A Bond of Family
by Daily

Summary

After the holidays Harry returns to Hogwarts, but this time he’s not alone. Follow Sirius and Remus as they put their own personal stamp on the castle and every resident in it as teachers.

Notes

Warning: Includes Dumbledore, Hermione, Snape and Molly bashing. Some other bashing.

Very strong bromance.

This story deals with a very strong relationship between Sirius and Remus, and although it is not sexual they do love each other and will display behaviour one might see as such. If you can’t handle grown men hugging, holding hands, displaying possessive behaviour and having strong none sexual emotions for each other then you should hit the previous button now.

Also people occasionally get hurt so there will be some blood and described injuries, you are warned.

Involves mentions of Sirius’ past, Azkaban and past torture.

Snape or Malfoy fans should not read this story, I don’t follow the whole redeemable nonsense. One good deed does not redeem someone after a lifetime of causing pain and terror. And just because a man becomes a spy because he wants to save the woman he’s lusting after, it does not make him a better person in my eyes.
And sure, he remained a spy even after Lily’s death, but that still doesn’t make him a good man to me, so sorry Snape fans.
Also, people who are expecting detailed lessons and confrontations, I am sorry to disappoint, but I am a hurt/comfort writer above all and will not write conflict overly much. My apologies for that.

Rating: T for some light strong language, conversations involving past torture and occasional described injuries.

Special thanks to Kitty for beta-ing this story; our conversations always give me idea’s and joy, thank you.
"Gran?!" Neville ran inside with a letter in his hands and a small brown owl bobbling on his shoulder.

"In the front room," the answer came almost immediately.

"Wipe your feet," his grandmother ordered as he tried to enter.

"Sorry. Gran, I just got a letter from Harry. He's saying his godfather wishes to make an offer to me," Neville walked over to her and handed it over.

"Yes, I just received one myself. He is proposing to meet and discuss a proposal to give you extra tutoring in Potions," she glanced at the letter. "But I have to admit I do not understand why he would do that."

"Harry says that his godfather and Professor Lupin will take over Defence from Umbridge after the break. And that Professor McGonagall asked if he would be willing to give me extra tutoring."

He looked down at the letter. "He also writes that the requested meeting is about that, but that he asked Harry to write a separate letter to me so that I had time to think about the offer before it would be sprung on me."

"That is nice of him. What do you think of his offer?" his grandmother looked up to him.

"I-I hate Potions. I had been looking forward to the class since I received my letter but Professor Snape terrifies me. I can't concentrate or do anything right in his classes so I am happy that I can drop it after this year," he paused, biting his lip.

"But this offer...if he is anything like he portrayed at Hogwarts then I think he would be very different and I would like to learn how to properly brew Potions without Hermione Granger always having to whisper in my ears."

"The fact that the man has been viewed as a dangerous murderer for the last fourteen years doesn't scare you?" his grandmother asked surprised.

Leaning against the table Neville thought for a long moment about that.

"To be honest? No. I have always heard the stories of how he murdered all those innocents and betrayed his friends. And I admit that I was terrified when he broke into Hogwarts two years ago, despite never having seen him with my own eyes. But when I finally did last week...I couldn't believe for a second that any of those stories were true."

He stared out of the window.

"Even before he showed us the memory of You-Know-Who's resurrection or being declared innocent...even before it had been revealed that he was partly responsible for taking You-Know-Who out, I knew it wasn't true."

He turned to his grandmother.

"The way he acted and spoke, it all screamed to me of how much he cared about Harry. Why would a mass murderer who's in service of You-Know-Who care so incredibly much about The-"
Shifting he absent-mindedly petted the small owl on his shoulder, aware that his grandmother wasn't interrupting him for once so he continued his thoughts.

"I mean, what kind of person would barge into a school full of magical people and threaten a staff member, no matter how hated; or the Headmaster himself for how they've mistreated his godson? Who but one who loves their child more than anything and wants them to be safe regardless of their own safety? How can I possibly believe him to be evil when all his actions speak of love?"

His grandmother stared at him with an unreadable expression before a small smile broke out.

"Very well, then I suggest we reply to him to inform him we would like to accept his offer and will meet up to discuss the details," she said. "I have to admit I am curious to see the man that has left such an impression on you."

Confused Neville blinked.

"You unfortunately fear people all too easily, but I have never seen you look up to someone, least of all someone you don't even know. Yes, I think I would like to see you bloom under his care."

Uncomfortable Neville blushed, but smiled slightly as he recognised the untold love that his grandmother rarely expressed in her words.

"Do you want to send a reply to him or should I write one myself while answering Harry's?" he asked.

"As your guardian it is my obligation to answer it personally. Though it speaks for his character that he has asked young Potter to send you an advanced warning. Why do you not write your own note to him, to inform him of your decision if you are certain?"

"I am. I think I could learn a lot from him," nodding determined Neville straightened from the desk. "I'll write Harry and give this owl another reply for...I should call him Professor, shouldn't I?" he realised with an excited but nervous smile.

"You should. When you are done return here so that this owl can carry my answer as well for now."

"We have to send any reply back with Boo."

"Boo?"

"It's the owl's name. We have to send any reply back with him because the protective anti owl wards are still in place around his godfather so only a specific few can find him."

"Sirius Black always has been an exceptionally bright wizard. It will be a delight to see him and Professor Lupin take charge at Hogwarts."

Neville frowned. "Do you think the Ministry will give Professor Lupin trouble? Or any of the parents?"

"Due to his lycanthropy?" at his nod she let out a small laugh. "I think we shall be pleasantly surprised by how the Ministry and most parents will react to the news that the vanquisher of the Dark Lord is teaching at Hogwarts."
Returning the smile hesitantly Neville nodded before he walked to his room to give the small owl a treat before writing his reply.

Tapping the tip of his quill on his desk a small smile broke out over his face, for the first time he truly looked forward to returning to Hogwarts.
It was near noon on a Saturday that Harry woke up, stretching out with a yawn out and reached for his glasses.

Glancing at the time he blinked; his heart skipping a beat as he tossed the blankets off.

Listening for sounds in the hallway he sighed relieved upon not hearing any and spotting faint light coming from the living room he slipped out of the bedroom.

Aware Remus was probably still asleep; he crept downstairs with minimum noise to ensure he'd not wake up because of him.

Walking into the living room he immediately spotted his godfather, seated on the ground with books spread out around him.

"Hey, how did it go?"

"Morning. It went all right; he wasn't bothered by your scent at all. I let him sleep as the transformation itself was brutal as always," Sirius smiled as he untangled himself from the books, a sweep of his wand moving all but the one he was holding back to the bookshelves.

"How do you know he could smell me?" Harry asked as he held out a hand to help his godfather up, taking the book he was holding from him to carry it, ignoring the roll of Sirius' eyes.

"He told me and I could smell you too."

"Told you? But he was a wolf...can you communicate with him while both transformed?" Harry asked curiously.

"On a rudimentary level, yes. We can't talk like you and I are doing right now, but we can project emotions to one another, communicating like that."

"Can you communicate with more animals like that? Or only Moony?" Harry asked interested as they walked towards the kitchen, Sirius leaning lightly on him, crutches nowhere in sight.

"As Padfoot I can communicate with every remotely intelligent creature like that. It's how Prongs and I communicated and how I was able to make Crookshanks trust me," Sirius smiled. "As myself I can only sense their intentions rudimentary unless our connection is really strong."

"That's amazing," Harry frowned as he spotted a tiny owl sitting on the kitchen chair. "What's Pig doing here?"
"He delivered a letter about an hour ago but refused to let me take it as he was told specifically to only give it to you. Though he did apologise for the order, he couldn't disobey it."

"Why wouldn't you be allowed to accept the letter for me?"

"Because it's private?" Sirius suggested as he collected what he needed to make sandwiches and sat down at the counter-top to prepare them.

Harry placed the book onto the counter, untying the letter from Pig's claw and looking at the handwriting to confirm who it was from.

"What could Ron possibly want to write about, we only saw him a week ago," Harry opened the letter and skimmed over it, a frown forming

"Do you have a quill?"

Sirius shook his head. "Probably on the dining table."

Quickly retrieving it, Harry quickly scribbled an answer on the parchment and folded it again.

"Can you take this back to Ron?" he asked as he bound the reply on Pig before letting him out of the window.

"Okay…why are you annoyed?" Sirius paused in smearing button on the bread as he watched him carefully.

"Ron wrote to inform me his mum invites me to come over to them and stay the night so that we can travel to the train together when we have to return to Hogwarts. And that she expects me there for Easter."

"Do you want to go?"

"No, but that is not the point. She hasn't asked you before inviting me."

Sirius frowned. "But you hate it when people treat you as a child. Doesn't asking you directly indicate that she finally realises you are not a child?"

"If it was anyone else then probably, yeah. But when it is Mrs. Weasley it just shows that she has absolutely no respect for you."

Sirius sighed at that truth. "But do you want to go?"

"No. And I wrote back that if she wants to invite me for anything then she should first ask permission from you as my parent. Besides, we already have plans for Easter."

"We do?"

"Yes. Celebrating your birthday and our first Easter together."

"My birthday?" Sirius asked surprised.

"Yeah, we'll have classes to attend to on your actual birthday so I'm assuming we'll be celebrating it the Saturday after?"

"I hadn't even thought about it," Sirius admitted.
"We are not letting it pass by just like that," Harry said determined, making Sirius laugh.

"I really don't care about my birthday pup. So I'll just let you do what you want to do."

"You should care. It's your birthday!"

"So?"

"So we are celebrating it. What would you like to do? Have dinner? Go somewhere?" Harry rolled his eyes as Sirius shrugged.

"I've never really cared for my birthday. I'm good with anything you plan as long as you and Rem are there," Sirius admitted, handing Harry the plate with sandwiches.

"Aren't you going to eat?"

"I ate an apple at nine."

"It's almost noon now," Harry frowned as Sirius chuckled.

"What is it with you and Remus? You both keep feeding me at every turn."

"You need to eat properly and frequently or you won't regain more weight," Harry he held out a sandwich his own plate.

"I've gained fourteen pounds since last summer," Sirius protested, though he accepted the slice.

"And you still only weight one hundred pounds, which isn't exactly healthy for a man of your height."

"I'm doing the best I can," Sirius sighed as he looked at the sandwich. "I'm just not hungry and yes, I know I should eat regularly, regardless of being hungry."

"I know. Maybe Madam Pomfrey could prescribe something that gives you an appetite?"

Sirius shuddered. "I'd like to try and avoid her if I can, though I am sure she'll hunt me down the moment we step into the castle."

"No doubt about that," Harry looked at the bread. "Maybe you can eat something lighter if you aren't hungry?"

"I'll take a biscuit. Remus' always has loads of those."

"That's true. Are you nervous for this afternoon?" changing the subject he walked to the cupboard to retrieve a roll of biscuits for his godfather.

"A little," Sirius smiled. "It's a bit weird with how quickly things went."

"It is," Harry agreed exchanging the sandwich for the roll of biscuits, pleased when Sirius opened it and bit into one.

They ate in silence and Harry let his thoughts wander when Sirius took his empty plate to wash it.

It was indeed hard to believe how quickly everything had happened. It had only been nine days since they'd run into Voldemort's lair and Sirius had taken him and most of his followers down. The same day they have decided to move into this house.
His heart swelling, Harry realised only eight days had passed since Sirius had officially adopted him, legally making them family for the whole world to know.

Smiling, he remembered how they'd spend the following day magically upgrading the state of the small cottage, painting and decorating Harry's room to his liking. They had spent the evening; New Years Eve, with just the three of them, playing Muggle board games until it was time to go outside.

Remus has suggested they'd Apparate to a city so they could the fireworks at midnight.

He would never forget the feeling of waking up in his brand new bedroom on January first, knowing he truly belonged to a family now and living in a house where he was truly wanted by the two men living there and he could call his home with pride.

"What are you smiling about?" Sirius' amused voice pulled him out of his thoughts.

"Just thinking."

"About?"

