

Disclaimer for the story: I do not own Harry Potter

Summary: The fallout from the Dueling Club was worse than in Canon and leads to the release of one Sirius Black from Azkaban. And he is not amused.

**Warnings:** There are a few obvious AU things. Don't like, don't read.

**Be warned of exaggeration.** This is my exercise in ranting on stories that vilify Sirius and James and make Snape look like a poor misunderstood angel. If you're a Snape lover, this ain't the story for you! Complaints of Out of Characterness will be laughed at!

I moved the Dueling Club to the Tuesday of that week (Originally it was on a Thursday) and Justin Fitch-Fletchley petrification after the Christmas holidays. I need those two changes in the time line for my own time line to work.

This is **not** a bashing of Ron and Hermione. I needed them to be a little less composed in their reaction than in the book for my story to work but this **does not mean** they are evil or hate Harry. They are children; two twelve-year-olds who did not know how to react and their reaction will be explained later on.

**This is Snape Bashing! And Dumbledore is getting some too!**

You've been warned. Continue at your own peril!!

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## **“Overdue Protection”**

### **Chapter 1 – The sorry Ministry**

“So, er- you see. That’s how we realized that the previous administration was holding you against the law seeing as they never questioned or even charged you, much less gave you a trial and that is why we hastened to correct those mistakes and what a pleasant surprise to know you are such a credit to our society.”

“You mean to say I’ve been kidnapped and kept prisoner for eleven years by the Ministry,” the black haired man said in a flat voice and a look that clearly stated he was not pleased with the explanation he just got.

The rotund man in front of him fidgeted with his bowler hat and looked at the ancient looking man with an extreme long beard and garish looking robes next to him for help. “Er, see- that was the previous administration- er - Barty Crouch, and Bagnold- they did that – but - er- as soon as we realized that you had not been even charged we hastened to correct- er- and they aren’t even part of the Ministry anymore. Barty Crouch was summarily fired and Bagnold, well she passed away a few years er- Amelia?” he practically begged the no nonsense woman next to him.

“What Minister Fudge means is that there is no excuse for what was done to you Mr. Black, nor that it took us this long to realize what had been done and correct it. The Ministry extends our most sincere apologies and we have already deposited a compensation into your vaults. I know this does not bring back the years you’ve lost but unfortunately it is all we are able to do at the moment.”

The man surveyed her with calculating eyes and it troubled Amelia to no end. After eleven years in Azkaban she had expected to find a bumbling mess and yet Sirius Black was as coherent as he had been when he was a trainee Auror under her back when Crouch was Head of the DMLE and she

was Head Auror. Dressed in the fine robes that had been procured to him once they realized the gross and illegal miscarriage of justice that had been done to him, one would have never guessed where he had spent the last decade if not for the emaciated look he had.

“So, let me get this straight,” he started in a calm and dangerous voice. “You,” he pointed to Dumbledore, “Allowed your whole student body to gang up against one student-“

“Er, it was discovered he was a parselmouth like You-know-“ Fudge tried to defend Dumbledore but was sharply cut by Sirius Black.

“Voldemort was also a human being, who attended Hogwarts, spoke English, wielded a wand, wore robes and had two legs,” he looked around at the group gathered in the Minister’s lavish office. “I guess that makes all of us in this room Dark Lords then?”

The others looked uncomfortable and in what was his customary calm demeanor Dumbledore tried once again to placate the man in front of him.

“You are absolutely correct Sirius. I am most ashamed of my students’ actions-“

“And yet you did nothing to stop them. Wouldn’t be the first time,” Sirius snapped giving Dumbledore an ugly look. “So, recapping, after allowing a student to be terrorized, said student, most normally and quite smartly, fled in fear for his life. Once you realized he did not go back to his ‘loving,’” and here he spat the word as if it was an insult, “relatives you decided to check Gringotts by what could amount to kidnapping Petunia- since I am quite sure she must not have gone on her own free will - to get her to sign off on the Goblins telling you if Harry used his money, which is when you found out that Petunia Evans Dursley is not my godson’s legal guardian seeing as I never lost guardianship because, as you so nicely put it, I was never convicted. So you hastened to give me a trial in order for Petunia to get guardianship when your plans went astray by the little tiny detail of me being innocent. To which you then *hastened*,” he stressed in a mock voice giving the Minister for Magic a nasty look, “to butter me up by giving me the comfort of a shower and new

robes so I wouldn't press charges for kidnapping, seeing as only *convicted* felons can be sent to Azkaban and I was never even *charged*. And now you want me to go to Gringotts and tell you where my godson is? Did I get that right?"

The three most powerful people in Wizarding Britain at the moment were at loss to what to say and Sirius wanted to snort. They obviously had not expected to encounter such difficulties when they noticed Harry missing last night. Monday night and Sirius wanted to groan. The last someone had seen of Harry had been Friday night when the Gray Lady had run into some seventh year Ravenclaws hexing his godson. And do you think they did anything? Took his godson to the Hospital Wing? No! Dumbledore only realized Harry had been hexed because when he didn't show up for any class on Monday he called a school meeting at *dinner* to ask if anyone had seen him, which is when the Ravenclaw ghost had decided to open her mouth. Sirius never liked her, she never cared a wit about the students, always aloof and in her own world. Even the Bloody Baron, as intimidating as he was, tried to protect the students.

Sirius at first hadn't known what was happening when the guards had stormed his cell and portkeyed him to a full Wizengamot trial. He had lost track of time in Azkaban, but he did know that he would never get a trial if he hadn't gotten one back years ago. So he was quite surprised. Mind you, no one was being nice or anything. Procuring him a solicitor or even giving him time to look more presentable.

The guard shoved some Veritaserum down his throat and Amelia Bones started asking questions. Their intent was clear. They believed him guilty and thought this was a mere formality so they could get Petunia named guardian and make her sign the permission for the goblins to talk. Weren't they surprised.

Once his innocence was evident their tune changed. He was taken to a nice room inside the Ministry and given all the time to shower and dress on the pristine new robes they gave him. Then

he was led here, not dragged as before, but courteously and nervously accompanied to the Minister's office where he was quite sure the Minister and Dumbledore had been certain that he'd be just as guidable as Petunia, the Muggle who would have been too afraid of magic to protest.

They probably thought he was completely crazy and he would have been if not for two very deciding factors. He was the Black heir and an Animagus. The Black heir, the future Head of the Noble and Most Ancient House of Black was given extra protection when born. It was a spell cast by some many-times great-grandfather of his on the line of Black. Back when the Head of the Family and heir to the title of Lord Black had to fear for life attempts.

There had been several protections he was sure his mother loathed. One was that the heir couldn't be disowned (which he was sure his dear mother threw a hissy fit about), he would always be the heir and most importantly for Sirius' situation the heir was given a mental shield, much like an Occlumency shield, but instead of just wall between whoever was trying to get into his mind and him, he also had the ability of putting fake memories in front of that wall so the intruder wouldn't realize they were being blocked. The shield also stayed up regardless of the heir's current state or awareness, which didn't happen with Occlumency where the person had to keep the shield up themselves. That shield protected Sirius from the Dementors' effects completely and in turn he maintained his sanity. As the silence stretched Sirius decided to break it.

"Were the students who attacked my godson expelled?"

Dumbledore looked at Sirius with a reproachful look, "Sirius my boy, those students feel immense guilt and they have been reprimanded. I'm sure they deserve a--"

"Second chance? Yeah, you've always been all about second chances to the undeserving haven't you Dumbledore?"

"I believe you yourself weren't a saint in school--"

"I never sent anyone to the Hospital Wing," Sirius said angrily. "I changed their hair color, their clothes color, had a laugh, a prank. But not once did I physically harm anyone. Snape and his friends on the other hand couldn't go a week without maiming someone. And where did they end up? Oh, yes, with a nice little tattoo. If you won't take action against those who burnt my godson's things, kicked him out of his House, denied him food and then hexed him I will," he finished icily. "And forget about me helping you. I'm going to find my godson and if he doesn't want to he'll be welcome to never set foot on Hogwarts again," he finished turning around and storming out of the Minister's office without a by your leave. Before he knew it he was in the Apparition point, and, as if he hadn't spent the last decade without doing most magic, he gripped the handle of his wand that had been returned to him – since it hadn't been snapped due to his lack of trial - and Apparated to Diagon Alley. He paid people no mind as a few recognized him, and not having been informed of his innocence yet, screamed and ran for cover as he purposely stalked to Gringotts stopping at the teller and without a good-day barked:

"Lord Black to see my account manager."

The goblin gave him a nasty smirk and said, "He's been waiting sir."

xxx

Sirius had been led to a room in the back of the bank and was now sitting shaking his leg nervously as he waited for the account manager. What if Harry hadn't stopped at Gringotts? Dumbledore thought Harry used his invisibility cloak to get out of the castle with the older students on Saturday as it had been a Hogsmead weekend, but the truth was Dumbledore had no way of knowing if Harry still had his cloak. The only way he had it was if it had been in his bag when the other Gryffindors burned his trunk. Apparently the Gryffindors had tried to open Harry's trunk to see if he had any Dark objects and had been unable to. Ron Weasley had confessed to Dumbledore that Harry once told him he bought a trunk that could only be opened by him so his relatives wouldn't

be able to open it. Incensed, the Gryffindors threw the whole trunk into the fireplace. Harry should have gotten a fire proof trunk, but maybe Harry thought even Petunia wouldn't be that evil.

The last time he had been seen was when he was hexed Friday night. It was Tuesday afternoon now. The Gray Lady had not been forthcoming about the hexes sent and too much time had passed for Prior Incantatem, as the students weren't talking either. But the Gray Lady had said Harry looked pretty hurt. For all they knew he might have still been in the castle and all they would find would be his body.

Dumbledore seemed to think he was alive and somewhere new, something about blood wards having failed but the detectors he had on Harry still saying he was alive. Sirius's inside was getting cold at the thought of where his pup was. All this time he thought Remus had him. That was what James and Lily's Will had said. That was what the provisions he had made had said. He wasn't stupid. They were at war. He knew there was a chance that he'd be incapacitated but not necessarily dead so he had made such provision as had James and Lily. Harry was to go to Remus Lupin if he couldn't take him.

But Dumbledore had said Petunia had him and that Remus had left the Wizarding World after the ordeal. That Harry didn't even know him. He hadn't even seen Remus. He had not been at his trial. Granted, his trial had been put up in a matter of hours so maybe there had been no time to inform him. But still, Remus had a lot to explain.

"Ah, Mr. Black. I was wondering how long it would take to see you after Mrs. Dursley was unable to obtain the information she wanted."

"Well, yes here I am and I want to know if my godson was here."

"Do you wish to see the state of your estate?"

"I'll come another time for that. Right now I want to know when was the last time Harry Potter's

trust vault was accessed and if he might have said what he intended to do.”

“Certainly,” the goblin told him with a nasty smile and without even looking at the ledger he said.

“Mister Potter was here Saturday morning after having floored from the Three Broomsticks to the Leaky Cauldron. He seemed quite distraught and hurt. He took some money, converted some into pounds and inquired if the Potters had left any real estate property. I also offered the services of our healer, for a fee of course, seeing as Mister Potter looked injured. He took them.”

Sirius sighed in relief, at least he had an idea of where Harry could have gone. He knew the properties, James had gone through them with him and made sure to key him to all of them.

“What did the healer have to say?”

“That is confidential.”

“Mister Potter is a minor and I am his guardian.”

“Quite right, but I don’t know what she said. I can call her to tell you.”

“Please do,” after he heard the goblin give an order into a communication device he asked. “Did Mister Potter say which property interested him?”

“No.”

Crap, he’d have to go to all of them . The Potters had been quite rich and there were many unused ones. Some had been rented out but he had no idea if those leases were still valid, especially since there had been no one to sign any renewal. Well, he’d go to each one of them if he had to. He’d start close by though. Harry seemed to have his head screwed up right. Leaving the place where he was in danger, procuring himself money and a place to stay. So he hoped he had been rational once again and chosen somewhere he wouldn’t depend on magical transportation to get to.

The healer came in and greeted Sirius, she waited for the goblin to leave and started detailing what she had fixed on Harry and what she suspected but needed authorization for a complete

evaluation to confirm. Sirius stalked out of Gringotts furiously with his mind on two things. Find his pup and show him no one could hurt him and get away with it.

xxx

Harry regarded the parchment he had just received warily. He recognized the writing as Fred Weasley's. That was the one thing the twins hadn't managed to keep identical. Fred had said that they were sorry and that they were returning something that had been very helpful to them but they had recently found out was his. They said it wouldn't open up to them anymore because they wronged the line of Prongs, whatever that meant. Harry looked suspicious. The other thing in the envelope had been an old piece of parchment. Fred had said he should state his name with his wand touching it and he'd understand. Harry thought maybe they had booby trapped the parchment and just didn't want to hurt other people.

He would never forget how everyone looked at him after he stopped that snake from biting Justin. Even Ron and Hermione had looked at him like that. He had been scared and grabbed his bag and fled the room without understanding what the hell was going on. He only understood the next day when he looked up the word they called him, parselmouth, in the library. But that night he hid until he thought it might be safe to go back to his dorm, where Ron and Hermione would explain to him what was going on. Instead he found his whole house in the common room. Burning his trunk. Only Neville shouting at them to stop. Ron and Hermione to the side not looking at him or stopping the others. Then they said he wasn't a Gryffindor and had no place there. When Harry refused to move they all moved at once and that's when Harry knew he had to run. He knew better than that. He had spent his whole life running from Dudley and his gang.

He found an unused room and slept there. The next morning, Wednesday, he thought he better get breakfast before everyone but the other students were on to him and a committee from all houses was waiting for him in front of the Great Hall doors.

“Parselmouths aren’t allowed to eat with normal, decent people,” the spokesperson had said and had stung Harry’s hand with a hex as a warning “If you don’t leave on your own we’ll make you.”

Guess Dumbledore would be proud of the house unity. He tried again at lunch and dinner and had the same result. He didn’t try again. Wouldn’t be the first time he went hungry anyway.

By Friday night he was starving and a bit sluggish which is why he wasn’t fast enough to outrun those Ravenclaws. They jumped him, hit him, kicked him and hexed him. It hurt so bad, he had burns on his arms and face and one of his arms was hurting like hell. He was sure he cracked a few ribs too. One of the ghosts showed up and Harry took the opportunity to run. He thought of going to Madam Pomfrey but decided against it and tended to his wounds himself. None of the teachers had helped him so far. And they’d all seen him. He’d gotten points taken for not having his books. He had been bumped in class, his cauldron had been tampered with. No adult did anything. But then again, they never had. He was safer in his empty classroom. But he knew he couldn’t stay. He’d be dead by the end of next week if he did. He’s luck was that on Tuesday he had put his Invisibility Cloak in his bag. He had been happy for that. Losing all his things had hurt, especially his broom and album, but at least he hadn’t lost his father’s cloak.

But he didn’t have much money left and he knew he’d need some. He knew this Saturday the upper years got to go to the village, so the gates would be open. If he just walked out with them he was sure to find somewhere with floo and he could floo to Diagon Alley. There he could find out exactly how much money he had. Ron had once said that he couldn’t have just his trust vault because the Potters were as loaded as the Malfoys. That he probably would be able to access the rest when he was of age. So he wondered, he couldn’t access the money but maybe there was a house. His parents had to have lived somewhere. And he could stay there. Under the radar. Maybe find a way to go to Muggle school. After all he knew two things, Hogwarts wasn’t safe anymore and if he went back to the Dursleys he’d be dead. So with a plan in mind he crept up to the owlery

and told Hedwig to leave Hogwarts and find him wherever he went. He hoped she would. He couldn't take her with him, she'd call too much attention but he didn't want to leave her behind. He was worried someone would hurt her.

So, wearing his cloak he set out of Hogwarts and found this place. Hedwig had found him the next day and today this letter had arrived. Stealing his resolve he took a big breath and put his wand to the parchment over the counter.

"My name is Harry Potter". He waited with baited breath but no explosion came, instead letters started forming on the parchment.

*"Mr. Prongs is happy to welcome Mr. Prongslet to the pack."*

*"Mr. Padfoot says Mr. Prongs should deflate his head and explain what Mr. Prongslet has just found."*

*"Mr. Moony points out that Mr. Padfoot is delusional if he thinks Mr. Prongs is capable of deflating his head and bids Mr. Prongslet welcome to Mischief Making."*

*"Mr. Prongs wants to point out Mr. Padfoot and Mr. Moony are mean and jealous and tells Mr. Prongslet that if he were to solemnly swear he was up to no good he might be pleasantly surprised."*

As a response a drawing of two tongs blowing raspberries to the last line appeared sound and all. Harry smiled and touched his wand to the parchment.

"I solemnly swear I am up to no good," he said and his eyes boggled as lines started forming and a map of Hogwarts appeared with the title *"Messrs Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot and Prongs, Purveyors of Aids to Magical Mischief-Makers are proud to present THE MARAUDER'S MAP"* but that was nothing compared to how high he jumped when he heard:

*"I certainly hope not."*

XXX

**A/N- I want to thank my friends at the SiriuslySirius Yahoo! group who helped me see that not updating frequently is not a sin and convinced me to start posting despite not having finished the story.**

**This is a WIP and updates will depend on available time to write and inspiration. I hope you enjoy!**

XXX

## **Chapter 2 – A Meeting between Godfather and Godson**

Sirius didn't know who was more nervous. The little boy hiding behind the stool he had been sitting on who was now pointing his wand at Sirius or himself. He had to stop himself from fainting when he had seen the back of James Potter saying those familiar words but when he turned to look at him all Sirius could see was Lily and her big green eyes.

He had been right. Harry chose the one property he could walk from Diagon Alley to. It was a small, unassuming flat in a completely Muggle neighborhood. No one would look at it twice, but it had all the security any other Potter property had. Only people who were keyed into the wards could enter. It had been the flat he and James had shared their first year out of Hogwarts. Before James married. The flat he still lived in after James married. They had been in the Auror Academy at the time. They were in the Order. In the thick of it and Mad-eye Moody insisted his Aurors and trainees put full protection wherever they lived. They couldn't put the Fidelius in the place because it was an apartment building. Even the muggles would notice if suddenly one of the floors had less apartments than the others. But it was about the only protection this place did not have.

