and Sirius pointed to the Defense Against the Dark Arts' teacher's office. The dot there was not labeled Alastor Moody but Bartemius Crouch.

"You think Crouch is posing as Moody?" Severus asked skeptically.

"I think Crouch Junior is posing as Moody," Sirius said slowly.

"He's dead Sirius. He died in Azkaban," Remus reasoned.

"Crouch was given one last time to visit with his sick wife. Dementors can't see. What if Crouch used Polyjuice then? What if he exchanged the two? His wife died not long after that. It's the only explanation. Crouch and Moody were together at Halloween. We saw it. Moody has been acting strangely, more than usual. I was not exaggerating when I got into his face; the Moody I know would have never showed children the Unforgivables or put them under them. Then there are the little things. For one, he's been avoiding me. Second, there are comments I make, jokes he doesn't get. I was just thinking he was getting old you know? Too many hexes had taken their toll. But now, it makes sense."

"What if the Crouch that came on Halloween and for the First task was someone on Polyjuice? He was weird, didn't look good at all," Harry offered. "Maybe Crouch is posing as Moody and someone else came as him. Pettigrew or Bellatrix."

"No, they can't. It's like we said. Albus put a spell on the boundaries that reads magical signatures. Their signature would have been spotted at Hogwarts. Polyjuice can't mask magical signature, that is why the map shows Crouch, not Moody," Remus said.

"And as much as I hate to admit it, Bartemius Crouch would never serve Voldemort. That's for sure. But now that I think about it, you're right. He looked weird, apathetic..." Sirius said.

"Imperius," Severus whispered.

"Mischief managed," Remus whispered tapping the map. "We have to do this right, and quickly," he said looking at the others. "Go tell Albus what we suspect Severus. Sirius, can you contact Kingsley and other Aurors you trust with your life so that they can go to Crouch's house?"

Sirius nodded.

"Good, tell them to wait for your signal. You Harry, go back to Gryffindor Tower and stay there. If you see anyone about to go out after curfew stop them. After you talk to Albus, Severus you do the same for Slytherin, yes Severus, you will stay out of this. We can't risk your cover. I'll tell Pomona and Filius to make sure they lock their Houses in too. We can't have students roaming around in case he tries to escape. After, and only after we are ready, we go and confront Moody-Crouch and your team of Aurors breaks in Crouch Sr. house at the same time. We can't risk one being notified by the other. I don't think we should go in with too many to confront Moody or he'll get suspicious. It's best if it's just Albus, Sirius, me and Minerva; we can pretend we are asking him if he wants a drink or something. Anyone else would be weird and he would suspect."

Severus huffed and stalked out mumbling, "Bossy little thing."

"I'll take you back to Gryffindor Tower, Harry while Sirius contacts his friends."

"Yes, sir. Moony sir," Sirius saluted and left too.

Harry bit back a nervous smile and followed Remus.

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"Stop fidgeting Harry!" Hermione scolded. "What has you so nervous?"

Harry bit his lips and looked at his friends. Should he tell them? They could tell he was nervous. He was; he didn't know what was going on. He didn't know what happened to his family. What if Crouch Jr., if that was who he was, got the better of them? What if they were hurt? He decided he couldn't take it anymore and said in a whisper, eyeing Dean and Seamus who were in a heated chess game. "Go wait for me up in our room, I'll be right up."

As his friends got up, slowly gathering their things, Harry walked towards Fred and George who were in a corner muttering over a piece of parchment. George nudged Fred and they turned their identical innocent faces to Harry.

"Hello there Harry. How may we be of service this fine night?" George asked.

"I need a favor. A favor that is quite the opposite of what you are used to and I can't tell you why."

Fred and George looked at each other and shrugged, "Shoot."

"I need you to make sure no one leaves the tower. It's very important. I'll promise I'll tell you why tomorrow."

"George, brother of mine, I never thought the day would come when I would say this, but don't fret young Harry. We will make sure everyone ... *behaves*," Fred finished painfully.

"Thanks," Harry smiled and turned quickly to go upstairs. As he reached his room he saw his three friends seated on his bed. Hermione and Ron had woken up the day after their fight, acting as if nothing had happened and the others followed suit. Harry cast the Muffliato spell towards the door, after closing it, just to be sure and sat down. He quickly explained about seeing Crouch on the map and telling his dad and Uncle, conveniently leaving Severus out of the story. He told them about his dad looking at the map and seeing Crouch in Moody's office and how his dad figured out Crouch Jr. must have been posing as Moody with Polyjuice, again leaving how they knew someone had been stealing ingredients out of the story. Neville's face was white:

"He is alive then," he said through gritted teeth. Harry nodded sadly. "And he is the one trying to kill you?"

"Dad thinks so."

"Professor Black caught him once," Neville said firmly. "He'll do it again. And this time he won't have daddy to help him escape."

Ron and Hermione looked quite shocked at Neville's cold tone and Hermione also looked puzzled. Harry could see she thought something was missing from the story but thankfully she didn't push. Instead she became practical, "We can't do anything but wait. They will be fine. You said it yourself, it's four against one, and one of them is Professor Dumbledore. Why don't we focus on the second task to take our minds off this. We have to find a way for you to breathe underwater for an hour. Maybe a charm?"

"Gillyweed," Neville blurted.

"What?" Ron asked.

"It's in the book that Moo- the Death Eater gave me. I bet he did so on purpose so I would tell Harry, now that I think about it. But still, given by him or not, it works. It's a plant that will enable Harry to breathe underwater. We can buy it this weekend when we go to Hogsmeade."

"Why would he help Harry through the task?" Ron asked.

"Maybe he wants Harry to get through them safely," Hermione said frowning. "Maybe whatever he had planned to do to kill Harry is during the third task."

"Then we don't have to worry, I mean more than normal for a Triwizard Task. Because he'll be gone won't he?" Ron said confidently. Harry tried to feel the same way but he couldn't help but feel that his life was never that easy.

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There was a knock on the door and Alastor Moody opened it to find a twinkling Albus Dumbledore accompanied by his Deputy Headmistress and two of his teachers.

"We were going for a nightcap Alastor. Care to join us?"

"No thank you Albus," he grunted. "I am quite tired. I'm going to retire early."

"Oh, come on Mad-Eye," Sirius said happily, forcing himself in the room and thus creating more room for the others. "Don't be so grouchy. You never refused a nightcap before."

If Sirius hadn't been looking for it he could have missed it, but Moody's face faltered very briefly as if he had been taken by surprise but he quickly recovered, "Getting old, you know. Have to go to bed early."

"You are my age Alastor," Minerva smiled taking a seat. "And I don't think I'm old. Since you won't go out with us, why not enjoy a drink here?" she said, conjuring a bottle of mead and five glasses.

They all took places around the table, Moody clearly annoyed.

"Ah, no you don't Alastor. You've never suspected me before you won't start now will you?" Minerva said firmly when Moody had taken his flask out. Before he had time to react she had summoned the flask.

"Minerva, give it back to me," he growled, gripping his wand with one hand while the other was still extended.

"I don't think so," she said as hers and the other three wands were suddenly pointed at Moody. She sniffed the contents of the flask and wrinkled her nose. "My mead is definitely better than this Polyjuice."

"*EXPELLIARMUS!*" Sirius cried but Moody kept a tight grip on his by crying, "*Protego*". He smiled eerily at them, his magical eye swiveling like mad.

"There is no way out," Albus said as the four of them backed Moody into a wall.

"Care to explain to us who you really are?" Remus asked calmly. "We have a nice guess."

Moody's face twisted in a horrible smile and he said, "Then you should know you'll get nothing from me. I had the whole world thinking I was an innocent boy in the wrong place at the wrong time. If not for my father I'd have been declared innocent."

"How and why did you put Harry's name in that Goblet?" Sirius hissed.

"I'll never talk," he said in a singsong voice.

"Where is the real Alastor Moody? What have you done to him?" Albus said radiating power.

"Kept him well hidden didn't I?"

"If you won't talk voluntarily," Remus said firmly, producing a vial from his robes. "We'll just make you."

Moody's stance changed from cheeky to tense in a second and he cried, "I don't think so. You can't stop the Dark Lord." Before anyone could act he turned his wand on himself and cried, "*Avada Kedrava*"

"NO!" the four shouted as they lunged forward in vain. Moody's body fell to the ground and started morphing. His magical eye got practically spit out of its socket, as did his wooden leg. In Moody's place was the still body and empty eyes of a young man in his thirties. He was dead, and with him the answers they wanted. He had died smiling, as if laughing at all of them.

Loved all my reviews, thank you all.

"I 4 2 write" wrote a songfic for this story depicting the newly instated Potter Black family's first Christmas. It is under the penname "just to tell you". The story name is "A Baby just like You" and the story id is 3946968. It's also on my favorites so check it out guys!

Thanks to SWaddict1986 for once again doing a wonderful job betaing for me.

Not mine.

Little Christmas gift for everyone.

Chapter 36- Snake in Lion's fur

Moody's stance changed from cheeky to tense in a second and he cried, "I don't think so. You can't stop the Dark Lord." Before anyone could act he turned his wand on himself and cried, "Avada Kedrava" "NO!" the four shouted as they lunged forward in vain. Moody's body fell to the ground and started morphing. His magical eye got practically spit out of its socket, as did his wooden leg. In Moody's place was the still boy and empty eyes of a young man in his thirties. He was dead, and with him the answers they wanted. He had died smiling, as if laughing at all of them.

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Chapter 37- Friendly support

"And he turned the wand on himself?" Kingsley asked as the dicta-quill copied everything he said.

"For the hundredth time, yes," Sirius answered, annoyed.

They had been at it for hours. They reported what had happened to the Auror Office and Rufus Scrimgeour, the Head of the Auror Office, said he would send a group of Aurors as soon as he could. The group of Aurors turned out to be the ones Sirius had asked to go to Crouch's house, which consisted of Kingsley Shacklebolt, Nymphadora Tonks and Hestia Jones. They had taken their sweet time getting to Hogwarts and all they told Sirius was that they had apprehended a Death Eater at Crouch's house and taken Crouch to St. Mungo's. Then they had separated the professors into different classrooms and started taking their statements, but not before opening Moody's trunk and finding the real Mad-Eye Moody locked there in a special compartment. According to Remus, he didn't show up in the Marauder's Map because the trunk must have been a magical space outside of Hogwarts.

"Sorry," Kingsley said. "But you know procedure, Sirius. It was the last question anyway. We have his wand to confirm the statement," he finished, turning the quill off.

"Good, now can you tell me what you found?"

"We found Pettigrew," Kingsley said and Sirius straightened immediately. "He isn't as devoted as Crouch Jr. and didn't off himself. We gave him Veritaserum and he told us what they had found out from Bertha Jorkins, who Pettigrew and Bellatrix ran into in Albania. She told them that Crouch had helped his wife exchange places with their son right before she died. It was her last wish or something. Jr. had been kept under the Imperius all these years and Jorkins stumbled into him one time, when she took some papers to Crouch for him to sign. Crouch Obliviated her. What Crouch didn't know was that Jr. was starting to fight the Imperius as of late. Winky, their house-elf, convinced Crouch to let Jr. go to the World Cup under an Invisibility Cloak."

"That's why she was there keeping his place for him," Sirius nodded. "Jr. was there."

"Yes, and he is the one that stole Neville's wand in the Top Box and conjured the mark. Apparently the boy was quite fanatic and thought anyone who didn't end up in Azkaban was a traitor," Kingsley said.

"That from someone who had tried denying his culpability by pleading innocence of youth," Sirius snorted.

"Yes, anyway. Long story short, Jorkins also told them about the Triwizard Tournament being hosted at Hogwarts and that Moody would be teaching. Voldemort thought it was the best opportunity to get Harry. So they "freed" Jr. from his father's clutches and put the old man under the Imperius. They attacked Moody the morning of September first and made it look like one of Moody's detectors had gone haywire."

"The dustbins. I remember that," Sirius nodded.

"Jr. came here and hoodwinked the Goblet to spit out Harry's name as the Champion for a fourth school."

"Just like he told everyone," Sirius snorted shaking his head and rubbing his eyes. He was right there under their noses the whole time.

"Pettigrew was supposed to take care of Crouch. Apparently he had started fighting the Imperius and so they forced him to send letters to work with directions saying he was ill. He is in bad shape mind you. I don't know if he'll ever function again. Anyway, Pettigrew didn't know much else. He said Voldemort wanted Harry and he was going to use the tasks to get him. He didn't know exactly why he wanted Harry, but he knew it was for some kind of ritual for which an enemy was needed, probably to give Voldemort a body back or some rot like that. He also did not know how Crouch Jr. was going to get Harry. I don't think Voldemort trusts Pettigrew all that much."

"Did he say where Voldemort and Bellatrix are?"

"No, he couldn't. It was obvious he knew because the potion kept trying to force him to talk, but he must be bound in some way to prevent it. We'll keep trying."

"Fidelius?"

"More likely a strong compulsion charm that doesn't allow him to tell us. In the state Pettigrew said Voldemort was I doubt he would have been up to casting a Fidelius Charm and he would never trust anyone else with such a task. Snape didn't have any lead?"

"No, we were all suspecting Karkaroff," Sirius said grimly rubbing his eyes. "I bet Snape is one of the ones Jr. considered a traitor."

"That's not very good for us. There's no telling what Bellatrix and Jr. told Voldemort," Kingsley said worried.

Sirius nodded with a grim face, "Did he tell you how they escaped?"

"Yes," Kingsley huffed. "Incompetence on our part."

"What?"

"The charm that stopped Pettigrew from transforming weakened as time went on. Each time he was more able to transform until he managed it completely. Bellatrix, who was his cell neighbor, had been encouraging him. So once he managed it, he slipped out from a small crack in the door and opened her door. They were out of there hours before the Dementors came for their rounds and realized they were gone."

"What? No one checked the charm?" Sirius asked outraged.

"It had been scheduled but Fudge cut it, unnecessary cost he said. Of course, he won't let the people know that," Kingsley growled angry.

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The news that Barty Crouch Jr. had been alive and posing as Mad-Eye Moody had been all over the papers the next morning. Fudge insisted that it was the work of lunatics and that Voldemort was dead and in no risk of returning. He made sure everyone knew Pettigrew had been caught and by reading the paper, you could almost believe it had been his idea and he had gone alone to apprehend him.

The Prophet delighted in the story about Crouch Jr.'s arrest and Crouch Sr.'s descent from glory, thanks to none other than Rita Skeeter who wrote one gut wrenching sad tale about the pureblood boy seduced by the dark side without his father's notice while this same father was more preoccupied with fighting said dark side than with his family, culminating in the destruction of another family; the Longbottoms. She added a history of all the accomplishments of Aurors Frank and Alice Longbottom and how they fought valiantly until they were driven to madness by Crouch Jr. and the Lestranges, reminding everyone that one of the Lestranges was still at large.

Harry had been furious when he read this; he knew that when Bellatrix Lestrange escaped Azkaban, Dumbledore, Mrs. Longbottom and Sirius had used all their influence and high contacts to make sure that the details of what she had done wasn't in the paper. The articles about her escape had mentioned she was one of Voldemort's most loyal and deranged followers, that she had killed and tortured many, which was true even if she had only been tried for the Longbottoms. They had mainly focused on the reason why Pettigrew was arrested since it had to do with the Boy-Who-Lived and was public knowledge anyway. But now everyone knew about Neville's parents and kept shooting him pitying glances, and a few even tried to approach, but backed off at Harry's and Ron's glares while Hermione kept chanting for Neville to ignore it.

Harry had thought that Hermione and Ron would have given Neville grief for not telling them, and consequently him too since he knew all along, but they had pleasantly surprised him by not mentioning it and immediately helping shield Neville from the others. When he pulled Hermione aside and asked her she said:

"Professor Black mentioned the Longbottoms in class last year, remember? I always knew Neville lived with his grandmother so I thought they had died at first. Well," she said embarrassed. "You know me. I need to know things. So I went to the library and looked them up when you were in your special lessons

with Professors Black and Lupin, and Neville was in the greenhouse. They are mentioned in a few books about the fall of Voldemort and there are also back issues of the Prophet there. Ron had been with me when I found it. We decided to keep it to ourselves; we didn't know if you knew but we thought Neville had the right to tell us when he was ready."

"We?" Harry asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Oh all right," she huffed. "Ron thought so." Harry's eyes went wide and his eyebrows shot up at this. He had thought it would have been the other way around. "He said that many people have trouble talking about what happened in the war and that we should respect that. Then he took one of the old Prophets we had taken out and showed me the piece that talked about Fabian and Gideon Prewett. Remember, Professor Black mentioned them, said they were heroes too?" Harry nodded. Yes, he remembered. Sirius and Remus had been friends with them and had talked about them when reminiscing of lost friends. "They were Mrs. Weasley's brothers," Harry knew that too. "Ron said that Mrs. Weasley rarely talks about the war. She doesn't like to remember why they died."

Apart from the staring they were enduring, all seemed to be once again under control, if not for an unfortunate dream Harry had that same night.

He was back in the same room where he had seen the old man die. The high chair was there by the fire once again and the cold voice coming from the chair had hissed "Crucio" angrily. The woman on the floor was twisting madly in agony. An enormous snake was slithering around her, unaffected by her desperate cries. Harry could feel his head being split open as if he was the one under that horrible curse. Finally the curse was lifted and the cold voice said dangerously:

"All may not be lost yet, Bellatrix, if you follow my instructions. Do not dare question me again."

Harry woke up panting and found himself being held down by Neville and Ron.

"Are you okay mate. You've been screaming bloody murder for the past few minutes," Ron asked.

"I have to talk to my dad," he gasped out and scrambled off of his bed. Not caring what time it was, he took off to the Marauder's Quarters.