"How now one will ever believe how domestic you and Remus truly are," Harry teased as Sirius put the clean plate into the closet.

It was completely true, too. Most people saw the two, Sirius specifically, as restless bachelors, unwilling to settle.

But both men truly enjoyed the weird little family life they had going on and it never ceased to amaze Harry how seamlessly the two did the various household tasks without ever discussing it.

He mused that it probably helped that the two had lived together before and knew each other inside out, but it still amazed Harry to see them wordlessly settle in a domestic family setting without ever getting on each other's nerves.

Especially since they had decided that for the time being Sirius would share a room with Remus as his familiar presence helped his godfather sleep and both men found comfort in the close proximity after all that had happened.

Sirius snorted, unaware of Harry's thoughts. "I don't care what other people think. And speaking of domestic, have you packed everything into your new trunk?"

"Mostly. I just need to pack the clothes that were washed this week."

"They'll probably be on your bed by now. I was going to iron them, but Dobby kicked me out of the laundry room. He actually threw me out!" Harry laughed at Sirius' perplex expression.

"You did agreed that he does the laundry so he has every right to kick you out for trying to do his job."

"I only wanted to help him," Sirius pouted, making Harry laugh even harder.

"Clearly he doesn't want your help."

"Clearly. So you've packed your school supplies? Your newly returned broom and everything else?"

"Yes," Harry still couldn't believe Sirius had written to McGonagall to get his Firebolt back as soon as possible, claiming that although Umbridge had the right to deny him to play Quidditch, she had
no right to take his possessions from him.

McGonagall’s reply had been immediate, attached to the broom Harry loved so much and informed them all of Umbridge's actions were annulled and both Harry and the twins were back on the team again.

"Toothbrush and other toiletries?"

"Yes Sirius, I packed everything," rolling his eyes good naturedly, Harry was too happy to have Sirius look out for him to be annoyed by the mother hen act.

"Then why is your spectacle case with your spare glasses still on the table next to me?" Sirius tapped the item with his nails.

Harry blinked as he spotted it.

"Because ...I didn't pack everything after all?" he admitted hesitant.

"I'm aware. I am also aware that you haven't packed your potion ingredients yet since those are still in the study."

Harry was forced to admit Sirius was right.

"Do you want to know what else you've not packed yet?" Blushing as Sirius teased him, Harry realised he hadn't packed even half of his necessary possessions.

"I-I'm so used to leaving everything in my trunk that I automatically thought I'd packed everything," he admitted as Sirius’ eyes glittered in amusement.

"I think the layers of junk and mould at the bottom of your old trunk were aware of that," Sirius said dryly as he rose from his seat.

"Remus is up, so how about we make a sweep of the house to ensure you've packed everything you need before you go wash up?"

"Might be a good idea," Harry leaned in as Sirius pulled him into a half hug, placing a kiss against his temple.

"That's my boy," smiling Harry followed his godfather to make quick work of collecting everything Harry had forgotten, amazing him by how far his stuff had shattered through the house in only a week's time.

It warmed his heart once more as he was confronted with someone who not only cared about him, but also took care of him.

Accepting the spectacle case his godfather handed him, he smiled while packing the last of his clothing, knowing everything had changed for the better and that Hogwarts was going to be a whole new adventure with his godfather around.

Chapter End Notes

Special thanks to kjwatson2 for pointing out an error I made with Sirius' weight.
Chapter 3

Walking through the deserted hallways of Hogwarts just after noon the following day, Harry's thoughts kept wandering to the welcome they'd received upon arrival the previous afternoon, all the while keeping an eye on the Marauder's Map.

They had arrived shortly after afternoon tea, consisting of some light sandwiches and home-made scones that Harry had both thoroughly enjoyed learning to make and eat.

All through dinner Harry had to bite his lip to prevent himself from laughing as Sirius completely ignored Snape's occasional taunting and treated the man himself like he wasn't even there.

The lack of response left the git bristling in anger as the other teachers had all warmly welcomed both Remus and Sirius, engaging in easy conversation.

After dinner Madam Pomfrey had forced them both to the Hospital Wing for a complete health check before they'd been released to settle into their new quarters.

Quarters which consisted of a large living room, two separate bedrooms with attached bathrooms and a small kitchen, courtesy of McGonagall, in which they'd be able to make tea and hot chocolate on the small stove. It even had an oven so that they could bake things if the mood struck.

It had taken the two men little to no time to change everything to their liking and the end result was very cosy, with two soft couches and a table with matching chairs at which they'd be able to play games or just sit.

The bedrooms were provided with a desk for grading work and queen sized beds that were almost certainly comfortable for two people to sleep in.

Knowing the sleeping arrangements the two had settled in at home, they'd probably share one all the time while Harry took the second room as his whenever he'd spend the night there as he had last night, not willing to spend the night in his dorm alone.

Harry had taken the time to visit Hagrid while Remus and Sirius had gone with the McGonagall for an extra meeting to discuss their lesson plans, helping him ready the Thestral's to pull the carriages for the students who'd come back that afternoon.

He had been thankful Sirius had warned him to their existence the previous summer, or he'd certainly have thought he was mad for seeing something others didn't.

After a light lunch he had made his way back to their quarters to wait for them there; but only Remus had returned shortly after two o'clock, informing him that McGonagall had wanted to speak to Sirius privately.

An hour later he had spotted his godfather in the Owlery on the Marauder Map.

Deciding to go to him, he, upon arriving now, found his godfather sitting in the window sill, absent-mindedly petting Hedwig, who was sitting on his pulled up knees while he looked outside.

His posture was relaxed, so Harry simply crossed the circular room, making sure his shoes stepped on enough skeletons of mice on the thick straw littered floor to alert his godfather to his presence, carefully pulling himself up to sit across of him in the same sill.
Letting the tips of his shoes touch Sirius' he mirrored his position and leaned his back against the wall behind him, reaching out to brush a hand over Hedwig's soft belly feathers.

"How'd you find me?" Sirius smiled as he turned to him.

"The Marauder's Map. You didn't return so I thought I'd go looking for you."

"Sneaky."

"Remus told me you and Dad never needed the map to be able to find one another, no matter where you were. Why is it that yesterday, you could easily find me after your meeting while I need the map to try and locate you?"

"You are remarkably like me in picking your hiding places when you don't want to see anyone."

"I am?" Harry was pleasantly surprised.

"Astronomy tower when you are angry. Third corridor of the third floor when you are upset, Black Lake when you are frustrated and the Owlery when you are sad," Sirius leaned his head against the wall behind him.

Harry gaped. "How'd you know that? Ron and Hermione have been here with me for five years and they don't even know half of those places."

Sirius chuckled. "I know because of the letters you've send me."

Seeing Harry's confused expression he elaborated.

"I could tell from your letters where you were while you were writing them. If you were angry while writing, the parchment would smell like the telescopes they use for Astronomy and have a fresh scent to it that only wind could cause."

He shifted slightly.

"The third corridor of the third floor has a very thick carpet that hangs before a little cove that is perfect to sit in when everything is just wrong and you don't want anyone to notice you. It has an unmistakable scent to it that I can easily recognise because I very often sat there to hide from the world too or if I needed to cry without anyone knowing," he smiled sadly.

"The Black Lake has this salty quality scent that seeps into the parchment deeply. It is a refreshing and calming scent that helps settle your frustration. And do I even have to explain how I know about the Owlery?"

Harry looked at him amazed. "I had no idea you could tell so much from my letters."

"Your way of writing gives things away, too. It becomes a bit wobbly when you are upset and your letters become tighter pressed together when you are angry or frustrated because you are writing faster than usual on those occasions."

"And when I am sad?" It was interesting that Sirius knew his handwriting so well.

"Your letters become more a lot sloppier, as if you aren't truly seeing what you are writing any more."

"You know me too well," Harry smiled a smile that Sirius immediately answered.
"I should hope so; you are the most precious person in my life. I should be ashamed if I didn't know you well."

Harry frowned as he realised Sirius had said they were remarkably alike in their hiding places.

"So...does that mean you are sad now?"

"A little, but in a good way. I got a bit lost in memories when I was on my way back to our quarters and ended up here."

"Memories of Dad and the Marauders?" Harry asked knowingly.

"Hmm, when we were twelve, your dad and I once snuck into the Owlery at night when his owl's egg was due to come out. We sat there all night, waiting for it to hatch. It was early May and so cold we had to huddle together for warmth underneath his invisibility cloak while owls soared around us."

"I thought Owls laid several eggs?"

"They normally do and she did as well, but during a storm most of her eggs were destroyed, all but that one."

"That poor owl. Did you guys see it hatch?"

"Yeah, it was amazing to see the little fellow pick his way out of the egg. Though we ended up falling asleep watching him. Remus was in hysterics by the time we returned. We had missed classes all morning and he hadn't been able to locate us due to the scents of the many Owls, while normally he could find us everywhere."

He chuckled. "It is what originally brought forth the idea of creating the map. So that we'd always be able to find one another."

"How would that work if there was only one map and four people?" Harry asked curiously.

"Either James or Remus would hold the map. James and I were usually together and if we lost Peter we'd always be able to find him near a food source. Though I admit Remus was usually able to find us by following our scents when we weren't in the Owlery and I gained the same ability after becoming Padfoot."

"Are you hiding from Remus now?"

"Maybe a little. He is nervous enough as it is without adding in my silly emotional state," Sirius admitted freely.

"But won't it make him feel better if he can be there for you? He must have felt the same when he taught here before."

"I know," Sirius sighed.

"Do you regret coming here?" Harry reached forward to squeeze his godfather's hand.

"No, I'm just a bit more overwhelmed with memories than I thought I would be."

"You weren't overwhelmed the first time you came back?" Harry asked, smiling patiently when it took Sirius a moment to understand what he meant.
"Constantly, but I mostly tried to force them down as I couldn't afford to be distracted. I did momentarily lost myself into one while you were all asleep when I broke in. Then Ron woke and I couldn't afford to let myself be distracted or I would be caught. I hid where no one would think to look until I could get away again."

"You were still in the castle then?"

"I was in the castle a lot, actually. Stayed with the elves several times and once or twice in the Room of Requirement. I actually didn't leave the castle until two days later; when Peeves and Crook gave me the all clear."

Harry chuckled. "I still can't believe Peeves helped you. Remus mentioned you were friends but he's always playing pranks at students so it's hard to believe he'd actually help and befriend one."

Sirius shrugged. "He's never once let me down. When I first met him I was trying to get away from my relatives. He helped me before hiding me until they left; even after they did he stated with me because I had hurt my ankle badly enough to be unable to stand on it. Kept me company and made sure a House-elf told James where to find me and we've been friends ever since. He helped me when I returned, too. Tried everything to help me catch Peter."

He looked outside again and Harry followed his gaze to see the Forbidden Forest.

"Everywhere I look I see your dad. In every corridor, every classroom..." he trailed off with a deep sigh.

"And I probably don't help very much with that do I?" Harry asked softly.

Confused Sirius turned back to him. "Why?"

"Well...everyone always says I'm a copy of Dad."

Sirius snorted. "You have the same nose, cheekbones and messy hair that he did. But you have your mother's ears; shape of her eyes and of course the colour too. Not to mention your grandmother Dorea's strong chin and build and the Evan's family's wobbly knees."

He poked Harry's knees, making Harry laugh before he smiled softly.

"But do you know what I love most of your appearance?"

"No."

"Your smile."

"Who did I inherit that from?"

"From no one. It's all yours and that is exactly who you are too. Just yourself. You are not a copy of anyone, not of your dad or your mum. You are your own person."

Harry nodded, knowing Sirius meant every word.

"Besides, anyone who says you are a copy of your father clearly doesn't know either of you very well. Your hair is slightly darker and has more volume. Your build is similar but you are scrawnier and will remain at least half a head smaller than him once you've stopped growing. Your hands are smaller and you have thinner fingers. Your toes are definitely smaller and quite frankly I think you inherited both your small hands and feet from my side of the family."
Harry laughed as Sirius poked at his shoe covered toes, relieved that he could see so many differences between him and his father. And although he was always proud when people said he looked like his father, it made him feel better to know that he wasn't an exact copy.