To enter, you either had to have Potter blood or a Potter had to have personally keyed you to the wards, as Sirius had been. He looked slightly around the small living room slash kitchen fondly. It looked like Harry had cleaned up a bit but he could still see the stack of old Daily Prophets he had meant to throw away that day. Before everything went to hell. He bet that when Harry had arrived he had found the place with a layer of dust and the Daily Prophets, his clothes and other messes scattered around as they had been. Remus, who had been the only other person keyed onto the wards- Well, him and the rat but Sirius was about to fix that as soon as he got Harry to lower his wand- had obviously not been here if those Daily Prophets from eleven years ago had still been here. He took a deep breath and put on what he hoped was his most charming smile.

"Hello Harry. I bet you're wondering who I am."

Harry shrugged and narrowed his eyes but did not put his wand down. Sirius wondered what a twelve-year-old thought he'd do against an adult wizard but he was glad to see Harry wasn't lowering his guard. "I've been looking for you. I'm Sirius Black, your godfather."

Harry's head straightened a bit but other than that his demeanor did not change at all, "I don't have a godfather."

"Yes you do," Sirius said raising his hands to show him he meant no harm and carefully putting his wand on the table next to the couch. Harry followed his every move. "See, now you're armed and I'm not. Go on, take my wand."

Harry looked suspicious but slowly, and never losing track of Sirius, came from behind the stool and quickly grabbed the offered wand going back to his somewhat protected position.

"If you're my godfather where have you been?"

Ah, straight to the point. He would return the favor.

"In jail," he said simply which seemed to alarm Harry so he hastened to explain. "I was framed. Someone made it look like I had betrayed your parents and killed a bunch of muggles and a wizard. The Ministry at the time didn't see fit to question me so they just chucked me in Azkaban- that's the Wizarding prison- until now when they needed me."

"See Harry, I'm your guardian and since they never tried me, I never stopped being your guardian. When your parents died their wills were automatically enacted, such is with magical wills, and your guardianship transferred to me. When Dumbledore realized you weren't at Hogwarts anymore he started searching for you and thought you might have gone to Gringotts, so he tried to get your Aunt to make the Goblins tell her if you'd been there, except she wasn't your legal guardian so they couldn't. That's when they found out I never had a trial and ran to give me one. Mind you, not

because they thought I deserved one, just because they needed me out of the picture. Except when they shoved Veritaserum down my throat, which by the way is also illegal-“

“Uh- Verita-what.”

“A truth potion. A defendant may demand to be given one but he can only be forced one if he is caught in the act of committing a crime,” he recited from his days in Auror training. “I wasn’t. I was caught at the scene but the Aurors, wizard police, only showed up later. So I was supposedly protected because of my right against self incrimination. But seeing as they had already trampled on many of my rights they didn’t mind trampling on one more. Except when they gave me the potion they were surprised, and not pleasantly, by me being innocent.”

“So you went to Gringotts for them?”

“No, not for them,” Sirius shook his head kneeling down to be closer to Harry’s height. “For *you*. Because I wanted to find *you*, to protect *you*. I left Dumbledore and the rest of them at the Minister’s office and tried to find out where you were. You were smart you know? Only people who have been keyed in to this flat can come here. There are only two other people keyed in and you as a Potter can change those wards. Then no one will be able to get you here.”

“How do I know you mean it? That you’re not just gonna hurt me like they did?”

Sirius looked at the parchment on the counter and said, “That map has a charm on it. You see, back when we were in school there was this kid who hated me, your dad and our friends. He found out a secret about one of our friends, Moony. I’m Padfoot by the way, your dad was Prongs,” he saw enlightenment in Harry’s eyes. “Well, this boy found out this secret and he was taunting me about it. And I ended up getting riled up and saying more than I should. The boy did something really, really stupid,” and he really, to this day, had no idea why Snape went to the shack. He had known he’d face a werewolf. He had known what Remus was and had been taunting Sirius and in a fit of anger Sirius had cried, “*Well if you’re so eager to meet a transformed werewolf next full*

*moon just press the knot at the base of the Whomping Willow!"* Really, how stupid did you have to be to actually do it? "And he put himself in danger. Your dad saved him but Moony thought I had told him his secret. Betrayed him. So I told Moony to charm the map. If anyone ever betrayed one of the Marauders they wouldn't be able to use the map again. Even a Marauder. So he did and I was still able to use the map, proving I was innocent."

"Oh, is that why Fred and George said the map wouldn't open for them? They said they betrayed the line of Prongs."

"Where they among the student who hurt you?" Sirius asked with a steely gaze.

Harry shrugged, "They didn't do anything, but they didn't try to stop it either."

"Then they are. They betrayed Prongs' son by not helping you and just watching." This was actually a good turn. If Harry had already had a sample of how the charm worked there was a better chance he'd believe Sirius.

"Can I show you that I intend you no harm?"

Harry looked unsure but nodded. He took the parchment and put it in the coffee table in front of the couch. Sirius took a seat on the couch as Harry stood in front of him. Sirius looked at his wand and grinned.

"Gonna need my wand pup." Harry's eyes narrowed and he scowled but he handed the wand nonetheless.

"I Sirius Orion Black, aka Padfoot, solemnly swear to never have betrayed nor meant any harm to the line of James Charlus Potter, aka Prongs."

The map of Hogwarts disappeared and in its place the familiar writing Harry had seen started again.

*"Mr. Prongs wants to state Mr. Padfoot is touched in the head if he actually has to state that he has*

*never betrayed my line."*

*"Mr. Padfoot says that Mr. Prongs should mind his tongue."*

*"Mr. Moony wants to remind Mr. Prongs and Mr. Padfoot that evoking the loyalty charm is serious business and they should stop messing around and give out the result, lest Mr. Padfoot get hexed wherever he is."*

*"Mr. Prongs says Mr. Moony is a spoilsport and states that Mr. Padfoot has never wronged the line of Prongs. Moreover Mr. Prongs lets it be known that it was Mr. Wormtail, who no longer is welcome in the Marauders, who wronged the lines of Prongs, Padfoot and Moony."*

*"Mr. Padfoot wants to also state that Mr. Moony is toeing a fine line because, though he has not actively wronged the lines of Prongs, he is getting dangerously close to by inaction."*

"How does the map know that?" Harry asked and Sirius looked back relieved. The boy had lowered his wand and had sat next to him. He obviously believed him.

"The charm is sentient. Though I don't think it's enough to prove anything in court, it is linked to each of the four of us, by blood, which then makes it linked to our direct descendants, like you. Its magic is aware of when one of the Marauders is wronged. It can't actually state outright what happened but see here. About Moony. That's Remus Lupin. He was supposed to take you in if I wasn't available and he didn't. And I think that's what it means. But it also means he didn't mean to wrong Prongs so we should probably ask him why he hasn't taken over his responsibilities before deciding how much to hex him."

"Wormtail is the man who framed you?"

"Yes, Peter Pettigrew."

"Says he wronged my dad too."

"He was the Secret Keeper. See, your parents were hidden by a charm. The Fidelius Charm. That

charm hides any dwelling in a soul. That of the Secret Keeper, and only those who he tells the secret to can see the place.”

“He told Voldemort,” Harry said seriously and Sirius felt a pang at a child having been through enough to be able to realize that so easily.

“Yes he did. But people thought I was the Secret Keeper. That night, Hagrid was at the house. He had you and said he was taking you to Dumbledore. I thought you’d be safe and Peter was still out there. He could still hurt you so I went after him. Except he got the best of me. He yelled to the whole street that I had betrayed James and Lily and blasted the street cutting his finger and transforming to escape.”

“Transforming?”

“He is an Animagus, he can turn into an animal at will. We all were,” Sirius said getting up and transforming into Padfoot to demonstrate. Harry looked amazed and stretched a hand cautiously to touch the dog. Sirius butted his head into Harry’s hand and let him scratch him for a while before transforming back.

“Everyone thought I killed him and the muggles. Didn’t help that I went a little hysterical, you know. I think everything came crashing down. I hadn’t yet absorbed what was happening and by the time the authorities came I was laughing.”

“Laughing?”

“Yeah, ever heard of how you either laugh or cry? I think my reaction was laugh. Little bumbling Peter got the best of the big bad Auror. Bested us all. They stunned me then and when I woke up I was in Azkaban with only Dementors- that’s the Azkaban guards, nasty dark creatures who suck the happiness out of people - and other inmates for company. Once a year the Minister of Magic makes a round but just that. I managed to keep my mind because I can close my mind off to the

Dementors effect or I just transformed into Padfoot at times. See, a dog's emotions are simpler. Dead boring though. Only myself for company for eleven years. I used to imagine we were living together and all the things I'd be teaching you so I wouldn't go crazy from loneliness. Can't do magic there, see, because of the wards. So I couldn't escape. After a while I just lived in my dreamland. Wasn't awful like the other inmates who were trapped in their worst memories but wasn't really sane either. I lost track of reality till they shoved reality on my face today."

He didn't know if Harry understood all of this. He figured he was a bit young but he wanted to be honest with Harry. He honestly had no idea how he was doing. Until this morning he had been mostly daydreaming and when he wasn't he was thinking he'd die forgotten in that little cell. He was realistic, he won't be the most stable of parents but he wanted to make sure he would be the best he could for Harry even if he had to go to one of those Muggle mind healers Lily had talked about. She had wanted to become one and bring the practice to the Magical World, to help the people affected by the war. From what he heard from the Healer at Gringotts there was a chance Harry would benefit from one to. To help him deal with the years of *care* at his relatives hands.

"So you're crazy?" Harry asked simply and Sirius let out a bark of a laugh. The first one in eleven year. He felt as if he had forgotten how to.

"Probably, but to be honest, I wasn't the sanest person to begin with. But I promise I'll get help to be a little less crazy. Gotta give me time though. I just got out of prison."

Harry nodded and then looked at Sirius seriously, "I'm not going back to Hogwarts."

"And I won't make you," Sirius said with the same tone. "If you want, we can see about other magical schools or even home schooling. If you wish you can even go to Muggle school. I don't mind. I'm not very fond of the Wizarding world right now."

"But won't Dumbledore make me go back?"

“Dumbledore might be powerful but he is not above the law and he is not your guardian. I am.”

“What if he comes here?”

“Only four people can get in here which reminds me-“ he said getting up and motioning for Harry to do the same. “After we’re done, there will be only two. Get your wand.”

“I’m not allowed to do magic outside of school,” Harry told Sirius.

“The trace only tells if magic is done near you. Not by you. If anyone says anything I’ll say I performed the magic. But they won’t. Part of the wards in here are wards that cancel any detection charm placed on a person while they are in here. Meaning, the Trace, which is the charm on minors, only works outside these walls. Come here,” he said leading Harry to the door. “Give me your hand. I’ll need to make a little prick. Promise it won’t hurt ,” he made a small prick on Harry’s finger and a bit of blood came out. “Place your wand and hand on the door and say after me. “As the Potter heir I disclaim any other permissions to these wards.””

“Won’t that kick you out?”

Sirius grinned, “Clever boy, but no. It won’t let me get in again if I go out of the wards but it won’t kick me out no.”

Harry nodded and followed his instructions. The door and walls glowed golden and then went back to their color. With his wand, Sirius pricked his own hand and put his hand next to Harry’s on the door.

“I hereby allow Sirius Orion Black entrance to these wards,” Sirius told Harry and Harry repeated the words. Once again the golden glow involved the whole apartment before dimming down.

“There,” Sirius smiled down at Harry. “Now what do you say we see if there is anything edible around.”

“I went shopping yesterday for food and cleaning supplies. The stuff in the fridge had created a

forest but I think I cleaned it up all right.”

“Well, seeing as this place was left alone since the moment I was arrested I imagined so.”

“You lived here?”

“Yes, at first with your dad. But then he abandoned me for a skirt,” he made a face and Harry giggled. “I’m going to forgive him because I wouldn’t have you if he hadn’t.”

xxx

“Albus, you let him leave? He was our only chance at finding Potter?” Minerva McGonagall cried outraged.

“What could I have done Minerva?” Dumbledore asked tiredly from his desk. “Imprison the boy, again. My hope is that he has found young Harry. I tried to see if he had gone to Gringotts but the Goblins were not very receptive of me. They wouldn’t tell me if Sirius was there. They seemed to take offense of my attempt to have Petunia breach their secrecy.”

McGonagall huffed. “The boy might be hurt Albus.”

“I know. I’ve sent a letter to Remus Lupin. He might have better luck with Sirius. He also has a better chance of knowing where Sirius might have gotten to.”

“You hope,” McGonagall huffed. “What of the students. What will we do with them?”

“What can we do? I have already talked sternly to the school last night.”

“Talked Albus! They burnt Potters things! Four of those students physically assaulted him and the rest didn’t allow him to eat!”

“Exactly. The whole school is involved. What do you suggest? I put the whole school in detention?”

“Yes!”

“And who will supervise the entire student body in detention Minerva? It just isn’t feasible and I

can't just punish a few of them for a transgression that everyone took part in. I made it clear I was very displeased with their actions."

"Well, then you best hope Sirius Black doesn't find other means of making his displeasure clear!" she snapped storming away.

xx

Sirius had taken Harry out to buy some clothes and other supplies they needed. Harry had been wearing the same clothes since Tuesday. With the aid of Harry's cloak, he had once again ventured Diagon Alley and Gringotts and talked to his account Manager. By some miracle his accounts and Harry's seemed to be in order. James had been very careful with protecting his son's estate. So, he took out enough money and went to pick Harry up. A special edition of the Prophet had come out with his innocence but he didn't want to brave the mobs.

So Harry and Sirius went shopping for Muggle clothes. Sirius clothes had been dusty but thanks to the household charms in his closet they were in pretty good state. Horribly old fashioned but in good state. He put on what he thought would look less ridiculous after seeing how fashion had changed when walking to the apartment and shrunk another set for Harry and they set off. With a new wardrobe and considerably more food than Harry had bought they set to take care of the small, two bedrooms flat. Sirius reclaiming his room and Harry's his dad's old room which Sirius had previously turned into a study room for him. Fortunately James's bed had still been there so it was just the case of rearranging things. Harry had been especially ecstatic at finding pictures of his parents and Sirius felt his anger rise when Harry explained that the only pictures he had had been in his trunk. Sirius was prompt to rectify the situation by making copies of the pictures Harry liked and creating a new album for him.

All in all Harry and Sirius spent the next few days making a home for themselves and getting to know each other. Sirius had also used his considerable vault to not only replace all of Harry's things

but also spoil him rotten for Christmas. Harry had been astounded about receiving so many presents and had been horribly shy about it. Sirius had told him he had eleven years of presents to make up for. The only thing he didn't buy was a new broom for Harry because, one, Harry couldn't fly here in London and two. The shopkeeper at Quidditch Supplies confided in him that a brand new broom that was top of the market would be released that summer. Their peace was not disturbed until mid-morning Christmas day when a rattle ran through the apartment and the walls glowed blue.

"Sirius?" Harry asked worried.

"Someone tried to breach the wards Harry. Get your cloak and stay under it. If a fight begins I want you to run out of the apartment and to Gringotts. You remember the way right? Stay there till I turn up."

Harry was scared but nodded getting into his cloak after Sirius positioned him behind the wall but close to the door so he could escape as soon as Sirius moved. Sirius himself was between Harry and the door. Whoever was outside would not be able to walk through the wards even with the door open, at least if they held, but better safe than sorry. Sirius cautiously opened the door and rolled his eyes. He lowered his wand and with a quick look at Harry and a sign for him to stay quiet he leaned over the banister and looked at the man sprawled on the floor nursing his head.

"Problems Moony?"

Remus Lupin didn't know if he should glare at or hug the man in front of him. He compromised into awkwardly getting up and complaining. "The wards repelled me."

"Hum, wonder why?" Sirius said nonchalantly.

"Sirius, I-"

"Didn't bother trying to get me a trial, no you didn't. Didn't take care of Harry as both James and I

asked, no you didn't. Didn't even bother to stop by to visit him once in a while, yeah, that's another one you didn't."

"So you have him," Remus said in a mixture of exasperation and relief.

"Have who?" Sirius asked innocently.

"Harry Sirius!"

"Says who?"

Now Remus did glare at him, "You know I haven't seen him and-"

"Dumbledore told me."

"The wards were changed. Only a Potter can change the wards!"

"How do you know I wasn't the result of a love affair between Charlus and mother and Father just-"

"Because you're not Sirius, we both know that!" now Remus was really losing his patience. He missed Sirius. He had never wanted to believe he had betrayed them but the evidence had been overwhelming, hadn't it? A little voice in the back of his head said he should have gone to get the map. That this was the second time he believed others over Sirius. He squashed that voice and focused on the relief he had felt when Dumbledore said Sirius was innocent despite it pointing out that Peter wasn't. Somehow, he'd always known that it made more sense that way.

He wanted to hug and shake Sirius at the same time, but he did not want to get shocked by the wards again and Sirius was conveniently inside the threshold. But before Sirius could say anything else or Remus respond a very well known piece of parchment floated on front of Remus more or less at the height of both Remus' and Sirius's waist and a small finger appeared out of nowhere pointing at a line in the parchment. Sirius frowned at the air and Remus rolled his eyes until he read what was written in the parchment.

*“Mr. Padfoot wants to also state that Mr. Moony is toeing a fine line because, though he has not actively wronged the lines of Prongs, he is getting dangerously close to by inaction.”*

He swallowed. The map was right. When Dumbledore had told him Harry was better off with his relatives because of Blood wards he had just accepted the orders to leave the boy alone.

Dumbledore’s orders. Automatically. So grateful for all Dumbledore had done for him. For allowing him to go to school. But hadn’t James and Sirius done more? Even in death James had provided for him. The day after being notified of James’s death he was also notified from Gringotts of a trust account in his name. An account that would provide him for life. An account that had saved him from starving many times over the years. And he hadn’t said anything about Sirius not having a trial, he knew he wouldn’t be listened to. Probably just be locked up too, but he hadn’t even tried. He had believed in Sirius’s guilt. He swallowed hard and asked something that had been bothering him since he learnt the truth.

“Why didn’t you tell me of the switch? Didn’t you trust me?”