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"Hagrid!" Hermione shouted, pounding on Hagrid's cabin's front door. "Hagrid that's enough! We know you're in there. Nobody cares if your mum is a giantess! Open up! You can't let that foul Skeeter woman do this to you! Hagrid, open up or we'll hex the door- Oh, Professor Dumbledore!" she blushed as the door was opened by the Headmaster.

"Why don't you four come in before Ms. Granger sees the need to incinerate Hagrid's door?" he said kindly, and Harry, Ron, Neville and Hermione entered the cabin sheepishly.

Hagrid was sitting at the table with four large mugs of tea. Behind one of them, Sirius was sniggering madly. Remus was doing a much better job of pretending not to be amused.

Dumbledore waved his wand and four new chairs appeared and the kids promptly sat down.

"Now," Dumbledore said gently. "We were here telling Hagrid about the countless letters I've received from parents that remembered Hagrid fondly from their school days and do not want to see him gone."

"Of course they don't," Harry said forcefully.

"Not all of 'em," Hagrid said hoarsely. "Some of 'em wan' me sacked."

"Honestly Hagrid. Not everyone can have universal popularity," Sirius snorted. "You can't please everybody. Dumbledore here has at least an owl a week complaining about the way he runs the school."

"You don't hold universal popularity either Sirius," Remus said calmly and Sirius looked at him shocked.

"You shouldn't have said that Professor Lupin," Neville said calmly. "Now Professor Black won't leave his room anymore."

"I liked shy Neville better," Sirius mumbled.

All of them, including Hagrid, chuckled, which was just what Neville intended.

"Anyway," Hermione said firmly. "Rita Skeeter is a foul woman who only wants to stir people up. Don't you remember what she wrote about Professor Black and Professor Lupin? So what's it to her if they don't want to make their relationship legal--"

"Hermione, we're not--" Remus started, and Harry bit back a smile, but Hermione didn't stop.

"We don't care who your family is, we care who you are. That rot about giants is just that; rot."

"Yeah," Harry said firmly. "It's like what they say about werewolves, and are you afraid of Uncle Moony? Of course not. He's not evil like people say; dad is way worse than him and I don't see anyone saying anything."

"Hey!" Sirius cried out.

"Hermione's right," Ron said. "I mean look at Harry, he's related to Malfoy and that psycho Bellatrix Lestranger and he's okay."

"I'm okay too," Sirius offered.

"Of course you are Professor," Neville said waving his hand at Sirius. "The point is, Hagrid, that you shouldn't listen to other people. What they say doesn't matter; it's what you do that matters, and we want you back. Or else Hermione fighting with Skeeter will be for naught."

"Yeh should'n' have done that 'Ermione," Hagrid said.

"It was worth it. I can take what she dishes out."

"My little Gryffindors," Sirius said proudly.

"When did you see Skeeter?" Remus asked.

"In Hogsmeade today, at the Three Broomsticks. Bagman was there too. Seemed a little ruffled. He was talking to some Goblins," Harry said. "So Hagrid, what do you say? Will you stop hiding and come teach like the Gryffindor you are?"

"Well," Hagrid started.

"I refuse to accept your resignation Hagrid. And I expect you back at work on Monday," Dumbledore said firmly. "If you don't believe me, ask Remus here how it goes. Good afternoon, all of you." He finished nodding and left the cabin swiftly, pausing only to scratch Fang who was snoring by the door.

"Great man, Dumbledore..." Hagrid said with misty eyes. "He's the one who stuck up fer me after me old man died. Got me the job as Gamekeeper. Even said I should get a new wand now that me name is cleared."

"You should," Remus said kindly. "You can always finish your education Hagrid."

"Nah, I like me job. I'm an old dog now," he said.

"Finishing your education doesn't mean you have to leave your job Hagrid. You should do it for you, to make your life easier," Ron said.

Hagrid shrugged, but there was a light in his eyes that hadn't been there before.

"So what did you three do in Hogsmeade?" Sirius asked.

"We bought Gillyweed," Harry showed them. "For the second task."

"Thank God you figured it out," Remus sighed. "We didn't know how to hint at it anymore without outright saying it."

"You shouldn't be helping," Hermione scolded.

"If Harry had entered the tournament by his own free will, we wouldn't be. But that's not the case, and all I want is to get him through this alive. Now that Crouch Jr. has been caught, things may have gotten less dangerous, but it's far from finished. And we still have to worry, especially after recent developments which I am sure Harry mentioned," Sirius said eyeing the kids and confirming his suspicions that Harry told them about his dream. "Oh, and Hermione."

"Yes, Professor."

"I am not gay and in love with Moony here."

"Of course you're not," Hermione said soothingly. "They're shy," she whispered to the others.

XXXXXXXXXX

"Here it is," Andromeda handed an official looking parchment to Severus.

"That's the seal?" he asked.

"Yes," she said pleased and ducked as the cork of the champagne Albus had been opening flew through the air.

"This deserves a toast," Albus beamed.

"We also have the rest of the paperwork, of course," Ted said. "But that little piece of parchment is the most important. Since the PWA already has everything in order, we can start the next full moon."

"In March then," Remus beamed.

"Yes, sorry it was a week late for this month's," Andromeda said, but Remus cut her off:

"Believe me, this is great. One more moon doesn't make a difference when you'll change these people's life forever."

"Here Severus," Sirius said, handing a goblet to Severus. "Stop drooling over that piece of parchment and let's toast. You deserve it."

Severus looked up from the seal for the first time and smiled.

"To Severus and the Pro-Werewolf Association," Ted said firmly.

"Cheers," the other five said as they toasted.

After taking a sip from her goblet Andromeda said. "By the way Sirius, could you introduce me to Hermione Granger? We've only spoken in letters and we have a proposition for her.

"What sort of proposition?" Sirius asked suspiciously.

"We want to offer her an internship," Ted said. "That girl worked faster and more meticulous than the graduated interns we have."

"But she's fourteen," Sirius said.

"Actually," Albus said his eyes twinkling. "She's fifteen."

"She hasn't taken her OWLs yet," Sirius pointed out.

"We won't have her full time," Andromeda rolled her eyes. "I want to know if she would like to intern in the office during the summer, and if she could continue doing research as she did for us now."

Sirius looked worried and exchanged glances with the others.

"I think Ms. Granger could do it. She is perfectly capable," Severus offered. "In an insufferable know-it-all kind of way."

"Can't you just say she's smart and let it be?" Remus rolled his eyes.

"Of course not," Severus looked offended.

"Fine, but you'll have to ask her parents," Sirius said. "Hermione is known to bite off more than she can chew."

"Fine by me," Andromeda said.

XXXXXXXX

Sirius, Remus and Severus had been summoned to Dumbledore's office the night before the second task and were calmly sitting in front of the Headmaster sipping some tea when Albus said:

"I called you gentlemen here today because for the second task, we will take what the champions will miss the most and place it at the bottom of the lake. To know what they'll miss, each Headmaster or Headmistress cast a spell for their champion privately, and Harry's results came back with somewhat of a three-way tie. More precisely, your names all came out. Since Severus can't be the one chosen for obvious reasons, I ask the two of you which will be the lucky gentleman who gets to spend an hour underwater?"

"Moony!"

"Sirius!"

The two cries were simultaneous.

"Such display of Gryffindor courage astounds me," Severus sneered.

"I am faculty," Sirius said, "Therefore I can't be the one."

"I am faculty too," Remus said outraged.

"I am Deputy Head of Gryffindor. I may be needed."

"Minerva will be there," Dumbledore said, "I am sure she can manage an hour without you."

Sirius glared furiously and Remus smirked. His smirk faltered when he saw an evil grin spreading on Sirius face.

"I am older," Sirius said crossing his arms and smiling slyly.

"What?" Remus asked, gobsmacked.

"I am thirty-five and Moony is thirty-four, so considering my advanced age he should go."

"That is ridiculous! You just turned thirty-five and I'll be thirty-five next month!" Remus cried outraged.

"Now Moony. Don't disparage the elderly. The fact stands that you were born in March of 1960 while I was born in January of 1960. Therefore it stands that young Moony should go."

"I can't believe that you are actually admitting your real age for the first time since you turned twenty-five to weasel out of this."

"I have no idea what you are talking about," Sirius said nonchalantly.

"You've been celebrating your thirtieth birthday for the last four years!"

"Not a clue!"

XXXXXXXXXXXX

Harry was pulled out of the water by Sirius and Remus after they had helped him get Gabrielle Delacour out. Remus gave Harry, Gabrielle and Sirius warm towels.

"You looked wet Paddy," he offered with a smirk.

"Weaseled out on a technicality," Sirius mumbled as he dried himself up.

"Let's go," Remus said, "Madam Pomfrey has to make sure you are all okay. And your sister is worried about you," he finished kindly to Gabrielle, leading her towards a hysterical Fleur.

Sirius hooked his arm around Harry and shook his head, "I can't believe you took that song seriously."

"Well, how was I supposed to know?" Harry cried and he narrowed his eyes at a chuckling Sirius. "You shouldn't laugh that much. You weighed me down a lot," he said, patting Sirius flat stomach. Sirius' eyes went wide and he started examining his stomach. Harry knew he'd get that reaction; Sirius worked out very hard to keep a fit body, he did not enjoy being called fat, not that he was.

Before Harry managed to get to Madam Pomfrey, he was accosted by Fleur Delacour, who hugged him tightly and kissed his cheek crying:

"Thank you, you saved 'er, even though she was not your 'ostage. Thank you."

Harry blushed violently and shrugged mumbling, "Yeah."

Sirius was laughing but stopped abruptly and also blushed as the girl did the same to him, "And you 'elped Professor. Thank you so much."

A/N- Poor Padfoot, he's had a tough chapter!

Rasa Rainboweyes wrote a fic answering to my "Remus comes back from the dead" Challenge. It's called "Him". You can find it in my favorites or in my C2. The story id is 3951654. Check it out, it's a beautiful one shot.

"disgruntled female" asked me how often I update: I usually update once a week. Sometimes when RL allows I update twice. I try to keep a pattern of updating on Mondays but again it depends on life like today. Do you have an account? If you don't you can register, it's free, and put me on alert, then you'll know whenever I update and I can answer your reviews.

Thank you all that read.

I loved all my reviews.

Big Thanks SWaddict1986

Happy holidays everyone!

Not mine.

Chapter 38- Projects progressing

He traced the outline of the little boy in the picture. He loved this picture; Harry had been six and though he already knew how to read he loved being read to. Here, Harry was on his adopted grandfather's lap hearing for the hundredth time one of Beedle the Bard's tales, and if you looked closely you could see smudges of paint on Harry's face and on Albus' desk. Albus smiled sadly, he had left Harry in his office alone when Minerva had called him to tend to a squabble that had occurred between two groups of students and when he came back his office had been redecorated with little paint hands on the walls and furniture. Harry and Fawkes were nowhere to be seen until he heard a giggle and a soft squeak and bent to look under his desk. Sure enough, Harry and Fawkes were both there, completely covered in paint and drawing on the desk's wood. When asked what he was doing, Harry answered smiling:

"Finger-painting Grandpa."

Albus made him come out from under the desk and waved his wand over him, Fawkes and the office making most of the paint disappear. He put Harry in his lap and explained that finger-painting should be done on parchment, not walls and furniture. He summoned the book and started reading to Harry to see if he could calm the hyperactive child down. He never saw Minerva coming in the office later and taking the picture.

A tear fell on the glass. This little boy had adopted him as his grandfather, the lonely old fool, and had made his empty life worth living. He wasn't just the leader of the Light anymore, not the man everyone came for guidance but afterwards forgot about. No, he was Grandpa. He never forgot that time he got ill and Harry took care of him. He was so little and so serious. So kind.

He had ignored the signs all he could. Had tried to explain off Harry being a Parselmouth, his wand being the brother wand to Voldemort's, his scar hurting in Voldemort's presence, but he could not do so anymore. Severus himself had taught Harry Occlumency and vouched for the boy's shields. Albus had tested them himself and he couldn't break them. There had to be another explanation for Voldemort unintentionally breaking through those shields. And Albus knew why; there was no denying it. A strangled sob escaped him as he acknowledged, just to himself, that Harry was a Horcrux. That Harry had to die in order for Voldemort to die.

Could he sacrifice him, his boy, for the greater good? Could he sacrifice hundreds, thousands of others for his little boy?

No, deep down he'd always known Harry's fate, he just didn't want to believe it.

Right now, Voldemort had some semblance of a body, but was nowhere near being able to cause destruction. Albus didn't know where he was. He would have to wait. Harry was one of the last two Horcruxes, yes, because Albus was sure Voldemort created his last one with the death of Bertha Jorkins.

Harry was an accident that Voldemort was unaware of. Albus noticed that Harry's connection seemed to be with the snake, Nagini, and not Voldemort. That could only be if she too was holding a piece of Voldemort's soul.

When the time came, he'd have to act, but now Harry could live happily. While Voldemort still had Nagini, Harry's death would mean nothing. How long he had, Albus didn't know, but he vowed that no matter how long or short, Harry would be able to live his life to the fullest. And maybe, just maybe, he could find another way out of this.

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"That was very nice of you Harry," Susan said in their Herbology lesson. "Bringing the small Delacour girl back."

"Thanks," Harry blushed. "I got there last though."

"Yes, but what did Professor Dumbledore say? It showed moral fiber, and you ended up second in points and tied up with Cedric for first place in the Tournament."

"Well, yeah. Hum, Susan, what are you doing this Saturday?"

"Nothing special," she shrugged. "Why?"

"Well," he said embarrassedly. "There's a Hogsmeade weekend and I thought that, you know, maybe, you wouldn't mind my company, terribly, I mean."

"I'd love to go to Hogsmeade with you Harry," she smiled brightly. Then she looked sideways and whispered conspiratorially, "What are you going to do about Professor Black?"

Harry grinned mischievously, "It's not his turn to chaperone. I thought we could meet at the gates; you know how the saying goes: what he doesn't know can't hurt him."

She giggled.

XXXXX

Sirius folded the paper with a frown and threw it on top of the coffee table, where he had his feet propped up, much to Remus' displeasure.

"I don't think Hermione should go spend the summer with Krum. She barely knows him."

"Why don't you leave that decision to her parents? Aren't you busy enough trying to control Harry's love life?" Remus asked raising an eyebrow at him from the center table where he was working.

"Harry doesn't have a love life," Sirius snorted. "He's too young and Skeeter is *delusional*," he said the last word in a singsong voice.

"You believe whatever helps you sleep at night Paddy," Remus said, paying more attention to his work than to Sirius.

"Why?" Sirius asked, abruptly getting his feet off the table and sitting straighter. He narrowed his eyes and asked slowly, "What do you know Moony? Has some, some, *woman* been trying to take advantage of my baby?"

Remus bit back a laugh and answered in a strained voice, "Not that I know of. But he is hardly too young to start dating. If I recall correctly, at his age, you were already working yourself around your goal to deeply know all the female population of Hogwarts."

"That's not true," Sirius glared at Remus and Remus turned his head and gave Sirius an incredulous look. "Okay, maybe there is some truth there, but Harry is still too young."

"And yet the girls his age are already vicious women to you."

"Of course they are! Girls are different. They are more... you know?" he waved his hand, grasping for a word.

"Vicious," Remus offered.

"Yes!"

XXXXXX

Harry waved to Ron and Hermione. They were going to go to Hogsmeade by themselves today because both Harry and Neville had other plans. Ron had not liked Neville's plan one bit since it included Ginny but, once again, Hermione reminded him that Neville was a much better choice than anyone else.

Harry grinned when he saw Susan waiting for him at the gates.

"Hello Susan, you look lovely this fine morning," he said bowing and kissing her hand.

She giggled and said, "You don't look too shabby yourself."

"Shall we explore the wondrous town of Hogsmeade?" Harry asked, gesturing towards the road ahead of them and extending one hand.

"You are so full of yourself," she said as she rolled her eyes, but took his hand. They walked together laughing and talking and did not see the brown haired Marauder that smirked from a few feet behind them as he walked to his chaperoning duties. He glanced towards the castle and thought to himself, *"Best if Padfoot doesn't know what Harry is up to today."*

Harry was really enjoying himself. The whole day had been great. They had walked around Hogsmeade, stopped at Honeydukes where both bought tons of sweets, and went to Zonko's to see the latest products that Fred and George would be using on them.

"Though they already have their own line in the works and are planning on opening a shop," Harry told Susan.

"I bet they'll be a great success," she answered.

Afterwards they had a nice lunch at the Three Broomsticks where Harry saw Bagman once again being hounded by Fred and George, but he didn't pay them much attention. He was more interested in talking to Susan as they apparently had a lot in common. He liked talking to her; it was easy. He had been so afraid she would be too, well there was no other word, girly. But she wasn't, she was just normal. Better not let Hermione hear that or she'll rant about how girls are normal, but Harry would bet that every other male would agree with him that they are not.

As they walked back to the castle, they were almost knocked over by Karkaroff who ran right into them on his way out.

"Don't think you have to look where you're walking Potter?" he sneered. "Everyone else has to just scuttle away."

"No sir, I didn't see you," Harry tried saying, but Karkaroff didn't wait for apologies and continued down the road to Hogsmeade.

"Charming fellow," Susan snorted and Harry laughed.

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"Are you okay Uncle Sev?" Harry asked worried after his grueling training session. Only Severus had been there tonight because they didn't want Moody to notice the same three teachers disappearing together twice a week at the same time. Madam Pomfrey had treated Moody and had him well and ready to teach in a couple of days, but since his return he had been more paranoid and observant than ever.

"Why do you ask?"

"You've been rubbing your arm a lot lately, does it hurt?"