"So I have some parts of you, too?" he asked pleased.

"The colour of your hair and your toes and hands. And I think you've got my height as all the Potters are freakishly tall. And of course Remus claims you inherited my recklessness too," Sirius grinned. "Which is very possible since a blood adoption meant you were likely to inherit some of my personality too. Sorry about that."

"I can think of worse things to inherit," Harry smiled warmly.

"Ah, that's the smile I meant and love so much. If I had my way you would be smiling like that all the time."

Harry chuckled and Sirius grinned.

"I like that one too."

Harry fondly shook his head, letting them fall into a comfortable silence, quietly petting Hedwig for some time before Sirius eventually shifted.

"We should get cleaned up for dinner."

"We should," Harry smiled as Hedwig gave them both an affectionate peck in their fingers before flying off to a nearby perch and Sirius used that moment to pull him into a short hug.

"Thank you," he whispered, sliding down and helping Harry down too.

Harry only smiled, taking his godfather's hand as they left the Owlery together.

Watching their steps down the spiraling staircase, Sirius led him through a short-cut to avoid the hospital wing.

"The hallways are so empty," Harry eventually broke the silence.

"That is because almost everyone went home after what happened."

"I thought there were few students left in third year, but those six seem like a lot now as I haven't come across a single student yet now."

"There are two; a first year Ravenclaw and a seventh year Slytherin."

"How do you know?"

"I came across both this morning. It was rather funny to see a Ravenclaw that speechless while dropping his books."

"And the Slytherin?" Harry laughed at the image.

"He said hello and told me to take "him" down a notch," Sirius answered while his fingers made punctuation marks.

"Who's he?"
"That's what I asked, too. But he only said that he found it a shame that he couldn't see it happen."

"No arrogant behaviour?"

"Not all Slytherins are the same, pup. Everyone deserves at least a chance."

"And if they blow that chance within moments?"

"Then you take them down with words. And if that fails to give result, you warn me or Remus."

Harry smiled shyly.

"I never had someone to come to before for help."

"You do now...oh, hey Peeves."

"Siri," the approaching poltergeist greeted him before turning to Harry. "Potty."

"Hey Peeves," Harry replied, uncomfortable despite knowing his godfather was friends with him. It was hard to forget all of Peeves' behaviour towards himself.

"Now Peevsie, don't call him that..." Sirius frowned to Harry's relief. "At least come up with something new. Happy Harry or eh..."

"Pottery Black!" Peeves exclaimed cheerfully, bouncing up and down.

"That doesn't rhyme and his last name is Potter."

"I don't mind. The only reason I haven't asked to add your last name to mine is because I know how much you hate the Blacks."

"Silly Siri has always hated disgusting Blacks," Peeves agreed, coming closer to Harry, staring at him intensely with his orange eyes before taking his hat off.

"I should apologise for all the trouble and sorrow I've caused Siri' charge. I've never been nice to you, made more fun of you than I should have and brought you trouble. James would be ashamed if he had seen my behaviour. But I solemnly promises to start treating Pottery Black like the Marauder legacy he is."

Harry stared at Peeves surprised for a long moment, both because of the seriousness of his words and the properness with which he spoke as his bell-covered hat swayed slightly in his hands as he hung in the air before him.

"I...you say that you are sorry for causing me trouble because I'm Sirius' charge. But if you care so much about Sirius, then why were you so cheerful when he was going to be Kissed, back when he was captured here at Hogwarts two years ago?" Harry hadn't forgotten the glee Peeves had expressed while he'd been on his way to the hospital wing after rescuing Sirius.

"Of course I was happy, but not for the reason you think. I was happy because Pottery Black and the Know-It-All rescued Sirius. I was there when you appeared outside of the window on the Hippogriff," the Poltergeist added at Harry's confusion.

"He came to keep me company while I was imprisoned in Flitwick's office but stayed invisible so no one would see him. I never did say goodbye to you with all that happened, did I?" Sirius shot Peeves an apologetic glance.
"We were both surprised to see them appear in front of the window, and you said did say goodbye after your visits last year," Peeves waved his apology away, turning to Harry again. "I'm mean, not evil. I would never betray a friend."

Harry nodded, swallowing as he could see the devotion and sincerity in the orange eyes.

"You won't pester Harry from now on any more, will you?" Sirius asked and the black haired poltergeist shook his head.

"I'll try not to include Pottery Black in my prank pulling," he promised, speech suddenly changing again as he turned upside down. "Oh, Loony Lupin was looking for you. He asked me to keep an eye out. I kept out two."

Sirius nodded. "We are on our way back, thank you. It was nice seeing you again and I'm sure I'll see you around."

"You will," Peeves gave a maniacal grin, waving his hat at them and disappeared down the hallway.

Harry smiled as Sirius tugged on his sleeve and they continued on their way.

They reached the third floor just before Sirius suddenly let go of his hand and shifted to create some distance between them.

Confused Harry was about to turn his gaze to him when he heard footsteps approach, suddenly understanding his godfather's action and he bit his lip.

He appreciated Sirius' move to not embarrass him in front of others, but Harry had decided the previous summer that he didn't care what anyone thought any more. He would no longer let other people's opinions restrain him from what he wanted.

As he slipped his hand back into Sirius', it crossed his mind that perhaps his godfather had taken the distance to appear more professional. But as quickly as the thought had entered his mind it disappeared again, realising that Sirius had never given a darn about what others thought and never cared about appearances.

Sirius in turn, gazed at him in wonder for a moment, squeezed his hand tightly with a knowing smile as a young man came around the corner a few meters before them.

The Slytherin, one Harry only knew by face, nodded in greeting, not giving any indication of surprise at them holding hands.

"Professor, Potter," he greeted as he came into hearing reach.

"Good afternoon Bowen, are you getting ready for dinner too?" Sirius asked pleasantly while Harry murmured a greeting as well.

"Y-yes. I look forward to seeing everyone again," Bowen seemed as surprised as Harry was that Sirius knew his name but recovered quickly enough.

"I bet. These hallways are too quiet and deserted without the voices of teenagers echoing around, don't you think?"

"I couldn't agree more," Bowen smiled.
"Well, we won't keep you longer, we'll see you at dinner," Sirius answered his smile.

"Until dinner Professor...Potter."

With a slight bow he walked on and a small pull on his hand alerted Harry that Sirius was continuing too.

Harry waited until there was enough distance between them so Bowen wouldn't be able to hear them any more before he looked at Sirius.

"How did you know his name?"

"I'm a mind reader," Sirius replied, managing to keep a straight face under Harry's sceptical gaze for several seconds before he cracked a smile.

"Remus showed me his memories of what he's taught to every year as a preparation for our classes. After seeing a year worth of classes I know the same students that he does."

"When did he show you those?"

"While you were working on your homework or had already gone to bed."

"I never noticed," Harry admitted.

"We didn't want to bore you with the lessons shown since you've already been taught most of it and we needed to discuss the students and the material..."

"Which is confidential," Harry finished for him.

"That too, but mostly I didn't want to involve you because it would defeat the purpose of keeping you interested in your classes," Sirius admitted.

"That's not going to happen. I want to do better in my classes and learn as much as I can while I still can. And though I'm not half as brilliant as Mum and Dad were, I want to try and get the most of my education. I want to make you proud."

"I am always proud of you, pup, regardless of how many O.W.L.'s you receive. And you are smarter than you give yourself credit for. You usually just didn't apply it to your education. But I am happy you are taking your studies seriously now."

"I do. Until now I have always been more concerned about Voldemort above everything else. When I got my letter, I was so excited. I read through all of my textbooks to learn more about this fantastic world, but even though I've been in the magical world for four and a half years now, I still hardly know anything at all. I don't know why I lost my interest to learn as much as I could, but I am not going to slack off any more," Harry promised.

"Don't take offence, but you have a lazy ass, who'd rather die than being found doing homework, as a best friend on one side. On the other side there's a girl who is so obsessed with studies, that she drives everyone to the brink of insanity. Between those two I don't think it's really surprising that you weren't very motivated to study."

"Can't deny that, but even so there was a lunatic after me. I should have learned as much as I could so I'd stand a chance. But I never bothered and the only reason I am still alive is because I've had a lot of luck and you looked out for me. That has to change, even if there's no one after me any more."
Sirius turned to him. "I'm already helping you study, but I do want you to have fun too."

Harry smiled. "I will and if I go overboard in studying I have no doubt that you will stop me."

"I promise I will," Sirius squeezed his hand as they reached the quarters, giving the password they entered to find Remus sitting in the living room with a book.

"Hey, you found him."

"And he captured me," Sirius grinned, showing Remus their hands.

"Ah...good work, Harry," Remus chuckled as Harry laughed. "You two should get ready. I've laid out one of your uniforms on your bed so you can get changed here."

"Thanks," Harry nodded, he and Sirius splitting ways to get ready.

Quickly washing his face and hands Harry changed into his uniform, making his way back to the living room when he was done.

Remus was closing the buttons on Sirius' sleeves as they were too tight for him to do so himself.

"Should I take this off?" Sirius asked, reaching up to his collar.

"No, it's a part of you," taking his hand Remus pulled it away from the black collar around his neck. "Just like Harry's glasses are a part of him that collar is a part of you."

Giving a small nod, Sirius slipped into the black cloak Remus held out.

"How do we look?"

"You both look fine," smiling at their Muggle clothing Harry stepped forward to straighten Remus' suede jacket and fastened the buttons on Sirius' cloak, ignoring the roll of his godfather's eyes and the laugh Remus tried to cover in a cough.

"You heard Madam Pomfrey. As long as you are still so underweight, you have to dress warmly to ensure you won't catch pneumonia or other infections," Harry reminded him, smiling as Sirius shot Remus a glare before nodding.

"I know, sorry."

"I'll ensure he eats and drinks properly," Remus promised, attempting to look serious.

"We should go or we'll end up having to hurry," Sirius spoke up softly, pulling Harry close to place a kiss on his temple.

Nodding Harry smiled, walking with the two to the Great Hall so they could await the arrival of the other students.
Entering the Great Hall, Harry immediately spotted Fred and George seated at the Gryffindor table.

"Hey, what are you guys doing here before the rest?"

"We are on duty. Hey Professors, looking good," George whistled approvingly, making them both laugh.

"Hey Gred, Forge. Thank you for coming early," Sirius smiled as he squeezed their shoulders in gratitude.

"No problem. What kind of Beaters would we be if we didn't protect our Seeker?" Fred said.

"Besides, we'd do anything for our favourite teachers," George added.

"I wonder how long that obedience will last," Remus laughed as Sirius gave Harry a quick hug.

"We have to go to the staff table now. I solemnly swear that I will eat and drink properly and that I will retreat the moment I become tired."

Harry smiled at the promise. "Good, will you say goodnight before you go to bed?"

"Yes, pup," Sirius nodded obediently, making the twins laugh. "Through the mirror or do you want me to come to you?"

"Both?" Harry chuckled, letting Sirius drop a kiss into his hair.

"Gentlemen, have a nice evening," Remus placed a hand on Sirius’ lower back to alert him they should really continue.

"Have fun," Sirius grinned as both men left with a wave.

"So, what was that about Sirius promising to eat properly?" Fred asked once they had arrived at the High Table.

"Madam Pomfrey' orders. He is still so severely underweight that he easily gets ill now that he lives in proper living environments again and will be surrounded by teenagers."

"And he's probably always cold, too," Fred added, eyeing the warm cloak.

"Yeah," Harry agreed.

"How's his ankle? We asked Dobby when he came to pick us up, but he didn't want to tell us," George asked.

"Healing well though he still has a bit of a limp. The swelling's gone down and he can lean his full weight on it again so he gets by without a crutch now."

"That's good to hear. Oh, don't be surprised if Ron and Hermione are a little grumpy. We didn't tell anyone but Dad that we were leaving separately until they had to leave for the train. Mum wouldn't allow them to come along."