“Considering you didn’t trust me maybe we shouldn’t have. But no,” Sirius heaved a sigh. “They couldn’t torture what you didn’t know out of you Remus. If you got captured you could just let them rift through your memories, if you knew, you’d try to hide it and then they’d torture you. Peter was supposed to go into hiding. Be safe because I was the decoy.”

Remus swallowed hard. He had wanted to believe they hadn’t trusted him so he could justify his inaction but it was worse. They had done it so if he was captured he wouldn’t suffer.

“Are we gonna let him in?” Remus heard a whisper and Sirius sighed frustrated again.

“I told you to stay hidden.”

“But it was Moony.”

“Still. Next time obey me. Come on,” he finished fishing something off the air and a miniature

James Potter appeared out of nowhere. Except when he looked at him Remus could see the green eyes of the baby who had called him Mooye and smiled.

“Okay. But temporarily,” Sirius warned to Remus he said. “You know the drill.” Remus nodded and made a small prick in his finger. “Grab his hand and say “I hereby allow Remus John Lupin one time entrance to these wards,” and he smirked at Remus who glared at him as Harry’s small hand grabbed his and did as Sirius told him. Tentatively Remus put a foot forward and sighed relieved when he wasn’t flung back with an electrical shock.

xx

A/N- Thanks for reviewing!

### Chapter 3 – Sirius' payback

Remus Lupin finished reading the article and threw the paper away with a snort. Sirius was not going to let this one go. He sighed remembering his meeting with Sirius and Harry, he still hadn't been permanently admitted to the wards, and he guessed Sirius would hold that one over his head for a while. Not that Remus could blame him, he was right. Remus had betrayed his and the Potters' trust. He wouldn't forgive himself any time soon. He had just accepted Dumbledore's orders and word that Harry was fine where he was. He didn't even check. He convinced himself Harry would be better off without him and stayed away. Sirius hadn't been satisfied with the answer.

*"Better off?" he had cried taking a step forward in a menacing way. "Better off for who Remus? You or him?"*

*"You know what I'm talking about," Remus had hissed with a furtive look at Harry who had been watching both of them avidly from the couch. The last thing he wanted was for Harry to learn his secret right away.*

*"You know what Remus, someday you're going to have to stop hiding behind Moony," Sirius said flatly and turned on his heels towards Harry who had a completely confused look on his face but did not ask anything, "Our food isn't going to prepare itself. We got a Christmas dinner to prepare," then to Remus he said without looking at him as he stalked back to the kitchen area, which was really only divided from the living room by a counter. "You can stay, that is, if you can brave that much."*

But at least Sirius and Harry hadn't outright rejected him and Sirius had even asked for his help with Harry's education and they had invited him for Christmas dinner.

Harry, oh Harry. Harry seemed to be a bit wary of him, which was understandable with all that had

happened to him, but at the same time he was willing to give him a chance for the sole reason that he had been James's friend, and at times, he thought Sirius hadn't just decked him because of the little boy who sat patiently at his side while Remus tried to apologize for disappearing like that.

At least the boy seemed to trust Sirius, somewhat. He could see he wasn't completely comfortable with the man. He still looked as if he was ready to duck but he would at least sit next to Sirius and trust Sirius's judgment. Considering that in the last few weeks Sirius had been protecting Harry and taking care of him, which was something Remus learned the boy never had, it was understandable why the boy trusted him.

He glanced at the article and winced. Dumbledore was going to get a nasty surprise and Remus didn't envy him. Remus had avoided him the last couple of weeks, not wanting to break Sirius and Harry's confidence. He wrote back to Dumbledore's inquiry on if he had found the two outright lying and saying he had no luck. He picked the newspaper and read Sirius's statement again:

*"Hogwarts should be called Hogwarts Training Camp for Death Eaters. Albus Dumbledore has had the habit of letting children and teenagers run rampant and exert their cruelty freely without the fear of consequences. Why wouldn't they think they could continue so in adulthood? He says they deserve second chances, that they are just children.*

*But children grow up, and if they don't learn right from wrong they will have no problems in just taking what they want regardless of other people's rights. It's not just about punishing them for kicks, it's about giving them boundaries, teaching them to be better people.*

*A fine example of that is the fact that in my school days Severus Snape and his friends, Avery and Mulciber, frequently sent students to the Infirmary with their Dark hexes. Did Dumbledore expel them, discipline them?*

*No. He claimed that if he turned them away or was harsh with them he'd encourage them to join (here Lord Black said You-Know-Who's name) as many of their housemates had. Back then being in*

*Slytherin automatically gave them a free pass despite the fact that the other houses have produced criminals and Death Eaters as well. But apparently, the other houses were tougher, could stand whatever is thrown at them and would always stay good, not the poor delicate Slytherins.*

*Well, where is Snape's mate Mulciber right now? In Azkaban, for torturing Muggles and Wizards alike, for killing. Where did he start? Hogwarts.*

*And Severus Snape, known Death Eater, where is he now? You ask? Once again Dumbledore shielded him from his crimes. He is at Hogwarts where I learned from a reliable source Snape routinely and freely verbally abuses and intimidates his students without any fear of consequences.*

*In the Muggle World Severus Snape would have been sacked long ago. He would probably have been arrested too. But not here, no, because the likes of Albus Dumbledore wants to make sure children learn that human life is not something valuable that should be protected. That they should not feel safe in the hallowed halls of Hogwarts. That they should expect to be attacked, have their property violated at every turn and should not expect any adult to help and protect them.*

*The difference between when I was in school and now is that this time Dumbledore isn't shielding just the Slytherin bullies but an entire school of bullies. Well, I've had enough of that. I am taking the Black and Potter seats on the board of governors and Albus Dumbledore better be prepared because I will not let another generation of Witches and Wizards grow up to be criminals."*

Dumbledore rubbed his temple as he dropped the article on his desk. Sirius had not lied in his intentions. And yesterday he had the first taste at the emergency Board meeting that had been called after Justin Fitch-Fletchley was petrified a couple of days after the start of term.

"I don't understand, you have something petrifying students and not only you haven't administered an antidote to these students but you haven't sent the others home before someone else gets hurt?" the dark haired man had asked.

Dumbledore had been surprised at finding Sirius seated there when he entered the room set aside for Board meetings at Hogwarts. Especially since he had not had the chance to talk to the man yet. He didn't seem to be the only one surprised or even displeased. Lucius Malfoy had been voting in proxy for the Black and Potter seats as well as the Malfoy seat for the last decade because of his marriage to Narcissa Black and apparently was sore at losing both votes back to Sirius.

"We didn't think the situation warranted sending the students home," Dumbledore tried to explain calmly.

"Of course not! Better wait for someone to die first," Sirius said sarcastically and the other board members all looked at him disapprovingly for his tone, though none of them seemed to contest the content of the outburst, just the tone. Albus continued as if he hadn't been interrupted.

"And the mandrakes needed for the antidote are not ready yet."

"Are you telling me that Hogwarts can't spare the coins to buy the ingredients? The Hogwarts mandrakes might not be ready but the Apothecary in Diagon Alley grows various batches all year long and will certainly have properly matured mandrakes to sell. Or is Hogwarts reluctance to spare the money for the ingredients due to the two petrified students being Muggleborn? Maybe if a pureblood gets petrified you'll finally decide to stop being cheap."

Dumbledore had visibly bristled at the implications of Sirius's accusations. Yes, the boy was angry, but to say that he, Albus Dumbledore, was being prejudiced against Muggleborns was too much. Dumbledore just did not want to ruffle the feathers of whoever was helping Tom Riddle open the chambers once again. He knew quite well who the current self proclaimed Heir of Slytherin was and he also knew he needed Harry to deal with him. After all, the boy had been prophesized to be the one able to vanquish Voldemort. It was better to deal with it here in a controlled situation. Making Tom irritable by thinking his actions were having no results would not help and then Albus might never learn how he did it.

And the students were perfectly safe, though petrified. But they were safe. To his surprise Sirius let out the tiniest satisfied smirk. As if he knew exactly what Albus was thinking which he had to remind himself, was impossible. Sirius leaned forward and said in a dangerous quiet voice.

“This is a school Albus. Not you personal recruitment and training camp. Don’t think I didn’t realize why you brought a dangerous artifact that had been perfectly safe for over six hundred years into the school. Who you wanted to lure and who you wanted to test,” he then threw a coin bag on the table with a sneer. “If Hogwarts can’t afford the ingredients there you have it. Those petrified students better be out and about by dinner time, Albus, or I’m calling a vote to dismiss you of your duties.”

Albus looked around the table expecting the others to cry in outrage, well, all except Malfoy and his cronies, but was surprised to see nods of agreement from the other Governors. Even Augusta Longbottom looked at him seriously and said:

“Young Sirius has a point Albus. Many things have been happening at Hogwarts that shouldn’t be allowed and maybe Hogwarts needs a Head whose sole interest is the children and nothing else. Maybe you’ve been stretching yourself too thin. Please prove me wrong. Find the culprit or send the students home.”

Albus had been speechless as the governors rose and left. Never, in all his years as headmaster had they so blatantly threatened to sack him. Not even Malfoy had the guts to try. And he would soon find out that was not to be his only surprise.

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### ***Hogwarts students arrested and charged***

*In an unimaginable turn of events Aurors arrived at Hogwarts this afternoon arresting four*

*Ravenclaw students and delivering subpoenas to almost every other Hogwarts’ student save one.*

*When questioned, Amelia Bones stated:*

*“One of the parents pressed charges against the students. The four who were arrested physically attacked this student and the rest either threatened him with physical harm or destroyed his property, or were witnesses to these actions. The students shall present themselves on the specified date for questioning at Aurors Headquarters from which point we can have a better idea of what happened and decide if a trial is warranted and who is implicated. Failure to comply will incur in the punishment foreseeable by law.”*

*When asked who the parent was the Head of the DMLE was not forthcoming but this reporter did not have to wonder much as the parent in question came forward with a statement himself.*

*“The school did not take any disciplinary action to what can be considered by our law as criminal activity by the part of the students. Therefore I was left no other choice than to resort to the Legal System. People are not allowed to harm others and I will teach my godson so. And the first step for him to understand this so he can grow up to be a good person and a law abiding citizen is to know that if someone hurts him there will be consequences. That people cannot break the law and just walk. How can he learn not to hurt others if he sees those who hurt him go unpunished?”*

*Sirius Black stated in no uncertain terms that he will ensure that all aspects of the law are seen to. Having been the victim of a gross miscarriage of justice Lord Black did confess to this reporter that he would have preferred that the Headmaster of Hogwarts School or Witchcraft and Wizardry had taken disciplinary action and that he did not have to introduce these children to what he calls “Our very flawed legal system”. He ensures that he does not wish any miscarriage of justice to happen. He will make sure that the accused be prosecuted by the extent of the law and only the law and that their rights to defend themselves will be upheld, but in a direct quote from Lord Black “That does not mean that they will not have to face the consequences of their actions.”*

*Mr. Black also stated that that is not the only legal action he will take:*

*"I have had the displeasure of finding out that my godson spent the last decade in the hands of child abusers. I intend to press charges on them too but being Muggles I will resort to the Muggle legal system for them. What I am curious about is why no one at Hogwarts took any action to remove a child from an abusive situation despite the fact that said child was under the care of the Hogwarts Medi-witch at least twice and that his acceptance letter from Hogwarts was addressed to "The cupboard under the stairs" in a house with two empty bedrooms. That he was dressed in rags when it is well known by the Headmaster, seeing as he was the one to take care of the practical aspects of Harry's placement, that his relatives received a sizeable sum every month for his up-keeping. A sum that would provide for the entire family of four comfortably and not just Harry. Last time I checked educators and School Nurses are obligated by law to report such suspicions to Wizarding Children's Service. In my tenure as a student at Hogwarts I learned of a few cases of students who had been removed from their homes and placed in foster care for this very same reason. So, why the breach in protocol for this particular child?"*

*When questioned about the whereabouts of his godson he had no comments but it is the belief of this paper that Lord Black is indeed in contact with young Mister Potter.*

Sirius read the article satisfied though he winced a bit at the end. He knew Harry had not been pleased at his situation with the Dursleys being published like this but Sirius had told him in no uncertain terms that what the Dursleys had done to him was wrong and they had to press charges. That Harry should have been removed from their care long ago.

The mind Healer he had contacted, Psychologist they were called, which he had been pleased to find out was the sister of a muggleborn witch who Remus had known so they could speak freely, had also told Sirius it was important for Harry to confront his abusers. See them be punished for what they'd done so he could understand that it had not been his fault. Sirius also knew that once the Muggle relatives of the Boy-Who-Lived were sued for child abuse, in the Muggle world or not,

the press would have a field day, so it was best to release the news on their terms.

Harry had made his opinion of the fact clear by the silent treatment he was doling out since the Prophet arrived that morning. Sirius looked at the boy who was doing the homework Remus had assigned him (as angry as he was with Remus he did have to admit that hiring him as a tutor for Harry was the right move. Remus just had a professor way on him). Harry looked up feeling watched, narrowed his eyes and scowled and then turned back to his homework turning around a bit so that his back was turned to Sirius. Well, according to the mind healer, this was a good sign. Meant Harry trusted him enough to show his displeasure.

He sighed and thought of the students. He knew that most of them would just get away with a slap on the wrist. They were minors and what they had done was a misdemeanor, not to mention the fact that the vast majority was guilty of just standing and watching without doing anything, and thus, giving their silent support. Only a few had actually done something but he hoped the shock of having to go through the whole process would teach them some kind of lesson.

Not the four Ravenclaws though. They weren't just of age but the hexes they had used were vicious and they had been brutal. Harry was lucky he dodged fast enough or he would be dead. Attempted murder was what they were being charged with as Madam Bones had been horrified when watching the pensieve memory.

Turns out those Ravenclaw weren't just attacking Harry for being a parselmouth either. They had just been waiting for a good excuse to mete out the revenge for their father's imprisonment and one for their older brother's death since the year before but hadn't had a chance till then. Two of them had Death Eater fathers who had been arrested, one by Auror James Potter and the other because he was named after Voldemort's downfall. One of the Ravenclaws' older brother had been killed by a Death Eater with the Killing Curse a few days before Harry survived it and he had been furious at a baby surviving the curse when his brother hadn't. The fact that he allied himself

with the sons of the very people who killed his brother seemed to be a minor detail for him. The fourth Ravenclaw had just followed his friend and the other two. But hadn't been less vicious just because he didn't have a cause. Sirius actually was disgusted by him the most, he just went because he thought beating a little kid up would be fun. The other three, misguided and sick as they were, at least had a reason.

Sirius watched Harry as he wrote on the parchment and pondered what to do. It wasn't healthy for Harry to continue this isolation they had both created. No matter how much Sirius liked to be here with his godson. In their bubble.

Harry hadn't wanted to go to Muggle school. He had even said yes at first and Sirius had enrolled him but on the actual day of the start of term Harry had been petrified and wouldn't let go of Sirius's hand to go inside the school. Sirius's resolve to take him back home was made when Harry, who rarely initiated physical contact and who had scowled when Sirius insisted on holding his hand when outside despite Harry's age (lest he lose Harry in the crowd), grabbed him in a desperate hug and begged Sirius to go home. Sirius had then agreed to do so and when Remus arrived for their afterschool lesson he went back to the school and explained the situation. Saying Harry had been attacked at his old school and had not recovered yet. That he would arrange for homeschooling instead.

Watching Harry Sirius wondered if magically healing the wounds was such a good thing. Physically Harry had been completely healed by the Gringotts healer in a matter of minutes. But emotionally he was still hurt. The Psychologist had said that sometimes that made it harder for Harry to face what he went through since he can just pretend it hadn't happened.

Right now Harry was completely comfortable only with him. After the holidays when Remus came to see them and Harry had gotten used to Remus, Sirius was able to leave him alone with Remus, but he knew the boy was always on edge when that happened. And he only stayed alone with the

Psychologist because he knew Sirius was sitting in the next room waiting for him.

Sirius bit his lip and slowly slid down to the floor. Pretending to look the other way he noisily moved with his bum towards Harry. When Harry looked up from his spot Sirius made a point of trying to innocently look around as he whistled. When Harry turned his head down again Sirius moved again till he was right next to Harry who turned his head up and pursed his lip in a manner way to reminiscent of his mother for Sirius's comfort and a look that clearly stated he knew what Sirius was up to and was not amused.

Sirius innocently fidgeted with a piece of parchment and asked "Whacha doing?"

"I think you know," Harry said flatly and Sirius leaned his head into Harry's line of view. "You can't be angry at me forever. It was for your own good."

"Humph, watch me."

Sirius didn't. Instead he transformed and Padfoot turned over with his paws facing up and tongue lolling out in a clear doggy plead.

"That's not going to work," Harry said sternly and crossed his arms. Sirius didn't move from his position and neither did Harry for a good five minutes until Harry finally sighed and huffed at the same time.

"Fine, but this does not mean I forgive you," Harry said as he started scratching Padfoot's tummy who barked happily.

xx

A/N- Thanks for your reviews!

I wanted to warn you that I've decide to have a slash couple. I don't want to say who as to not give out spoilers. But I wanted to give you fair warning so that if you don't like to read slash you won't

be surprised later on when they appear. You know me, I don't write any explicit sex scenes or anything, it's just the fact that they are a couple and that their relationship will be discussed.

People have been asking about updates, as I said this is a WIP. What is up is what I have written. I will try my best to update at least once a week but that will depend on time and inspiration. But I can give no guarantees.

#### **Chapter 4- The Headmaster reassesses**

He was at yet another Board meeting. Those seemed to be happening at a higher frequency ever since Sirius joined them. But this time he was confident. He had good news for them and since the culprits on Harry's attack had been arrested and would be tried soon he hoped young Sirius would be more amenable to bring the boy back to Hogwarts. "As you requested, the students have been given the antidote and I am happy to announce that I am confident that I have stopped the attacks."

And so he was. It had been a stroke of luck. Mr. Filch had come into his office raging about students flooding the halls and had dropped a book that apparently one of the students saw fit to dispose of in the out-of-order second floor girls' bathroom. At first Albus had thought nothing of the matter and had dismissed Filch with platitudes of finding the culprit. It was later, when examining the book closer that he saw something that made him freeze. Inside the blank book were the words: *Property of T.M.Riddle.*

After careful examination of what he had previously thought was a blank journal and many detection charms he came to the horrifying conclusion that it was a Horcrux. Now, it wasn't all just luck. Albus had been trying to figure out how Voldemort had survived for years, since, thanks to Severus's Dark Mark, he had known the man had not indeed died. And the creation of Horcruxes had been a possibility. A strong one. One that Albus had been investigating thoroughly.