Severus stopped mid-motion and noticed that he had indeed been rubbing his left arm. He sighed and looked at Harry. He did not want to worry Harry, but then again he already knew Voldemort was getting stronger.

"It itches sometimes. The Mark is becoming clearer," he answered rolling his sleeve up and showing the Dark Mark. It was dark grey, almost like a faded black.

"Is that what Karkaroff wanted to talk about during our last Potion's lesson?" Harry asked.

Severus eyed Harry, narrowing his eyes and chided, "You shouldn't eavesdrop."

"You shouldn't read embarrassing articles about my love life in front of the whole class," Harry pouted.

"You know why I do that. I've had to be particularly more vicious this year with the new added attention," Severus said tiredly, and then grasping Harry's shoulder, he looked into his eyes and said:

"You know I don't mean any of what I say then, don't you?"

"Of course I do Uncle Sev," Harry said comforting. "I was just teasing you."

Severus nodded and answered Harry's previous question, "Karkaroff's Mark is getting darker too and he thinks the same as we do; that the Dark Lord is getting stronger and it's just a matter of time before he is back to full power. Karkaroff is a traitor in the Death Eater's eyes. The ones that got off like Malfoy and Nott socialize with him if they have to because they are not stupid. They know they can't bring suspicion towards them, and if they openly shun him people will ask themselves why, and they worked too hard on their image and their Ministry bribery to ruin it with gossip. But in their private meetings it's quite clear that if the Dark Lord ever comes back, Karkaroff is as good as dead. Since I was vouched for by Dumbledore, he thinks I may be in the same situation as him and is trying to get my help."

"Will you?"

"No," Severus said. "Karkaroff enjoyed being a Death Eater. He loves killing and torturing. He should be in Azkaban, and if he gets his due from the Dark Lord instead of the Ministry it's nothing more than he deserves. I'm not about to jeopardize my chance at spying to help someone like him. I know it sounds ruthless Harry, but in war you can't be soft hearted, and that is our next lesson."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I've noticed that you try your best not to hurt your opponent Harry. You keep trying just to disarm us. So during our next session next week, it will be you against me, Sirius and Remus and you will shoot to maim."

"But-"

"No buts," Severus said sternly. "Death Eaters won't be nice to you just because you are being nice to them. You have to neutralize them for good so they can't start fighting you back. The spells we will allow won't be anything that can hurt us permanently and nothing Poppy can't deal with. So you don't have that excuse not to try. Am I clear?"

Harry nodded reluctantly. He did not like the idea of hurting his family one bit.

"We'll do it on Friday instead of Tuesday. This way we will all have the weekend to rest. Also because Wednesday is the PWA's first full moon and I don't want any worries about what's going to happen distracting our session. So you get two Animagus sessions in a row. I know you've been making a lot of progress."

"Yeah," Harry smiled. "I've managed to turn all my skin into fur and hooves. I've even managed to transform a little of my arms into legs. Dad says he thinks I'll be done before the last task."

"Good," Severus smiled.

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"Welcome to the Pro- Werewolf Association," Albus said happily to the people in front of him. They were in a large living room that was comfortably furnished with squishy armchairs and couches in which ten people were seated. Three children, aged five, ten, and a teenager around Harry's age, and seven adults, two of them around Minerva's age, but you would have bet they were older. "These people behind me," Albus said gesturing to Hagrid, Sirius, Remus, Tonks, Hestia Jones, Emmeline Vance, Molly, who had shot Sirius some nasty looks to which he was honestly bewildered, and Arthur Weasley, Professor Sprout, Ted and Andromeda Tonks, Poppy Pomfrey, a young looking man with brown hair and blue eyes, a pretty blond woman of around thirty and black-haired man in his fifties who were standing in a row. "Are here to help you. You were assigned rooms for your stay during this week. Unfortunately you'll have to share because between having more rooms to sleep in and having more safe rooms for the transformations we preferred, and I hope you agree, being able to help more people."

"And you thought right," an elderly man said kindly. "We are very thankful for your work."

"Thank you Richard," Albus said. "As I was saying, you will receive one dose of the Permanent Wolfsbane every day. It's very important not to miss a dose. Madam Pomfrey and Mr. Evans here," he said gesturing to Poppy and the brown-haired man with blue eyes, "Will monitor you during the week to make sure there are no adverse reactions. On the night of the full moon you will transform in a safe room so that in the very unlikely case that the potion does not work for you, you will be secure and not able to hurt anyone. But we have no reason to think that will happen, since all our tests were very successful as Mr. Lupin, Ms. Chase and Mr. Abbot here can attest to," Albus said gesturing to the pretty blond, the black-haired man and Remus.

"If you have any question as to how the transformation will happen and feel, just come to us and ask away," Mr. Abbot said in a cheerful tone. "Mr. Lupin will stop by every night and Abby and I will be here the whole week. Yes, even on the day of the full moon. We will be here, in complete control of our minds, as we have been since Mr. Evans here first tested the potion with us back in October."

"On the next full moon you shall return," Albus continued. "So we can make sure that the change is permanent. You do not need to come for the whole week since you won't be taking the potion, but if you want to, you are welcome to."

Sirius took a step forward, "The house is divided in this form: there are five stories plus the basement. The ground floor has this living room where you can read, play chess, or many other games and toys that you can find on those shelves. We have quite an extensive library here thanks to donations from the members, and our resident bookworm, Mr. Lupin has approved of all the choices. You can find entertainment for all ages. There is a drawing room where you can also find more books and games. There you will also find a Muggle Television and a VCR. If you don't know what they are, they are something Muggles have invented for entertainment and were added at the request of Mr. Tonks and his daughter over here, so you can badger them to explain to you how to work it. It's basically a box that has moving and talking pictures that tell a story. Ms. Tonks here got you a wide variety of movies, again for all ages. She swears that she did get movies that others other than herself would like. Let me know later if that's true- oi!" he winced and rubbed his head glaring at the purple haired Auror.

"Never mind him," she said ahead. "On this floor you will also find a kitchen and a dining room. Breakfast, lunch and dinner schedules are affixed in the dinning room. There are also two toilets which we separated between male and female. Can you believe he didn't think it necessary?" she said glaring at her cousin and all the females in the room snorted. "There are four safe rooms in the basement, eight on the third floor and eight on the fourth floor, totaling twenty. Each month we have ten people taking the potion and ten returnees. The first and second floors are divided in eight sleeping rooms with private bathrooms. Right now each room has two bunk-beds totalizing thirty-two beds, but there is room to add more if we need to."

"Since we are volunteering, not all of us can be here the whole week. On the night of the full moon there will be one person for each person taking the potion, and one for every two returnees. We just don't

have enough volunteers yet for one for each," Hestia said apologetically and continued, "but during the rest of the week only, Ms. Chase, Mr. Abbot and Mrs. Weasley and three of Hogwarts' finest house-elves will be here full time, so I ask you to help us keep this place in order. Madam Pomfrey and Mr. Evans will stop by every day to check on your health and Mr. Weasley and Mr. and Mrs. Tonks will come and stay every night after work. The rest of us will also try to stop by at least once a day to help you and see if there is anything you need. You can count on everyone's discretion here as we know we can count on yours."

"There are also some volunteers who are not here today but you may meet at a later day," Molly said clapping her hands. "Now shall we get you settled up?" she asked extending her hand to the little five-year-old girl and telling her kindly, "Your mommy and daddy said they would stop by every day. They can't be here because they also have to take care of your siblings, but they promised one of them will be here the night of the full moon."

The little girl nodded as she took Molly's hand, her curls bobbing up and down.

"Mr. Evans," the same elderly man that talked before said.

"Yes," Severus answered.

"Thank you."

"You are more than welcome," Severus nodded.

XXXXXXX

"So everyone is there tonight?" Hermione asked having trouble turning the page of her book with her heavy bandaged hands. She had received a lot of hate mail because of the article that said she was playing Harry and Krum, and in one of the letters there was some undiluted Bubotuber pus that made her hand erupt in large yellow boils. "Thanks Neville," she said as Neville turned the page for her.

"Yes, on the first night, the volunteers that will be there on the full moon all stop by to meet the new guests," Harry explained.

"So who's there from the teacher's?" Ron asked.

"Dad, Uncle Moony, Hagrid, Professor Sprout and Professor Dumbledore. Oh, and one of the house-elves that has been permanently directed to the PWA is Winky. Dad said she is way happier now that she has a house to take care of. She was kind of more depressed than before when Crouch Jr. offed himself, but she is doing better. Oh, and yes, Hermione, the House-elves will be sleeping in one of the rooms and not on the floor like some people make them," Harry told Hermione, who nodded satisfied.

"I thought Flitwick and McGonagall were volunteering too," Neville said.

"McGonagall and Dumbledore can't both leave the school at the same time," Hermione explained and Harry nodded. "And I'm betting that since she has to act as Deputy Headmistress and her Deputy Head of House is at the PWA, Flitwick and Snape have to take care of the Gryffindor and Hufflepuff Houses for the night."

"Exactly," Harry said leaving out that actually McGonagall was balancing both the school and Gryffindor, so Flitwick took care of Hufflepuff and Slytherin as well as Ravenclaw. They didn't know Severus was at the PWA.

"Dad said Aunt Andy and Uncle Ted really liked your work Hermione," Harry said changing the subject. Hermione blushed and she said, "Yes, they offered me an internship during the summer and to keep doing the same research I did for the PWA during the school term, but for their other cases. They are going to pay me and everything, and mom and dad said that as long as I don't overdo it and my school work doesn't suffer I'm allowed to."

"So you are not going to Bulgaria?" Ron asked a little too happily.

"Don't know yet," Hermione answered nonchalantly. "Maybe I'll go. Mom and dad talked to Mr. and Mrs. Tonks and said that even though I am allowed to intern part time for them during the summer I still have to take some time off for vacation. They usually take me traveling, so maybe we will all go."

Ron's ears went red and Neville asked Hermione:

"Did you find out how Skeeter has been listening to private conversation?"

"No, but I will. I asked Professor Lupin if he knew of a way to make electronic devices work at Hogwarts and he said that wizards have managed to make some Muggle things run off magic instead of electricity like the Wireless and other things, but he highly doubts that anyone tried it on something as complex and delicate as the small microphones she would have had to have planted in order for no one to see them. Not even Professor Moody and his eye saw anything. I asked him," she said annoyed. "But I'll find out, and then she will be sorry she messed with me," she finished with a dangerous glint in her eyes that Harry often saw in the twins and his dad. That glint never bodes well.

A/N- Dumbledore told everyone there about Remus because all the volunteers are either Order Members that knew of Remus being a werewolf or people (like the Weasleys) that already knew. Since all the "guests" are werewolves that don't want to be outed either it's understood between them that they will not talk about who they met in the PWA outside of it. I had thought of having them taking oaths binding them not to talk but I figured that that would be a little aggressive towards the werewolves since the Order wants them on their side.

Thank you all for reading and special thanks for those who took the time to review.

Humongous thanks to my beta SWaddict1986.

Happy New Year!

Sadly, I don't own Harry Potter. My bank account could really use the rights to Harry Potter but I am just left to cry.

Chapter 39- The calm before the storm

"You are being too proper Harry!" Severus scolded. "I told you, in this exercise everyone is the enemy. It's shoot first, ask questions later. Your reactions are delayed because you wait to see who it is and you are not shooting to maim."

"But, I would hurt you," Harry protested.

"None of the hexes we discussed are life threatening and Poppy is on call," Severus said firmly.

"But let's say I am in a battle, shouldn't I try to just disable the enemy and not hurt them?" Harry tried to reason.

"That is a very noble thought Harry, and when dealing with noble people it is laudable, but Death Eaters are not noble, therefore it is just stupid to do so with them because you *will be* at a disadvantage. They will be shooting to kill, not disarm. Now we'll start again. Everyone is the enemy Harry," Severus reminded him.

Severus, Sirius, Harry and Remus all positioned themselves. The Room of Requirement resembled a battlefield and there were plenty of places to hide. Harry's goal was to cross the field without being captured, and preferably capturing the 'enemy'. They were so intent on the exercise that no one heard the door opening. Harry was trying to get to his target when he felt movement behind him. He turned and cried "*Expelliarmus!*" The figure, caught unaware, flew backwards as his wand flew into Harry's hand. When Harry looked at who it was, his eyes went wide.

"STOP!" Severus shouted and stalked towards Harry, "What did I say about you keeping to the disarming charm?"

But Harry didn't answer as he had run towards the fallen man and was apologizing profusely, "I'm sorry Grandpa. Uncle Sev said to shoot first. I didn't know it was you."

"That's fine Harry. No harm done," Albus said as he got up with Harry's help.

"Yes, and I said shoot to maim," Severus growled.

"But Grandpa wasn't in the exercise," Harry defended himself.

"Albus shouldn't have come here when he knew we were dueling," Sirius said flatly. "If he did he was a fair target. You had orders Harry."

"Here is your wand Grandpa," Harry returned the wand to Dumbledore.

"Start over," Severus snapped and everyone went back to their places. Dumbledore, who said that he came to observe, was drawing a chair with his wand to sit in when one glare from Severus had him taking a hiding spot and joining the exercise too.

By the end of the exercise, Harry had managed to stun Remus once. Severus was a little more satisfied but still pointed out that the only one Harry managed to get was the one who suffered from Harry's "proper mannerism" as Severus called it.

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Dear Mrs. Weasley,

I would firstly like to thank you for the thoughtful gift you bestowed upon me this Easter. The Easter eggs you sent me and my family were greatly appreciated especially by my Uncle who is a known chocoholic.

Ron tells me you enjoy reading "Witch Weekly" and like Rita Skeeter a lot. I don't know if you read her articles as of late but I wanted to make sure that in case you have, you didn't get the wrong idea. Ms. Skeeter seems to be somewhat confused you see. Hermione and I have never had anything happen between us, and as a matter of fact I've been occasionally seeing another girl since the Yule Ball. Her name is Susan Bones and we have been having a really nice time. Hermione is like the sister I never had to me.

Ms. Skeeter also seems to have understood the relationship of brotherhood between my father and Uncle in the wrong way. I assure you that though I wouldn't have anything against it, my father and Uncle Remus are not a couple and are both straight. As a matter of fact, according to my father, my Uncle has been showing interest in a certain young lady who shall remain nameless for I am a gentleman. Both my father and I approve of a possible relationship between my Uncle and said lady.

I also assure you my father has always treated my Uncle with utmost respect and he is a very much valued and recognized member of our family.

I wish you good fortune.

Sincerely,

Harry James Potter Black

Harry, re-read the letter once again and, satisfied, sealed it and tied it to Hedwig. As she flew away he dearly hoped Mrs. Weasley believed him. She had sent Easter eggs to everyone, as she did every year, a tradition of hers since she first met Harry at the age of nine along with sending them the famous Weasley jumpers. Sirius always said that Mrs. Weasley seemed to think that the three of them would run around naked and not eat if she didn't remind them to, something about not having a woman around. This year though, both Sirius and Hermione's eggs had been quite small while Harry's and Remus' had been bigger than usual. Remus had been quite happy with his amount of chocolate but Sirius and Hermione had been crestfallen. Sirius had already frowned at the lack of his usual Weasley jumper this year, and now Harry thought he understood why Mrs. Weasley had seemed to "forget". Especially after Hermione asked Ron if Mrs. Weasley read *Witch Weekly*. He hoped the letter worked.

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"I thought you looked like you needed some hot chocolate," Tonks said as she sat on the steps of the front porch of the PWA's manor next to Remus, handing him a steamy cup.

"Thank you," he said smiling. They both turned to watch the children and a few adults play an impromptu Quidditch game. The contractors had warded the gates and walls surrounding the property in a way that no Muggle nor Wizard could see what was going inside. This allowed them to roam around the grounds freely with no worry of being spotted, and of course they could fly, so McGonagall had donated an assortment of Cleansweep Sevens for the Association.

"How is Harry holding up?" Tonks asked.

"Better than me," Remus gave a small chuckle and rubbed his eyes tiredly. "I'm so scared something will happen. Albus promised us he is supervising everything but I can't help this feeling of foreboding."

She smiled kindly at him, "It's your fatherly instincts kicking in. They always expect the worst. You'll see, nothing will happen, Harry will end up the youngest Triwizard Champion ever and we'll all laugh at how silly we were."

"I sure hope so," he gave her a small smile.

She hid a grin behind her cup and asked, "And how are you and Siri? Has he finally proposed?"

"NYMPHADORA!"

She laughed heartedly, "Oh, come on. You can't deny it was funny. And what's funnier is that people believed it. I mean Sirius Black! Please, there isn't a witch between twenty and forty that hasn't gone out with him at least once. By the way, I heard a few stating that his sexuality was the reason they didn't work. They should have known."

"Well, I assure you I am very much attracted only to the female variety," he said dignifiedly.

"Anyone in particular," she asked hopefully. He blushed but did not answer.

"You know, only you can get away with calling me that," she said, changing the subject and smiling as she sipped her hot chocolate.

XXXXX

Time seemed to speed up. For some reason, Mrs. Weasley sent both Sirius and Hermione some very tasty pieces of chocolate cake. She said she baked it and that she and Mr. Wesley weren't able to finish it. No one else got cake.

By the end of May, Bagman told the champions what the third task would be. A Maze full of obstacles with the Triwizard Cup in the center. The first to touch it would be the champion. That same night Krum asked Harry if he had a history with Hermione, and Harry had to work really hard to not laugh and reassure the Bulgarian that she was like a sister to him.

His training lessons continued as usual, with his dad and Uncles focusing on spells and hexes that could get him safely through the maze. In early June, Harry finally accomplished his transformation and trotted around the Room of Requirement in his Animagus form. The magnificent stag came close to Sirius who had his hand extended and slowly petted it's head.