Harry sighed. "Thanks for the warning."
Nodding George took a sip from his drink but Fred’s eyes narrowed and he leaned closer.

"Say, did you get new glasses?"

"Yeah, Sirius took me to an optician to have my eyes rechecked and got me better glasses," Harry smiled.

"Did you pick the frame?" George leaned in for a better look too.

"Sirius did. I was just going to go with the old frame, but he said I shouldn't as these would look better."

"He's got good taste. They look really good on you; the red brings out your green eyes better and gives you a softer face."

"But don't hide half of it under the thick frame any more," George added to his brothers words.

"Yeah, Remus said the same thing," Harry laughed.

They chatted for a while until they could hear footsteps and chatter beginning to approach in multiple numbers and knew the carriages had arrived.

"Here goes," Harry muttered, shooting a glance at the High Table in time to see Sirius and Remus both take a deep breath, though neither of them broke their conversation with the teachers around them.

"Harry!" Neville was the first to arrive of their house and he quickly slipped in the seat across of him, leaning forward. "Be prepared. I don't know who spread it, but word came out that Professor Sirius and Lupin are teaching."

"That is what we are here for," Fred and George said in unison, straightening a little and Neville smiled relieved.

"I felt that I should warn you."

"Thanks, I appreciate it. I wonder who spread it around though," Harry frowned.

"Who knows? Such things usually leak out and get spread," Fred shrugged.

Harry nodded, knowing that was true. "Are you looking forward to classes again?"

"Yes actually. I cannot wait to see what will happen in Defence," Neville said excitedly.

"Sirius wrote to you about extra Potions tutoring, did you accept?" George asked curiously.

"I did. Had my first lesson already too. We met up at our house and it kind of got turned into an impromptu class. It was fun and the Professor was really patient and he didn't mind at all when I didn't know things."

Fred grinned but anything he might have tried to say was overruled by Ron's loud voice as he arrived at the table.

"Why didn't you come with the rest of us by train?" he asked, dropping down beside Neville as neither of his brothers made any indication of moving.

"Hello to you too. You knew Sirius and Remus had to be here yesterday already and I went with
them."

"Mum invited you over for the weekend so that we could go to the train together."

"And I refused. I wanted to go with them," Harry told him a bit irritated.

"Hey guys. Isn't it great to have Professor Lupin back and I'm sure we are all curious to what Professor Black will teach us," Dean greeted them, obvious to Ron's glare as he joined them.

"It's Professor Sirius, actually," Neville corrected him.

"What?" Dean turned to him confused.

"His name. He hates his surname so his official title will be Professor Sirius," Harry elaborated.

"That will take some getting used to," Seamus chuckled, leaning closer curiously. "So...what's he like?"

"What do you mean what's he like?" Harry asked confused.

"As a person and a guardian? I read in the paper that he's your legal guardian so I just wondered what he's like. We already know he's powerful and fiercely protective of his loved ones," Seamus said.

"He's very kind and funny. Patient and unorthodox in this methods," Fred answered instead, "If you liked Remus...Professor Lupin's teaching then you will love his."

"How do you know that?" Lavender asked.

"He taught us a few things last summer."

"You saw him last summer? But he was still a fugitive then!" Parvati gasped.

"Some of us have known he is innocent for ages," Hermione bragged.

Parvati frowned at her behaviour but before she could react Professor McGonagall called for attention as she rose from her seat.

"Good evening everyone, may I have your attention please? There are a few announcements to be made."

She waited for the turmoil to quiet down.

"First of all, Professor Dumbledore will be absent for an unknown amount of time as an investigation takes place of Hogwarts actions in the past. Secondly, as all of you most likely already know, Dolores Umbridge was arrested for illegal practices both in her Ministry function and as a Hogwarts professor," she paused as loud cheering broke out.

"Yes, I am certain she shall not be missed. I have managed to get two new teachers to agree to take her place and share the position of Defence against the Dark Arts Professor. Please give a warm welcome to Professor Sirius and Professor Lupin."

Loud cheering broke out among the students and at Remus' name three tables rose as one to give him a standing ovation.

Harry grinned at the surprise on Remus' face at their happiness to have him back and as Sirius
leaned in to say something he wasn't surprised his godfather was slapped on the arm, making Sirius laugh and Remus blush.

McGonagall didn't seem to notice this as she raised her hand.

"Thank you…yes, a few more moments of your attention please. As you all know, Professor Lupin is a werewolf. This has absolutely no consequences for your studies outside of a few simple rules. The third corridor on the fifth floor where their private quarters are located is forbidden territory on the day of the full moon. As is leaving the castle after dark on the same evening. Failing to heed these rules will result in immediate expulsion from Hogwarts and you shall have to answer to the Department of Magical Law Enforcement to face criminal charges against knowingly endangering a life, which will result in time spend in Azkaban."

She let her gaze slide over the students slowly. "This is not told to frighten you, but to warn you of the consequences should you believe to be above the rules. They have been put in place to protect both yourself and Professor Lupin, who's taken every precaution to ensure your safety. The least you can do is show him the same courtesy. Thank you for your attention, enjoy your dinner and welcome back."

As she sat down everyone immediately began to speak as one.

"That's a rather clear set of rules," Dean said.

"Why will the corridor to their quarters be forbidden territory on the full moon?" Seamus asked confused.

"Because the Professor transforms inside his quarters?" Neville suggested with a shrug.

"But that would be extremely dangerous," Parvati's eyes widened.

"Not really. There is this potion called Wolfsbane. When taken they keep their sanity after transforming into a werewolf. With it he can simply lock himself up in his quarters and spend the night there without any harm being done," Harry explained.

"I've heard about Wolfsbane, it's extremely difficult to make isn't it?" Katie asked.

"Yeah, but luckily Sirius can make it without a problem," Harry smiled.

"What's it like?" Parvati asked.

"What is what like?"

"To have him as your guardian. I read in the Prophet that he adopted you. What's it like to have someone like him as your guardian," Parvati looked curious.

"Someone like him?" Harry asked sharply.

"Well…you know..." Parvati fidgeted nervously at his sharp tone. "He is rather dangerous, isn't he? He came here and successfully threatened Professor Dumbledore, Snape and Umbridge and played a large part in You-Know-Who's defeat."

"Is it difficult? To have your guardian as your teacher?" Katie interrupted, shooting Parvati a disbelieving look.

"I don't think it makes that much of a difference," Harry shrugged. "And as for your question. He's
only dangerous to those who try to harm his family, rips them apart with his teeth."

They stared at him in shock for a moment before a snort escaped Fred and George chuckled.

"You...were kidding?" Lavender’s eyes were wide.

"If you are lucky you will never find out," Harry said calmly.

"I'd be horrified if my Mum or Dad were to teach at my school. You're not?" Alicia shuddered.

"Why would I be? They are both great people and we can learn a lot from them," Harry shrugged.

"That might be true, but parents always humiliate their children in public...not that he's your...I mean..." Parvati stuttered.

"Obviously he's not his ki...," Hermione began but Harry interrupted her.

"I wouldn't know. Before Sirius came into my life I didn't have a parental figure at all. And although he might do things to embarrass me sometimes, I don't really care. I'm proud to have him as my parent and I look forward to seeing him teach in class," Harry revealed unashamed and Parvati bit her lip with a nod while Hermione huffed.

They all looked up to see Sirius and Remus approach.

"Hello," Sirius greeted them cheerfully as he squeezed Harry's shoulder.

"It's good to have you back, Professor," Dean directed at Remus with a beam.

"It is good to be back, Dean, thank you," Remus smiled, turning to Harry. "This one was giving a yawn so I'm going to fulfil my promise now."

"Already?" Harry looked at Sirius critically to ensure he was feeling well.

"It's already eight, pup," Sirius chuckled, making Harry glance at his watch automatically, sighing when he remembered it was broken and reached forward to Remus' watch to glance at the time.

"Huh, I hadn't noticed. All right, sleep well and I'll see you both tomorrow?"

"Of course. Remember your spells and remind me that I buy you a new watch," Sirius frowned. "Actually, here, take mine for the time being so you won't be late for class tomorrow."

He unclipped his pocket watch and held it out to Harry, who looked surprised, not taking it.

"I...are you sure? Don't you need it yourself?"

"I've got a spare, we'll exchange them tomorrow," Remus assured him and Sirius placed it in his hand, folding his fingers around it with a soft smile.

"Good night you all," Sirius smiled at them as Harry let him ruffle his hair for a moment, his hand still folded around the watch, speechless.

"Night," the Weasleys and Neville chorused, the rest muttering something.

"Tut, tut. That won't do, now, will it? I should like you to, please, reply properly," Sirius' expression and his imitation of Umbridge were so spot on that most of the ones listening in on the conversation froze before bursting out in laughter.
"There, that's better. Night, night," Sirius cheerfully grinned at them, bowing when the twins saluted him and ruffling Harry's hair once more they walked away with a small wave.

Most of the Gryffindors waved after them and a chorus of "Good night, Professors," rang after them, making both laugh.

"That was brilliant," Dean wiped the tears out of his eyes.

"Scarily accurate and it certainly broke the ice," Katie agreed. "I think we'll have a lot of fun with him."

"Is he always that funny?" Lee grinned.

"I hope he will be more serious when teaching," Hermione frowned disapprovingly.

"Don't count on it," Ron said gleefully. He had seen the memory of Sirius teaching the twins and Harry the Silencing Charm last summer and he had been anything but serious in it.

Harry smiled, looking down at the watch Sirius had given him and brushed his hand over the silver front tenderly.

"You seem rather fond of that watch," Fred noted softly as the others were still talking about Sirius.

"Yeah. My grandparents gave it to him on his seventeenth birthday."

Harry clicked it open and held it slightly sideward's so that Fred could read the engraving.

"To our dear Sirius, happy seventeenth birthday, love Mum and Dad," he spoke just loud enough for George to hear it too as he leaned in close.

"He has to cherish this," George commented just as softly as Harry closed it again, putting it safely away.

"He does, it is one of his most precious possessions. I can't believe he just handed it over to me," Harry whispered, still awed at the thoughtlessness with which Sirius had handed it to him.

"He trusts and loves you," George shrugged.

"I know, but not even Remus has ever taken that watch from him," Harry swallowed thickly.

"You are his child; he loves you and trusts you will keep it safe," Fred smiled softly.

Harry nodded. "I'm going to bed."

"Okay, let's go then," George grinned.

Surprised Harry turned to him. "You don't have to come with me."

"Hush, Sirius gave us the duty of being your official guardians for the first day so it is our duty and our pleasure to accompany you to your dorm."

"You don't have to go through all that trouble, they're leaving me well enough alone," Harry chuckled.

"Sirius didn't say our duty ended after dinner, besides, it would be more fun than watching this lot eat," Fred admitted.
Grinning all three of them rose, drawing the attention of the others.

"You're already going to bed?" Hermione looked surprised.

"Yeah, we have History of Magic and Potions first thing tomorrow so I'd like to get a good rest," he explained.

"I'll join you," she said, but Harry shook his head.

"Nah, you aren't done eating yet and I'm going straight to bed anyway," he informed her as he turned to the twins.

"If you are sure..." Hermione sounded hesitant.

"I am, good night," Harry nodded and they left the Great Hall undisturbed.

As they walked towards the Gryffindor Tower they passed the fifth floor but even as Fred and George slowed Harry continued.

"You don't want to say good night to Sirius?" Fred asked surprised, making Harry turn to him.

"I will, but if I go to him in person he'll want to escort us to our tower and I'd like him to rest," he explained as they continued.

"You have a different method of contacting him?" George asked.

"Yeah, I'll show you when we get to the Common Room."

Giving the Fat Lady the password they climbed through and Harry, after checking there was no one there, pulled a small mirror out of his pocket.

"Sirius," almost immediately his godfather's face appeared inside it.

"Hey, are you at your dorm already?" Sirius looked surprised.

"Common Room, I didn't feel like staying so Fred and George accompanied me here, they want to say goodnight, too," Harry grinned as the twin's jaws had dropped as he turned the mirror to them.