He also realized that said Horcrux must have been controlling whoever had been writing in it and they must have started fighting it and tried to get rid of the journal. Which Dumbledore agreed was a wise move, and with controlled Fiendfyre he proceeded to do the same.

This explained much, how Voldemort hadn't died when hit by the killing curse, but it also posed even more questions. Was this the only one? Albus didn't think so. Voldemort seemed to become

more unhinged with time and less human. Probably as he fractured his soul.

This also brought a horrible realization to Albus, or more of a confirmation. He knew Harry and Voldemort had a connection. He had sensed the dark magic concentrating on Harry's scar when he had scanned the boy that fateful night, when he had Hagrid bring him to Hogwarts where he had stayed until Albus managed to erect the protection spells and blood wards around Privet Drive number four. The boy had felt Voldemort's closeness last year and Albus had known it. That was why he orchestrated the detention in the forest. To be sure it had been Voldemort.

But he didn't believe Voldemort made Harry into a Horcrux on purpose which led to the belief that his soul had already been so fractured that it broke unintentionally.

"Oh," said Lucius Malfoy in his customary drawling voice, "And have you apprehended the culprit?"

Dumbledore sighed internally, not the least because he had been sure Lucius must have had something to do with the issue. "Alas, no. But I believe whoever was behind the attacks was being controlled by means of an enchanted diary that belonged to Voldemort," the expected hisses were heard, except from Sirius, and funnily enough Alexander Nott. Despite his youngest son being a Death Eater and Nott having been a schoolmate of Voldemort he never joined the man. He never seemed to think much of the man despite being a traditional pureblood who didn't like the mixing of Magical folks with Muggles. "So as you can see, they bear no blame. And they did begin to fight the possession and disposed of the diary which is how I found it."

"So," Sirius started and Albus cringed. He so missed the times when the boy would just take his word. "You mean you got lucky and you have no intention of finding out who actually opened the Chamber. Don't you think that if you are right they might need help with the aftereffects of the possession? And that is if you are right and they weren't acting of their own accord, a willing participant who just got cold feet. But let's say, for argument's sake, that you are right. Which still leaves how and who smuggled one of Voldemort's school things into Hogwarts and is therefore

accountable for the attacks. This matter is far from closed but I do agree that maybe the school can stay open, given you maintain the extra protection measures enforced during the attacks until all is clarified.”

Murmurs of assent were heard around and Dumbledore made a mental note to put up extra protection measures before they found out he hadn’t put any. “Yes, of course,” he agreed with a cordial smile masking his discomfort.

“Good,” Sirius nodded. “Now to the matter of your teachers’ substandard-“

“Excuse me Sirius,” Dumbledore interrupted. “My teacher-“

“Have been leaving a lot to be desired for a long time,” Sirius stated flatly. “The Heads of House, for instance, have not been performing duties outlined in the Bylaws for a long time. At least since I’ve been in school maybe even longer. But that is a matter for later as it is not so urgent. The urgent matter, considering the OWL and NEWT students need a lot of help catching up, are Binns, Lockhart and Snape.”

Dumbledore put on his most grandfatherly reproachful look and fixed Sirius, “Sirius, you shouldn’t let childhood grudges dictate your work as a governor.”

“I’m not the one letting childhood grudges interfere with my work. Notice Snape wasn’t the only teacher I mentioned. But since you did bring him up, let’s start there. Snape is a potions genius, I’ll give him that. He has made many contributions to Potions studies in the last decade or so, but that he can *do* does not mean he can *teach*. He is an awful teacher who bullies and intimidates his students and does not teach. And I did my homework Dumbledore, before you accuse me of bias.”

“Young Sirius brought several disturbing facts to our attention Albus,” Nott said. “Facts that were corroborated by my grandchildren. Two of which have already graduated and one who is still in school. All Slytherins.”

Nodding at Nott Sirius continued, "I have been going through the school scores for all classes.

Hogwarts has an average of around 40 students per class year. Potions NEWT classes however have an average of 3 students, on some very few occasions he had 5 students, but never has he had more."

"Severus is very strict. He only accepts students with Outstanding on their OWLS--"

"And yet he doesn't prepare them to achieve said standard," Augusta Longbottom cut him.

"According to the OWL scores over the years since he has been teaching the Hogwarts Potions' OWL average is Dreadful to Acceptable, against Slughorn's Exceeds Expectation average. But the funny thing Sirius brought to our attention Albus is that, despite that low average on their OWLs and despite the only 3 *official* NEWT students, an average of around 30 Hogwarts' students takes their potions NEWTs every year. After all, to take the exam you don't have to be enrolled in the class. You just need an A on your OWL, and Potions is a requirement for most careers. And you want to know the other startling discovery?" No, he didn't. "The Hogwarts Potions NEWT has an average of EE. Care to explain that phenomenon?"

"Er," he had of course been aware of that, but since the students were managing and he needed to keep Severus on the position he had let it be.

"I will," Amelia Bones stated. "After interviewing several current and former students we found out that after doing so abysmally on their OWLs the students seek outside help. Many of them having to retake their OWLs at the Ministry on their sixth year to be able to take their NEWTs on time. And it is the tutors these students hire who bring the average up."

"I believe," Sirius said picking up one of the parchments in front of him. "That Mr. Ryan, a trainee healer who had an A on his OWLs and an O on his NEWTS exemplified this situation perfectly. He said and I quote, '*Before Mr. Wyatt started tutoring me I had no idea why I had to stir this way or that, how the ingredients interacted with each other. Snape just puts a recipe on the board and*

*expects us to brew while he hovers over us. I found out later that the students who manage to get on his NEWT class were all being tutored with outside help since first year. Mostly students with older siblings who already knew the drill.’ And before you complain of bias, Mr. Ryan was a Slytherin. Though I have a stack of interviews from students from all houses who pretty much say the same. Even the students who did get into the NEWT class said they needed a tutor to pass their NEWT. Here is a recently graduated Ravenclaw.”*

*“I had a tutor for my entire Hogwarts career. My older sister was a sixth year when I entered and my parents already knew I wouldn’t get into NEWT class without help. They thought it was Snape’s way of filtering out the potions geniuses, you know? Whoever gets in must really love potions. Man, were they surprised when I entered the NEWT class and found out Snape is just the same as before. All I know about potions I learned from my tutor.”*

Dumbledore was now frantically trying to think of arguments to save Snape’s position when Sirius continued.

“As I said, Snape is a potions genius. That doesn’t mean he can teach. He is more suited to a lab where he can be as crabby as he wants. As a teacher he is doing damage.”

“I agree that Severus has a strict way of teaching, he expects his students to research for themselves as he did-“

“In his mastery,” Sirius said. “Slughorn taught us potions the right way. These are children not adults. They need to be taught why they do things and how to research so that when they do get to the stage where a teacher only leads the student in the right direction and expects the student to find the answers on their own they know how to.”

“Here, here,” Nott said. “I don’t remember you entering a room and expecting your students to be proficient at a transfiguration you hadn’t shown them Albus. But maybe my memory has become faulty since I was your student. Did you?”

"No, I didn't," Albus said uncomfortably, "What do you suggest?" he asked the man defeated noticing that Malfoy had remained uncharacteristically silent during the whole debate. He knew why. Malfoy was thinking that if Snape lost his position next to Albus Voldemort would not be pleased. Nott's youngest son probably wouldn't be either and Albus wondered if Nott Sr. knew that and didn't care or if he just didn't get involved at all in that aspect of his son's life.

"Replacing Snape would be nice," Sirius said simply. "But I do realize that the Potion's Master position is not one easy to fill, especially not with so little of term left. But we can't leave the OWL students hanging either just because the NEWT ones are covered."

"What if he improves his teaching method?" Lucius finally offered his opinion and the other governors snorted. "Sirius said so himself, Severus is a potions genius who needs to be able to impart that knowledge."

Sirius seemed to be considering the option. He looked at Dumbledore and smirked with a knowing look, "Fine. Probation then. He keeps the students through first to fourth year and the sixth years and we ask Slughorn if he'd be willing to temporarily take the OWL and NEWT students to bring them up to speed for their exams until the situation is resolved. I suggest though Albus that you start looking for a replacement, just in case. Oh, and the school shouldn't suffer for Snape, which means whatever we need to pay Slughorn gets cut off of Snape's salary. After all it's for his benefit that we are bringing another teacher in to do his job for him. All in favor?"

The motion was passed and Albus gulped. Severus would not be pleased at all.

"Now Binns. I don't believe we can wait to deal with him. The man should have retired years ago. He hasn't been teaching anything new since he died and his OWL scores are even worse than Snape's."

"No arguments here," Lucius said.

“That can’t wait though. The OWL students need to be brought up to speed and I’ve noticed the NEWT students take a similar approach as with Snape. Those interested on a NEWT sought outside help. We already only have a few months to help these students,” Sirius explained and in no time Dumbledore was given a week to replace both Binns and Lockhart who had been deemed an incompetent buffoon.

“DADA is too vital a subject to have incompetent teachers,” Apollo McGonagall, Minerva’s brother, said firmly

“I know, but I have been unable to keep a teacher for more than a year. There is a curse that was placed in the position-“

“Then change the position,” Amelia said simply. “Cancel the DADA class and call it some other way but find a decent teacher. The amount of Auror trainees I get every year who don’t know the basics is astounding! They were lucky they managed to pass their NEWTs on their own but they are lacking in so many other areas. I pretty much take them on on potential more than skill nowadays or I’d be left without Aurors and I waste valuable training time bringing them up to speed with things they should already know!”

xxx

“I asked Professor McGonagall yesterday, she says she doesn’t have any official news.”

“Do you think the Prophet is right and he’s with Black?”

“I don’t know,” she bit her lip and voiced the question both of them were wondering. “Do you think he’ll ever come back?”

“Would you?” he asked and she shook her head. No she wouldn’t. How could they have been so stupid? The moment she heard the hissing she let logic fly out the window and only remembered what she had read in *The Rise and Fall of the Dark Arts*. Logic, later, pointed out that the snake was

about to bite Justin and that after Harry hissed it stopped. It was obvious he was helping and yet, she forgot all about logic, all about the fact that she knew Harry better than that. That she had seen Harry want to fight to stop You-Know-Who despite his young age. She didn't even have the excuse that she had been raised fearing Parselmouths that Ron had. And instead of helping their friend they just stood by not knowing what to do and scared to speak up. Scared they would be attacked too.

Sure they didn't join the others in burning his things or hurting him but they didn't stop them either. Unbeknownst to her Ron was thinking the exact same things, how he could have let his friend down that way.

On Saturday morning, when the older students had left to Hogsmead, they had started looking for Harry but found no trace of him. They had thought of telling a teacher they couldn't find Harry but were scared the teachers would force Harry back to the Tower, and wherever he was he was safer than in the Tower.

They had already realized they had been stupid pretty much that same night. But facing the entire student body had been scary. Ron snorted, Neville had been the only one who hadn't been afraid to say he thought everyone was a bunch of idiots and point out that Harry probably saved Justin. Neville, who was scared of his own shadow, wasn't scared of standing up for what was right. He had paid the price though. The other students hadn't tried to hurt him like they had Harry but only Ron and Hermione, and the Twins sometimes, had been talking to Neville since. Well, at least until they had been all hauled in for questioning by the Aurors. After the questioning and the articles that came out in the Prophet the students were all singing a different tune. How they knew that being a Parselmouth didn't make Harry evil all along. After all, Harry saved the Philosopher Stone the previous year. He couldn't be evil.

Stupid two faced gits. He shuddered as he remembered his interrogation and figured theirs had

been the same. To make matters easier the Aurors decided to interrogate the students at Hogwarts instead of their previous idea of making everyone go to the DMLE. After the first batch of students showed up escorted by their Head of House they realized that it was impractical. He didn't know if it was because it was Harry or if it was because of the noise Sirius Black was making but the Head of the DMLE herself made a point of interrogating the students herself, and let her displeasure at so many young witches and wizards letting their prejudice cloud their judgment known too. And believe me, that wasn't a lady Ron wanted to ever cross. She was scarier than Snape on his worst day. Susan Bones, who apparently was her niece and because of that had been interrogated by both Madam Bones and the Head Auror, had approached them the next day asking if they knew how to reach Harry. She had a thick envelope and her eyes were blotchy. She said she needed to send an apology letter.

"Maybe we could write to him?" he asked hopefully but Hermione shook her head.

"I think what we did needs an apology in person."

"I know, but we don't know where he is."

"I know," she said gloomily and stared out of the window of the common room.

xxx

"Sirius, may I have a word?" Albus asked at the end of the meeting. He was sporting quite the headache and already had the task of finding two competent teachers in a week and create the paperwork for a new position. He confessed he never thought of that as a way to get around the curse. He hoped it worked.

Sirius shrugged and followed Dumbledore to his office sitting down in one of the chairs offered to him in front of the desk. He was surprised to see Dumbledore sitting in the chair next to him instead of behind his desk. Well, at least there was a chance the Headmaster had realized he

wasn't a little boy to be scolded anymore.

"I understand your resentment and I do agree Severus's classroom manners are lacking but you need to understand that--"

"He can't play double spy without a position close to you. Oh, I do understand that Albus. But you need to stop paying for this war of yours with innocent children. If you need him close to you make him your secretary but do not sacrifice a whole generation's future for your war. Bad enough the childhood you already stole."

And there was the problem, Albus thought to himself, "How is Harry doing?" he asked and at the stony silence he was met with he said, "Sirius, everyone realized he is with you. Where else would you have gotten some of the information you have, or Harry's pensieve memories?"

"Oh, you mean the fact that you allowed a teacher who was willingly sharing his body with Voldemort within Hogwarts? Or how about you sending eleven-year-olds into the Forbidden Forest too find whoever was killing unicorns, or that--"

"I needed to be sure Voldemort was behind those attacks and Harry seems to have a unique connection with--"

Sirius smirked as if he had known something Albus didn't. "Yes, unique connection. Tell me Albus. Harry tells me he was under Pomfrey's care at least twice, so how is it that the Healer I hired to do a full check-up on him found not only obvious signs of abuse and malnutrition but also quite an interesting fact about Harry's scar that Pomfrey didn't?" Albus breath hitched for a second but he hoped Sirius hadn't noticed. No such luck as the smirk grew. "Care to share anything? I bet that little journal has something to do with it. No. Silence. Well, the Healers I have on the case think they may have a way to dispose of the foreign presence in Harry's scar."

"That is not possible, only the destruction of the vessel--" he realized he had said too much when

Sirius's eyes narrowed and he hissed leaning forward dangerously:

"No one will be hurting Harry even if I couldn't get rid of the Horcrux- Oh I know Albus, one of the perks of coming from a family such as mine," he finished leaning back again and continued studying his hand instead of looking at Albus, as if he was remembering something far away. "I never believed in that prophecy and will do everything to make sure that adults take care of the problem, not a child," he turned to look Albus in the eye, "You can work with me or against me. But think on this, right now Voldemort is a disembodied spirit, have you thought of what might happen if we get rid of all the Horcrux he has made? Because I'm sure there wasn't just that one. But tell me, what are you waiting for? You've had eleven years more than I did to figure all this out and act, what have you been doing? Waiting for Harry to grow up and do your job for you?"

And with that Sirius stalked away from his office and Dumbledore realized that had been exactly what he had been doing. He sat down heavily on his chair left with a lot to ponder.

Xx

A/N- JKR never really explained how the governors work and besides Malfoy being one and there being 12, we never heard anything more. When coming up with how they worked I decided that as the Wizarding world seems to place so much stock on family lines and such the governor seats would have been established by the founders and inherited through time. So I had to come up with twelve pureblood families and I tried to use some of the known characters. So the families would be the following: Potter, Black, Malfoy, Nott, Longbottom, Bones, Smith, McGonagall, Greengrass, Abbot, Corner, and Parkinson.

Off course, I couldn't have a teacher in the board so the McGonagall seat would be taken by her brother.

I also devised that there would always be twelve seats, meaning if for some reason two line converged then the Head of the Family wouldn't be the only one to occupy a seat. The second in

line would do too. (Or else I figured that with the inbreeding the seats would have already been diminished to one after a thousand years). The only reason why Malfoy was voting by proxy for three seats and then Sirius is for two is because, Sirius was never convicted and therefore never lost his post and Harry has the Potter seat, but by being underage, his guardian needs to vote for him.

Thanks for your reviews!

## **Chapter 5- Decisions need to be made**

“We need to talk,” the silver bird said and disappeared.

“What was that?” Harry asked in wonder.

“A Patronus,” Sirius explained. “It’s a type of shield against creatures called Dementors and can be used for communication. See a Patronus is unique to every person and can’t be replicated, so you can guarantee the message isn’t a fake. That was Dumbledore’s.”

Harry’s face fell at this and he asked quietly as he sat next to Sirius on the couch, “Will I have to go back?”

“Only if you want to,” he ruffled Harry’s hair. Sirius hoped he didn’t though. Not right now. With what he had learned about Hogwarts of the last few decades he wasn’t sure it was the best choice anymore. Apparently things had been going downhill since Voldemort’s first rise. With Dumbledore and the teachers being more worried with the war than with school.

He was astounded to find out in the Bylaws that the Head of Houses were expected to have head counts every night after curfew, bi-monthly meetings with each of their students to follow their progress and a weekly House meeting to see if there were any inter-house issues. That sure hadn’t happened during his student years or he and his friends would have been caught out of bed at least once a month, most times more. And he never had a meeting about his school progress. Detentions, he had many. Scolding from McGonagall, he lost count, but never had she discussed his school progress. Most Gryffindors managed their studies on their own and he found out that the other houses had done so too.

Sirius looked at one of the complaints from the father of a first year who went back home on Christmas with most of her things missing. How did Flitwick let that kind of bullying within his own house go on? With students from different houses that was normal, maybe even expected despite

needing action too. But within the house. Where the girl should feel safe, where Harry should have felt safe?