"Now we have to find you a name," he said beaming proudly.

"Emerald," Severus said as he too came to examine the animal.

"Emerald?" Sirius asked.

"I think it's fitting," Remus smiled running a hand over the stag's back. "How many stags have you seen with green eyes?"

Harry's scar kept bothering him every now and then, and when Hermione asked about it when they were walking back from Care of Magical Creatures once, Harry just said it hurt a few times this year. According to his father it was either good because it meant Voldemort was pissed and failing at whatever he wanted, or very bad because he was happy. There was really no way of knowing. On the night before the third task Dumbledore called Harry to his office.

"I want you to have this Harry," Dumbledore said, and handed him his wand. "It hasn't been working quite right for me lately but I have a feeling it will work for you."

"But Grandpa-" Harry started.

"When a wizard wins a wand he becomes its master," Dumbledore explained. "You won that wand by disarming me. It doesn't belong to me anymore. And it never hurts to have more than one wand Harry. I want you to use this wand during the last task and keep the other one in your holster."

"But Grandpa, I don't feel right taking your wand, and I like mine. Can't I do it the other way around, and keep yours in the holster?"

"Do you remember what Mr. Ollivander said about your wand Harry?"

"Yes," Harry said eying Dumbledore nervously. "But you said it didn't matter. That what makes the wizard are our choices not our gifts. So it was okay that my wand and Voldemort's were brother wands."

"It doesn't define you Harry but it handicaps you in a fight against Voldemort," Harry looked puzzled.

"Brother wands are not meant to duel each other, and when they are forced to, they don't work properly. If you are caught by Voldemort, which I, your father and Uncles will do the utmost to prevent, your wand won't work properly against him."

"Neither will his then."

"No, but what are the chances that he will be alone? When two brother wands are forced to battle what happens is an effect called Prior Incantatem, meaning they will connect and one of the wands will force the other to regurgitate the past spells it has performed- in reverse. Which means your and Voldemort's wand would be locked together until one of you broke the connection."

"Giving one of his minions time to finish me off," Harry finished. "I understand Grandpa. I'll use your wand for the task and keep mine in my holster, just in case I'm disarmed. What will you do?"

Dumbledore produced another wand and waved it around, "Pine with a unicorn hair, very good for transfiguration. My very first wand. I've missed it," he winked.

"This isn't your first wand?"

"No, I won that one from someone just like you did. Well not exactly, but that is a story for another day."

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The day of the third task was quite interesting. Right bright in the morning, the Daily Prophet announced that Harry was "Disturbed and Dangerous" courtesy of the one and only Rita Skeeter. Somehow she found out Harry's scar had been hurting and decided that she had to have a new tale about him. Being the tragic Hero wasn't selling anymore. She unearthed the story of Harry being a Parseltongue and the whole Dueling Club disaster, thanks to Malfoy. And of course, being close friends with Hagrid just added to his dangerous personality. She also pointed out the possibility Harry was pretending his scar hurt in an attention-seeking scheme, which was further confirmed by St. Mungo's specialists. She also had the gall to say Harry may try using Dark Arts to win the Tournament.

Harry scoffed at the paper but Hermione had a sudden insight and ran to the library. To do what? Only God and Hermione knew.

The champion's families were invited to watch the third task and spend the day with them. Since his dad would be busy with exams, Dumbledore invited the Tonks' to spend the day with Harry and Remus. Amos Diggory was not very happy with Harry, but Andromeda quickly shut him up by saying Skeeter loved to stir trouble up and since he worked at the Ministry, Diggory should know better. Fleur insisted on introducing Harry to her parents who thanked him for rescuing Gabrielle. They were very impressed with him since he made a point of talking to them in French.

The day went pretty well as Harry walked around the castle showing his Aunt and Uncle all the places where he had helped Tonks and Charlie set up pranks. Tonks had smiled sheepishly and reminded her mother she was an adult now and could not be grounded. At lunch they were joined by Sirius who sat with them at the Gryffindor table instead of the Head Table as usual. The students didn't seem to be troubled by having to eat at the same table as two teachers, and Ted said that was because the only thing that separated Sirius from them was the lack of uniform.

At dinner, Sirius and Remus took their spots back at the Head Table, much to Sirius' disgust since their esteemed Minister had joined them. Finally after a tense dinner Dumbledore announced:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, in five minutes' time, I will be asking you to make your way down to the Quidditch Pitch for the third task of the Triwizard Tournament. Will the champions please follow Mr. Bagman down to the stadium now."

"Good luck Harry," Susan said as Harry was about to leave the Great Hall.

"Thanks," Harry smiled. She looked sideways and quickly leaned forward and kissed his lips.

"For good luck," she said blushing.

"I'll certainly win," Harry said grinning and Bagman had to push him to get out as he ran his fingers over his lips dazedly.

At the Head Table, Remus was trying to restrain Sirius, "Leggo Moony. Didn't you see that! She attacked my baby! A hundred points from Hufflepuff and detention!"

"A hundred points to Hufflepuff for bravery," Professor Flitwick said. "Kissing Harry in front of his lunatic father takes guts!"

In response, Sirius huffed and straightened his robes. He turned around and stalked out of the Great Hall through a back door behind the Head Table. Remus smiled apologetically and followed his friend out. He had to run to keep up with Sirius as he entered one passage after another until they were exiting the castle through a small hidden door not far from the huge entrance doors. As they ran towards the steps they were just in time to see the champions and Bagman exiting.

"If you allow me Ludo," Sirius called. "I'd like a word with my son before he goes."

Bagman shrugged, "Why not. You know where to find us Harry. Don't be long."

Harry nodded and joined Remus and Sirius.

"Good luck," Remus and Sirius called to the other champions and then turned to Harry. Sirius grasped both his hands on Harry's shoulder.

"You remember everything we taught you right?" Sirius asked and Harry nodded nervously. Sirius gave him a strained smile. "It will be fine. You'll see. Just keep your head on and focus on the maze. If you think you can't handle something shoot up red sparks and we will be there in a second."

"The spectators will have a complete view of the maze," Remus told Harry. "But the rules say we can't interfere if you don't ask for help. So don't hesitate in doing so."

"I won't," Harry said nervously and launched himself into Sirius arms and hugged him as if his life depended on it. Sirius' strong arms circled Harry in a tight embrace, "Love you dad," Harry whispered and Sirius said back into his hair:

"I love you too son. You'll be fine. I know it," he finished kissing Harry's temple. As he left Sirius' arms Harry launched himself into Remus' arms in the same way.

"I love you Uncle Moony."

"I know. I love you too and we will have many opportunities to tell each other again," Remus said firmly.

"Don't worry." Harry nodded into Remus' chest but Remus knew he wasn't the only one worried that his words would turn out to be untrue.

Harry nodded once more as he reluctantly left Remus' embrace and marched towards the maze, squaring his shoulders. Remus gripped Sirius shoulder and felt his friend was shaking slightly.

"It's almost over Paddy. Nothing will happen."

"I so want to believe that Moony. So much!" Sirius said in a strained voice as he hugged himself for comfort.

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Harry couldn't believe it; he had a chance at winning. There it was, the shining Triwizard Cup, gleaming on a plinth at his reach. After running into a Boggart, a Blast- Ended Skrewt, a jinx that made him turn

upside down, helping Cedric when Krum was Crucioing him, what was that by the way? And a sphinx, Harry had finally made it. He reached his hands towards it. It was almost over and Voldemort would not manage to get him. But then, out of the corner of his eyes, a figure hurtled out on the path behind him and Cedric was running towards him. Harry smiled and mouthed "sorry." He extended his hand and had almost grabbed the cup when he saw something immense over a hedge to his left, moving quickly along a path that intersected with his own, and Cedric was about to run into it. Without second thought, Harry took his hand back and cried:

"Cedric, look out! On your left!"

Cedric looked around just in time to avoid colliding with the enormous Acromantula that had come between him and Harry. It was bearing down on him and Cedric yelled "*Stupefy!*" but it had no effect. He continued trying spells to no avail: "*Impedimenta! Stupefy!*" But it was either too large or so magical that the curses had no effect. Harry didn't think twice. He transformed, right then and there, not caring who saw. He lowered his head and poised his antlers and took off at a run colliding with the Acromantula and making it stumble a little. Enough to forget Cedric and focus on Emerald.

"What the hell!" Emerald heard Cedric gasp, but he didn't waste any time. He took another run and hurtled his antlers at the Acromantula making it back away some more. He had pierced it with his antlers twice now, but it wasn't enough yet. The Acromantula started clicking its razor-sharp pincers and when Emerald was backing away, it scraped his right hind leg causing Emerald to stumble in pain. His Animagus form was now useless and Harry transformed back. By then Cedric had regained his bearings and when Harry pointed his wand at the injured Acromantula that was still going towards them, he yelled: "Stunner on three," Cedric was ready. "One, two three, *STUPEFY!*" they both cried and this time the force of both spells was enough to make it keel over.

"Harry," Cedric cried. "Are you alright? You're bleeding."

Harry finally looked at his leg and sure enough there was a huge gash on it. Cedric tore a strip of his robes and made an impromptu bandage to stop the bleeding.

"I think that will hold until Madam Pomfrey can have a look," he offered.

"Yeah," Harry said. "Thanks."

"Harry," Cedric said awed. "When did you become an Animagus?"

Harry bit his lip and answered, "I managed it this month. But you can't tell anyone Cedric. It's a secret. It's for my protection," he said desperately.

"Harry, you saved my life twice today. If you weren't an Animagus I'd be spider food right now."

"You would have thought of something."

"I was scared shitless. I highly doubt I could. Don't worry. Your secret is safe with me."

Harry smiled and looked back at the cup.

"Go on," he said. "I won't be winning any races with this leg. Go take it."

But Cedric didn't move. He looked at the cup longingly and then at Harry. He shook his head and said, "No, you deserve it more. You stopped twice to help me. You were already there and came back for me."

"Cedric!" Harry cried annoyed. "Don't be daft! I can't outrun you. It's yours. This is a competition!"

"You helped me with the Dragon. I would have gone down in the first task if you hadn't."

"I had help in that too and you told me about the egg, we're even," Harry said through gritted teeth. The cut was burning and he really wanted Poppy. The longer Cedric argued the longer it took for them to get out of there.

"I had help there. The fake Moody told me to take a bath with the egg."

"Why?"

"Beats me, but he did."

"It doesn't matter anyway," Harry said pointing at the cup. "That cup is yours. Go get it."

Cedric shrugged and backed off and crossed his arms. Unbelievable! Harry crossed his arms and leaned on the hedge.

"If you don't get it we will just stay here all night long, because I'm not moving," Harry said stubbornly.

"But Harry, I am telling you to get it. Don't you want eternal glory?"

"Got enough attention as it is," Harry shrugged.

They both stayed that way for a while until Cedric said, "Both of us then? At the same time."

Harry looked questioningly and nodded pensively, "It would be a complete Hogwarts victory. Are you sure?"

"Yes, it's this or nothing," Cedric said.

"Okay."

Grabbing Harry's arm below the shoulder, Cedric helped him walk towards the cup. They both extended their hands and Harry said:

"We touch it on three okay?"

Cedric nodded and together they counted.

"One, two, three!"

Harry and Cedric each grabbed a handle and instantly felt a hook behind their navels and their feet left the ground.

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Thank you all who take the time to read, especially to those who take the extra time to review.

Huge thanks to SWaddict1986 for betaing and catching my mistakes.

Really not mine.

Chapter 39- The calm before the storm

Harry and Cedric each grabbed a handle and instantly felt a hook behind their navel and their feet left the ground.

Chapter 40- The return of the servant

Harry's feet slammed on the ground and his injured leg gave away as he fell forward. He broke his fall with his hands losing his grandfather's wand in the process. He grabbed his aching and burning leg with one of his hands and bit his lip against the pain. It was getting worse and the burning sensation was traveling farther up his leg; it felt like it was getting ripped slowly from inside out.

The Triwizard Cup rolled in between Harry and Cedric, and he asked Cedric in a strained whisper, "Where are we?"

Cedric shook his head and got up. He pulled Harry to his feet and looked around. It was so dark they could barely make out shapes which seemed to create a graveyard. They were definitely not at Hogwarts anymore. Harry tried to kneel down, feeling for his wand, and at the same time be alert.

"Do you think this is part of the task?" Cedric asked apprehensively.

"Dumbledore wouldn't allow us to be taken away from Hogwarts," Harry answered with certainty. He had no idea where they were but one thing he was sure of, this was not a friendly place to be.

"Someone's coming," Cedric said as they heard a rustle of leaves. They squinted tensely towards the darkness as a figure drew near. Harry kept patting the ground with his left hand and keeping his right wrist ready to flick out his other wand. He didn't want to use it until it was his last resort lest he lose both wands. As the figure approached, he could see it was tall and slender and carrying what looked like a baby.

Without warning, Harry's scar exploded with pain and he put his hands over his face. A horrible feeling came to him as he recalled the last time he felt such pain and suddenly he knew who those figures were. Harry reached one hand out and searched for Cedric. He grasped the boy's hand and tried pulling him down as he heard a cold voice hiss, "Kill the spare."

Cedric didn't understand at first but Harry managed to pull him down just in time to avoid the green light of the "*Avada Kedrava*" that the tall figure sent his way.

"Oh, wittle Hawwy wants to play?" a singsong voice asked. "He wants to save his wittle friend."

"Run," Harry gasped out through the pain to Cedric. "They want me, not you."

"No," Cedric shook his head. "I won't leave you alone," he said, trying to help Harry up so they could run together. But Harry was in too much pain and kept tumbling over. Suddenly a mad laugh sounded above them:

"Found you," Bellatrix Lestrange's face looked eerie as it was illuminated by the light of a wand. "*Crucio.*" She said pointing at Cedric, and he screamed and twitched in agony, falling to the ground next

to Harry. "I think I'll save you for a little fun later instead," she said as she released the spell and with an Incarcerous, she had Cedric gagged and bound to a headstone. Then she turned to Harry who was starting to gain his bearings, propping himself up and was about to flick his wrist. She slapped him forcefully making him topple to the side. She then sent an Incarcerous at him, bounding and gagging him too, and levitated him to another headstone farther away. Harry was able to read the inscription: Tom Riddle. Every now and then Harry caught glimpses of a large snake slithering around.

What followed next was a very disturbing ritual where Bellatrix brought over a cauldron and lit a fire. She threw the baby, which Harry was sure was not a baby, inside it. Then she started chanting "*Bone of the father, unknowingly given, you will renew your son.*" She pointed her wand at the grave Harry was tied to and it cracked; from within came a fine trickle of dust that fell into the cauldron.

"*Flesh of the servant willingly give you will revive your master,*" she said her eyes glinting and she took a knife from her robes and smiling she sliced her right hand off letting it fall into the cauldron. She didn't even scream. Without stopping to care for her wound, Bellatrix turned to Harry and chanted:

"*Blood of the enemy forcibly taken you will resurrect your foe,*" she walked swiftly to him, and without a second thought, she sliced the knife through the crook of Harry's arm. Blood trickled down his robes and Bellatrix collected some with a conjured vial as she smiled sweetly at him and went back to the cauldron dropping the blood in it.

As the liquid within the cauldron turned white, Bellatrix stepped back to wait and wrapped her stump in her robes. As Harry silently begged for Voldemort to have drowned, the cauldron bubbled and steamed and, too quickly for Harry's liking, a figure emerged from it and asked to be robbed. With reverence Bellatrix obeyed. The figure stepped out from the cauldron and Harry looked straight into the red eyes of Lord Voldemort.

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"What happened?" Sirius roared at Dumbledore as soon as the two boys disappeared from the maze.

"You promised me you took care of everything. That he was not in danger!"

"Mr. Black, control yourself. What are you going on about?" Fudge spluttered.

"Did you not see them disappear just now?" Remus hissed in a strained voice as if he was in pain.

"Well, I suppose that is part of the task-"

Dumbledore shook his head at Fudge's inability to react to danger and started towards the steps followed by Andromeda, Ted, Tonks, Sirius, Remus and Severus, leaving the still fumbling Minister behind. He didn't have time to deal with Fudge now. They practically ran down from the Top Box to the ground where they were met by Moody who grunted, "The cup was a Portkey. Both boys took it at the same time and were whisked away."

"I can get to him," Remus said but Dumbledore stopped him.

"We need to do this smartly Remus. If you go alone you'll just be another victim. Alastor call the old crowd and meet us in my office, I'll open the Floo. Lets go, we have to plan this quickly."

"Plan? My son may be dead by the time we finish planning!" Sirius cried.

"We know he isn't," Dumbledore said, looking at Remus for confirmation who nodded jerkily. "Our best chance is to go in as a large number. We do not know what waits for us there Sirius. Better not delay it anymore."

The group moved forward and quickly ran towards the Headmaster's office. As they arrived and were joined by Minerva, Filius and Pomona, Dumbledore opened the Floo. "Can you lead us towards Harry, Remus?" Dumbledore asked.

And Remus, who was hugging himself and had an expression of pain, nodded and said through gritted teeth, "If we are all touching it will be like side-Apparition."

Another hiss of pain was heard as Severus held his left arm. He rolled his sleeve up and swore, "He's back and calling."

Everyone paled when they saw the Dark Mark on his arm burning black.

"Backup should be here soon and we will leave as soon as they arrive," Albus said firmly.

"I'm going now," Severus growled and went for the door.

"Severus, you can't. It's too dangerous," Minerva gasped.

"We don't have time to wait. He's back and his first order of business will be killing Harry. I'll do what I can to convince him of my loyalties and bring Harry back. If I die so be it," he said and before he left he exchanged glances with Sirius and Remus.