"Thank you for your help tonight. I'll make it up to you some time," Sirius greeted them, laughing as he saw their faces. "He didn't tell you what this was?"

"No! This is brillianit. How does it work?" Fred asked as he and George moved as one to stand behind Harry so that all three of them could look into the small mirror.

"It was officially part of a set, but I added a mirror to the set so that both of us would be able to communicate with Remus if necessary. I can teach you guys the spells we used sometime if you'd like so that we can add two more."

"That would be wicked. It makes communicating so much easier than a Floo call!" George exclaimed.

"Yeah, we got the idea from telephones. Muggles use it to call each other across the world if needed, but they need to stay in one spot. We improved that bit so that we can contact each other anywhere and at any time with visual instead of only sound," Sirius explained.

"But aren't you afraid it will break?" Fred asked.
"It can be mended like a regular mirror; the shards won't lose their charms. We tried that out after we entered the war, to ensure it would still work even if it was damaged."

Harry grinned. "I still think it's a brilliant invention."

"Thank you, I do have my moments," Sirius shifted, accidentally dropping the mirror momentarily, showing them only a bed before he could grab it again.

"Sorry."

"Where's Remus?" Harry noticed the other man wasn't present.

"I'm here," a new voice spoke and Sirius shifted the mirror, showing Remus entering the bedroom with a towel over his head and two mugs.

"You should go to bed, pup, it's going to be a long day tomorrow," Sirius smiled, shifting his gaze to the twins. "The two of you too actually."

"We will," they said in unison and Fred and George smiled. "We'll go to our dorm, goodnight to you all."

"Night," Harry, Sirius and Remus said and Harry moved to his own dorm too, placing the mirror on the bed while he changed and brushed his teeth, speaking to Sirius in between.

Crawling into bed he picked up the mirror again.

"Okay, I'm in," he said as he saw Sirius and Remus had finished their drinks.

"All right, sleep well, don't forget to cast your spells and if there is anything wrong call us on the mirror or ask Dobby to get us."

"I will, you sleep well too," Harry smiled.

"Don't worry about that, Remus just fed me a potion so I'll be out like a light soon," Sirius chuckled as Remus smiled guiltily.

Harry smiled. "Night."

"Goodnight, love you and we'll see you tomorrow," Sirius waved.

"Love you too," Harry waved back, ending the connection and safely tucking the mirror away in his night stand.

Pulling the blankets up a big higher in the cold night he cast his usual Silencing Charm to ensure he wouldn't be awoken by Ron's snoring and made himself comfortable, smiling as he fairly quickly dropped to sleep excited to know he'd be able to see his godfather even during the school term.
It was under excited murmuring that the Gryffindor students sat down in their spots upon entering the classroom that Monday afternoon, for their first Defence lesson with the new professors. They hadn’t arrived yet, so the students shared ideas on what to expect from the two who had split them from the Slytherins for this class.

Harry smiled at the various ideas being tossed around, excited after Sirius’ little imitation stunt the evening before.

Looking up when he detected familiar footsteps approaching, the others quickly fell silent as they caught his distraction, focusing on the door, too.

Moments later the door opened and Harry automatically grinned when Sirius entered, raising an eyebrow when he noticed Crookshanks and Mrs. Norris tripped in after him. Sirius shot him a fleeting glance, frowning slightly but greeted the class instead.

Hermione gasped her pet’s name, but Crookshanks ignored her as he jumped onto the desk while Sirius, to everyone’s confusion, halfway into the classroom turned on his heels to Mrs. Norris.

“Go bother someone else for a change, shoo!”

He made a funny sound that was probably supposed to scare her but she wasn’t impressed and started to rub her head against his left leg.

Sirius growled before he turned to the class.

“All right, let’s see. How would you lot get rid of an annoying creature?”

They all stared at him bewildered and Harry bit back a chuckle, used to his godfather’s antics.

Sirius frowned. “Come on Gryffindors, think on your feet. How would you get rid of it?”

Slowly Hermione raised her hand.

“Without magic,” he added as he waved his wand and everyone’s wands immediately rushed towards him, making them gasp as they remembered him having done so before.

“Why would we not have our wands?” Hermione asked alarmed as Sirius caught them and placed them on the desk.

“Because I just disarmed you and left you to rot and die at the mercy of the wilderness,” Sirius simply grinned, making several of them snicker at his bluntness.

He moved to the desk and pulled himself up to sit on it beside Crookshanks, who immediately curled up onto his lap and started purring.

“What about you? Lavender right?”

Lavender looked alarmed at being singled out but cleared her throat.
“I’d throw rocks at it.”

“That’s….what if you hurt her?” Sirius tilted of his head. “It’s an annoying creature, not evil.”

Lavender frowned. “But she’s bothering me.”

“What if you piss her off?” he looked down at Mrs. Norris, waving his wand over her, suddenly causing her to grow to the size of the desk.

Happy purrs erupted as Mrs. Norris could now rub her head against his arm.

“You are supposed to become mad, not try to smother me in cuddles,” Sirius berated the cat with a sigh as the class laughed.

“All right, we’ll just pretend you have severely pissed her off now. Now what? Yes…Dean?”

“Run like hell.”

Sirius shook his head. “Never…and I mean never attempt to outrun a feline. Or any four legged predator that’s quick on their feet actually. It will mean certain death, especially when you are unarmed and unable to use wandless magic.”

He pushed Mrs. Norris aside as she almost toppled him over when attempting to climb the desk to crawl onto his lap, Crookshanks hissing at her from his spot.

“Knock it off. The majority of these creatures will see running as a challenge to catch you. Even if they are not hungry it is in their instincts to run after a quickly moving target. It might work with other creatures though. Neville, do you have any idea?”

Alarmed Neville looked at him before he visibly shook himself to get a grip.

“Is it just annoying you or is it out for your blood?” he asked.

“I’m not so sure right now,” Sirius said as Mrs. Norris used her raw tongue to lick the side of his face, shoving her aside he lifted his wand, tapping her with it to make her shrink again.

This didn’t deter her from immediately trying to claw her way up his legs so Sirius pulled them up, crossing them as he shifted further onto the desk, not disturbing Crookshanks with his movements.

Neville laughed. “Did you come close to fish or so this morning, Professor? I’ve never seen her act like this before.”

“It’s just his natural animal attraction charm,” Harry commented as the class almost doubled in laugher at the cat’s behaviour.

Sirius shot him a mock glare, sighing. “She’s just annoying.”

Neville smiled as the cat was now sitting directly before Sirius, staring at him with her yellow eyes while Crookshanks curled up on his lap again.

“Well, it is a cat…so I’d make it chase something else?”

“Like what? We don’t have a wand to conjure something,” Hermione said annoyed.

Neville faltered for a moment before he turned back to Sirius and smiled.
“When I was a baby my Dad always used to amuse me by playing with the garden gnomes. He’d use his glasses to make a light appear on the ground and have them chase that around.”

Harry smiled, knowing Sirius had showed Neville that memory of his father. He had given Neville a whole phial filled with memories that involved his parents and himself as a baby, so that the other could see them as they had been.

Sirius smiled softly, his smile widened slightly as he seemed to know something the rest didn’t. “Okay, do you have anything that can make a light appear?”

Neville patted his robes. “No...”

“Then you make use of the environment around you. Now you have the luck that the wild in this case means a classroom so go ahead, chase the annoying creature away.”

Neville didn’t hesitate to move from his seat to look around for something shiny before he turned to Sirius.

“I don’t suppose I could borrow your watch sir?”

“I rather have you didn’t. It’s not that I don’t trust you but it’s a very treasured possession that I don’t lend to anyone. But you can borrow these glasses,” Sirius handed him a pair of glasses he pulled from his robes, removing his hand from Crookshanks’ back as the animal followed what was happening interested.

Harry looked at them confused as Neville accepted them.

“Why do you have glasses in your pocket?”

“They are your old glasses. I put them into a pocket to dispose of them later but forgot about them. They come in handy now,” Sirius explained, nodding to Neville and the blond looked at the window before frowning as he realised something.

“There’s no sun.”

“I noticed,” Sirius replied dryly. “So what do you do when there’s no sun to create a light with?”

Neville thought for a moment before Harry raised his hand, answering as Neville looked lost.

“Let her chase a ball instead.”

“Do you have a ball?” Sirius asked with a playful smile.

“No. But I do have parchment so I can crumble that tightly enough to make it round and throw it,” Harry answered, having seen Sirius do just that when playing with Crookshanks last summer.

“Go help your classmate out then,” Sirius replied and Harry rose, tearing a piece of parchment off and rolling it up tightly, making sure it was round before handing it to Neville.

Neville looked at it, testing it on the desk to see if it would indeed roll, holding it before Mrs. Norris.

Immediately Mrs. Norris tensed, her lamp like eyes following Neville’s hand as he pulled his arm back and storming forward as the crumbled ball flew past her, running out of the classroom as Neville had aimed it to do so, closely followed by Crookshanks.
A wave of Sirius’ wand closed the door behind her. “Five points to Neville and Harry for successfully working together to chase the creature away.”

Unfolding his legs Sirius slid from the desk.

“Now, as you all know my name is Sirius Black and I’ll be your professor from now on. Yes...I’m sorry, I’m afraid I don’t quite remember your name.”

“Seamus Finnegan, Sir. I was just wondering where Professor Lupin is,” Seamus said as he had raised his hand.

“The official arrangement is that he teaches first to fourth years and I’ll teach the other years. You’ve probably heard that we’ll teach the fourth and seventh years together?”

Seamus nodded.

“That is because they are so far behind on what they need to know in contrast to you guys. So he will only join us when he’s got the time or something’s up,” Sirius answered him.

“Is that why the Slytherins were separated from us for Defence?” Lavender asked.

“Yes, I requested for them to be put in a separate class as they are further behind than the rest of this year and will need a different lesson plan than you guys to catch up.”

Understanding crossed the student’s expression and Sirius smiled. “Now, your classes have been really irregular and quite frankly your best teachers so far have been Professor Lupin and a disguised Death Eater.”

Sirius paused, tilting his head slightly. “I wonder what that says about the quality of your overall education if a Death Eater is able to teach students more properly than a Ministry toad, an idiotic fraud and a possessed fool.”

He raised an eyebrow and Harry wasn’t the only one snickering at his words even as Hermione looked scandalised that he insulted Lockhart.

“Anyway, since the only information I have to go on is the DA lessons Harry gave you and Professor Lupin’s memories, my plan was to let you show me what you know.”

He moved around the desk. “I want you all to come collect your wand one at a time and then show me the spells that you know. I will name what you should know by now and make a note if you know it or not. From there I’ll form a lesson plan.”

“Why can’t we just write a list of the ones we know?” Hermione frowned.

“Knowing a spell and actually being able to perform properly it are two separate things. For example, knowing you, you probably know exactly what the spell Expulso does?”

“Yes. The Expulso Curse is a curse used to produce immense explosions, blasting the target apart with a burst of blue light. It has enough force to throw people into a wall,” Hermione replied immediately.

“And in your own words, what does it do?” Sirius asked.

“What do you mean? I just told you.”

“No, you told me the textbook answer. I’d like an answer that you formed with your own words.”
Hermione stared at him and Sirius sighed.

“Anyone else?”

Dean and Harry raised their hands.

“Dean?”

“It’s a spell used to make things explode, using pressure instead of heat,” he answered.

“Five points to Gryffindor. When I ask for an answer I want an answer formed in your own words from what you’ve read. Textbook answers are useless to me as I cannot tell if you truly understood what you’ve read. They will not be accepted,” he warned while looking at Hermione.

“Please come forward.”

Hermione rose, looking annoyed that he’d not given her points, and walked to him.

Sirius conjured a wooden box and handed Hermione her wand back.

“Use the spell please.”

“Expulso,” Hermione said as she swept her wand in a complicated movement, but nothing happened.

“Why are you moving your arm like that?” Sirius frowned.

“The book says that this is the movement used for the spell,” Hermione snapped at him.

“Maybe. But you are also dead because the enemy got through your defences while you waved your arm around like a lunatic,” Sirius promptly shot back.