He hated to admit this but from the records, despite being an atrocious teacher, Snape was the best, or maybe the least worse Head of House. He at least did take the head counts and didn't allow bullying within his house. From what the former students he interviewed said, Snape expected the Slytherins to show a united front. But he did not have the monthly or weekly meetings or else he would have noticed his own students' abysmal grades in Potions.

He looked at Harry and asked seriously, "Do you want to go back?"

Harry shrugged, "I miss the school and having friends but," he scrunched his nose and bit his lip as if he was afraid of saying it out loud, "I'm scared of going back."

Sirius heart squeezed at Harry saying he missed having friends. He knew Harry thought that his friends hated him. He had received an apology letter from a girl named Susan Bones but Sirius knew Harry hadn't been close to her. She wasn't the one Harry wanted back in his life and Sirius wished he could fix that for Harry, that he could find out what happened and fix it, but he knew from experience that friends needed to work things out without parents forcing them or else things wouldn't go back to normal.

He pulled Harry into a one armed hug. "I'm working to make sure you don't have to be scared if you ever want to go back. But I want you to be happy, wherever you are."

"I'm happy here with you," Harry said with a smile and Sirius felt all kinds of warm inside, "and Moony," the little sneaky bugger added with the most innocent look. "He's very nice. I feel bad with him having to prick his finger every time he comes," Harry finished making puppy eyes at Sirius. The gall, Sirius had showed him those puppy eyes!

Far from London, in a castle, in a dungeon, an apprehensive headmaster was delivering the ruling of the last Board meeting to his Potions Master, and said Potions Master was not pleased with his new situation.

“Repeat that,” he said curtly and Dumbledore felt that maybe coming to speak with the man in his potions lab was not the smartest move. There were knives about for crying out loud.

“The Board of Governors feels you need to change your way of teaching. That you actually have to explain things to the students and be less, er, abrasive. They have decided you will be on probation-“

“You mean Black thinks that and he is getting what he wants-“

“No Severus,” Dumbledore sighed. “I’ve been fending off complaints about you for years. I’ve been telling you for years that you need to change. Sirius is just the first Board member who didn’t just accept my word for things and went to dig out information for himself, and when presented with the information the other governors could not fail to see what everyone else has! You’re an awful teacher!”

“Oh, you think so?” Snape sneered, “Well I never wanted this post anyway. I only applied because-“

“Voldemort wanted you to spy on me, I know, and if you want to be able to say you kept your position you are going to have to shape up or we’ll have to figure something else.”

Snape’s nostrils flared and he crossed his arm looking murderously at Dumbledore.

“And if I do not wish to change my ways?”

“You’ll lose your post at the end of term and I will be expected to have a new Potions Master for next year,” Dumbledore sighed and said simply. “Look Severus, think about what you want to do before you react. We might come up with another way to make it look like you are in my favor but

this is the best one. You know that. This doesn't just give you access to me but to Harry and you know Voldemort will want that."

"If I start favoring the brat, who by the way is just as arrogant as his father, lazy, and..." he faltered with the look he received and continued his previous line of thought, "The Dark Lord will not believe I am on his side."

"Lucius was at the meeting. You don't need to favor Harry or anyone else. Just be fair, to all of them. Lucius will be able to vouch that you had no other choice. He was the one to suggest you be given a chance to change."

Snape just glared at Dumbledore and Dumbledore shook his head sadly, "Think about it. You have until the end of term. From now on you will be teaching first through fourth year and sixth year. Horace will take over your OWL and NEWT classes. I've already spoken to him. He's accepted to come and get paid only for those hours even if it doesn't reach the minimum wage. Those hours will be deducted from your salary."

"WHAT?" Snape shrieked.

"The Board decided so, and between you and me, if you had listened to me a long time ago Horace wouldn't need to come anywhere near Hogwarts," Albus finished with a sharp tone and turned to flee-er-walk out of the room.

xxx

"This is so good," Harry said as he took another bite of the pizza he was holding. Sirius smiled from the other side of the table. They were on their weekly outing. Sirius had decided that Harry needed it. First, so he could see what normal families did and second, to interact with the world outside their bubble. So, after meeting Dumbledore while Harry was in classes with Remus, he had taken Harry out for Pizza. And a little celebration.

Dumbledore had finally decided to work with him instead of around him. They had talked a lot about the Horcruxes and Dumbledore shared what he knew. He had produced a few memories from a House-elf, one of his own and a couple of memories that were about the Gaunt family, who apparently had been Voldemort's family. No wonder the man was deranged. He of course didn't understand a lot that was said, since they were speaking Parseltongue, but what interested them the most was the items that had been pointed out. A cup from Hufflepuff, a ring from the Peverells and a locket from Slytherin. Sirius had shivered once he realized that James had been a direct descendant from one of the three famous Peverell brothers too. The youngest. But he soothed himself by remind himself that as small and inbred as the Wizarding World was, most half and purebloods were related.

"I know, your mum introduced us to pizza. At first we had been very skeptical, it looked so greasy. But I have to admit to have fallen in love at first bite."

"Me too," Harry said and Sirius's smile faltered a bit at the reminder that Harry had never had a Pizza. He shoved the thought aside not wanting to think of the Dursleys. That case was going slow since they didn't have actual evidence of the abuse. The Healer's report wouldn't be admissible in Muggle court and they were having a hard time finding someone who would speak up against the Dursleys. Apparently Vernon had ties with important people in the community and people were scarred of what might happen to them.

"You have to leave a bit of topping to eat the crust with. It tastes better that way, see," he said showing Harry how his crust still had a thin slice of cheese and sauce and taking a humongous bite off the crust. Harry tried to imitate but his mouth was considerably smaller and he ended up smearing sauce all over his face. He only protested a little bit when Sirius took a napkin to clean his face up.

xxx

On mid April Remus was surprised when he entered the flat (Sirius had finally conceded for Harry to grant him permanent permission) and on the counter where he and Harry worked he found the boy arranging a tray with tea and sandwiches next to his text books. He looked at Sirius who was studiously ignoring him in favor of whatever paperwork he was dealing with over the couch and coffee table. Sirius had decided to take an active role as Lord Black and was taking ownership of every and any position the title granted him. He was determined that what happened to him and Harry could not happen again.

He had personally supervised the trials of the students who were charged to make sure every aspect of the law was followed using the Black seat in the Wizengamot.

The four boys who had attacked Harry were current residents of Azkaban and would stay there for a very long time.

Gryffindor house, or at least the students that were deemed to have been active participants of destroying Harry's property and not just bystanders, were ordered to pay Harry back for every item they destroyed (which was quite a heavy considering Harry had a state of the art broomstick).

Remus had been shocked but pleased to know that they weren't going to be allowed to share the expenses. Each student had to pay the full value of Harry's destroyed property. Their lawyers tried to argue that that meant Harry would receive many times more what was destroyed but the Wizengamot was adamant. Each student was responsible for their individual action. They made the decision to destroy Harry's things alone and therefore they had to face the consequences individually too. They shouldn't be allowed to share the sentence just because they were many. The values had been deposited directly to Harry's trust fund.

The students who had conspired to stop Harry from getting food were sentenced to community service during the summer. Helping out at St. Mungo's. Seeing firsthand what being denied food does to a person.

The teachers were another matter all together. The DMLE had decided that since they hadn't actively known what the other students were doing until they realized Harry was missing they couldn't be deemed criminally responsible. But the faculty had been deemed negligent and the Wizengamot ordered Hogwarts Board of Governors to take disciplinary action. The Board was already currently making a thorough investigation of everything that had been going on in the school to decide the best course of action. They had been given until the end of term to pass on their ruling. Dumbledore, who had to excuse himself from the Wizengamot for the proceedings due to conflict of interest, accepted all the decisions without faltering, almost resigned and Sirius had been pleased to see, accepting.

"Hi there Harry," Remus said approaching the counter. "What's this?" he finished as he pulled the stool to sit.

"It's Green tea. It's really good for colds sir. I looked it up," Harry said eagerly peering at Remus with a clinical eye.

"Oh, er colds?" Remus asked confused.

"Yeah, well. You had to go away on business again," Harry said and paused as Sirius heavily dropped one of the law books he had been reading on the coffee table. Remus ignored him. Sirius should really get a proper table for them to work instead of using the coffee table. He could go use the perfectly good desk in Harry's room too. "And every time you go off on business you come back looking like death warmed over so I made this to help you get better," he finished happily and Remus was touched by Harry's thoughtfulness. He accepted the tea and almost choked on it when Harry continued. "I think you shouldn't go away on that business anymore. You should tell whoever hired you you have another job. It's not good for you." Even as busy as he was spluttering and having a worried Harry pat his back to help him he did not miss the other slap of books nor the scowl that came from the couch.

"Thank you Harry," he composed himself. "But I'm afraid it's not something I can just quit."

"Oh, did you sign a magical contract? I was helping Padfoot research them the other day. If you did that's bad. You can't get out of one," Harry said with a sympathetic look.

"Something like that," Remus flustered a bit trying to go for Harry's homework. "So, er- the essay I set you."

"Here."

Remus engrossed himself on the essay trying and failing to ignore the burning sensation of someone glaring at the back of his head.

xx

"He's too young to know!" Remus cried after the class when Sirius had told Harry that he was going to show Remus out of the building. Harry gave them a look that clearly stated he knew Sirius wanted to talk to Remus without Harry listening. They were currently on the doorsteps of the building and Remus was worried a Muggle would hear them.

"Bollocks, he's no younger than we were when we found out! You're just being a coward."

"No I'm not!"

"Yes you are. And you're thinking poorly of Harry," Sirius snapped and Remus sighed. He knew why Sirius had chosen those exact words. He and James had figured his secret by Christmas of first year and then spent the next term giving him hints to open up. Right before school ended James walked up to him and said. "My folks told me I can invite my friends to come over during the summer. Except I don't know if I should invite you since you think I'm gonna bail on you because of your furry little problem. I am quite offended of you thinking so poorly of me. When you decide to believe I am your friend, let me know."

Sirius glared at him and said in a low tone, "Too many people have let that boy down Moony. I

won't let you keep lying to him. I don't want to lose his trust so you decide. If you want to stay in his life you have to tell him. He's a good kid. He isn't going to desert you. You have till next full moon to decide, and I'll pester you for your answer every time you show up. You have to decide, are you going to man up or are you going to abandon us again?" with that Sirius turned on his heel and slammed the entrance door. Remus stood watching the man go. That was part of the problem wasn't it? That Remus had abandoned *both* of them.

xx

Sirius had hated this house and the oppressiveness from his mother the house still reeked of. And shrieked thanks to a portrait he had the misfortune of finding as soon as he entered the house.

He had to come here though, not only to see the state of one of his properties. One that unfortunately he could not sell to a non-Black due to family magic –maybe Cissy would be interested- but he wanted the library. The Black Library was a wealth of Dark Magic knowledge and he needed it. The Healers were pretty confident they had found a way to dispose of the Horcrux in Harry but they needed confirmation to their theory, and short of someone turning a rat into a Horcrux to test the theory – which considering what making a Horcrux needed was out of the question- the only way to prove the theory was if someone had already done it before. So they were researching and Sirius decided to research too.

He also wanted to check the lineage tomes his parents had. See if they could find out what else Voldemort might have used to make a Horcrux. They were pretty confident he had used at least two objects from the founders and one from his own family lineage. Maybe he could trace Gryffindor's and Ravenclaw's descendants to see if they were missing any relic from the founders.

There was also the fact that he wanted to check the books to figure out the number of Horcruxes Voldemort might have made. Dumbledore thought Slughorn might know and he was going to see if the man could help. With him on staff now that might be easier.

So, that was why Sirius found himself in the dusty library of Grimmauld Place. The place looked as if it had been abandoned since his mother died. He wondered if Kreacher had died with his mother. He had yet to see the elf and wasn't interested in summoning him. Kreacher had always been foul to him. He had always been an extension of his mother and been the one to punish young Sirius when he did something to embarrass the family and Sirius grew up to resent the elf. He knew house-elves had to do their master's orders but they needn't be gleeful about it which Kreacher was because he believed Sirius embarrassed the Black family. Sirius was not ashamed to say that as he grew he had treated Kreacher with distaste and resentment too. But it had been earned. Sirius didn't mind house-elves in general. Quite the contrary. He had always been fond of the Potter elves and had been delighted to see them again and find out that they had been keeping the Potter properties in perfect shape. But Kreacher he couldn't stand.

After choosing a few tomes that looked promising Sirius moved to the drawing room that had more light to see if they were safe to take with him. He didn't want Harry getting hexed if he accidentally opened one.

He deposited the tomes on top of a table and went to open the curtains of one of the windows. He coughed at the dust that rose turning around from the sun's glare. As he did so his eyes landed on a glass cabinet that had always been there. He was turning again without a second thought when something caught his eyes. It couldn't be.

He walked slowly towards the cabinet and opened the door. He reached his hand and slowly picked the locket up.

It was. The exact same locket he had seen in those memories Dumbledore showed him. How did it get here?

A loud crack sounded behind him and he turned around sharply pointing his wand to where the sound came from. There, the old and dirty house-elf was looking at him with a murderous look.

"Bad master! Horrible master! You is not stealing Master's Regulus's bad locket!"

"Excuse me?" Sirius said bewildered. Had the elf gone mad?

"Bad locket is Master Regulus! You is not stealing it!"

"This locket and everything else in this house is now mine Kreacher," Sirius said crisply. He needed to check this locket and didn't want to have to deal with Kreacher trying to protect Regulus's loyalty to Voldemort. Had Voldemort asked Regulus to store the locket? He had obviously entrusted the diary to Lucius. That, both Sirius and Dumbledore had been certain of even if they had no proof.

"Kreacher is not letting you! Master Regulus is asking Kreacher to destroy the locket and Kreacher is not being able to but Kreacher is not letting bad Master take the bad locket."

That made Sirius stop. Regulus wanted to destroy the locket? Did Kreacher know what the locket contained?

"Kreacher, why is this locket bad?"

"Locket bad, Master Regulus order Kreacher to destroy it. Master Regulus order Kreacher home, poor Master Regulus lost forever for that locket and bad Kreacher not finishing the mission," Kreacher sobbed.

For the first time in his life Sirius felt sorry for the elf. Since Kreacher had always been the vessel his mother had used to discipline him Sirius couldn't help but resent the elf. Especially since the elf, much like his mother, had doted on Regulus. Good proper Regulus who didn't embarrass the family by running wildly in the yard, by asking improper questions. By accepting their vitriol without questions. Sirius knelt down with a patience and care he didn't know he was capable towards the elf and asked gently.

"Kreacher, please tell me everything you know about this locket, how did Regulus get it, why did he

want it and most importantly why is it so important to destroy it?”

What followed would change Sirius’s perspective of his brother forever.

xx

Thanks for reviewing!

## Chapter 6 - Progress

The locket burned in the Fiendfyre inside the fireplace and Sirius and Kreacher had to duck and cover their ears when a wail and vapor came out of it. It was as if someone had been dying. As if someone had actually been burnt in that fire and they could feel a dark presence passing through them and disappearing. The whole house seemed lighter once it was gone.

Sirius wondered if that would happen to Harry. Sirius couldn't help but hope the Healers would hurry in their findings. He wanted that evil out of his pup as fast as possible. He had an urge to run back to the flat and make sure Harry was safe and sound. He turned to Kreacher.

"Kreacher, you did well. Regulus would be proud of you. Once we're done with all of the Horcruxes I want you to take me to that cave so we can recover Regulus's body and give him a proper burial." He knew that wouldn't be possible now. Not while Voldemort magic was still working to animate the Inferi. He'd have to destroy his brother's body if he tried and he did not want that. But he also knew that that same magic would have preserved it and Regulus deserved proper rest. "I need you to clean up this house. And I need you to find any other information on Horcruxes that might be here. And if by any chance you know anything else I need you to tell me so we can finish what Regulus started for good."

"I know the Dark Lord isn't just asking Master Regulus for help. He is entrusting others with his objects."

"Who Kreacher?" Sirius asked gently.

"Master Regulus isn't knowing, but after Master Regulus is dying," Kreacher sobbed. "Kreacher is hearing, in the memorial. Mistress is having a memorial, the tapestry is showing her when Master Regulus passed and Mistress is having a ceremony."

Sirius knew that, he had tried to attend but his mother ran him away. His father on the other hand

had come after him as he left. He hadn't understood him at the time but maybe Orion had known how Regulus had died. He'd never forget his father's words. It had been so long since Orion had said anything positive to Sirius. Since he had shown anything but disappointment towards his eldest son.

*"You knew better than all of us Siri," his father hadn't called him that since before Hogwarts. It wasn't appropriate for the heir to be called pet names. "But I'm afraid for you. I don't want you to end up like your brother. Don't make me have to mourn two sons. Be careful."*

Sirius had nodded and hadn't protested when his father had pulled him into a hug. So uncharacteristic of the patriarch to display so much emotion in public. He had always been affectionate in private. It had been his mother who had been the hardened one towards her sons, often saying Orion spoiled them. But in public Orion had been the perfect pureblood.

That had been the last time he had seen his father. News of his death had reached him in Azkaban. The guard coming to tell him with glee. One less Black in the world and much as it had surprised him how much losing Regulus had hurt, despite having grown apart so much, so had knowing his father wasn't out there anymore.

When they informed him of his mother's passing he had wondered why he hadn't felt it as he had Regulus' and Orion's, but it was hard to miss a mother who had never shown affection towards him, only expectations, demands, and disappointment.

"Who did you hear in the memorial Kreacher?"

"Master Lucius and Mistress Bellatrix. They is wondering how Master Regulus is dying. They is worried because they is being asked to safe keep things for their Master in the same meeting as Master Regulus is being asked to lend me. I is hearing Master Lucius say they had to put them away in a safer place. Where no one could get to them regardless of what happened to them."

"A safe place," Sirius thought out loud. "Did they say where?"

"No."

"Good job Kreacher," Sirius nodded. "I'll go now but I'll be back later. If you need anything to be able to take care of the house owl me. I'll send you an owl this afternoon so you can use it. You won't be able to Apparate where I'm staying so don't try. You might hurt yourself."