"We'll be right behind you," Sirius said firmly.

Severus ran out and not long after did Moody come back in. "They should get here any second now."

Dumbledore nodded and went to the glass case behind him. He took Gryffindor's sword and Andromeda said:

"A sword Albus?"

"Yes, I can't explain why but if anyone has the chance I want them to kill Voldemort's snake, preferably with this."

Sirius and Remus instantly understood and nodded. Right behind him Moody whispered to Sirius as the office started flooding with former Order Members, "Been teaching your kid a few family tricks haven't you Black?"

Sirius looked at him strangely but said nothing.

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"Listen to me reliving family history..." Voldemort said quietly. "Why, I am growing sentimental...But look Harry! My real family returns..."

The air suddenly filled with swishing cloaks. Between the graves and the yew trees, cloaked figures Apparated and came forward. They moved slowly, as if they could hardly believe their eyes. Except for one. One came forward with certainty, as if he would be rewarded. Another Death Eater fell to his knees crawled towards Voldemort, and kissed the hem of his robes.

"Master...Master," he murmured.

The Death Eaters behind him did the same except for the one who was so full of himself. Bellatrix sneered at all of them as if she thought they were something slimy and awful. After they all had backed away, standing up once more, and positioned themselves on a circle with few gaps, the Death Eater that hadn't groveled came forward and bowed.

"My Lord," he said, and Harry gasped. He knew that voice.

"Igor, my slippery snake," Voldemort said smoothly. "You did well."

Igor Karkaroff bowed and returned to the circle. Harry could hear astonished gasps from the Death Eaters.

"Oh, yes," Voldemort said. "I know what you are thinking. How can I welcome him back after he betrayed us? But Lord Voldemort is forgiving," he said smiling generously as if he was a nice grandfather. On his deformed face, that smile seemed twisted and gave Harry the creeps. "But I do not forget," he warned. "Bellatrix, you did well too. And you shall receive your reward."

Voldemort waved his wand, and from her stub a silver hand grew. She flexed it and you would have thought she was merely wearing a silver glove.

"Thank you my Lord," she bowed.

"Don't think I forgot your little misbehavior over there," he said pointing at where Cedric was watching everything with wide eyes, unable to say anything as he was gagged just like Harry had been. "I may have been hasty in my orders though. He may be of use. I mean what use is it to kill The-Boy-Who-Lived and not let anyone know of it?" he frowned walking towards Cedric slowly. He kneeled down and smiled eerily again. "No, maybe we can memory charm him and send him back with Harry's body. It has to be strong though, a charm that Dumbledore won't dare break lest he breaks his mind," Voldemort said caressing Cedric's cheek. "He wouldn't do it. I would, but not Dumbledore. Who knows, they may even believe you killed Harry and then went mad with grief," he smirked evilly and pointed his wand at Cedric who was struggling furiously. "*OBLIVIATE!*" Voldemort roared and a jet of light engulfed Cedric.

Cedric convulsed for a few seconds and then slumped back unconscious. Harry couldn't believe it. Cedric looked dead. He prayed that he was alive, hoping that no matter what the force of the Obliviation charm it wouldn't kill.

Voldemort turned back to his Death Eaters, "Thirteen years... and here we are. United under the Dark Mark, or are we?" he asked walking slowly among them. "I smell guilt. I see you are all whole and healthy and I ask myself, 'Why did not one of you try to find me?'"

"Master," Lucius Malfoy's voice came from under one of the masks.

"Spare me your drivel Lucius. I know why. Because you thought me powerless, gone forever. You, who know the steps I took long ago to guard myself against mortal death. If I were unreasonable," Voldemort said waving his hands slowly, "I could interpret it as betrayal. But see, I am not. And so I welcome you back with open arms."

Harry shivered at the tone, he definitely did not think it boded well and most Death Eaters must have agreed since they too were trembling.

Voldemort looked pleased and faced them all again, "Now, who do we have here? Who pleaded innocence, bewitchment and forsook me all those years ago and now comes begin for forgiveness? Avery, Crabbe, Goyle, Nott... oh yes Nott, I know all about you and Lucius worming yourselves up the Ministry's ranks. I hear both of you have our Minister in your pockets. Are known as his advisors. I am quite pleased with this," he finished in front of a Death Eater that bowed deeply.

"I knew My Lord would be back and would appreciate having such control."

"Yes, I do. Macnair, you shall satisfy your thirst for blood on better targets than dangerous beasts," he said as he walked to the empty spaces, "Three dead in my service, others faithful to me and facing Azkaban rather than renouncing me, and one that has left me forever, he will die," Harry's eyes widened at the thought of who that one was. "And lastly Igor. My Igor who brought me Harry when I had lost my faithful servant at Hogwarts. Bellatrix didn't want me to trust you, you know? No, she was quite adamant for me to find another way. But you answered my missive and came to me and delivered what I asked you for. Harry Potter. You see," he said turning from Karkaroff to the rest of the Death Eaters, "Igor here had a simple job. He had to charm the Triwizard cup and make it a Portkey. Since Dumbledore didn't trust him he had to do it before they took it to the center of the Maze. He sneaked in at night and made it a Portkey that would only be activated when touched by one particular magical signature; Harry Potter's. Then he had to make sure Harry got there first, so he put his champion under the Imperius Curse and told him to take the girl and Diggory here out of the race. Something obviously went wrong."

"Potter helped Diggory when Viktor was torturing him," Karkaroff said apologetically. "They both took Viktor off the run. But I had foreseen any problem master. The cup would not react to anyone else. It was supposed to take the champion to the Top Box as he or she touched it. So Diggory would have been stumped and Potter could have still touched it."

"A faulty plan. Dumbledore might have just retrieved Diggory himself. But lucky for you we did get Harry and I won't punish you...yet," Voldemort said.

"And lastly, our guest of honor. Harry Potter, The-Boy-Who only lived because his Mudblood mother refused to step aside. She didn't need to die, did you know that Harry?" Voldemort asked and Harry just glared at him. "No, she died *because of you*. But you see, that protection she gave you that saved your pitiful life four years ago is worthless since I have it too now. I can touch you." And he did touch Harry's cheek and Harry's scar burned even deeper than it had been all night long.

Voldemort moved back and said, "Now, I shall kill you Harry. I shall prove you are nothing. Untie him!" Voldemort ordered. "*Accio* Harry's wand." He Summoned Harry's wand from where it had fallen on the ground. Thankfully, Harry's Auror standard holster was charmed against those kinds of spells and the wand in it could only be summoned by the owner, ensuring that it did not move an inch.

After Malfoy and Nott had unbound Harry and lifted him to his feet forcibly, Voldemort turned to him and was about to hand him back his wand when he stopped dead. He held it closely and examined it carefully, caressing it almost lovingly and Harry wanted to scream at him to knock it off.

"Impossible," Voldemort breathed. "How did this wand come into your possession Harry?"

Harry shut his mouth in a tight line. He had no idea why Voldemort wanted to know, but Harry sure as hell wouldn't volunteer information. He stopped himself from Summoning his other wand, knowing Voldemort had wanted to give him back the one he won from Dumbledore and not wanting to give away he had two.

"Maybe you need some memory refreshment," Voldemort said flicking his wand at Harry and crying "*Crucio*."

Harry withered in pain. Voldemort's Cruciatus was ten times worse than Bellatrix. He once again bit his lips not to cry out. He wouldn't give the bastard the satisfaction. After an eternity the pain stopped and Voldemort asked again, "Where did you get this wand Harry?"

"Wouldn't you like to know," Harry gasped and Voldemort roared:

"*Crucio!*"

Once again Harry was assaulted with pain beyond measure. As Voldemort released him, he felt feverish and he didn't know if it was from the pain of the Cruciatus or the burning ache in his leg that was now spreading upwards.

"This isn't working Harry. We'll try something new," Voldemort said gently. "*Imperio*."

Harry felt as if all the pain had vanished and he was wiped of all thought... he was peaceful and a voice asked:

"Where did you get this wand Harry? Tell me."

He was floating dreaming... "*Just answer 'no'*" he heard someone else say.

"Tell me!"

"*Just answer no*"

"TELL ME!"

"NO!" Harry cried, and suddenly all the pain he was feeling came crashing back and he gasped. He was still on the ground and Voldemort was towering over him. A soft pop was heard and Voldemort looked up to somewhere behind Harry, completely forgetting his quest. He walked towards the new arrival who kneeled and bowed his head.

"My Lord, you're back. Forgive my tardiness."

"Severus," Voldemort said smoothly and dangerously. Harry slowly turned on his stomach to see what was happening, his blood turning ice cold at the thought of what Voldemort had said about Severus earlier. Everyone only had eyes for Severus and Voldemort. "I thought you wouldn't join us. That maybe you're loyalties had shifted."

"Never my Lord," Severus said. "I had to shake the old fool before I was able to leave the Anti-Apparitions wards without raising suspicion. I thought my Lord would still want his spy in place."

Voldemort slowly walked towards Severus. Harry was panting, every bone in him hurt and he was loosing an enormous amount of blood, but none of that mattered to him, he only had eyes for his Uncle and Voldemort.

Voldemort had pocketed his own wand and was caressing Harry's.

"I've been told Severus, to be wary of you. Bellatrix and Igor don't trust you. They say you are too close to Dumbledore, and that you have changed sides. Crouch even told me that Black was defending you. I have to agree that I should distrust you. Was it not you who I saw saving the boy as I left Quirrell's pitiful body four years ago?"

"My Lord, I did not know you were with Quirrell. I believed him to be no more than a greedy man that did not deserve the prize he looked for. Had I known it was for you, I would have helped my Lord."

Harry tried to crawl unnoticed towards his Uncle.

"Would you Severus?" Voldemort said stroking Severus' cheek and Harry shuddered. Voldemort turned and walked away and Harry inched closer. Turning back towards Severus, Voldemort said:

"Rise Severus," Severus complied eying Voldemort warily. "Severus, Severus. Do you take me for a fool?"

"Of course not my Lord," Severus pleaded nervously.

"Do you really think I believe such excuses? That you can fool Lord Voldemort?"

"My Lord I would never-"

"I don't take treason lightly Severus. Why is it you betrayed me? Was it for the Mudblood? The one whose life you begged me for? The one you handed to me?"

Voldemort raised Harry's wand and cried, "*Avada Kedrava.*"

Severus closed his eyes tightly as a beam of green rushed towards him.

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A/N- PadyandMoony asks that I deliver her thanks for reading and reviewing and her thanks to SWaddict1986 for betaing. She is currently undertaking plastic surgery to change her features and identity as she enters a protection program to escape from angry readers. And here everyone was worried about Cedric.

A/N-I was very moved at how much you all care for Uncle Sev. It makes me happy to know that!

A few of you came close to what was going to happen, one actually nailed it, you know who you are. I won't mention your names in case someone read the reviews and remembers.

Not mine.

Chapter 40- The return of the servant

Severus closed his eyes tightly as a beam of green rushed towards him.

Chapter 41- For love

Severus closed his eyes tightly when he heard the words and waited for the inevitable, but it never came. Instead he felt a body fall back on him and as he opened his eyes he met his worst fear; Harry's lifeless body fell into his arms and they both sank to the floor.

Severus didn't hear the others as they ran towards Voldemort who had fallen backwards when the curse hit Harry. He only had eyes for the still boy clutched in his arms. He rocked back and forth stroking Harry's hair as tears fell from his eyes.

"No, Harry, please no," he begged in a strangled voice as he kissed Harry's forehead.

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Harry woke up and realized he was naked. He really didn't like being naked, especially since he didn't know where he was. He looked around and he only saw mist. He wished he was clothed, and suddenly robes appeared a short distance away and hurriedly he put them on. He looked around. He tried to remember how he got here and suddenly his eyes got wide. Uncle Sev! The last thing he remembered was throwing himself at Uncle Sev in the hopes of getting him away from the killing curse.

So that was it, he was dead? He heard a cry but couldn't find the source. The mist was fading and Harry could finally see where he was; the Marauder's Quarters. There was what looked like a baby wailing in a corner, it oddly resembled Voldemort before his rebirth.

"Don't mind him. You can't help him," came a voice from behind him and Harry turned around. The two people were there beaming at him. One with beautiful red-hair and green eyes, a kind smile, almost the same height as Harry, just slightly taller; his mother. And looking almost like him but with hazel eyes and a goofy smile just a head taller, was his father, who pulled him into a tight hug.

"I am so proud of you son," he said. Harry relished the first hug he could remember from his father, hugging tightly back. As they pulled away his mother engulfed him and once again he tried to memorize each feeling as he burrowed his face in the crook of her neck and deeply inhaled her flowery scent.

"You are so brave Harry."

He smiled looking at both of them, holding both of them. "I'm dead then?" he asked.

Lily and James exchanged looks. "Not yet," Lily said smoothing Harry's fringe. "You have a decision to make."

James guided Harry to the same couch where he had sat with Remus and Sirius hundreds of times, putting Harry between him and Lily. Harry felt guilty; wasn't this supposed to be heaven? And here he was in heaven, finally with his birth parents, and his thoughts were back on the parents he'd always known. Was he that bad? As if reading his thoughts James said:

"I couldn't have chosen better parents for you myself," he smiled kindly and then his smile turned into a roguish smirk. "Oh, wait, I did choose them. Well not Snivellus, but who would have thought the day would come when I would say that I am very glad that he loves you so much?"

"We're glad you have them Harry," Lily said. "Don't feel bad for loving them. It doesn't take away the love you feel for us. And don't call Severus that James!" she finished in a scolding tone to her husband.

"Sorry," James said sheepishly. "Anyway, back to you. Albus, the great old coot, forgot to let you know something. Well he didn't exactly forget, I think he didn't want to burden you with the knowledge."

"The knowledge of what?"

"When Voldemort tried to kill you as a baby and failed," Lily explained. "His soul was so fractured and unstable that it broke and a piece of it attached itself to the closest living thing around; you."

"I'm a Horcrux?" Harry asked.

"You *were* a Horcrux Harry," James corrected. "When Voldemort's killing curse hit you it destroyed the Horcrux," he finished glancing at the baby that was still wailing and Harry understood.

"So I had to die," he said nodding resigned to his fate. "Now he can be killed."

"Not exactly," Lily said smiling. "You see, Voldemort was so keen on having my protection that he unintentionally anchored you to his body. You have a choice to make. You can go back or move forward. It's your choice and only you can make it. But unlike others you have it."

"Will Voldemort be anchored to life while I live because of my blood that he took?" Harry asked worried.

"No," James shook his head proudly. "You are anchored to him, but his blood does not run in you. You have a choice here Harry, not only because of this anchor but also because the killing curse had two souls to choose from. If Voldemort hadn't used your blood tonight you probably would have died along with the piece of his soul, but because he is anchoring your soul to him, you can still go back and the curse will only kill his piece of soul. The next time old Voldie encounters a killing curse, he won't have any more Horcruxes and all he will have is his one piece of soul, one very lousy soul, for the curse or whatever other means to kill. It won't matter that he has your blood in him."

Harry nodded; he looked at his mom and dad and smiled. He had always wanted to be with them, and here they were. He tightened the grip he had in their hands observing how his father's hand completely engulfed his while his mother's smaller hand was in more of an equilibrium with his teenage one. He tried to memorize every detail; he knew that if he chose to go back he wouldn't see them again, at least not for a long time, especially since Wizards could live up to two hundred years old. He didn't want to

leave but at the same time his heart ached for the people that were still behind. For his dad who was always goofing around, but would not survive losing a son. For his Uncle Moony who faced a cruel world so bravely and did not deserve to lose one of the few people who saw him and not the wolf. For his Grandpa, who really did not have many people who really loved him. For his friends, who he would miss dearly. For his Uncle Sev, who would lock himself from the world again. Who was still with Voldemort. He had to help him, get him to safety.

"I think you know what you want," Lily said gently brushing his bangs. "Go back and tell Sev I love him and I forgave him long ago."

"Forgave what?" Harry asked trying to delay the departure.

"He'll know, and if some day he tells you, remember to listen with your heart and don't forget what I told you," she said.

"And tell Padfoot and Moony that I'm really proud of how they've raised you. And that even though I miss those flea bags I don't want to see them here for a long time," James grinned at him.

"Can I tell da- Padfoot that you want him to lighten up on my dating privileges?"

"You can tell your *dad* that he should keep it up. What fun is dating without challenges?" James smiled.

"I'm okay with it Harry. He has been your dad all this time and deserves the title. They all do actually. Even Sniv, but I guess calling three people dad can get confusing."

"I love you two," Harry said blinking back tears.

"We love you too," Lily said as she hugged him one last time.

"So much Harry," James added in a rough voice as he joined the hug. "So much."

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They Apparated to the outskirts of a cemetery. Remus recognized the outline of a mansion on the hillside. He had seen it before when looking for Marvolo Gaunt's ring. They were in Little Hangleton. The group of about twenty wizards and witches walked swiftly and quietly towards the assembled Death Eaters they could see using the darkness and the headstones as covers.

They approached as closely as they could without being seen. The Death Eaters seemed far more occupied rushing towards a crumpled figure. Remus tried making out the best way to attack. He couldn't see Harry and was getting anxious. As they got closer he finally made the outline of Cedric Diggory's unconscious form tied to a headstone and prayed the boy was still alive. He made a sign to Ted who was a little behind him and motioned towards Cedric. Ted nodded in recognition and pulled Amos Diggory as quietly as he could towards the boy.

The rest of the group continued their approach, waiting for the best moment to act; Remus heard a swish and a thud and looked back suddenly. His eyes widened at the sight of Albus swinging back Gryffindor's sword. On the ground laid the beheaded form of a gigantic snake, whose head was dangerously close to Sirius.