“But...”

“Try it again, but without the useless waving around. Just point your wand at the box and use the spell,” Sirius said as he gave a flick of his own wand.

Hermione clicked her tongue annoyed before she tried to do as Sirius told her to, but she still made unnecessary movements and the box remained standing. Though this time it returned fire with a small red beam and Hermione yelped as the Stinging Hex hit her stomach.

“That’s twice dead. Stand back, Neville?”

Neville hurried forward, accepting his wand from Sirius surprised.

“How do you know which wand belongs to whom?”

Sirius blinked and glanced at the wands. “I’m an Animagus. I can smell it.”

“You are?” Neville asked surprised as he stared at him.

“Yes, I registered earlier this week,” Sirius confirmed, nodding at the box.

“Same spell.”

“But I’ve never used it before,” Neville nervously shifted.
“Doesn’t matter. The incantation is ecks-PUHL-soh. Just point your wand, channel your magic into wanting it to explode and say the spell.”

Neville gripped his wand a bit more tightly, shifting into position before raising his wand. Taking a deep breath his expression became determined.

“Expulso!”

Immediately the box exploded, the pieces slamming into an invisible shield cast around the box and the class cheered.

“Good work, ten points to Gryffindor. Who can tell me why Neville succeeded where Hermione failed?”

Seamus raised his hand.

“He had more guidance?”

“Maybe...Harry?”

“Because he wanted the box to explode. He pictured it in his mind and that powered the spell.”

“That’s correct. The books can say a whole lot of things, but just knowing something doesn’t mean you can actually use it properly, too. Expulso is a spell that has multiple functions. So when you don’t know the workings behind a spell it can be quite useless to rely on book information. Neville succeeded because he used his own mind to make it happen. Five points to Gryffindor for the correct answer.”

He turned to Hermione. “How did you try to make the box explode?”

“With the spell.”

“How did you vision it in your mind? Did it burst outward into flames or just crumble?”

“I- I don’t know. I wasn’t picturing anything,” Hermione turned red.

“And that is why it didn’t work for you. The books say it uses pressure to make things explode, but you don’t know what that looks like so you didn’t know what to expect and therefore nothing happened.”

“I’ve never had problems with other spells before,” Hermione complained.

“That is actually not entirely true. I’ve seen you perform several spells over the years and I noticed that they were all rather sloppily preformed. You lose a lot of power in useless movements and following the rules stated by the books.”

“That’s not true!” Hermione exclaimed angrily.

“But it is. Has none of your other teachers ever said anything?”

“No, because I do well in class. I know all my spells.”

“You know them, but you can’t perform them to their full potential. You both know the Levitation charm. I want you both to levitate these two books,” Sirius summoned the books from Harry and Lavender´s tables and placed them on the desk.
“I haven’t mastered that spell yet Professor,” Neville admitted ashamed as he leaned towards Sirius.

“I have every bit of faith in you, Neville. The pronouncement is wing-GAR-dee-um levi-O-sa. Don’t bother with wand movements. Just give it a little sweep and think of what you want it to do,” he told him, taking a step aside so the students could all see what was happening more properly.

“I want you both to levitate the book before you to touch the ceiling and have it dance through the air at mid height, make a circle around the students and then return to the table as quickly as possible. Are you ready?”

Neville braced himself, biting his lip as Hermione stood proudly beside him.

“Relax Neville. Just imagine the book in your mind doing what you want it to do and your magic will do the rest. Don’t watch Hermione but just focus on your task, all right?” Sirius told him and Harry saw Neville relax slowly at Sirius’ voice.

“On the count of three. One, two...three!”

“Wingardium Leviosa,” was called out at the same time and Hermione’s book rose neatly and quickly.

However, Neville’s shot up to the ceiling and halfway down again at high speed, danced around the students in a circle and returned to the table before Hermione’s book had even reached the ceiling.

Surprised, everyone cheered.

“That’s not possible; I have much better control than Neville does! You helped him,” Hermione accused Sirius.

“I did that...” Neville whispered shocked, his wide eyes as he stared at the book.

“Yes you did Neville, and all on your own. Because he pictured in his mind what he wanted the book to do, his magic reacted accordingly and did what he asked. You were forcing your book to do your bidding, not allowing your magic to take over but to keep tight control on it. It’s what de-powers your spells,” Sirius explained.

“It doesn’t matter what type of spell you use, it is all about intent. You can concentrate all that you want on a spell, but if you do not properly know what you want to do, a spell will never work properly for you.”

He turned to the class. “Hermione and Neville used the exact same spell but with different results because Hermione concentrates too much while Neville just acts. Ten points to you, Neville, because you’ve mastered the spell in one attempt and managed to win from your classmate.”

Neville coloured deeply and straightened slightly from his normally slouched stance at the praise and pride in Sirius’ voice.

“Now, I’d like all of you to put your books away and form a line before the tables. When I call your name and read a spell from the list, show it to me.”

“You don’t want to know the theory behind the spells?” Lavender asked.

“What is the use of theory if you cannot use the spell properly? Harry taught you all the
Expelliarmus charm. That is second year stuff, yet many of you had sloppy spell work. Why is that?”

“Because we focused on the theory and followed the written instructions but never practised it more than the mere minimum,” Lavender admitted.

“Exactly. Forget theory, you can read up on that for your homework. In class I want you to learn the practical side. I want you to be able to use a spell, to truly know how to use it without a moment’s hesitation. If I throw a hex at you I want you to be able to identify the spell by the colour and it’s movements alone and react accordingly.”

“But the theory!” Hermione exclaimed.

“You will write essays that Professor Lupin will grade about what you’ve been taught now and then.”

“You won’t grade them?” Dean asked.

“I might peek at them occasionally. I have always found them a gigantic waste of time that can be spent better. In the time it takes for an average person to write an essay you could have practiced and learned two spells properly. I only give essays out at all because a certain amount is required to pass your exams.”

Everyone gaped at him surprised, though only Hermione seemed upset.

“Also a fair warning. If you have to write an essay you will be given a required length. Keep to that. I will not have Professor Lupin waste his time with reading pointless words for no good reason. If you cannot get to the point of what was asked in the required length then you’ll simply fail. The first few times I will give you a chance to redo it, but if you fail to comply in that it will simply be failed immediately without being read,” Sirius warned them sternly while looking directly at Hermione.

Harry bit his lip to keep from bursting out in laughter as this was a very clear warning and Hermione gasped.

“If that’s clear then form a line please,” Sirius continued pleasantly.

They had more fun than they thought they’d have with revising old spells and Sirius helped them with their spell work whenever it was slightly lacking or gave them as homework to practice the spells they had almost mastered. He made a list of what they all knew and had Harry walk around to give them tips after they were done.

“Okay, wands down everyone. Not bad. You know about half of what you are supposed to know by now so we’ll have to do some serious catching up if you do want to pass your O.W.L.s. That makes you advanced compared to the Ravenclaws so you can be proud of yourself.”

He tucked his notes into his bag before leaning against the desk.

“If you are interested I can ask Professor McGonagall if she’d agree with adding a double hour of Defence on Thursday. Since according to my knowledge you only have Potions that morning and no other classes. You don’t have to give up your free afternoon, but it might help to have more time to get on track.”

“I’m for it,” Neville immediately said and Seamus and Dean nodded, too.
“It would be wise to use the time to catch up,” Lavender admitted.

Only Parvati, Ron and Hermione didn’t look too happy with the idea of extra classes but Parvati sighed.

“I don’t want to fail my O.W.L’s. so I’m in too.”

“Good, I’ll speak to Professor McGonagall then and get back to you. To make up for costing you your free hours I’ll bring a treat if she agrees,” Sirius promised.

“What kind of treat?” Ron asked.

“Some kind of food,” Sirius answered.

“That you made?” Harry asked with an expectant grin.

“Yes,” Harry, Neville and Ron whooped in delight, making Sirius laugh.

“Are you a good cook Professor?” Lavender asked interested.

“I get by,” Sirius admitted and Harry snorted.

“You more than get by.”

Sirius shrugged as the bell went off, signalling the end of classes.

“That’s it for today, you all know your homework and I’ll see you Friday. Harry, can you wait for a moment?” Sirius bid them goodbye as they all left cheerfully, only Harry remaining.

“So, what annoyed you?”

“Huh?” Harry looked confused as he sat on the desk as Sirius collected the rest of his notes.

“You seemed annoyed when I arrived, though it disappeared quickly. So I know you weren’t annoyed at me, leaving me to wonder who or what annoyed you today,” Sirius explained as he sat on the other side of the desk, facing Harry.

“I had Potions before and Divination,” Harry sighed.

“Though I know you don’t like Divination, you knew it was the last class you’d have to follow before dropping it so I doubt you’d let her annoy you. Which leaves the git, what did he do?”

“Just being his usual nasty self. He seems to be taking it as a personal insult that the two of you are teaching here and was extra nasty. He dropped my potion, which I knew was brewed perfectly thanks to your lessons and failed me again,” Harry sighed.

“I see. Could I have the memory of it?” Sirius asked, rummaging in his bag for a vial.

“Sure, but why?” Harry asked as he extracted the memory from his mind.

“Because I’ve had it with him. I’ll write to the board, including a copy of the memory to make an official complaint. I’m not letting your education fail under his incompetence so I’m pulling you out and I’ll tutor you myself,” Sirius collected the memory inside the vial and grabbed a piece of parchment to write on, quickly scribbling a letter before folding it and putting the vial into an enchanted bag.
“Will they allow you to do so?” Harry asked hopeful.

If Sirius could pull him out he’d never have to endure another disastrous lesson under Snape’s unfairness.

“I’m not asking them for permission. I’m just informing them of my actions. I’m also sending a copy to Augusta Longbottom. She is on the board and she will not appreciate how Snape treats Neville either. Hopefully she’ll pull Neville out, too, before the git ruins him.”

“He discovered Neville’s receiving extra tutoring from you in Potions and was extra hard on him today,” Harry revealed softly, feeling sorry for the nervous boy.

Sirius shook his head sadly. “I noticed he was more subdued and unsure than the first time I saw him so something had to have happened. How can someone be so petty as to take his frustrations out on a teenage boy, especially one who already has little to no confidence in himself.”

Taking up both sealed parchments he put them inside his bag, shrinking it and putting it into his coat pocket before holding the door open for Harry.

“Can I borrow Hedwig to send this after dinner?” he asked as they walked through the hallway.

“Of course. Where’s Boo?”

“I sent him to an old acquaintance of mine.”

They walked in silence until they saw Harry’s classmates standing near an angry Hermione, and Peeves, who was floating high above her.

“What’s going on here?” Sirius asked as the Gryffindors moved aside to let him through.

“Peeves was throwing water balloons at us and Hermione got mad at him. Told him she is a Prefect and he should respect her. He started blowing raspberries at her,” Dean shrugged, used to Peeves’ behaviour.

Sirius looked up to Peeves. “Could you come down here?”

“Of course,” Peeves grinned, immediately lowering himself so that he was on Sirius’ eye level.

“Were you targeting them with water balloons?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Hot or cold water?” Sirius asked, making the students look at him confused.

“Warm. Wouldn’t want your students to catch a cold or burn themselves,” Peeves’ voice was sugary sweet.

“How thoughtful,” Sirius replied dryly, a small smile playing on his lips as he turned around at the students and looked them over, taking in their wet clothes. Only Neville appeared to be dry.

“I must say that I am disappointed. I just told you I want you to think on your feet and react so how is it that only Neville is mostly dry when under attack?”

“He threw water balloons at us!” Hermione exclaimed angrily.

“So? An attack is an attack,” Sirius shot back, turning to Neville.
“Why are you dry?”

“I used a shield spell when he aimed at me,” Neville admitted shyly, making Dean slap himself on the forehead.

“Why didn’t I think of that?!”

“Five points for thinking on your feet while under attack,” Sirius praised him, frowning as he once more looked over the others.

“Your aim is terrible as ever I must say,” he directed at Peeves with a frown. “I thought you learned something from the aiming lessons James and I gave you?”