With that Sirius left with a lot on his mind and a completely different relationship with an old enemy. Voldemort had asked Lucius and Bellatrix. He would bet his entire fortune that Lucius's had been the diary. Where would they store the Horcruxes though? The Lestrangle Manors had been raided after their incarceration. Sirius had informed himself. The only reason his flat wasn't raided was because of the protections and since his parents had still been alive when he was sent to Azkaban his father wouldn't stand for anyone raiding his properties without all the proper paperwork.

Somewhere where no one could access despite the political climate? Sirius stopped on his track. Somewhere that operated separate from the ministry. That didn't care a whit what the Ministry wanted...Gringotts. Sirius smiled dangerously, oh, he never thought being Lord Black would come in so handy one day. Instead of turning to the flat he went to Diagon Alley. Remus had Harry and he'd protect Harry more if he managed to get rid of two Horcruxes in one day.

xxx

Sirius was pleased with himself as he strolled the halls of Hogwarts. He had indeed found Helga's Hufflepuff cup in Bellatrix's vault – to which he had access since he was Lord Black and she was incapacitated- and after scanning the cup determined it was a Horcrux. He had flooed to Hogwarts and he and Dumbledore had disposed of the cup much in the same manner as the previous two Horcruxes. They were three Horcruxes down.

Dumbledore said he was having a hard time convincing Sughorn to talk but he was confident he would break the man soon. He also had good news, he had managed to track down the old Gaunt house which Dumbledore was almost sure might have been where Voldemort hid at least one of the Horcruxes. Especially after hearing the tale about the cave.

“Remember the story the matron at his orphanage told me, about their trip to the seaside and how he trapped two of other kids in a cave? I think it’s the same cave,” Dumbledore had said. Well, on the weekend Dumbledore intended to track the Gaunt shack. Sirius didn’t think he should go alone, not after hearing about the protections on the cave, but he had a deal with Harry.

Weekends were theirs. With the Governor’s Board and the Wizengamot Sirius spent a lot of the week out and about while Harry was in classes with Remus. But the weekends were theirs. He had told Dumbledore this and Dumbledore suggested he’d ask Remus to accompany him. Sirius nodded but something inside him froze at the thought. He was worried about Dumbledore going alone, but Dumbledore was Dumbledore. As much as he might care for the old man he wasn’t close to him. He might worry. But for Remus, he really didn’t want to explore what he was feeling.

So he accepted the fact that this weekend Dumbledore and Remus would be going to Little Hangleton look for Horcruxes and bid Dumbledore goodbye.

As he got farther away from Dumbledore’s office and the weekend got even farther away the fact that they were three Horcruxes down started bringing a spring to his step again. Especially after he caught sight of two forms from the corner of his eyes. He slowed down a bit to let them catch up.

“That’s him,” said a whispering voice.

“You sure?” answered another.

“Yes, his picture was in the Prophet.”

“Okay. Should we go?”

“Yeah.”

Sirius bit the inside of his cheeks to prevent him laughing. As stealth went the two children who had not very covertly been following him had a lot to learn about. He had recognized them by Harry’s description though and had a pretty good idea of who they were. So he lingered giving them a chance to actually engage him in conversation by taking his time to arrive to the Entrance Hall. He was here though and could not dawdle more. So, instead, he turned around and said clearly, “Ms. Granger, Mr. Weasley, would you like a word?”

There was a yelp and the two children came out from behind an armor.

“How did you know we were there?” Ron asked blushing.

“Lucky guess,” Sirius shrugged.

“Er, Mr. Black, see,” Hermione started awkwardly and with a stolen glance at Ron for encouragement she plunged. “We wanted to see Harry.”

“Really?” he asked innocently. “Harry is of the opinion you hate him.”

“NO!” both children cried suddenly and Hermione continued. “We messed everything up,” she sighed. “We were shocked when he spoke Parseltongue and we kind of...well, we bollixed our reaction up, but we never thought that he was evil.”

“No, we should have helped him but... we were scared,” Ron hurried to help her. “Not of Harry sir, is just, everyone else was ganging up on him and... we’re not like him sir! Harry is fearless, we were scared they’d do the same to us. We should have stood by him.”

Sirius sighed. Part of him wanted to say “Yes you should,” but part of him knew they were just kids, they shouldn’t have had to be afraid. Harry shouldn’t have had to be afraid. “He isn’t fearless. He just wasn’t given a choice. I’ll talk to him. See if he accepts to see you. But I promised him he doesn’t have to come back here, so you might have to wait till summer.”

“We’ll ask our parents if we can leave the school for a weekend sir if we have to. Just please, we want to see him. Is he okay?” Hermione asked worried.

Sirius smiled gently, “He’s getting there.”

xx

The rat had scurried from the bag and to the safety of the bed as soon as Ron had put it down. He had to stop going around in Ron’s bag. That was so close. He was just thankful Sirius had been in human form or else he would have smelled him. No, he would have to stay in the dorm where it was safe. At least, as long as Harry did not come back.

Here he could keep his ears open. It would have been best if Ron and Harry hadn’t been estranged. He would know if Harry made the connection between him and Wormtail. He had no idea how detailed Sirius might have been in his accounts. The Prophet sure hadn’t spared the details they knew. Apparently even under Veritaserum Sirius had managed not to let the detail that they were Animagus out. That was a perk of Veritaserum, the questioner had to be precise in their questions because the potion would make Sirius tell the truth but wouldn’t actually compel him to give more information than asked for. Even if he wanted to. The potion dazed him too much for that. So Sirius had just said he’d faked his death. The Prophet had assumed he had Apparated out after cutting his finger off and either Sirius hadn’t seen the need to correct them or hadn’t bothered to. He didn’t know.

He had to keep his ears open. At the first sign of danger he’d have to run. He didn’t want to. He had a cozy situation here. But he’d rather be on the run than in Azkaban.

xx

Sirius entered the flat to find Remus and Harry playing video games. Sirius had bought the TV and video games since they were part of Harry’s life as a Muggle, before Hogwarts. A part Harry had

been allowed only to watch not to touch and Sirius decided to indulge him. It had been one of his Christmas presents. Sirius had decided to buy it when he had seen Harry stare at one on display. When they had been walking back home from the full check up in St. Mungo's that Sirius had taken Harry to on that first week they had been together.

"I see you two are studying hard," Sirius said and the two guilty parties startled.

"Sirius!" Harry cried happily and ran to give Sirius a hug. Harry was getting better with initiating physical contact. "We didn't hear you come in."

"No," Sirius agreed. "You two were very busy studying," he finished seriously and Harry blushed.

"You took longer than expected," Remus said nonchalantly putting the controllers away. "Our class ended a while ago."

"Yeah, well. Stuff happened," Sirius said shortly. He ruffled Harry's hair relishing in the feel of his pup, knowing he was a bit safer today than he was yesterday, "Say pup. Why don't you practice a bit more so you can take that old man out," he said pointing at Remus who glared at him, "while I talk to him in my room?"

"Okay," Harry sighed and Sirius gave Remus a jerky nod towards his room. They both walked there slowly and Sirius closed the door and cast a silencing ward.

"If this is about my furr--"

"No," Sirius cut him shortly. "This is about Horcruxes and Albus needing you to go with him to destroy another."

"Horcr- what- you can't mean--"

"Pieces of Voldemort's soul that the bastard scattered around. Yes, that's exactly what I mean."

Remus rubbed his forehead shocked, "Start from the beginning Sirius," and so Sirius did. From when the Healer at St. Mungo's found the foreign presence on that first consult, about the diary,

about finding the locket and the cup and how Dumbledore thought he knew where to find another one. Once he was done he felt lighter. He had been holding this to himself all along and even strategizing with Dumbledore he hadn't confessed how scared he was for Harry. If they didn't find a way to safely destroy the Horcrux. But somehow in the middle of his story Remus had stopped being the man who abandoned them and he was Moony, and to Moony he could confess all his deepest fears. He looked at Moony and saw the fear he felt reflected there and he felt something that he had been missing for so long. He felt an urge that he had been battling for so long but didn't want to anymore. He was about to move when Remus said quietly.

"Why didn't you tell me sooner? The risk Harry was in?" and there was hurt in Remus's voice.

Sirius didn't think to lie, "I didn't know if you'd run away again."

"How could you think that?"

"Why wouldn't I?" he shot back and Remus stood abruptly from the bed where he had been sitting while Sirius had been pacing. He stopped and inch from Sirius's face and yelled.

"Are you ever going to forgive me?"

"Why should I? You forgot everything so easily?" Sirius yelled back thankful for the ward and Harry being wholly unaware of what was going on in here.

"You think I forgot?" Remus spluttered and without thinking he pulled the other man into a rough kiss which he then broke and said steely. "I never forgot you."

He then turned around and stalked out of the room grabbing his coat from the hanger and turning to Harry who was on the couch still playing. "Harry I'm a gay werewolf who's been in love with your stupid godfather for over sixteen years. Have a nice day," and with that he stalked out of the apartment banging the door and leaving a gaping twelve-year-old behind.

Sirius walked dazedly out of the room to find Harry staring at the door. Harry turned to him and

asked, "Do I have to find the love of my life in school too?"

"Uh?" Sirius asked stupidly.

"Mom and dad started dating in school and you and Remus had to have started in school, he said sixteen years and you two are old but not that much, I don't think I know anyone I want to marry."

"That's, what?" Sirius said pointing to the door. "Of all the things he said that's what worries you?"

"I really don't want to get married now," Harry shook his head simply. "I'm too young. Married people are weird."

"That- married people aren't- you don't have to- I'm losing my mind," Sirius finally said rubbing his eyes and starting to laugh.

Harry just watched as his godfather slowly made his way to the couch and sat next to Harry putting the controllers away.

"Pup, I'm serious."

"I know," Harry answered cheekily and Sirius glared at him.

"Did you understand what Remus said? About him being a gay werewolf and, er, that meaning I'm \_"

"Gay too?" Sirius nodded. "Uhu," Harry nodded simply.

"Don't you have questions?"

"Nope."

"You're okay with me being-"

"Uhu."

"You sure?" Sirius asked skeptically. Harry was taking all of this too well. Harry inhaled deeply and said.

“Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon hate anything that is not considered normal,” Sirius nodded. They had spoken about this in the joint sessions with the Healer. “They hate me,” and Sirius felt a pang but couldn’t deny that. “Because I’m not normal,” Harry said making quotation marks with his fingers and Sirius was satisfied that Harry realized that it didn’t matter he wasn’t just like everyone else.

“People sometimes are irrational about people who are different than them.”

“Exactly,” Harry said. “I spent all my life being hated for being different, I don’t care if people are different than me. I just care that they don’t hate me. And you don’t, right?” Harry asked worried.

Sirius smiled and pulled Harry to him kissing his temple, “No, pup. I love you. And so does the scaredy-werewolf that stormed out of here, and speaking of that. About werewolves,” he pulled back looking straight at Harry. “You understood that right?”

Harry nodded, “We had to read on them for Lockhart. That’s why Remus is always ill when he goes away on business right?” Sirius nodded and waited for the question. About if Remus was a monster. As Harry opened his mouth he dreaded what would come out. “In Lockhart’s book he said he cured one. I had to reenact in class and all. Can’t we ask him to cure Remus? I read that the transformations are awful, that they hurt themselves because most werewolves lock themselves up so they won’t hurt anyone and then they turn on themselves.”

Sirius had to smile again and deep down thank Dumbledore. Because he knew that if there was a book like that in the Hogwarts library instead of the biased crap he had found, it was thank to Dumbledore. He’d find out later that it had actually been a book Remus wrote under an alias. He looked sadly at Harry and shook his head, “No pup. Lockhart was a fraud. That spell he mentioned- your dad and I came across it when we were researching ways to help Moony. It only forces back the transformation once and it’s very painful for the werewolf. Not to mention the spell is ridiculously hard. I highly doubt Lockhart can manage it.”

“Is that why you became Animagi?” Harry asked and Sirius nodded.

“Werewolves aren’t dangerous to animals and that way we could distract him from hurting himself. Nowadays he has a potion he takes but it still takes a lot from him due to the transformation. But at least the worse is off, hurting himself.”

Harry nodded satisfied that there was something and he turned to Sirius, “I want to learn to be an Animagus too. So I can help.”

Sirius couldn’t help but smile at his pup and pull him closer. Every time Harry did something like this he marveled at how Harry had managed to keep such a good nature despite everything. To take the abuse and learn to be better instead of just replicating it.

xx

## Chapter 7 - Taking Action

"Hey pup, dinner's ready," Sirius called as he started serving their dinner on the plates.

This had been a long day. He had taken the tomes he had found in Grimmauld place to the Healers and had discussed their plan for a long time. Then he stopped by the Ministry to see how the adoption process was going. He wanted to legally and blood adopt Harry to avoid any problems and to make him the next Black Heir. He sure as hell didn't want Lucius Malfoy's son to inherit the title. He was glad to arrive there and see everything was almost done. Apparently the Ministry was bending backwards to make him happy. The paperwork was done and his signature had sealed the deal. Now Harry just had to take the blood adoption potion, which he would as soon as the whole Horcrux in him thing was dealt with. The healers felt it was safer that way. But legally, Harry was already his son.

A smile came to his face every time he remembered when he had asked Harry if he was okay with being adopted.

"You want to adopt *me*," Harry had asked surprised. "*Me*?"

"Well, er, yes, if you're okay with that," Sirius had said awkwardly. "I don't want you to think I want to replace James, but you're my pup and I want to make sure you're protected and-"

"You want to be my dad?" Harry asked still with a shocked face. "You want me to be your son?"

"Well," Sirius said with a nervous smile, "To me, you already are my son, now I just want to know if you would accept-" he was cut off as the air rushed from his lungs when Harry launched himself into his midsection.

"Yes," he heard coming from his stomach and Sirius held Harry back stroking the messy hair. He had been so nervous, he shouldn't have. The mind healer had told him that Harry would probably accept and that it would do wonders for Harry to accept that Sirius was serious. That he was reliable and wouldn't be abandoning Harry.

Then when he had gotten home Remus had just left without a word to Sirius. Nothing. He didn't even mention his outburst of yesterday. Not when he arrived for the class and Sirius left for Grimmauld to get the books he had left there, not when he arrived home. Apparently that was to be Sirius's punishment for punishing Remus for so long.

He guessed that was why Sirius had taken Moony's actions so hard. He had loved him. He still did. They had been together. Shouldn't Remus had known him better? Had fought for him more? Had fought for Harry? Hadn't they said Harry was the pup they couldn't have? He didn't want to think of Remus leaving so angry with him. One thing was when he was angry at Remus, he felt justified. Now he just felt worried because he wouldn't see Remus again until Monday and he knew Remus and Dumbledore might be heading towards danger tomorrow. He didn't want Remus in danger angry at him. He was confused, he wanted to be angry at the man and at the same time he wanted to have his arms around him. He huffed as he gave the salad a final stir. Stupid confusing thoughts. Sirius shook the thoughts away and looked at Harry had sat on the stool in front of him instead.

"So, I met these kids yesterday at Hogwarts," he said slowly and Harry narrowed his eyes suspiciously. "They wanted to talk to you. Said they wanted to apologize. Bushy haired girl. Boy with freckles. Sound familiar?"

"Why did they want to apologize?"

"They reckon they messed up. They wanted to explain."

"They don't hate me?" Harry asked quietly.

"No," Sirius smiled sadly. "They were scared pup. Not of you," he hastened to explain at the look he got. "Of the other kids. You were scared weren't you?" Harry nodded. "They were too, and sometimes people are just too scared to stand up for what's right."

"Like Moony?" Bugger, Sirius thought.

"Yeah, I guess," Sirius tried to change the subject back to Ron and Hermione. "Would you like to meet with them? Maybe in Hogsmead. The Three Broomsticks has a killer butterbeer. We could go there, you can talk and then you can decide what to do."

"I guess. I would like to see them," Harry said slowly. "And hear them out. Like we heard Moony out. And I miss them so- I don't know. I guess- depends on what they say."

Sirius smiled and ignored the Moony comment. No, he was not thinking about that. He'd just write to the two kids later and see when they could meet.

xx

Crap, he was thinking about that, he couldn't stop thinking about stupid Moony. He shook the covers off him, well, what little was on him. He had been tossing so much since he tried to go to sleep, operating word, tried. He got up and grabbed his leather jacket and put it on top of his pajamas. He hastily shoved on some sneakers. He loved them. He hadn't been able to use them often because he had to be presentable as Lord Black to command respect on those Board and Wizengamot meetings but he'd take sneakers over boots any day. He checked on Harry who was peacefully sleeping. Cheeky little bugger.

He didn't want to leave Harry alone but short of waking him and making him add Kreacher to the wards he had no choice. And he might have made a truce with the elf but he still didn't completely trust him with Harry. He inhaled deeply, he'd be away just a moment, twenty minutes at most and Harry was safe. No one could get in here and Harry had been alone here before. Yeah, he'd Apparate, do what he had to do and be back and sleep peacefully. He nodded. He walked out of the apartment, out of the building and then to the alley he used to Apparate. He Apparated to the Lupin's cottage. He didn't wait for an invitation. He stormed in with an Alohamora - apparently Remus didn't change the wards- he stalked up to Remus's room where the werewolf had the gall to be peacefully sleeping. He shot an Aguamenti at the man who woke with a start. He grabbed him

by the shoulders and kissed him.

"If you dare die tomorrow I'll kill you," he hissed shoving Remus back on the bed. "I'll be waiting for you so we can talk. You better show up," and he stalked out without paying attention to the yell:

"How exactly do you plan to kill me if I am already dead?"

xxx

The door opened quietly and the figure in the bed did not stir. The man entered the room quietly and watched the other sleep for a while. He had been positively giddy since last night. He couldn't believe it. He knew he had failed. He had known it and that is why he hadn't pushed before. Why he hadn't even brought up their relationship before. He was glad he did give Sirius that kiss. To be perfectly honest he still didn't understand what he had done. All his perfect control, his well guarded secrets had just been spilled in a fit of temper. He was grateful though. Because if he hadn't they would still be at a stalemate.

Sure, he knew it wouldn't be easy. Sirius would probably take a long time before he believed that this time Remus would not abandon him and Harry. Remus might have been stupid once, made a huge mistake but if there was one thing he knew how to do was learn from his mistakes and he would not repeat them. And he would prove himself however many times he had to.