"Thanks," Sirius mouthed and Remus squelched the panic that tried to take him as he realized how close that snake had come to biting Sirius. If Albus hadn't killed it... Well, that was the last Horcrux gone. If someone managed to kill Voldemort he had nothing more holding him here.

Swiftly the group left the snake's body behind and approached the Death Eater group. Remus saw someone getting up with the aid of some Death Eaters. He froze as he recognized who it was; Voldemort. He saw Voldemort approach a figure Remus had not seen before. Someone who was kneeled on the floor, rocking back and forth, and holding someone else who was unmoving. A horrible coldness came over him. And when he heard Voldemort say it he just couldn't think. The world had ended and all he knew is that he would bring them all to the hell he had been thrown into with him and he launched forward after Sirius' cry.

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Voldemort rose again, "Get away from me," he hissed at Bellatrix who had been one of the Death Eaters helping him up. He walked towards Severus and smirked.

"So this is why you left me? This boy. The-boy-who-finally-died. Don't worry Severus, you will be reunited soon."

Severus held Harry close to his chest and glared at Voldemort.

"I'd rather die than kiss your hypocritical half-blood robes," he growled.

"Oh, you will. But not without a lesson first," Voldemort turned towards his Death Eaters and said in a clear loud voice; "I shall make an example of Severus. Show you all what happens to those who defy me. But first let it be known that Harry Potter is dead."

"NOOOOOOO!" came a cry from the distance and Sirius Black and Remus Lupin launched themselves at the Death Eaters, hurling hexes and curses without second thought. A battle between Order Members and Death Eaters ensued but Severus could only think of Harry. Of Harry's still body. Of Harry's blood soaking his robes. Flowing from his body. He buried his head on Harry's chest and heard it. Could it be? He stilled, and there it was, so soft under the chaos of yells and crashes that he could have missed it. But he did not miss the soft rise and fall of the chest.

Voldemort was drawling, annoyed again, "I'll have to kill you quickly instead then. So I can deal with them," he pointed his wand at Severus and cried again, "*Avada Kedrava.*"

"But this time Harry had lifted his hand and flicked his wrist on time and shouted faintly, "*Expelliarmus.*"

The two beams of light collided and once again in Voldemort's life the killing curse rebounded on him. Except this time, after he was hit by the curse, his body fell backwards, lifeless and not moving. He crumbled to the ground with nothing leaving his body, no piece of soul, no mist that would prowl around unknown places. Lord Voldemort was truly dead and Harry Potter was alive in his Uncle's arms holding both of his wands weakly.

"Sorry Uncle Sev, but I disarmed him," he whispered weakly.

"Yes, you did," Severus said smiling through his tears as he ran a hand through Harry's hair. He couldn't believe his eyes. His boy was alive!

Some Death Eaters rushed to Voldemort's body and a couple Apparated away as soon as they saw Voldemort fall. Bellatrix Lestrange cried in agony as she ran to her Lord and fell over him. Taking advantage of the dazed Death Eaters, the Order Members started gaining ground and apprehending them easily.

Before someone could get to her, Bellatrix launched herself towards Harry and Severus and cried "*Sectusempra*."

Another gash cut Harry's side and blood started pouring out viciously. He looked surprised at Severus and started coughing blood before his eyes rolled back and he fell unconscious. Bellatrix was about to throw another curse when Severus' wand slashed the air with another cry of *Sectusempra* and Bellatrix's throat was sliced open. She smiled as if enjoying a private joke as she fell forward, on top of Voldemort's body. Remus ran past her and reached Severus and Harry.

"Here, this Portkey will take you directly to the infirmary. Poppy is waiting," Remus said urgently, handing Severus a small object that Severus recognized as being one of the many in Albus' office. "We'll send Cedric along too," was the last thing he heard as he felt the familiar pull behind his navel.

XXXXX

A/N- So, I guess I may live to see another day. Thank you all for your great reviews. I was incredibly touched by the amount of reviews I got. Last chapter was the most reviewed chapter in this story. Thank you guys. Uncle Sev send his thanks too, he is touched at being so loved.

Thanks to SWaddict1986 for betaing and for great tips (Bella falling on Voldie's body was her idea)

Chapter 41-For love

"Here, this Portkey will take you directly to the infirmary. Poppy is waiting," Remus said urgently handing Severus a small object Severus recognized as being one of the many in Albus office. "We'll send Cedric along too."

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Chapter 42- Cover up attempts

"What you cooking Uncle Sevvie?" the little boy asked eyeing the big cauldron Severus was stirring. He couldn't get near; Severus had put up a spell to stop him from touching the fire.

"I am not cooking, I am brewing a delicate potion."

"Okay."

...

"When you teach me how to cook?"

Severus eyed the boy and said, "I'll teach you how to brew when you are older. You are too small to play with fire."

"Am not! I am a big boy. I'll be four in a month almost five."

Severus bit back a laugh and said, "Oh! I am sorry. You're so grown up. I must have been misled by your diminutive stature."

The boy nodded satisfied then frowned and asked, "What stature mean?"

"Height."

"Okay."

Severus worked in silence for a very short while.

"Will you teach me now?"

"No."

"But I'm older now."

"No you are not."

"Yes I am, see?" Harry said pointing to the clock on the wall. "The big hand moved and the very thin big hand made one whole turn and that's a minute. Uncle Moony said so. So I am a whole minute older."

Severus rubbed his temple with his free hand and said, "You have to be more than a minute older."

"An hour?"

"Years."

"How much is that?"

"A whole lot of minutes."

Severus awoke and rubbed his neck. He stretched his back as he saw the first rays of sun entering through the window. Sleeping in a chair wasn't the most comfortable position. He looked at the bed

where Harry was asleep. Padfoot was curled at the foot and Remus was sleeping in a chair on the bed's other side, slumped on the bed, holding one of Harry's hands.

Madam Pomfrey hadn't been able to get any of them to leave Harry's side. Harry had already been badly injured before he reached that graveyard. The Acromantula's venom that had entered the wound he had wasn't much, but would have eventually killed him if left untreated. Thankfully Poppy had the antidote on stock since she knew there would be one in the maze. But Harry had already developed a fever that was hard to break and the venom had already done considerable damage.

There was also a cut on Harry's arm and the cut the Acromantula made, which had made him lose a considerable amount of blood before Bellatrix's Sectusempra spell hit. How he hated himself now for ever inventing that spell. It was a close call when Severus reached the infirmary and closed the cut as Poppy rushed with the Blood Replenishing Potion. They were almost too late; Harry's heart was very close to giving out.

There were also signs of prolonged exposure to the Cruciatus Curse and there was no telling what the effects of the failed killing curse would be. It didn't seem to have done anything, just like before, but they had to keep their eyes open. It was a miracle Harry had survived, and recovery would take time. There was just so much magic could do.

He was alive, Severus reminded himself rubbing his eyes with both his hands in distress. He would never forget the moment he felt Harry's lifeless body sagging against his. The moment he thought he had lost Harry forever. When he had wanted to die with him.

He watched mesmerized as Harry's chest rose and fell. It was the most beautiful sight in the world to him. He took Harry's hand in his, "Why did you do it Harry?" he whispered. "I'm not worth it."

"Yes you are," came a raspy reply from the bed. Harry tried to squeeze Severus' hand, but it was very weak. He smiled, "I wasn't going to let him take you away from us," he finished before he fell asleep again.

Severus heard the door open slightly and turned around, wand at the ready. He relaxed as soon as he saw the bushy head that poked through and sure enough it was followed by four redheads and one brown. They all stopped dead at the sight of their most feared and hated professor holding Harry's hand. To give him credit, Neville was the first to recover from the shock.

"We wanted to know how Harry was, sir. No one would tell us," he spoke in a low tone so he didn't wake anyone. "They just sent everyone to their rooms last night and said Cedric and Harry had been found."

Severus sighed, "Yes, Cedric is fine," Severus answered, glancing at a bed farther away where Cedric's parents were mimicking Severus and Remus' positions with their sleeping boy. "He has signs of exposure to the Cruciatus Curse but no lasting effects from that. His gravest injury is a very strong Obliviation charm he was put under. He woke up earlier and the last thing he remembers is something that happened over two years ago."

Hermione gasped and put her hands over her mouth.

"There is no telling if he will regain his memory, but at least his mind wasn't broken. He'll probably just have to relearn what he lost of the last two years. If he decides to come back to Hogwarts next year he'll have to be put in your year. He was lucky. The Dark Lord's and the Death Eater's main attention was on Harry and he was mostly left alone."

"And Harry?" Ginny asked quietly.

Severus looked at Harry and then answered, "He survived the impossible, but he is weak and it will take time before he is back to his usual annoying self," Severus smiled to himself and since he was looking at Harry he missed the shocked looks of the students. "He woke briefly just a moment ago but had strength only to say a few words. But he is strong, I am confident he'll recover."

All the kids nodded in understanding that they should leave the patients to their rest. They were about to leave when George decided to ask, "Professor, how come you're here?"

"That is a story for Harry to tell you when he is feeling stronger. When he does remember that there were lives at stake," Severus finished, glaring pointedly at Ron. The moment was broken by a loud slamming noise that woke Padfoot and Remus.

"Wha-?" Remus slurred.

"Sorry," Hermione said sheepishly holding something tight in her hand. She quickly ran out of the Hospital Wing and the others shrugged before they followed her.

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Later that morning a commotion could be heard outside and Severus recognized Poppy and Minerva's angry voices.

"You cannot go in there!" Poppy cried. "I have patients there."

"I am the Minister of Magic and I can go wherever I want. Stand aside."

The double doors burst open and Severus started standing up. Cornelius Fudge walked in, followed by three Aurors. Two of which had been in the graveyard, Kingsley and Tonks.

"Dawlish, Shackbolt. Arrest that man!" The Minister cried pointing at Severus.

"What?" Sirius cried bewildered. *When had he transformed back?* "You can't do that!"

Cornelius Fudge was not to be deterred, "This man is a Death Eater. He was identified by the others detained last night and shall be taken in for questioning."

"He saved Harry! He was our spy!" Sirius cried angry.

"Mr. Black, you may be on extended leave, but you are still under my command as an Auror. Do not make me detain you as well for disobedience."

"It's fine Sirius," Severus said walking towards the Aurors, "I'll go in. Take care of Harry and let Albus know about this."

"Severus, you can't-" Remus started, but was silenced by a glare from Severus.

"It's no good if we are all detained."

Kingsley made him turn around and conjured handcuffs. Under his breath he whispered, "I am sorry." He and Dawlish escorted Severus out and Severus maintained a stony face as they walked through the corridors and passed the whispering students who were on their way to breakfast. He did not let his mask down one second as he was escorted through the gates and Side-Apparated away.

Back in the Hospital Wing, a riot had started, "You have no proof other than the word of Death Eaters who are trying everything to weasel their way out of prison again," McGonagall told the Minister sternly. "My dear lady. I have witnesses. I have accounts from the Death Eaters' trials that appoint Snape as a Death Eater and he has the Dark Mark."

"And how exactly will you prove he has it?" Remus asked. "The Dark Mark vanished when Voldemort died," he was satisfied to see Fudge flinch, "Not just faded to white like the first time around. It's completely gone."

"Well, we have pictures from his trial don't we? Even Dumbledore confessed to Snape being a Death-" "A Death Eater turned spy for us at great personal risk', were my words if I am not mistaken," Dumbledore said as he entered the Hospital Wing and Fudge gave a start. "I do not appreciate you humiliating my staff Cornelius," he said, giving Fudge a disapproving look over his spectacles.

"Well, there is nothing you can do about that," Fudge said flustered. "Snape is going to be tried just like the rest of them."

"Like your good friend Alexander Nott?" McGonagall asked with a raised eyebrow. "Or the one who just happened to escape, Lucius Malfoy?"

Fudge flustered even more, "Well, hum, Lucius and Alexander's guilt are still to be seen. But that's none of your business. Auror Tonks, take Potter's and Diggory's statements."

"If you haven't noticed *Minister*," Poppy said shortly. "Harry and Cedric are both sedated and will stay that way for quite a while. They both sustained serious injuries and need their rest-"

"Well, wake them up!" Fudge ordered.

"My son will give his statement when he has recovered and in the presence of our lawyer Andromeda Tonks. He is a victim here," Sirius said through gritted teeth.

"And my son can't give you a statement. He was Obliviated and has no recollection of what happened before he was knocked unconscious," Amos Diggory spoke for the first time.

"Obliviated, huh. You're saying Potter wiped his memory?" Fudge asked eagerly.

"No!" Diggory cried outraged. "You-know-Who did!"

"That is still to be verified. There is no proof You-Know-Who was alive-"

"What about his body and the countless witnesses who saw him?" Sirius barked.

"Well, the body, we never found a body all those years ago. Someone could have stored it-"

"Your raving Cornelius," Mr. Diggory cried. "Of course it was him, and this boy defeated him again," he finished, pointing at Harry.

"He would love to have us think that, wouldn't he? Wake him up!" Fudge ordered again but Poppy did not move.

"Harry has the right for his lawyer, as does Severus by the way," Remus said calmly. "You'll have to wait."

"That won't do. I won't have you coaching him on what to say in order to save Snape," Fudge insisted.

"Severus saved Harry's life," Remus said firmly.

"As I hear it, Potter took a killing curse meant for Snape," Fudge said.

"And then he killed Bellatrix Lestrange, who you let escape, when she tried to kill Harry," Dumbledore said calmly.

"After his master had been killed to save his skin," Fudge argued.

"Much like you are doing," McGonagall muttered.

"You aren't making any sense Cornelius," Diggory said. "Didn't you just say you didn't believe You-Know-Who had been alive?"

Fudge flustered but regained his bearings quickly, "I said that has yet to be determined."

"I won't wake Harry and Cedric," Poppy said firmly. "If you want to tell the public how you interfered with The-Boy-Who-Lived's recovery, be my guest. But bring your own healer."

Fudge's face was growing purple. He spluttered, "Fine. Let me know the moment they wake." He took a bag out of his pocket and shoved it in Mr. Diggory's hands. "Their winnings. They both tied for first place. You figure out how to split it." And he stalked out. Before Tonks could follow, Sirius said in a low tone to her:

"Tell your dad to meet Severus at the Ministry. Make sure he doesn't say a word before Ted gets there."

She nodded and left.

"Good call," Mr. Diggory said. "Ted Tonks is Muggle-born isn't he?"

"Yes," Sirius nodded. "Andy has more experience with criminal law than him, but I know she'll help him and Severus will need the sympathy points."

"Let them know he can count on us," Mr. Diggory said pointing to his wife who still hadn't left Cedric's side. "He helped save our boy and we will help him."

"Thanks," Remus smiled.

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At least he had his own cell. Fudge wanted to keep them separated so they wouldn't get some made-up story straight. Thank God for small favors. If he had been put with his colleagues, he would be dead by now.

He wasn't overly worried about his trial. He knew Dumbledore would find a way to get him off free. Fudge was only trying to look good after his biggest supporters, Malfoy and Nott, were caught red-handed. Well, Malfoy slipped away and if he was smart he would be on the run.

No, he was worried about Harry. He still had to wake up for more than a few seconds, and who knew what his condition would be? Severus had wanted to be there for him. To hold him. To explain what happened, even though he couldn't. How had Harry survived the killing curse? Albus had said something about his blood being used to resurrect Voldemort and Harry being a Horcrux. That's why Voldemort was dead. Nagini had been killed and whatever part of Voldemort that was in Harry had been destroyed. Severus couldn't believe it. Albus had said he had researched for ways to destroy the Horcrux in Harry without killing him and then, almost by accident, without any planning, it was done and Voldemort was gone for good. It was almost anticlimactic.

But Severus knew that the chaos would start now that all the upstanding pure-blooded members of society were caught red-handed. Their children and spouses wouldn't take this lying down, would not stand idly at the side as they were carted to Azkaban. The public would start doubting their commander and Fudge would do his best to cling to power. Even if his best meant sending innocents to Azkaban and letting the guilty roam free. Severus sighed deeply.

"What are you so gloom about?" he heard. He opened his eyes and cried:

"Ted!" He got up and walked towards the bars where on the other side Ted Tonks was grinning.

"Heard you were in a pickle."

"You could say that," Severus snorted.

"They don't have a case, don't worry."

"Not to be rude or sound ungrateful, Ted, but why did you come instead of Andy?"

"Never! Never marry someone with the same career as you," Ted huffed theatrically. "Am I not enough? Don't you love me anymore? Why does everyone want Andy?" Severus smirked. "She's going to be with Harry," Ted said more seriously. "Fudge wants him to testify. He made a fuss about it. Wanted Poppy to wake the boy."

That caught Severus' attention and he cried, "What? He can't! Harry is inj--"

"Relax. He wasn't able to; Poppy refused. But he wants Harry testifying as soon as possible. I bet Fudge wants to twist Harry's words so he can get Malfoy and Nott off. Andy won't let it happen. Now to us, there's a reason Sirius asked for me."

"You're Muggle-born."

"Yes. I have to admit, defending Death Eaters, even innocent ones, isn't what I'm used to. But you need someone you can trust and the fact that my wife is the victim's lawyer and I am Muggle-born will be good for you. Never thought the day would come that being Muggle-born actually got me a job."

Ted conjured a desk and chairs for both and Severus. They both sat down and Ted took out of his briefcase parchment and a quill out, "We can't forget that your past speaks against you, but the fact that you turned to spy for the Light will be in your favor. It would be best if we could tell them exactly what made you do it. What you did," at Severus' horrified expression he elaborated, "As a spy not a Death Eater."

No he couldn't do it. Harry would know his part in James and Lily's death.

"No! That's classified!"