“I did. But the Longbottom boy tried to protect them,” Peeves pouted as he turned upside down.

“Oh stop that, you’ll be able to take revenge the next time,” Sirius laughed as he waved his wand and everyone’s clothes dried up.

“Will you let us pass in peace before we’ll be late for dinner?” Harry asked.

“All right,” Peeves readily agreed, handing Harry his remaining balloons.

“Why do you listen to him but not to me? I’m a Prefect while he is not,” Hermione complained.

“You should respect me.”

“I think you are the one who should respect him, Hermione. Peeves is more than a thousand years old, as old as Hogwarts itself is actually. This means that he is your elder and you are just a hatchling in his eyes. Have you never learned to respect your elders?” Sirius asked as Peeves moved behind him, wrapping his arms around Sirius’ neck and leaned his head on his shoulder in a loose embrace.

“I...he’s a poltergeist, not a person,” Hermione protested, her eyes wide at the display of affection from Peeves before her. And she wasn’t the only one shocked, beside Harry they all stared at the scene with wide eyes.

“So House Elves are people but a poltergeist is not?” Sirius asked with a raised eyebrow as he reached up and patted Peeves’ hands resting on his chest. “That is rather unfair of you.”

“I didn’t...I mean...he’s......” Hermione stuttered, turning red again.

“A being just like we, and deserving of respect,” Sirius frowned at her. “And yes, he causes a lot of trouble, but that does not mean he’s less of a person as we are.”

As he turned slightly Peeves let go of him again, floating at eye level again so that Sirius didn’t have to look up.

“When Peeves plays pranks and is malicious you have every right to defend yourself and even try to counter-attack. But he still deserves respect, especially if you ever wish to gain his. Status means nothing to him, so he doesn’t care if you are a Prefect or a Professor or even the Queen. In his book respect is earned and none of you has.”

“And Harry has?” Ron asked scandalised.

“I’m Sirius’ charge,” Harry answered.

“And that is the reason he respects you?” Hermione looked annoyed at that information.
“Pottery Black is the Marauders’ legacy,” Peeves replied cryptically as Sirius held out his hand.

“Harry?”

Handing over the water balloons Sirius gave them back to Peeves, who accepted them surprised.

“Do try to behave Peevsie, at least until I am out of sight or I will have to retaliate and we both know my aim is very accurate. I doubt you've forgotten our paint war,” Sirius winked at him before he saluted the poltergeist and moved past him.

“Yes sir!” Peeves crackled madly as Sirius walked on with a small wave with Harry, the others quickly following after him to not be left as targets of the water balloons, impressed by Sirius’ words.

Chapter End Notes

¹ - according to the Harry Potter Wiki’s Fifth year article, the fifth year’s timetable shows no classes on Thursdays except for a mentioning of Potions. Seeing that all of Harry’s class follows the same classes as him I’ve taken it to be their main timetable. However I do not know if Hermione has other classes that day not mentioned but I assume she doesn’t.
“All right, if everyone could give me the essays assigned to you by Professor Lupin when he took over for me last week.” Sirius asked several lessons later as he sat down to make some notes at his desk near the end of an interesting lesson about curses and counter curses and their uses.

Hermione was the first at his desk to place her roll of parchment down.

Sirius glanced at it. “Ten points from Gryffindor and you just got yourself a T.”

“What! Why? You haven’t even read it!” Hermione’s hackles immediately rose.

“This is at least ten inches more than what was asked for. Professor Lupin asked for two rolls of parchment, he didn’t ask you to add parchment to the bottom. I wasn’t born yesterday, Miss Granger, and can tell when parchment has been magically attached to a roll. If you cannot follow simple instructions then you will bear the consequences,” Sirius frowned.

“I didn’t add parchment,” Hermione said scandalised.

“Dean, can I have one of your rolls, please?” He accepted the roll given to him and rolled it out, grabbing hers and unrolling it too. Holding them side by side they could all see Hermione’s parchment was at least fifteen inches longer than Dean’s.

“I am not stupid and I find it extremely insulting to be thought of as such. The T stands.”

A quick tap of his wand had both essays roll themselves up again and he handed Hermione hers back.

“Can’t she do it over?” Lavender asked softly as she clutched her own rolls to her chest.

“This is my second version! He returned my original one without looking, too when I presented it to him last time!” Hermione snapped angrily.

“Was that one too long, too?” Dean asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Only thirty five inches! I had to include all that I had discovered.”

“No, you were supposed to write two rolls of parchment on the various uses of the spell taught. Professor Lupin did not ask for the history behind the spell or the various wand movements used.”

“Why can’t he read it over like he usually does?” Hermione asked, crossing her arms as she huffed in annoyance.

“Because I read them over this time and that is another ten points. I am sick and tired of getting into an argument with you every single time you fail to listen and do what’s being asked of you. I gave you two simple tasks; write a lot bigger and write a whole lot less. The next essay where you write more than is asked for I will tear it up and you will lose twenty points and get a detention with Filch. And that is the last warning you will receive.”

“We are supposed to learn something in this class, aren’t we? Then why do you punish me when I show you what I’ve learned?” Hermione argued despite his words.

“The only thing I want you to learn is to listen. You have ten seconds to return to your desk or you can leave right away with a detention,” Sirius snapped at her.
Hermione gaped at him in disbelief.

“Five seconds left.”

Defiantly she remained standing before his desk.

Sirius grabbed a piece of paper, writing something on it before placing it at the front of his desk.

“You are to give this to your Head of House. Above whatever punishment she gives you I want to see you report to Filch tonight at seven for your detention.”

“You can’t send me away! I’m your best student and I’ve never gotten a detention before!”

“I think we both know that is not true, but at any rate you’ve just received one. Now leave my classroom or it will be a week worth of detentions and I kick you out permanently,” he threatened her.

Hermione bristled as she tore the parchment out of his hand and stamped to the door.

“Oh, and Miss Granger?”

Hermione turned angrily.

“You place twenty fifth in this class of this year. You are by far not even remotely close to being my best student. I just wanted you to be aware of that fact. You can go now.”

Hermione’s expression was thunderous as she slammed the door behind her, making Sirius roll his eyes. “Childish.”

He looked up to see most of the class gape at him in shock.

“Professor...c-can I do my essay over?” Lavender asked in a small voice.

“What for?” Sirius asked, leaning forward to take her essay from her, unrolling the first inch to glance at it.

“It’s a bit longer than the required length,” she admitted softly.

“Is it now? Nope, you can’t do it over,” he placed the roll onto his desk.

“But Professor....” Lavender’s lip trembled.

“Normal handwriting, so I accept it.”

Dean suddenly snickered. “You are wicked Professor.”

Sirius turned his attention to him.

“I don’t mind if the essay is too long. As long as it isn’t over the top, has the facts that were asked for and isn’t written so tiny it’s unreadable or has words I can’t even decipher without magic.”

Ron grinned guiltily.

“Yes, that was meant for you. Who taught you how to write?”

“Mum,” Ron answered truthfully.
“And your dad taught your brothers?” Sirius asked knowingly, moving to lean against the desk.

“How did you know that?”

“Because I can read the twins’ handwriting just fine and Bill and Charlie have very decent handwritings as well. Your sister’s handwriting has your quality, too. The tons of angry letters your mother writes to me I’ve given up on trying to decipher because they are just unreadable,” he paused with a despaired sigh.

“I actually send her a Muggle children’ book given to children beginning to learn how to write properly, but I don’t think she opened it because she send me yet another undecipherable letter shortly after that.”

Ron didn’t even bother trying to hide his laughter, not the least bit offended as everyone snickered at Sirius’ innocent tone of voice.

“Which is actually why I would like you to report here at six tonight,” Sirius continued and Ron blinked surprised.

“What? Why?”

“It is not a detention and hopefully you won’t be the only one. Did any of you know that teachers dock your essays grade for lousy handwriting?”

“No!” everyone exclaimed horrified.

“Yes, which is why Professor Lupin and I have already dedicated classes of his first to fourth years to writing skills. But I cannot afford spending an entire lesson of my fifth to seventh years on the subject because only a few have trouble, even with the extra Thursday added for classes, at least not yet. So I’d like to try it this way for those. I am hoping that Dean, Seamus and Harry would be willing to join you tonight.”

“Is our handwriting that bad?” Seamus asked surprised.

“Oh no, but you and Harry leave smudges from your Quill and Dean’s handwriting is very small and thus hard to read because ink leaves thick letters. It’s truthfully quite logical considering all three of you learned to write with Muggle pens. Unless your mum taught you how to write with a Quill?”

He directed at Seamus who shook his head.

“And you were only a few months old when your father passed away so I doubt you ever used one either.”

Everyone looked at him surprised. “You...knew my Dad?”

“Of course, he was only two years above me and also a Gryffindor,” Sirius answered him confused.

“My Dad was a wizard? Like...you are sure of that?” Dean looked shocked and relieved at the same time.

“Y-yes....you didn’t know?” Sirius was the one shocked now.

“No. Dad abandoned Mum and me when I was a baby. He never told her if he was a wizard or not.
We suspected...Dad was in Gryffindor?”

“Yes. Not the best student I had ever seen but he was courageous and fought against the Death Eaters once or twice before they got to him.”

“You said he was dead?” Dean swallowed thickly.

“I...would you rather talk in private?” Sirius asked suddenly as he glanced at the other students who were listening interested.

“I’m not leaving him,” Seamus declared immediately even as Dean shook his head.

“I don’t mind...how did he die?” Dean asked softly.

“In the war. It was a terrifying time and the Death Eaters were targeting those who mingled with Muggles. They tortured the partners and slaughtered the children, usually leaving their torn corpses for their spouse to find them. Many decided to run to try and protect their families from them, basically abandoning them.”

“And my Dad was one of them?”

“Yes. But the Death Eaters caught him and murdered him because he refused to join them.”

“So Dad abandoned us...to try and protect us?” Dean asked, on the verge of tears. Seamus wrapped an arm around him, pulling him close to comfort him.

“So your dad wasn’t a low-life who just abandoned you for no reason,” he tried to make Dean feel better.

“No. Your dad was a brave man, a bit of an idiot but brave,” Sirius sighed. “I’m truly sorry, I thought you knew.”

“Until I got my Hogwarts letter I never even suspected magic might be real. Mum and I thought that maybe my Dad had been magical but we couldn’t prove it and I found no records of him here,” Dean admitted.

“There should be, have you ever asked a teacher?” Sirius asked.

“No, I didn’t think they’d tell me.”

“I’ll look into it and get back to you on that. I didn’t interact with him a lot, but I remember he was in our combined art classes and you certainly inherited his talent.”

“Mum always said Dad was good at painting,” Dean smiled before he took a deep breath. “Is he....buried somewhere?”

“Yes. I don’t know exactly where, but I know someone who can find out easily, I’ll ask if you want me to?”

“I would like that and I think Mum would want to know the truth, too...I just don’t know how to write this to her,” Dean tried to laugh but it turned into a sob as Seamus tightened his hold.

“This isn’t something that you should tell her through a letter. I’ll talk to your Head of House but I doubt she would object to paying your mum a visit for this. Professor McGonagall taught him for seven years, so she would be able to tell you more about him than I ever could,” Sirius offered Dean a small smile.
Dean nodded before his expression hardened. “I would like to learn more about him. But that will have to be later. I believe you were talking about extra writing lessons?”

Sirius nodded, letting him change the subject back to what it had been without argument, knowing the boy needed a moment to give everything a place.

“Yes, so would you boys be willing to come here tonight for some writing lessons?”

They nodded but Parvati raised her hand.

“Would you mind if I joined too? I know my handwriting is normal but the ink always leaves smudges on my hand and I’d like to try and learn how to prevent that.”

“You are welcome to join, but you can never completely prevent that from happening unless you bend your wrist in an awkward position or constantly use magic,” Sirius explained.

“I’d still like to join, Professor,” Parvati said.

“Me too. I could always use pointers too,” Lavender admitted.

“And me,” Neville smiled. “Would you mind having the entire class minus Hermione over?”