He took off his shoes and jacket and crept on the bed. He didn't know if they were ready for this but then again, Sirius had never been one for doing things slowly. He inched closer and encased the man's mouth in a kiss. The other man responded until his probably fogged brain came into gear and he pulled back.

"What, how- how did you get in here?"

"I'm keyed into the wards," he said simply. "Then I walked. One foot in front of the other," he said

mimicking the movement with the fingers of the hand that wasn't propping him up.

He could see Sirius's glare through the dim light that came from the street.

"Ha,ha, fu-nny," Sirius scorned, then he made a face and ran a hand through his face and Remus's clothes. "Why are you so dusty?"

Remus shrugged, "The place was abandoned for years and we had to check it thoroughly for wards. Took us the whole day and part of the night. We destroyed the Horcrux. It was a ring. Albus almost put it on but I stopped him and we used Fiendfyre. Must have had a compulsion charm or something. I preferred not to risk it though. You could have warned by the way. I thought I was about to be attacked by a spirit."

Sirius gave him an evil grin as he got cozy resting on his side with his head propped up by his hand.

"So, you just thought you could come in here and pretend this was twelve years ago and you just returned from a mission?" he asked nonchalantly.

"Yes," Remus said simply taking off his dusty shirt, falling back on the bed and squeezing off his trousers. Without even asking, he got under the covers and turned to Sirius lightly.

"If you're not interested that's okay. I'm quite beat," and he turned around and closed his eyes suppressing a smile as he heard Sirius splutter.

"You can't, get off my bed- this is, go to your own house," he ignored Sirius and continued laying there. Sirius tried pushing him but Remus did not budge. After a while Sirius gave up and turned facing the other wall.

"Fine, but... just because I'm a good person and you can sleep there... only sleep, mind you! No funny business!"

Remus's smile grew wider.

“Uhu, I understand,” Sirius said as he chewed on his nails while he was practically thrown over the counter talking on the phone. Remus frowned as he saw him. He had not been pleased when he woke up to find Sirius already gone from the bed. He put on some of Sirius’s pajama’s bottom and a white t-shirt, which had fit too well for comfort. Sirius had always been larger than him, more muscular. But he hadn’t yet recovered from the years in Azkaban and the fact that his clothes fit Remus instead of being loose was a reminder of that.

Remus looked around and frowned again. He checked Harry’s room but it was empty.

“You’re going to have to wait to shower,” Sirius said. “And by the way, you need it. I shouldn’t have let you sleep in my bed so dirty.”

Remus brushed off the remark and finally noticed the sound from the bathroom. So Harry was there.

“Hadn’t realized you owned a phone,” he said calmly pouring himself some of the juice from the counter.

Sirius looked at the cordless phone he had just hung up, “Yeah, well. I needed it for the Muggle lawyers. Except since we use it sparsely I had accidentally buried it under a bunch of jackets.”

“What did they say?”

“What?”

“The lawyers.”

“Oh,” Sirius stole a look at the bathroom door and lowered his voice. “They think they found someone who can help. A teacher Harry had. She had actually reported her suspicions to Social Services but before anything happened she got fired. The lawyers took some time tracking her down. She said she found out later that Petunia Dursley was in a tea club with someone who was high up in the local Social Services office and that they probably alerted her. The lawyers dug in

and it turns out the case was buried but not actually closed so they think they can use it.”

“Is that good?”

“Yes, that means that Social Services has a reason to start an investigation despite the fact that Harry isn’t under their custody anymore. The lawyers said that now they’re investigating if there was any bribery and cover up. And they also found out that Petunia and Vernon never bothered making their guardianship legal, so there is the fact that technically, they had a child with them that was not their ward. They’re questioning how they managed to enroll him in school, take to the doctor and every other bureaucratic thing. They hope that by going this angle they might prove something even if they don’t manage to get someone to corroborate the abuse.”

Remus nodded satisfied, the Dursleys had to pay, somehow. Even if they caught them for something else. Remus cleared his throat and said.

“Listen Sirius.”

“I want a date.”

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me. I love you,” Sirius inhaled deeply. “I still do, but you hurt me, a lot,” he finished looking straight at Remus. “I need you to prove me you won’t again. Or hurt Harry. Now I’m not alone anymore I can’t just let you in our lives on that level without being sure, so you have to woo me. Yep, that’s it. You have to take things slowly and stuff...you know. The stuff we kind of didn’t have the first time around because we were roommates and-“

“Already all over each other?”

“Yeah,” he agreed with a small smile. “I don’t trust you anymore. Not like I did once. You have to prove me wrong.”

“I will,” Remus said leaning on the counter with a smile as he took a sip of his juice. The moment

was broken by Harry coming out of the bathroom with his hair all wet. He looked at the two and sighed.

“Great, now you’re married and are going to become weird,” he huffed and went to his room.

Remus looked bewildered at Sirius.

“He thinks married people are weird.”

xx

“Hey pup, can we talk,” Sirius asked opening the door of the room slowly.

“Are we still going to meet Ron and Hermione?”

“Yes, but later. I wanted to talk about Remus,” Sirius said sitting on the bed and patting the spot next to him.

“I told you I don’t mind. I just don’t want you becoming weird,” Harry said sitting down and looking at Sirius.

Sirius sighed, “What do you mean by that?”

“You know,” Harry shrugged. “Like Mr. Weasley and Mrs. Weasley this summer. Mrs. Weasley would say something but not finish and Mr. Weasley would answer- but she never finished! Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia do the same. Drives me bonkers because I don’t know what they’re talking about and then I can’t know what to expect!”

Ah, Sirius understood. It wasn’t the finishing each other’s thoughts that many couples did that worried Harry. It was the fact that Harry was used to having to know what was happening to know how that affected him. Especially because at the Dursleys it could mean physical punishment.

He turned to Harry, “I’ll talk to Remus and we will make an effort to always let the other finish what they’re saying okay?”

“Okay,” Harry nodded but didn’t look convinced.

“But we talked about this with the Healer, you know I won’t hurt you right?”

Harry nodded shyly.

“Or let anyone else.”

“What about Remus?” Harry asked bravely.

“I won’t let him, and he won’t. He hasn’t and you’ve been alone with him right?”

“Yeah, but that’s different. Teachers can’t do stuff that parents can.”

Which in Harry’s mind meant a good beating. Sirius made Harry look pulling his chin up with a gentle finger. “Neither Remus nor I will ever strike you. Ever. No matter what you do. Clear?”

Harry shrugged and Sirius sighed. He hoped one day Harry believed him.

## Chapter 8 – Moving Forward

Hermione stared at Harry without knowing what to say. How to begin apologizing for all she had done. From the corner of her eye she could see Mr. Black at the counter talking to the owner of the bar and another man around his age. He had gone to fetch Hermione and Ron and had brought them here to the Three Broomsticks where Harry had been waiting with the other man. Then both men had left them alone. They had been in an uncomfortable silence ever since.

“Who’s that bloke?” Ron finally broke the silence.

“That’s Remus. He’s my tutor,” Harry said, then he bit his lip and twitched it as if afraid to continue.

“He’s Sirius’s boyfriend. And Sirius adopted me, he’s my dad now.”

She could feel that was a test, he was testing their prejudices again by wanting to see how they would react to his new family. She inhaled and smiled.

“That’s great Harry. Mr. Black seems to be good for you.”

“He is,” Harry nodded.

“I think I heard of him,” Ron said. “On Christmas break I asked my dad about Mr. Black, he said they were in some kind of organization against You-Know-Who together. And he mentioned your dad had three friends with him all the time.”

“Yeah, er- that’d be Remus and Pettigrew.”

“Oh, we read about him in the paper,” Hermione said and bit her lip. She took a deep breath and blurted, “I’m sorry!” at the exact same moment Ron did. The three stared at each other again in an awkward moment and then Harry burst out laughing.

“Couldn’t have been better if you’d timed it,” Harry sniggered at the blushing faces of his friends.

“Shud’up,” Ron mumbled but then looked seriously at Harry, “We are Harry. We should have stood by your side but we panicked and by the time we un-panicked we couldn’t find you.”

"I don't think that's a word," Harry responded.

"You got what I meant," Ron said exasperated and Harry nodded.

"I thought you hated me like everyone else," he whispered into his butterbeer.

"No," both Ron and Hermione said quickly.

"We just went about the whole thing the wrong way," Hermione tried saying. "And then you were gone and we didn't think this was something that could be resolved with letters."

Harry nodded.

"We missed you," Ron said. "S'not the same thing without you. There's a lot more hanging around the library and a lot less talking about Quidditch for starters," Ron finished in a suffering tone as Hermione rolled her eyes and Ron and Harry sniggered.

"You're still my friends?" Harry asked hesitantly.

"Always Harry, if you'll have us," Hermione said honestly.

"I guess we can start again. Maybe Sirius will bring me to visit more," Harry said stealing a glance at the adults at the bar.

"Won't you come back?" Ron asked.

"Dunno," Harry shrugged.

"Well," Ron said. "Let us know, 'cause, if you want to change schools I'll pester my parents till they let me change too."

"Me too," Hermione nodded firmly and Harry smiled.

"So," Harry started slowly. "How are things going at Hogwarts? I heard you have new teachers."

"Yeah, they're great. Really know their stuff. And there's been all kinds of changes too. McGonagall does bed-checks now and we have meetings with her," Hermione started telling Harry animatedly.

From the bar bench Remus nodded at the trio, "I guess they are working things out."

"Yeah, well. Friends will do that," Sirius said taking a sip of his drink.

"You know, I've seen Andy lately. She's a bit crossed you haven't been by to see your favorite cousin yet."

"She has? Hey, when did you see her?"

"The other day in Diagon Alley. Anyway. I'm sure letting her babysit Harry for a night, let's say, tomorrow night, would do wonders to get her forgiveness."

"Uhu," Sirius said skeptically. "I'm sure. What would I do all alone then?"

"We could go on that date. I've got a job now, getting paid and all. I could treat you."

"Yeah, really? Must have a very generous employer then."

"Nah, he's stingy, but then again I've never spent too much on myself so it's easy to save up. Ow, what was that for," Remus said rubbing his head.

"Calling me stingy."

xx

Things seemed to be looking better over the next few weeks. Remus and Sirius had gone on a few dates, Andromeda had accepted to babysit after putting Sirius through a long lecture about proper family behavior and then she proceeding to pamper Harry all she could. Sirius was a firm believer that that was payback for Sirius spoiling Tonks when she was little and was supposed to be grounded.

Harry had met with Ron and Hermione every Saturdays since and their friendship seemed to be slowly on the mend. Sirius had talked to the healers and he had good news to share when Dumbledore called him and Remus for a meeting.

"I called you gentlemen here today because I have good news," Dumbledore said.

"Really?" Sirius asked taking a seat in front of Dumbledore's desk as Remus took the other.

"Yes, really," Dumbledore said and from his desk drawer he produced what looked like a tiara and dropped it on the desk.

"Rowena Ravenclaw's lost diadem and I believe, the last Horcrux," Dumbledore said simply.

"How?" Sirius asked dumbfounded.

"You're not the only one who has been lucky lately. I addressed the school a while back to announce the changes we were implanting and the fact that security would keep tight until we found the culprit for the attacks even though the attacks had stopped."

"Yes," Remus prompted the older man as he seemed to feel that was enough of an explanation.

"Ms. Ginny Weasley came looking for me earlier this week. She confessed she realized she had been the culprit. She had found the diary among her things, thought it was a present from her parents and had been corresponding with Tom. She noticed she had black outs that coincided with the times of the attacks. She tried to dispose of the diary and was afraid to come forward. But apparently her talks with Minerva made her want to come forward."

"She told McGonagall?" Sirius asked.

"No, but Minerva did ask her how she was adjusting and commented on the fact that her grades had vastly improved this last term. Apparently Minerva was praising the girl's academics and she felt guilty. After all, her grades improved because she wasn't being possessed anymore."

Sirius and Remus nodded. This just proved Sirius had been right. These kids needed guidance.

Without the talks the girl might have never felt like coming forward.

"I've talked to her parents since and she's been through a full examination. She seems to bear no aftereffects but I encouraged them to let her see a mind healer for a while. I also talked to Arthur.

He never bought that book but he did say he had an altercation with Lucius Malfoy at Flourish and Blotts.”

“And Malfoy slipped the Horcrux into the girl’s books,” Sirius snorted. “How does that lead to this?” he pointed at the diadem.

“Ms. Weasley had very little recollection of her time being possessed but that she wasn’t conscious doesn’t mean the memory isn’t there. I asked if I could see her memories and she consented. Apparently the Horcrux was a little more attuned with the other pieces then we might have thought. Despite, I believe, being the first, the piece of Voldemort in there made Ginny go check if the other one in the school was protected. It was hidden in the Room of Requirement. Shall we dispose of it?”

“Do you think Voldemort knows what we’re doing then?” Remus asked worried.

“If he does there is little he can do as a disembodied spirit. It may be that the diary Horcrux was in Voldemort’s possession when he made the others and that is why it was aware of the others or that the Horcruxes are aware of each other. I do not know. Whatever the case is I believe it wise to move fast after this one, as I believe that with the destruction of the Diadem the only Horcrux left is the one in Harry,” Albus told Remus and Sirius satisfied.

“Are you sure?” Sirius asked warily.

“Quite, I was finally able to convince Horace to share his real memory of his conversation about Horcruxes with Tom. Horace is a good man and was ashamed of having shared such information with Tom. He couldn’t have possibly known the outcome. But I managed to convince him that he could help stop Tom if he gave us the information. And it seems that Tom thought that dividing his soul in seven pieces would make the protection stronger.”

“So that is six plus the piece left in him,” Sirius said pensively. “We have only destroyed five.”

“Yes, but he wasn’t able to make the sixth he intended to make that night, and without a body he couldn’t make another. I did the research, even with his possession of Quirrel, to create a Horcrux one needs to have a body of our own. So, he is still without the sixth he thinks he should have had, but that is in fact Harry.”

Sirius nodded. “The books you provided were quite useful and the healers are confident. We can schedule the procedure for tomorrow, we just need a favor.”

“And that is?”

Sirius looked at Fawkes, “For Fawkes to cry. Will you Fawkes? For Harry?”

The bird gave a soft thrill and Sirius thanked him. The three men stood up and proceeded to destroy yet another Horcrux.

xxx

The healer inserted the needle right on the skin of the famous scar. Sirius had been biting his nails convulsively as he watched. He wanted to be holding Harry’s hand but the healers said they needed space in case anything happen. The other needle was ready at the other healer’s hand. He felt a hand on his shoulder and turned to look at Remus. He inhaled deeply and tried to calm down as he saw the monitors start beeping and racing.

“We need to inject the Phoenix Tears,” one of the healers said.

“Not yet,” the other said. “We’re still good and the Basilisk venom hasn’t yet reached the “Hor-“

He was interrupted by a long wail coming from Harry despite the fact that his mouth was closed.

He started convulsing and the healers held him down. His scar broke open again but instead of blood the same vapor that had left every other Horcrux came out of it and dissipated into nothing.

The Healers promptly injected the Phoenix’s tears and Harry’s monitors started stabilizing. One of the healers cast a diagnostics charm and smiled nodding at Remus and Sirius.

“He’ll be fine.”

It had worked. They had been right, injecting the Basilisk venom right on the area where the Horcrux was located did destroy it and still gave them time to heal Harry. They had taken a long time to reach that conclusion. Basilisk venom destroyed Horcruxes but the trick was destroying the Horcrux before killing Harry. The venom had to reach the Horcrux before destroying Harry’s organs and Basilisk venom killed quickly. One of the healers had suggested locating the exact point of the Horcrux and injecting it directly there. They had established the Horcrux was encased in his scar. Then they had injected the venom directly into the location of the Horcrux and been ready to heal Harry with Phoenix Tears, which were much more rare than basilisk venom, which was why they had to ask for the Headmaster’s familiar’s help. The bird had not just cried for the healers to collect the tears on the syringe but had surveyed the entire procedure perched on top of the Hospital bed. The healers gave the two men space to verify how the boy was for themselves. He was still unconscious. They hadn’t known if the procedure would hurt so they had sedated him before hand.

At Hogwarts the second-year potions class of Gryffindor and Slytherins were watching their teacher startled. He had stopped dead in the middle of one of his sneering comments and grabbed his arm. He had pulled his sleeve down and looked at his arm for a good five minutes as the class waited with baited breath for what he’d do. Without a word to them he turned around and left the room. His dark presence stalking through the halls of Hogwarts. He snapped the password to the gargoyle and strode up banging the door open interrupting the conversation Professor McGonagall and Professor Dumbledore were having. Both looked up startled.

“I quit,” he said firmly.

“Severus, we’re a week away from finals!” McGonagall cried

“Couldn’t care less,” he said simply. “You wanted my answer. There you have my answer. I don’t

need this job anymore,” he said simply showing his left forearm to the two elder members of the staff.

Dumbledore looked at it pleased. More at what wasn't there. The faded Dark Mark that had been there ever since Lord Voldemort lost his powers. The patch of skin that was just a tad darker than the rest and let them know Voldemort was not as gone as they thought.

“When?”

“A few minutes ago.”

A silver wolf came rushing through the window and the joyous voice of Sirius Black announced.

“The procedure worked. He's free. Check with your pet Death Eater. This should have been the last and Voldemort's spirit shouldn't have anything else anchoring him. He should have passed.”

“He has,” Dumbledore said as he sent his own Patronus back.

“Have a nice life,” Snape said with a smirk but without his usual venom. “I know I will. Far away from the brats.” And with that he stalked out to pack his belongings. He was leaving Hogwarts. Once and for all. He had no idea what he'd do but he really didn't care. He wanted to leave everything behind. Only the memory of Lily was holding him here. He didn't care for any of these people. Dumbledore had extracted a vow to protect the brat from him out of his grief but he had never cared for the brat. He had wanted Lily to live, not the brat nor his father. He couldn't have cared less if they had died, he probably would have preferred if they had and Lily had lived, that way the path would have been clear for him. It was his guilt over her death that made him promise to protect the brat. Now the Dark Lord was gone and his vow was fulfilled. He could do with his life whatever he wanted and Wizarding Britain held nothing for him.

xx

“So I'm free and Voldemort will never come back?” Harry asked as he sat up on his Hospital bed.