"You-Know-Who is dead for good and you've been ousted as spy. Surely you can-"

"No!"

Ted sighed, "Fine, we'll work around that. Okay, start with what you can tell me and explain all that happened that night. I know I was there, but I need to know what happened to you."

So Severus started telling Ted everything since Harry had that first dream during the summer, when he realized his Dark Mark was getting darker.

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Harry opened his eyes slowly. He felt tired and groggy, and his right leg didn't feel right. It was prickly and was bothering him.

"Hey sleepy head," Sirius smiled from the side of the bed. He rested his elbows on the bed and stroked Harry's hair. "You gave us such a scare you know?" he said hoarsely. "Don't do that again."

"M' fine," Harry mumbled tiredly.

"Not yet," Remus answered as he approached the bed and sat next to Sirius. "But you will be. It's just going to take some time and a lot of bed rest."

Harry made a face at the comment about bed rest, but right now he didn't think he could lift a leaf much less his whole body.

"Cedric?" he asked hoarsely as Sirius put raised a goblet to Harry's mouth and he gratefully sipped some water.

"He is fine. Poppy has already released him. He lost a big chunk of his memory, and only time will tell if he will have any other effects from the memory charm that was put on him," Remus explained.

"Voldemort wanted to kill him," Harry said tiredly. "But I pulled him down and then Voldemort changed his mind. Said he would frame him for my murder."

"Well, he wasn't able to," Sirius said firmly. "And he won't be hurting anyone else ever again."

Harry looked around, "Uncle Sev, s'he hurt?"

"No," Sirius said in a strange voice. "He's fine. He just can't be here right now. But you'll see him soon."

Remus was giving Sirius *The Look* but Sirius ignored it.

"Leg feels funny," Harry mumbled.

"Is it hurting?" Remus asked.

"No, prickly. Like it's about to get to sleep you know."

"Poppy gave you the antidote to the Acromantula venom but it had already done some damage to your leg. It will take some time for the potions to re-grow everything that was basically dissolved by the venom though. Poppy estimates about two months. You have to tell us if it's hurting because that means the pain killing potions are wearing off okay," Remus explained.

"S'going to hurt?" Harry asked.

Sirius bit his lips then answered firmly, "Of course not. That's why we have pain killing potions."

"It may at times," Remus answered, giving Sirius a scolding look. "The potions are basically re-growing nerves and muscle tissues, and that hurts. You can't take too many painkillers and sometimes they may wear off before it's time for your next dose."

"Kay, m'tired," Harry slurred.

"We know. You will be for a while. It's everything catching up to you. But you'll be well in a jiffy," Sirius said. "Now sleep pup."

Harry's eyes started dropping and as he was falling asleep he mumbled, "Saw mum and dad. They said they were proud of you three. An' to lemme date."

As Harry's breath evened out, Sirius looked at Remus worriedly, "Did he say he saw James and Lily?"

"Yes," Remus said pale. "He must have dreamed it."

"Yeah, James would never tell me to let him date," Sirius said nodding, and Remus rolled his eyes.

A/N- I know everyone was expecting to know how Remus got to the graveyard in this chapter but it was too long so I broke it in two. I don't like to post chapters more than 8 to 10 pages long because I know sometimes long chapters are tiresome to read in the computer, so I only do it when I have no other choice. Here I found another nice cutting point. But don't worry, I'll post the next one soon.

Thank you all for reading and reviewing. I was moved by so many reviews.

Thanks to SWaddict1986 for your help with my mistakes.

Not mine

Chapter 43- Explanations and Strategies

After hours of Severus explaining everything that happened from his point of view, Ted nodded and started putting his parchments away.

"They are charging you with Death Eater activity and murder," Ted explained.

"What?" Severus cried standing up.

"Calm down and listen. Fudge is doing his best to get a scapegoat and make it look like Nott and the others were there trying to detain you. The only one he isn't trying to bail out is Karkaroff, and I heard he is trying to make deals once again. He'll basically be the Ministry's main witness. We have to do this right; Fudge is desperate, everyone knows Nott and Malfoy had him in their pockets and MacNair is a Ministry employee. This isn't looking good for him and he'll do his best to divert the public's attention."

"Death Eater activity I can understand," Severus said slowly. "Nott and the others will say I kept in touch with them all these years, letting them think I was still faithful, and I did. I needed them to think that but what murder? I only killed Bellatrix and-" at Ted's nod, Severus' eyes widened. "They can't be serious. She was about to kill Harry. She was an escaped convict. Fudge himself authorized the Kiss, and that his Aurors apprehend her dead or alive. That's hypocrisy."

"He is stating that you are not an Auror, therefore were not allowed to kill her. But don't worry. There were witnesses. What I need from you is an exemplar conduct. Fudge will try to rile you up. Before I came here I went to the Department of Law Enforcement to see if they had already set a date for your trial, and I learned that he is trying to push this around for months. I immediately applied for an earlier trial date and for you to be kept in Ministry facilities since you have not been proven guilty yet. Fudge wanted to cart you to Azkaban."

"He wants to break me before I stand trial so I can't defend myself."

"Yes, and so you lose your head at the trial. I need you to stay calm. I wasn't able to have you released until the trial. I am sorry, but Fudge is claiming that you could escape since you have no family ties."

"Of course, no one knows about Harry. They all think I hate him," he buried his head in his hands and pushed back his hair.

"And you did a good job of it. I believed so myself. When Sirius talked to me before I came here I thought he was having me on. I always thought you were just barely tolerating working with Sirius and Remus at the school, in the Order and then at the PWA," Ted said grimly. "They'll use your reputation against you and we will have to try everything to show you were only acting. I will paint you as the hero that sacrificed so much."

Severus snorted.

"Yeah, I know it's not much up your alley but you'll have to play along. I will have witnesses and will ask to use Pensieve memories. Not only concerning the day in question but of your life with Harry. The part

we never saw. I will also need the paperwork that proves you are Sean Evans and a co-owner of the PWA. That kind of volunteer work can be good for your image."

"That can be a double edged sword. What if they say I was trying to control the Werewolves?"

"I'll have a rebuttal ready. They will try to undermine us anyway. They will try to turn everything we show them into something horrible, but we can't leave anything out. Besides, if we bring it up it's better than if they do. Shows honesty on our part."

"They wouldn't be able to know," Severus said. "I've been careful."

"I know. But it's better not to risk it. If by any chance they do find out and they are the ones to bring it up, then it's us defending your actions again. It's a perception game, Severus, and what they perceive is unfortunately more important than the truth. Which is also why I'll have to show that you filed for your Animagus training, since Sirius assured me you did file the paperwork," Severus nodded. "It would have been best if you had registered already but you are still within your time limit. Sirius told me that there was another instance when you saved Harry and that is good to exploit."

Severus sighed and rubbed his eyes.

"I'll go now but I'll be back and the boys will be around as soon as they can. We won't let you here alone. One of us will stop by every day with news. You have to stay strong."

Severus nodded and stood up, "How is Andy doing? With you defending me-"

"Relax," Ted smiled sadly. "Andy buried her sister long ago. I'm not going to lie, when we first got married, Andy had hope her sisters would see the light and change but then... when Dora was around four they were at Diagon Alley when there was a Death Eater attack... Bellatrix was there. Andy recognized her, and she had no qualms in coming after Andy and Dora specifically with gusto. They survived by a miracle. A healer from St. Mungo's helped Andy protect Dora. Dora didn't get hurt, but Bellatrix managed to get some pretty nasty hexes on Andy and the healer. The poor woman didn't survive. Andy was beside herself with grief. Especially when she found out who the woman was."

"Who?" Severus asked.

"Helen Lupin."

"Remus' mother; I knew she had died from a Death Eater attack but I didn't know how it happened," Severus said shocked.

Ted nodded, "That's the day Andy buried any hope for her sister. She had wanted to kill them, 'prune the family tree' and she managed to kill one of Siri's best friend's mother. We had already met Remus of course. He had been home with James and Sirius many times. But we hadn't met his parents yet. Andy would say every time they came that she had to commend whoever brought up such a polite son," Ted shook his head, "Never got to."

"That's why you both worked so hard on getting the PWA running; I thought it was because of Sirius."

"No, it was like we were able to repay Healer Lupin somehow, even if Remus wouldn't directly benefit by the association. She saved our daughter, so we tried our best to help her son," Ted gave a shaky smile and said, "Well, I better get going."

Severus nodded and reached a hand over the bars and shook Ted's.

"Thank you."

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It was four days until Harry was able to stay awake more than just a few minutes and actually sit up to eat and have a real conversation. It was then that he asked again for Severus and this time he wanted an answer.

"None of the other times I woke he was here. Where is he?"

Sirius looked at Remus with begging eyes but he just shook his head. Sirius took a big breath and said,

"He was detained and is awaiting trial."

"What?" Harry asked incredulously his mouth hanging open.

"Fudge is trying his best to turn this situation around to help himself. His two biggest supporters being accused of being Death Eaters was not good for him. He is trying to get a scapegoat," Remus said. "But he won't. Don't worry, Severus is innocent and we have a strong defense."

"Why is Fudge doing this?"

"Because he likes power and is afraid of losing it. His popularity has been downhill since Bellatrix's and Pettigrew's escape and he is scared he'll be sacked. So he is trying to say this was a sham. He is trying to prove that Bellatrix, Crouch Jr, Pettigrew, Severus and Karkaroff, in a desperate attempt to get Voldemort back, kidnapped you and tried to resurrect Voldemort. He is claiming that they had Voldemort's body stored and preserved somewhere and that you didn't defeat him again, that he was already dead. That what we all saw walking around and talking was an Inferi, and that Nott, Malfoy and company were actually trying to save you and accidentally got on our way. He is saying that when Severus saw us arrive, he killed Bellatrix so he could save his freedom and only didn't kill Karkaroff and Peter because he didn't have the chance."

"That is the most ridiculous tale I ever heard. I'll tell them it's not true," Harry said.

"Ah, but see, Fudge anticipated that," Remus said grimly. "On the day after the task, the Prophet had an article about the arrests and the story of what happened. How they knew so much, I don't know. And they were actually quite contained, for Rita Skeeter I mean. She reported what happened and the only thing she went off about was whether we should trust Fudge or not. But after that, not one word about what happened; instead a few articles came out speculating if you are trustworthy."

"Skeeter again?"

"No, some other reporter," Sirius said. "But they reminded the public about you being a Parseltongue. Then there was them talking about you making up scar pains. Oh, and there is the fact that since everyone had a very good view of the maze they all saw you transform."

"Sorry," Harry mumbled. "I didn't think."

"You used what you had to save yours and Cedric's life. We don't berate you for that even though we would have liked for you to have the advantage of no one knowing," Remus said.

"Will we get in trouble?"

"No," Sirius smirked. "When you started training I filed the paperwork. Except I filed it with Minerva, since I knew she would be able to keep it to herself. But there is a record. Sev did the same, though he didn't plan to register till the war was over. Once you are up to it we will go and get you registered. But the problem is that The Prophet has been claiming you did it undercover and that you are too young and had to have used Dark Magic to accomplish it at such a young age. Then they started a detailed account of every Black in history that has used Dark Magic."

"But why?"

"To discredit you. Since Cedric's memory is gone you are the main witness against Nott and the rest. We arrived after them so all we can attest to is that they were there and they fought us. But considering Sirius and I launched the attack they can claim self defense." Remus explained. "That's why he doesn't want to say Voldemort was alive and you killed him, because then you would be a hero again and your word would be strong against theirs."

"This is bad then?" Harry asked.

"It's bad. But they can't prove within the law what they want, so we are confident Severus will walk free. But there is a chance the others will too. The only one really screwed is Karkaroff because Krum told the Aurors Karkaroff Imperiused him and an exam on Karkaroff's wand confirmed it. The Triwizard Cup was also taken to be examined and Karkaroff's magical signature was found there as well," Remus said.

"How did you get there? Did you follow Uncle Sev?"

"No, Voldemort made the Dark Mark in such a way that even though it pulled his Death Eaters to him it didn't allow anyone to follow," Sirius said. "We followed another pull."

"What pull?"

"Have you ever wondered how I Apparated inside the Chamber of Secrets. Or how I knew when Pettigrew kidnapped you?" Remus asked and Harry shook his head. "When we magically adopted you, you became our son by blood. You became a Lupin and a Black, and therefore inherited some of our traits. That is how the adoption works. Like your hair for instance- it's messy and looks a lot like James', but before Sirius adopted you it was actually a lighter shade of reddish black. Now it's jet-black just like Padfoot's fur," he said ruffling Sirius' hair and receiving a glare and a scowl in return. "And it's a little more wavy than before. Your hands look a bit like mine. Your face is James'. Your eyes are Lily's. You have a bit of each of us in you."

"What does that have to do with anything?"

"I'm getting there. Do you know why Greyback wasn't able to take me away when he bit me Harry?" Remus asked and Harry shook his head again. "Greyback usually bit children and hauled them off with

him. I don't know how he had that amount of control without Wolfsbane, but he somehow managed to. But my father stopped him from taking me. When he was biting me my father showed up from nowhere, and managed to get him off me to Apparate us away. Later I discovered how he did that. Many generations ago a Lupin decided to protect his children the best he could. He wanted to be able to know and track them when they were in danger. And he found a way. He made a potion with his and his children's blood that let him sense when they were in need. They all drank it. What he didn't know was that the potion fused with their genes and with their magic creating new magic that was passed on through the generations. So from then on every Lupin descendant was born with the ability to track their offspring. When I became your father by blood, that ability was passed to you and that is why I can find you anywhere. My magic takes me to you even through wards, and even in my wolf form. That's how I got out of the office in your first year and how I got to the Chamber of Secrets. The only reason I wasn't able to get to you in first year was because the fact that I was transformed hindered my magic, delaying my release from the office. My magic Apparated me and everyone who was touching me out through the wards, and my magic guided us to the Little Hangelton graveyard. It was very hard to fight the pull while we were organizing ourselves to get there. The moment you were Portkeyed off the grounds, the bond was already pulling me to you because you were in danger of death. That's when the pull is stronger. If you are just in danger of being hurt, I feel a pull towards you but it isn't strong enough to go through wards. Like those times your cousin and his friends were hurting you or when Pettigrew took you; they didn't intend to kill you right away. I knew where to find you but the pull wasn't enough to get me through wards. When that Basilisk bit you, the danger was enough for the pull to work by itself and Apparate me to the Chamber. But this time I knew I needed help and I knew you were alive or I wouldn't be able to feel you, so I fought it until we were ready."

Harry was shocked. His Uncle had a twenty-four/ seven tracking system on him? But a lot of things made sense now. Uncle Moony always seemed to show up when he needed help.

"I first learned about this in a letter my father left me with his will. My mother died in my seventh year in a Death Eater Attack in Diagon Alley and..." Remus faltered but Sirius continued for him.

"And John said in his letter that he only kept going for his son after losing the love of his life. That Remus was all he had left and losing him would be unbearable. I can relate," he smiled sadly squeezing one of Harry's hands.

"When I told him I entered the Order he supported me but still didn't tell me. One day, right after you were born Harry, there was yet another attack in Diagon Alley. The Order was called and we all Apparated there. It was crazy, we were all fighting for our lives. I had been injured with an ugly cutting hex and was down. The Death Eater responsible was already uttering the Killing curse when out of nowhere my father Apparated in front of me and took the curse for me," Remus said sadly and Harry took his hand and squeezed it. He could relate to the feeling. Voldemort had been especially cruel when

he said Lily died because of Harry. He felt like he was at fault many times but his dad and Uncles always said he wasn't.

"James saw it," Sirius continued. "He had just seen the Death Eater and was trying to get to them but he was too late. He managed to catch him though. The distraction of someone Apparating in front of Moony was enough to disorient the Death Eater long enough for James to get there. Afterwards in the will reading there was a letter explaining the Lupin bond, when he used it, and that he hadn't told Moony because he knew Moony would make him promise not to use it."

"I would have," Remus said sadly. Harry hugged him.

"Thanks Uncle Moony."

"You are my life too cub. You're my son, I couldn't lose you," Remus said a little muffled by Harry's hair, to which his face was pressed.

"And you are one of my four dads. I am very lucky."

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The next time Harry woke, only Sirius was there. Remus had gone to see Severus and had taken a letter Harry wrote to him. After Madam Pomfrey did a thorough check on Harry and had him swallow half a dozen disgusting potions, Harry smiled knowingly at Sirius.

"What?"

"The Lupin bond was the technicality that made you be the one chosen for the second task wasn't it?"

"Yeah," Sirius grunted. "If you had been in danger, the bond would break the stasis spell and Moony would suddenly wake up underwater. That wouldn't be good."

Harry smiled as Sirius huffed.

"I still say it was a technicality, what were the chances?"

"Big."

More huffing and scowling. There was a knock on the door and a bushy head came in, "Professor Black, Professor Lupin said that Harry might already be awake and up to visits."

Sirius smiled. "Yes he is. But not long okay?"

Hermione bounded in, followed by Ron, Ginny, Neville, Fred and George.

"You okay mate?" Ron asked.

"I'll live," Harry said as they all took seats around his bed.

Hermione crossed her arms and said in a stern voice, "Harry James Potter Black, you have a lot of explaining to do."

"What?" Harry asked.

"Well, there is the little fact that you are an Animagus," Fred said his eyes shining with mischief.

"Then there is Professor's Snape weird behavior," Neville said. "I mean, he was holding your hand Harry. Holding your hand!"