"Yup," Sirius said ruffling the boy's hair.

Harry nodded satisfied.

"And now you can take the adoption potion," Sirius said happily. "If you want, that is," he finished seriously.

"Of course I do!" Harry cried motioning with his hands for the potion.

Sirius was about to produce it, he had it prepared before hand and had all the authorizations to give it to Harry when Remus cleared his throat.

"Moony?" Sirius asked.

"Hem, er- I- that is," Remus said fishing some papers from his pocket. "I know Sirius and I are still working things out but even if we weren't together I'd like to, well. I want to do this with Sirius Harry. I want you both in my life, forever. I should have done this twelve years ago. Taken you. Adopted you and- well, I hope I'm not too late. I have the paperwork here. I asked Ted Tonks to help me, he is a lawyer, and well- this adds me, I'd be adopting you together with Sirius. That is if you want, and if you don't want I understand. And if you want but don't want to add me in the potion-" his rambling was cut short when Harry leaned forward and pulled the paperwork from his hand and signed it with the quill Sirius gave him. He had already signed these for Sirius so he knew what to do. He handed them to Sirius who had to accept too since he was his adoptive father.

"Do we have to wait for another potion to be brewed?" Harry asked.

Remus shook his head, "No. Er- I asked the healers, when they were brewing Sirius's to brew one with my blood too. I asked them because I wanted to make sure there were no risks and they guaranteed there weren't. Lycanthropy can only be passed when I'm transformed," he said fumbling with a vial he took from his pocket, "If you need more time to think-"

He was interrupted again as Sirius summoned the vial rolling his eyes, "What do you say pup?

Ready to be a Potter-Evans-Black-Lupin. This will add parents but will not take away yours. You might change a bit but you shouldn't change that much. You already have a bit of Black blood due to your grandma anyway."

"Ready," Harry nodded taking the vial, "Bottoms up," he said downing the contents in one go, "Blargh, why do they have to taste this awf-" he didn't finish the sentence as his eyes dropped and he slumped back on bed.

"That's normal, I asked the healer," Remus said coming forward and checking Harry.

"I know, I did too." Sirius smiled at Remus's preparedness. Guess they were a family now.

"We should get a bigger place though."

Remus smiled.

"Thought we were taking things slowly."

"You know me, I never did slow."

"No, you haven't," Remus smiled kissing Sirius and running a hand on Harry's hair that was looking a tad more tame. They watched as Harry's features changed slightly. Only the most observant of person's would notice, and they'd probably attribute it to puberty. His hair was a bit tamer, his hand became just a little bit longer rather than the roundish way it had been before. "I love you both. Very much."

## Chapter 9- Epilogue

"I am retiring," Albus Dumbledore announced to the Board of Governors on the last meeting of the year. "You were all correct in your assumptions. I learned early on that power is dangerous and seductive and tried to shield myself from being in a position of power. I've convinced myself that staying at Hogwarts I was not indulging in my power greed and was not in a position of power. But that is not true. I am. Because of my role in the war, in the Wizengamot and in the International Confederation of Wizards. I need to let go of my security blanket and admit that I haven't been the Headmaster in a long time. I need to accept that my responsibilities are others and thrive not to let that power go to my head, as they say."

"I was a coward. I was afraid to admit to myself the power I held and in doing so I have harmed many people. I apologize for this and hope to work to make things better. And to start this I announce my retirement as Headmaster of Hogwarts and my successor Professor McGonagall. She is a capable professional who has been doing the job for me for a long time, and now that she will have a deputy she will be able to concentrate on her duties alone and not those of four different positions. I know that, as has been brought up by the investigation this Board has conducted, Professor McGonagall was not fulfilling all of her duties as a Head of House, but this is not due to her being a poor professional but to me fostering on her more responsibilities than one single person can take."

"Professor McGonagall had been executing the duties of a teacher, Head of House, Deputy Headmistress and most of my responsibilities. That is why some of her responsibilities were overlooked. This time around she will have one job, and one job only. Headmistress. And I am confident in her capacity to do this job well. I believe that now Hogwarts is starting to go back to what it should have always been."

There were nods of consent all around. Being the last board meeting of the school year the findings of the Board's investigation had been exposed and were being dealt with. Sirius was glad Dumbledore volunteered to resign instead of them having to ask him to leave the job. The Board had already decided Dumbledore was stretching himself too thin. The same was true for McGonagall. Which is also why they had established a few new rules to be amended to the Bylaws. From now on a Head of House could not hold another position besides teaching. Sure, all Heads were lacking and they had been neglecting their duties but McGonagall had been the worse one. Sprout hadn't been doing headcounts but she had House meetings, though not the individual ones. Flitwick had been on top of his students' grades and had called the ones with falling grades but hadn't check on the others.

Now things were looking up. All Heads had been following the Bylaws since the Wizengamot had ordered the Board to do a full investigation.

The Board was also glad to see that the teachers at Hogwarts had been taking a more active approach on the bullying going around since the whole Harry incident and they intended to make sure it continued.

They were satisfied with the choices for the Defense Against the Dark Arts and History teachers that Dumbledore had found. Two very competent individuals who were staying for the next year. Dumbledore had not found a new Potions Master but it was accepted due to the fact that after coming back to teach, Slughorn had asked to take over the classes Snape had left hanging when he just upped and left. Apparently Slughorn had been bored in his retirement. He was a competent teacher and a good Head of House so the board saw no need to change the arrangement.

McGonagall would be only left with the task of finding a substitute for her as Transfigurations teacher and Head of Gryffindor. She had already asked Professor Vector to take over as Deputy and the man had accepted. Her first choice had been Flitwick but due to the new rules the man would

have to stop being the Head of Ravenclaw and he had declined. He had stated that he agreed he had been lax in his duties. That he had let the duties that he had let fall during the first war stay that way and he needed to fix it, for the current students and for those he failed and had already graduated.

The Board had individually spoken with each teacher and they had been pleased to find that by the time the interviews came all the teachers, with the exception of Snape, had done some serious soul searching and had realized that they had been complacent with the bullying going around. They couldn't pinpoint where it started. Most thought that it happened during the first war. But the fact was that they had gotten used to the fact that some students were just allowed to get away with things and a general apathy had been generated and perpetuated throughout the years. The Board was satisfied to see that during the last term, since the changes had started, the teachers had been all thriving to change this situation without the need for the Board to punish them.

Another decision the Board made, together with the Wizengamot, since this actually had needed a law to be changed, was give the Hogwarts Nurse the right to do a full examination of the students once they entered Hogwarts.

That hadn't been possible before. The nurse had needed parental approval, or in cases where abuse was suspected, the Headmaster could override the parental approval. But his approval was needed and only his approval was accepted. That had lead to Dumbledore choosing to not approve a full scan on Harry despite Madam Pomfrey asking permission for one. The Headmaster, being more worried with the Blood Wards Harry needed, convinced himself Madam Pomfrey was exaggerating and that there was no abuse. Since Harry never made any official claim, the exam required for the Headmaster to agree that there was suspicion of abuse.

Sirius had snorted at the irony of the situation. Since Dumbledore never agreed that there was

abuse, and therefore never approved the full examination, he was also never presented with proof of the abuse, which exempted him from being culpable of not taking measures to take Harry away from the abuse. He was saved by his own will to remain ignorant. At least the man had admitted his fault in the Wizengamot hearing where they voted the change in the law. He admitted that one person alone couldn't hold that much power over others.

So now, a full check up was mandatory for every first year entering Hogwarts and for every student who was currently attending and was not given one. If a case of abuse was found Madam Pomfrey was obligated by law to contact Wizarding Children's Service. Not only that, but if any teacher in the school suspected abuse they could refer the student to Madam Pomfrey and authorize the check-up. It was not only at the Headmaster's or Headmistress's discretion any more.

But, despite everything, Sirius was pleased at how things were playing out. The school was shaping up, the Wizengamot seemed open to reviewing the laws and what needed to be changed. Sirius was putting up a project that was based on the Muggle correctional system to present to the Wizengamot. Having had firsthand experience with Azkaban, he knew that needed to be changed. It was what Muggles ruled cruel and unusual punishment and it made them no better than the people they sent there. Not to mention the fact that currently, in the Wizarding World, the punishment for murder and stealing a chicken was the same. Be sent to the Dementors. That had to change and it was Sirius's next crusade.

Things in his personal life were looking up too. He and Remus were doing okay, he wasn't sure he had completely forgiven the man but he was well on his way to and he knew Harry was also in his way to forgiving his friends. He had even asked what would happen next year. Tentatively. And with a lot of trepidation but he had and it was a huge progress for Harry to even cogitate going back to school, even if it was just a very vague cogitation.

Sirius, Remus and Harry had moved from their little flat. It was getting crowded. They moved to

one of the Potter properties. It wasn't one of the lavish ones, none of the three were into lavish. But it was a nice two story cottage with a nice field for flying. Which Sirius intended for Harry to inaugurate with the brand new Firebolt Sirius had ordered for Harry's next birthday. Okay, so yes, he ordered two. But honestly, why would just Harry get a Firebolt? He deserved one too.

The house was being kept by the new house-elf they had acquired and Sirius was still doubtful of the elf's capacity to keep the house from blowing up in his eagerness to please. But, what could he do? Harry had asked. With huge green eyes.

They had stumbled on the elf at Diagon Alley trailing behind Narcissa Malfoy, carrying her purchases. Harry had taken Sirius to the side and told him that was Dobby. The house-elf that had tried to warn and "protect" Harry. Sirius felt sorry for the little guy and apparently Harry felt even sorrier because he had begged Sirius to help him. So Sirius had. He had stopped his cousin in her tracks and stated simply.

"How much for the elf?"

"Excuse me?" the woman had looked at him with a shocked face.

"Aw, come on Cissy, you heard me. How much for the elf?"

Narcissa had crossed her arms and looked at him from over her raised nose.

"Why should I sell you my elf?"

"Because I have currently in my possession mother's diamond necklace that you've always coveted," he said simply.

"That necklace belongs to Black blood," she sneered.

"Sure, that's why I was thinking of giving it to Dora," he said with a nonchalant air. Like Tonks would ever want to wear that. She had been positively horrified when Sirius had asked Andromeda to go through his mother's jewelry.

"That mudb-" Narcissa was cut short by a glare from Sirius.

"Think twice before insulting your niece, Narcissa. I might change my mind."

"Fine, you give me the necklace and I give you Dobby. Though why you want him is beyond me."

"That's my problem. Later today. At three at your lovely manor. What do you say?"

"Fine."

Harry had been worried about Sirius going to Malfoy manor but Sirius pointed out they made the arrangement in public, and Lucius hadn't been this sneaky for so long by being stupid. It still grated on Sirius that they were not able to prove he was behind the attacks. Even after acquiring Dobby. Lucius had made sure the elf-master bond they had had before passing him to Sirius didn't allow Dobby to speak about his affairs. So, Sirius became Dobby's master and then proceeded to free him at Harry's request. Dobby was now a the Potter-Lupin-Black household's employed house-elf, much to Kreacher's displeasure.

"Master is not disgracing Kreacher with such things as freedom," he spluttered as if it was a curse.

"Kreacher knows his duties and Kreacher will keep the Black manor in perfect conditions."

And he had. And Sirius gave up selling the Manor, also because Kreacher managed to take down his mother's portrait and put it in Regulus's room. Which Sirius offered to Kreacher.

The house was a good property after being cleaned over. And it was useful to have, right there in the middle of London. Not to mention it had belonged to his family for so long he just decided not to sell it.

Yes, things were looking good, even the Dursleys were paying for what they did. Social Services had concluded their investigations and the Dursleys had been arrested for bribery, kidnapping and abuse. After the police cars came to take Petunia and Vernon from their home all the neighbors felt completely free to come forward and tell them all they'd seen happen to Harry throughout the

years.

Dudley Dursley had been sent to live with a distant cousin of Petunia, since after the investigation Marge Dursley wasn't deemed fit to care for a child. No, she wasn't arrested. Not much proof against her aside from her bad attitude. But the woman was arrogant enough to let Social Services know she approved of the heavy hand her brother used on Harry.

Dudley wasn't innocent but he was also a minor who was just parroting his parents beliefs so the authorities hoped that with a different environment he'd become a better person. Sirius was hopeful too. He knew the cousin he was going to live with. She had been at the wedding and Lily had thought very highly of her, probably why Petunia didn't keep in touch with her. She was a good person, and Dudley's chances of becoming a good person were increased by the upbringing he'd get from her.

Sirius was surprised when McGonagall's summoned him to her office in the middle of July but he would come out of the meeting with yet another problem solved as she offered him her old position.

"You had great Transfiguration skills and, despite not having a mastery, I believe you can fill the position well. Not to mention you can get one while you are teaching. And the most important aspect is that you really do care for these children's future."

Sirius nodded. He agreed. He cared for the future of the school. "The school is getting to where it should be and I want to help it get there. But I can do that better as a governor than as a teacher," he said simply. "If I become part of the staff I have to resign the Black seat to a family member. But just like you Minerva, nothing stops me from being related to a member of the staff, or else there would be no governors. Do you know Remus has a double mastery in DADA and Transfiguration? And he has done a wonderful job with Harry during these months."

McGonagall nodded and Sirius continued with a little smirk. He thought she might have expected

him to reject the offer and she seemed glad he gave her a solution, "Of course, as his spouse I would be allowed to reside at Hogwarts and I think that if I am here and Harry is allowed to live with us and not in the tower he might be amenable to return."

"Students have to stay in their dorm," she said in a nonsense tone.

"Minnie," Sirius smiled and Minerva glared at him. "I read the Bylaws. I've learned them backwards and forwards. Faculty children or wards can live either in their House dorm or with their parent or guardian. And Remus and I have legally adopted Harry. We felt he needed the reassurance. So no one can't even say he is not our son."

Minerva looked uncomfortable and said, "Yes, but it has been the practice of the school that students, even if their parents are faculty members, live with their housemates."

Sirius leaned forward seriously, "Harry has made enormous strides. You have no idea how scary for him the mere thought of stepping through those doors is. But he misses the classes, he misses his friends and he is willing to try. But he is not ready for the full Hogwarts experience. You have to meet me half-way or else he'll continue in his bubble. He approached me asking if there was a way he could come back but stay with me at the same time. I talked to him and we both talked to his psychologist about the possibility and we all agree, to come back he needs a measure of security. My presence here may give him that. Not having to sleep where he was attacked gives him that too. Think on it and give me your answer Minerva. I'm working hard so this school can be once again what it should have been. And as much as I want that for society I want that for Harry more."

He hadn't had to wait much. The next day Sirius received the answer and Remus received a proposal to teach Transfigurations and act as Gryffindor Head of House. The family of three sat down and discussed their options and in the end Harry had agreed.

"You'll be there right?" he had asked about a hundred times and every time the answer from both men was the same. A resounding yes.

“Ron and Hermione say things have changed. So did Neville.” Once the summer break had started, Augusta Longbottom had asked if Neville could visit. He had wanted to see Harry since Harry left but being at Hogwarts it had been hard for him. They had corresponded a bit during the year. But you know kids and letters. Not the best of friends. Neville had come often during the summer and so had Ron and Hermione. They had told Harry of all the changes. “I guess we can try.”

“And if you don’t like it, we’ll be back here in a second,” Remus assured Harry. “But I think you’ll like it better there, with your friends.” Harry had nodded and tried to smile but he had been too nervous to.

Remus had been right though and things were looking up. The very first day of school the same committee from all houses that had told him Parselmouths weren’t welcome was there to greet him. But instead of hexing him, this time they were there to apologize.

“We shouldn’t have done what we did. There are no excuses for what we did and if we could go back in time we would,” the spokesman said. “We’re really sorry and we get if you can never forgive us but you can be sure no one here will ever hurt you again.”

Harry hadn’t known what to say and had just nodded awkwardly and walked with his friends to the end of the Gryffindor table trying to avoid everyone. He wasn’t successful though as the Gryffindors led by the ones who had burnt his truck pretty much repeated what the committee had said.

“You’re welcome back in the tower Harry.”

“I’m staying with my parents,” he had said and it felt so good to say that. Parents.

“We know, we just want to let you know. You’re place in the team is there for you to take if you want.”

Harry had shrugged but he hadn’t wanted to play again. He loved flying but he wasn’t feeling very

prone to team spirit yet. "Maybe next year."

"Maybe," the seventh year had said and had glared at Oliver's moan. "Harry can come back if he wants and only if he wants. Clear?" he asked and everyone nodded, including Oliver after Katie Bell slapped his head.

In the end Harry did go back to play in the spring term. He only went back to the tower in his fourth year, but Quidditch, was just Quidditch. And being back in the tower didn't mean he spent less time with his guardians. Quite the contrary, Harry was often seen in the staff wing when he was visiting or when he was in one of his special visits. The one only Sirius knew about. Not even Moony knew about them because Harry wanted to surprise him when he managed. But he came religiously, every Friday, during his free period which Remus was busy with his NEWT classes, and Sirius instructed him in the fine arts of becoming an Animagus. Sirius couldn't help but snigger to himself every time he pictured Moony's reaction once Harry was done and presented his Animagus form to him.

Everything had been perfect. Voldemort was gone, the school and society seemed to be improving and a certain rat thought he had gotten away with living right under Sirius and Remus's nose. He was merrily wandering Hogwarts thinking of the food Ron would bring him when he was faced with a large orange cat. He gulped. He had heard Hermione had gotten a cat but hadn't had the displeasure of meeting said cat yet. He tried to run, but he wasn't fast enough as Mrs. Norris stopped him in his track. The Wizarding World never found the escaped Death Eater Peter Pettigrew, and they never heard the squeaks as Mrs. Norris and her new friend, Crookshanks, feasted on a certain rat. Ron was devastated when Scabbers didn't come back but Harry and Hermione joined their money and gave him an owl for Christmas. That seemed to cheer him up.

**The end**

This is done. I did not tell you Harry's form on purpose because I wanted to leave it to the imagination. Now Harry has his whole life ahead of him and I just wanted you to have a glimpse but not be too specific.

Thanks for all your support. I hope you all enjoyed. You can find the pdf version for download at my Yahoo! group. Link on my bio.