"That's nothing," Sirius waved absently. He had taken a seat at the foot of Harry's bed. "You didn't see the time when Harry was five and I decided to fetch him earlier than expected from Spinner's End and Sev was trying to give a very hyperactive kid a bath. I told him not to give Harry chocolate, but did he listen? No. Harry had been running around naked covered with soap, and Sev had just managed to catch him and was carrying him back upstairs. He was covered in soap too. I have a picture of that," he finished fondly and Harry could worriedly see his father's wish to enlarge and display said picture in the Great Hall. All the kids looked positively shocked and were not able to imagine their sour teacher in such a position.

"Uncle Sev worked as a spy for Dumbledore," Harry explained. "He couldn't be friendly to the Boy-Who-Lived because it would be quite suspicious. That's why he belittles me in public and favors the Slytherins who have Death Eater's parents."

"He favors all Slytherins," Ron said.

"No he doesn't," Sirius said seriously. "He just disciplines them in private. Slytherins are viewed by most as evil just because of their House. They are mistrusted by three quarters of this school. So they show a united front. Severus is quite rigid with his snakes. Unfortunately he can't be as rigid as he usually is with others with twerps like Malfoy or Nott for instance because they would tell their parents, and Sev needed them for information."

"He was my mom's best friend since before Hogwarts," Harry explained.

"But your mom was Muggle-born," Ginny said.

"And Uncle Sev is half-blood. His dad was a Muggle and mom and him lived near each other."

"This is just so weird," George said.

"Makes sense though," Hermione said matter of factly.

"No it doesn't," Ron said with a look that clearly said he thought Hermione was out of her mind.

"Many of Harry's stories have holes; like how Professor Black figured out Crouch Jr. was using Polyjuice. Why didn't he just think Mr. Crouch was snooping around Professor Snape's office?"

"Because Uncle Sev said that Boomslang skin was missing from his store."

"Oh, yes. That was such an interesting piece of information we got there," Sirius said eyeing the kids.

"We still have to establish punishment since now we actually can. Brewing Polyjuice unsupervised. Getting into the Slytherin Common Room unauthorized."

Neville, Ron and Hermione quickly gave their best innocent faces and Ron said evenly, "I have no idea what you are talking about sir."

"Harry already confessed."

"Under duress I'm sure. That will never hold on a court of law, he might have been tortured," Hermione said with a straight face.

"Polyjuice, Slytherins? Did you hear this Fred?"

"Yes, George," Fred sobbed theatrically. "They grow up so fast. I am so proud!"

"Anyway, there is also the fact that in first year Harry was adamant Professor Snape was not after the Philosopher's Stone and that night last year when Harry was kidnapped it was a full moon. No way it could have been Professor Lupin out there," Hermione said. "And of course, training to be an Animagus was what Harry was doing last year. The family tradition."

"It was supposed to stay a secret. So if I ever had to use my form in a battle or to escape no one would expect it or know it was me." Harry said shaking his head.

"You are too smart for your own good Ms. Granger," Sirius snorted. He saw Harry rub his eyes tiredly and yawn. "Okay, time's up. Harry has to sleep."

"But I just woke up," Harry protested.

"I know. But it's going to take a while before you have your energy back. Poppy says it's normal with what you went through and with the potions she is giving you for your leg. They take some of your magic and energy to do their work."

"What potions?" Hermione asked.

"I'll explain them to you all if you wait for me outside while I put Harry to bed," Sirius said gently.

"Okay! We'll come back later Harry!" George promised.

"Not a baby dad," Harry yawned again. "M' fine."

"You're my baby," Sirius said tucking Harry in, and Hermione and Ginny giggled.

A/N- Thanks for reading and reviewing.

Thanks SWaddict1986 for the help correcting my mistakes.

Harry Potter is not mine

Chapter 44- Rest for the Weary

Dear Uncle Sev,

Sorry I can't be with you and that it took me so long to write. I was sleeping a lot since the graveyard, and dad and Uncle Moony didn't tell me you were in the Ministry holding cells! They said you'll be okay though and I'll make sure you are back with us fast.

I wanted to tell you, when the killing curse hit me I went to this place and saw mum and dad. They explained to me I had a choice and could either move on or go back because the curse killed the Horcrux in me instead of me, and Voldemort was anchoring me to earth because he used my blood. Anyway, that's not what I wanted to tell you. I have a message for you:

Mum says she loves you and that she forgave you long ago. Though she wouldn't tell me what she forgave. Said it was up to you. And dad said he was glad you were there for me. Said you deserved the title of my dad with Uncle Moony and dad (Padfoot). Grandpa is calling it a near death experience, but at least he believes me. Dad (Padfoot) and Uncle Moony thought I was dreaming but then they went all misty eyed when I told them what dad said about being okay with you three raising me.

I gotta go now, but promise you'll be okay Uncle Sev. I miss you a lot and want to see you.

Love,

Harry

Severus reread the letter several times. Harry didn't say how he was and the insufferable mutt, werewolf and old codger only said he was recovering. What the bloody hell did that mean?

Relax, he is fine. He is well enough to write you. He smiled. He believed Harry had seen Lily. Of course he did. They lived in a world where ghosts roamed around, so why couldn't Harry's spirit been somewhere with his parents? Lily forgave him. Harry said so, which was only more proof that he'd been with her. Harry didn't know she had anything to forgive him of. How would he know to say that if she hadn't told him? And she did. Even after what he'd done.

A tear fell on the parchment and Severus wiped his face. Severus Snape does not cry. She loved him, what did he do to deserve that?

And Potter said he deserved to be Harry's dad. Who would have thought that James Potter would glad Severus Snape loved his son? Who would have thought it would have meant so much for Severus Snape to know that?

"Got a trial date," came a cheery voice from the bars and Severus looked up.

"Really? When?"

"In about three weeks," Ted answered.

"That long?"

"Sorry," Ted winced. "But believe me. The way things are going that is good news. Fudge would have you tried at the earliest next year if he could, but I argued that they had not presented any solid proof of your guilt to keep you locked up for so long. That if he wanted so much time to prepare the prosecution then they had to grant you at least a questioning with Veritaserum to determine if a trial was even needed."

"And of course Fudge doesn't want that. It would prove he has no grounds," Severus smirked.

"Indeed it would. That is why I will demand you be questioned with it at the trial. It's your right to do so," Ted said. "But I'll ask for it only then. Don't want Fudge preparing for it."

Severus and Ted exchanged confident smiles.

Xxxx

Cedric had come to see Harry and Harry had apologized for what happened. Since Cedric didn't remember, Harry explained that they had decided to take the cup together.

"You wanted me to take it. If I had you wouldn't be like this," Harry said.

"From what dad told me you saved my life twice in the maze. And Dumbledore said you saved me from a killing curse. So the way I see it, I owe you my life. You didn't know the cup was a Portkey and I could have just said no, so you're not to blame," he finished handing Harry a bag of money.

"What's that?"

"The winnings."

"I don't want them. It's yours," Harry said shaking his head.

"I don't want it either. I can't even remember what I did to earn it. It doesn't feel right taking it."

Harry had a strong sense of déjà vu and sighed. He spotted his get-well cards and a few tongue toffees. Remembering what the twins had told him about Bagman paying them off with Leprechaun's gold and running away from the Goblins when he lost a bet with them about Harry winning, he said, "Say Cedric, why don't we invest it then?"

XXXXX

Up and down, up and down. Sirius eyes followed the movements of Harry's chest as he slept. For the first four days, Harry had been sleeping non-stop, waking up just for a few minutes at a time. He was so weak and tired that his sleep was undisturbed, but as he gained strength enough to stay awake longer, he had started having nightmares and Poppy had dosed him with Dreamless Sleep. She said that right now sleep was what he needed the most but that she couldn't keep him on the potion too long.

When Harry was awake Sirius did his best to keep a cheery face, but when he slept Sirius crumbled. He was afraid to go to sleep and wake up to learn that it was a dream. That Harry had died that horrible night. Poppy had to force some Dreamless Sleep on him and Moony a few times after they refused to lie down, or after they woke up, shortly after finally falling asleep on one of the Infirmary's beds, screaming for Harry.

He would never forget the desperation that filled him when he heard Voldemort say that Harry Potter was dead. The world had ended for him at that point, and he couldn't think straight anymore. He saw red and the only thing he knew was that he wanted to get to Voldemort and kill him with his bare hands. He hid his face in his hands and sobbed quietly. He felt someone hold him and when he dropped his hands, he looked at the tear tracks on Remus' face that mirrored his.

"I thought we lost him," he whispered.

"Me too." Remus said hoarsely. "It was the worst moment of my life and one could safely say I have a lot to compare it to. I never felt pain like that and don't ever want to feel it again."

Sirius nodded but didn't move. Remus' grip tightened and Sirius held Remus' arms and rested his head on Remus'. They could not say how long they sat that way, in silence, seeking strength in one another.

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"Dumbledore made an announcement to the rest of the school about what happened and about why Professor Snape was missing. He called it an abuse of power and said Snape was a courageous man who fought for what was right and now is being unduly punished. He also told people not to bother you or Cedric," Hermione explained. They were leaving in an hour for the holidays and Hermione, Neville and Ron had come to the Hospital Wing to say goodbye to Harry.

Susan had come earlier, but Sirius had made a good impression of Uncle Sev while he hovered the whole time and she left promising to write. But Harry was feeling a kiss short when she left the wing, giving him a kiss in the cheek while Harry was clearly putting his lips out there for her. He had reminded Sirius that James had wanted him to relax, but Sirius had stared at Harry firmly until Harry confessed that James had said the opposite but please, please don't do it. Sirius could be seen with a satisfied smirk for hours after.

"Don't worry Harry, Mr. and Mrs. Tonks will get him out," Hermione finished confidently.

"Yeah," Harry said. "But from what the Prophet is saying, I'm worried they will have already convicted him before he even has a chance to say anything."

"At least Skeeter has been oddly quiet," Neville said. Hermione smirked.

"What?" Ron asked.

"Well, let's just say that I found out Rita Skeeter is an unregistered Animagus and struck a deal with her."

"She is? What animal?"

"A beetle. That's how she got around so easily. Of course she could just register and pay the fine, but she doesn't want people knowing now does she? She was here on the windowsill that morning after the task when we came to see Harry. That's also how she knew so much about what happened that night; she heard all the explanations Professor Snape gave Madam Pomfrey. I was going to make her stop writing altogether but then I decided that being able to actually control what she says could be good, so

I decided to make a deal with her after I kept her for a few days. She doesn't badmouth you anymore, and she sticks to the truth with no more embellishments and printing lies, and I'll say nothing."

"What do you mean, kept her a few days?" Ron asked worried.

Hermione smiled evilly and said, "Kept her in a jar. Don't look at me like that; I was very good to her. Gave her leaves to eat and everything, and even sent in the piece she had already written about the third task, after making a few corrections of course. It was printed that same day."

"How humanitarian of you," Harry snorted. "How did you get the article she wrote?"

"When Professor McGonagall had us researching Animagi, I learned the spells to force an Animagus both out of and into their form," she smiled evilly. "So, I took her to my dorm when Lavender and Parvati weren't there, and forced her out for a little chat. I took her wand and bag away while she was disoriented, but at that time she was very uncooperative so I forced her back into a beetle. Her article was in her bag. A couple of days later I forced her back into a human again and she was much more receptive."

"And she agreed to the deal?" Neville asked amused.

"Of course she did," Hermione said. "She had tried to blackmail me back with Harry being an Animagus but I just reminded her that that's not much of a blackmail since everyone knows that by now. So now we have someone who will write our side of the story."

"To bad no one will print it," Harry said grimly.

"There is someone who might," Remus' voice said from behind the kids, and they all jumped scared.

"Who?" Harry asked.

"One of the Ravenclaws is the daughter of the Quibbler's editor. And he doesn't mind going against the Minister."

"The Quibbler?" Harry asked raising an incredulous eyebrow.

"You will find that when people are getting only one kind of information they will read other versions no matter where they come from," Remus said. "I'll talk to Luna and see if she can talk to her father. Now, you three should run or you'll miss the train."

"Bye Harry," Hermione hugged him tight.

"Bye mate," Ron said patting his shoulder and then followed Hermione.

"Bye Nev. Tell Ginny bye for me," Harry said.

"Will do."

"You two make a nice couple," Remus said gently.

Neville blushed and checked to make sure Ron was gone, "We aren't actually. We quickly found out we don't have much in common. But don't let Ron know. Thinking she's with me gets him off her back. She's seeing a Ravenclaw she met thanks to her friend Luna. And I don't mind covering for her."

"So what did you do when you were in Hogsmeade supposedly with Ginny?" Harry asked.

Neville smiled shyly, "Well, you see, Hannah likes Herbology a lot. And sometimes she comes to the Greenhouse when I'm working there for Professor Sprout."

"Neville! You dog!" Harry laughed.

"It's always the quiet ones," Sirius shook his head as he came in.

"Well, gotta go. I'll write to you okay Harry!"

"Bye Nev. Good holiday!"

"Well," Sirius said with a grimace. "I already Apparated our stuff there and Vernon and Dudders already left. Got the Portkey here. It will take us straight to your bedroom at Privet Drive."

"I thought that now that Voldemort is dead we wouldn't need it," Harry scowled.

"You still have the protection for three more years and it's best to keep it. This way, if anything happens, you still have a safe haven to go to," Remus said gently as he picked up Harry, careful not to jar the injured leg, so he wouldn't fall at the landing as Harry was prone to ever since his first Portkey at the age of three.

"Safe is arguable," Harry muttered.

Sirius extended a teacup and Remus touched it.

"Harry, you have to touch it," Sirius said but Harry didn't move. His breathing was speeding up and he just stared at the cup keeping his arms crossed tightly.

"Harry, calm down," Remus said letting the cup go and putting Harry back on the bed.

"No, no," Harry said scuttling back and shaking his head.

Sirius dropped the cup and got on the bed. He wrapped Harry tightly in his arms and said in soft tone, "Sorry pup. I forgot. We won't use a portkey okay? We'll go some other way. Relax. It's gone; he's gone. You're safe." He kept repeating that until Harry started quieting down. He did not let go of him until he heard the even breath that meant that Harry had managed to exhaust himself into sleep.

Remus rubbed his eyes wearily and said, "He seemed fine when we discussed it at first. We should have imagined he'd have that reaction when having to actually touch a portkey. I'll go talk to Poppy. She doesn't want him Apparating, but maybe we could do it some other way."

"Car," Sirius said. "Arthur's car flies doesn't it? I could Apparate to the Burrow and borrow the car. I'd be back by nightfall. Then we drive. Harry can sleep in the back seat. We'd arrive tomorrow morning, but that's better than nothing."

"Okay," Remus nodded. "You drive the car here and I'll drive to Surrey."

Xxx

Petunia Dursley wrinkled her nose as she saw the ancient blue car pull in the driveway from the kitchen window. There was no way she would allow *that* to be displayed to the neighbors. She hurried outside as the two Muggle-dressed Marauders exited the car and were opening the back door.

"Put that thing inside the garage," she hissed.

"What?" Sirius asked bewildered.

"I don't want the neighbors seeing *that*. I'll pull our car outside and you'll leave *that* inside," she said.

Tired from the long trip, hot from the summer weather and really not wanting to wake Harry with a shouting match, Sirius reigned in his anger and got inside the car while Remus and Petunia opened the garage. He backed the car to give Petunia space to pull her car out and as he waited for her to bring her car outside, he glanced at Harry who was sound asleep in the back seat. He sighed; tonight had been the last night Poppy allowed for Dreamless Sleep. Dreamless Sleep could become dangerous to Harry's health since people needed to dream. Poppy had explained why but Sirius didn't really pay attention to the reason; he knew the important part, which was that from now on Harry could only take it every four days. The problem was that right now, what Harry needed the most was to rest because of all the magic and energy that the potions were using up. And how would he get it if he was woken up by nightmares all the time?

Sirius started the car again and swiftly entered the garage. He got out as Remus came in and closed the garage doors. Sirius opened the back door and maneuvered Harry so that he could lift him in his arms without waking him. Harry was still very pale and sickly looking, even after a week. Poppy had also put his injured leg into a cast, even though no bone was broken, to make sure he wouldn't smack it around while the flesh and nerves were re-growing. Sirius and Remus entered the house through the garage door and as they made their way towards the stairs they met Petunia. Her eyes widened as she saw Harry. His shirt had been caught in Sirius arm exposing the very long scar on his side that Bellatrix's spell left. Everything together made quite a sight. Sirius could swear he saw her eyes soften, but in a second the look was gone and she pinched her lips.

"You know the way," and with that she turned around and went back to the kitchen. Sirius exchanged a pained look with Remus and Remus muttered:

"It's going to be two long weeks."

"More like three," Sirius grimaced as he thought of the trial that awaited Severus. And to think that he had always thought that once Voldemort had been killed all their troubles would end. *I guess life never stops, it goes on*, Sirius thought to himself.

The End

A/N- As you've noticed this is by no means the end of my tale. Now I intend to deal with the aftermath of Voldemort's death. Things will change a lot but I am keeping a few things close to Canon because I just wanted to have our parenting trio deal with them. I intend to write the last three years of Hogwarts. When I first started this I had planned a sixty chapter fic, but I just took a peek on the rough draft I have of fifth year and I haven't even started it truly and am already in chapter 47, so I guess there goes my chapter planning out the window.

Since fics with too many chapters discourage new readers and I estimate at least 20 more chapters, more like 30, I decided to split this in two after a suggestion from my beta.

The sequel will deal mostly with family issues. There is still some Voldemort related things that have to come out as you know. But there will be some action, after all, we still have a couple of not very nice Death Eaters on the loose. I hope I can still keep you entertained and I should go write now.

The sequel "Life goes on" will be posted in about a week. I'll post a notice here for you anyway.

Thank you all for reading and reviewing, I hope to see you on the sequel.

Humongous thanks to SWaddict1986