“She is welcome to join too, as long as she keeps her yap shut and listens to what I’m trying to teach her,” Sirius bluntly informed them.

“That is unlikely to happen,” Harry snorted. “She’s always arguing with you.”

“I know,” Sirius sighed again before he clasped his hands together. “All right, I know it isn’t time yet but....”

A knock on the door interrupted him and McGonagall appeared in the door opening.

“Sirius, do you have a moment?”

“Of course, I’ll be back in a moment,” he told the class as he followed her outside and closed the door.

“Do you think Hermione complained about him?” Lavender asked.

“He was more than reasonable in his actions. McGonagall knows that,” Harry shrugged.

“He what!?” Sirius suddenly exclaimed loudly enough for them all to hear and they all looked at the door surprised.

“What do you reckon that’s about?” Ron asked curiously.

“No idea. But it sounds like McGonagall really surprised him,” Harry said.

The door opened and Sirius walked in, looking bewildered before noticing all their attention on him.

“What is your next class?” he asked Dean as he wandlessly moved their assignments into his bag.

“Double Potions,” Dean sighed.

“Alone?”
“No, with the Slytherins.”

“Of course you do. Grab your things; I’ll take you to Potions. The two of you, too,” he nodded to Neville and Harry.

Everyone groaned and Sirius smiled faintly.

“You’d almost think you don’t want to learn Potions.”

They all looked at him incredulous.

“Who could possibly enjoy two hours with Snape?” Seamus complained.

“Is this how you talk about me behind my back, too? Oh no, we’ve got that idiot again this morning?” Sirius chuckled.

“No! You are cool,” Lavender protested.

“You are?” Dean asked hopeful.

“Yes. Professor M just asked me to.”

“What’s wrong with the git?” Harry asked.

“I’ll explain once the Slytherins have joined us. I would appreciate it if the two of you would sit in front across of the desk,” Sirius directed at him and Neville again.

“Sure.”

They made their way to potions with a much lighter heart and as they arrived the Slytherins and Hermione were already waiting before the door.

“Where’s Professor Snape?” Malfoy asked immediately as Sirius unlocked the door.

“Snape had something else to do today so I’ll be your teacher.”

“What did he have to do?” Malfoy demanded.

“I don’t know. He left the castle without a word.”

“He left?” Several voices asked at once.

“Yes, it appears that he walked out in the middle of class and just left. No one knows where he went or when he’ll be back so I’ll be taking over Potions until he returns.”

“Didn’t he say anything?” Blaise asked, though he didn’t look at all sorry to learn the news.

“Oh, something about old manipulative fools, bloody pests and burning itches. I admit I wasn’t listening properly to Professor McGonagall’s explanation once she asked me to take over for the time being.”

“But you will be teaching two classes at once,” Harry said, worried for his godfather’s health.

“I know, there is a staff meeting tomorrow afternoon if Snape hasn’t returned yet to see what we’ll do now. But it will probably only be temporarily and he’ll be back before we can throw a party,”
Sirius looked wishful for a moment and even some Slytherins snickered.

The animosity between Snape and Sirius was no secret to any of the students. And while Sirius ignored the Potions master utterly and completely, acting like he didn’t exist when he could, Snape was often seen sneering and almost growling whenever Sirius was near.

“Potions cannot just be taught by anyone,” Pansy sneered. “We’ll all fail our O.W.L.s!”

“You are an idiot. Professor Sirius holds the same degrees as Professor Snape does. The only reason he never got his Mastery is because he was imprisoned,” Blaise snorted.

“How do you know that?” Pansy asked surprised.

“I’d like to know who’s teaching me,” Blaise shrugged.

“A filthy half-breed and a Mudblood loving disgrace,” Malfoy sneered under his breath but Sirius still heard him.

“50 points from Slytherin, a month detention and you can grab your things and leave right now,” Sirius spoke up.

“What for!” Malfoy’ eyes widened. “I was only saying the truth!”

“I will not tolerate that kind of language and disrespect while I’m teaching, not now, not ever. I don’t care what you say about me, but you will show the proper respect to a fully qualified and respectable teacher.”

“Potter calls Snape names all the time,” Malfoy argued.

“I specifically said respectable teachers, not slimy and unfair gits. And you’ve just earned yourself another detention on top of what I already gave you.”

“What? Why!”

“Backtalking,” Sirius said shortly.

“But Granger does that all the time, too!”

“And it has earned her detentions of her own. I believe I told you something.”

“I don’t take orders from one of the ones responsible for my father’s death,” he straightened to his full length proudly.

“Your father was a dead man the moment he willingly became a slave of Voldemort,” Sirius snorted.

“My father was not a slave!”

“No? Anyone who willingly kisses the robes of a lunatic mass murderer and does their bidding no matter what is a foolish slave in my eyes.”

“He was under the....” Malfoy started but Sirius interrupted him.

“The Dark Mark cannot be given to the unwilling. To be able to receive one you have to willingly torture and murder a human being unaided. It is a test of loyalty. Without it being performed completely voluntarily, the Dark Mark cannot be given.”
“How would you know that,” Malfoy sneered.

“Unfortunately I come from a family that mostly bowed down to that same lunatic. I know about the initiating ritual. Your father was not an unwilling participant as the Dark Mark was found on his arm, there for all to see. Ask your Head of House when he returns, he knows all about it as he’s got the same Mark.”

“But Lupin killed him!” Malfoy yelled angrily, even as the other students looked surprised at Sirius’ last words.

“Actually, Voldemort killed him with one of his wayward spells. This is what happened to most of his followers in the end. Voldemort killed more of his own lackeys than any of the Aurors ever did,” Sirius said coldly, ignoring the shiver most gave at the mentioning of his name, remaining remarkable calm while Malfoy flushed angrily.

“If you are wise you will turn your back on your father’s teachings. You are still young and not yet completely marked by his dark influences. But that is a choice you have to make. I’ve already banned you from Defence and if you keep up this attitude you will not be welcome in this class whenever I’m teaching it, either.”

Malfoy’s normally pale cheeks flushed in anger as he grabbed his bag and stormed out of the class without another word at the sight of Sirius’ wand casually twirling between his fingers and his unwavering gaze.

“And don’t slam...the door,” Sirius closed his eyes for a moment as the door slammed shut and sighed before turning to Hermione.

“Are you going to complain, argue or be a general pain in the butt this class? Because if I hear one thing from you again today I am going to immediately kick you out without further ado. With force if I have to, is that clear?” he warned her sharply and Hermione swallowed as she nodded, shrinking slightly into her chair.

“Good. Now, I’ve never had trouble with the rest of you, but I am not in the mood for any more discussions. So if any of you don’t like the way I teach or has a problem with me, there’s the door.”

He waited for a long moment but no one moved and he nodded, waving his wand at the board.

“All right, you know your way around, ingredients and instructions are on the board, so knock yourself out. If you have any questions, don’t hesitate to ask.”

Quietly the class gathered their ingredients before returning to their desks. Neville glanced at the board after several minutes had passed and raised his hand, making Sirius blink surprised.

“Already?” he asked amused, moving from the desk towards Neville.

Neville grinned apologetic. “No...I...why are you writing so small?”

Sirius turned around confused, frowning as his eyes fell onto the small writing.

“It must be preset to a certain size, sorry.” He returned to the board and tapped it with his wand, immediately making the text larger.

“Is this better?” he asked Neville who nodded.

“Sir?”
“Yes Seamus?”

“Would you mind enlarging it a little more?”

“What do you need the board for?” Sirius asked confused as he sought Dean out in the second last row.

“To read the instructions?” Ron asked like it was the most logical thing in the world.

“Why? From the third row and on there are instructions written on your desk.”

A silence fell over the classroom as the mentioned rows looked down astonished and the first two rows turned around, equally surprised.

“Is...that new, sir?” Blaise asked slowly.

“Not as far as I know, the settings were there while I was a first year; the teacher just has to activate it.”

More silence as even the Slytherins seemed to be at a loss for words.

“Snape has told you about this in your first year, hasn’t he?”

Several Slytherins shook their heads mutely.

“That’s absurd. How are you supposed to read the instructions on the board over several fuming cauldrons?” Sirius asked outraged.

No one answered as they shrugged.

“Anything else he failed to inform you about?”

Neville raised his hand. “Before you started tutoring me I had no idea why I was supposed to add some things first and other things later.”

“Or why we have to stir left or right,” Harry added.

“There’s a reason?” Daphne exclaimed.

“Of course. In Potions everything has a reason. It is all about reaction. When you combine ingredients you have to be careful to use the exact right measurements or it will become unstable and it can explode. Same with stirring. You stir clockwise to combine the ingredients and counter clockwise to bind them. It is why you have to alternate between directions and sometimes wait before continuing.”

“But how do you know in which direction you should stir?” Seamus asked.

“By listening and looking. A hissing sound means you are either stirring too fast or in the wrong direction. If you stir too slowly the potion will make a boiling sound and bubbles will appear.”

“There are always bubbles in my potions,” Daphne called out.

“Then you are always stirring too slow and probably usually mess up your potions,” Sirius paused as he looked at the class.

“Have you never asked any questions?”
“To Professor Snape?” Blaise asked in disbelief, making Sirius frown.

“I could have expected this from the Gryffindors, but he never taught any of you that, either?”

Blaise, Daphne and several others shook their heads.

“Then how did you learn the significance of your actions?”

“We didn’t. We enter the classroom, Professor Snape puts the ingredients and directions onto the board and then spends the rest of the time walking through the class to make hurtful remarks,” Lavender shrugged.

“He is friendlier to us, but still doesn’t explain things,” Millicent admitted.

“All the information we need is written in our book,” Pansy snapped at her.

“Is it? The book says we’ve got to stir clockwise, counter clockwise yes. But it doesn’t explain the theory behind it,” Daphne shot at her.

“And here I thought he was just unfair to Harry and Neville. Is this a problem only for your class or do you know if others have the same problems?”

“I know several second and third year Hufflepuffs failed their Potions. Even sixth year Ravenclaws usually have to drop Potions because they only pass it due to sheer luck or doing a lot of research,” Hermione answered softly.

“Okay,” Sirius took a deep breath. “You are supposed to cut your daisy roots into small even pieces, why do you not make them bigger and uneven?”

“They get hot sooner?” Seamus offered.

“To make them bind quicker,” Pansy sneered.

“You are both wrong. By cutting your pieces evenly you ensure that they cause the same chemical reaction at the same level. Uneven pieces create unpredictable chemistry when combined. Adding uneven pieces might in your mind not make much of a difference, but in potions everything does.”

Sirius walked towards Harry after picking Blaise’s ingredients up, indicating they should all gather around him.

“Harry was on step two, mixing the daisy and mandrake root. His mandrake is finely cut as you can see, while Blaise’ daisy roots are cut five millimetres bigger. Can you all see that?” he asked as he held a piece of both up.

“Right, you might want to take a step back,” Sirius warned as they all leaned in.

“See that the potion is thickening immediately? Now I’ll add the daisy roots. There won’t be a reaction while I stir clockwise, but the moment I stir counter clockwise it will start to bind,” Sirius explained as he added the daisy roots.

The moment he stirred counter clockwise five times, the potion began to boil dangerously and they all took another step backwards.

“Do you want to try and save it or hear a big bang?” Sirius grinned expectedly.

“Bang!” most of the class immediately cheered, even the Slytherins.
“Stand back further then,” Sirius stilled his stirring until they’d taken another step back and then stirred clockwise once before taking a large step back, too.

A familiar shield appeared around them all as the potion boiled up and the cauldron began to shake before exploding with a loud bang and a lot of smoke.

“Wicked!” Seamus exclaimed excitedly.

“That is precisely why, when working on a potion together, you need to communicate flawlessly.” He looked at the board for a moment before removing the instructions from the board and cleaning the mess with another wave of his wand.

“Professor Snape always makes us clean our own mess,” Dean sighed longingly.

“Waste of teaching time. I’ll keep cleaning cauldrons as a detention method if you don’t mind,” Sirius moved to the desk.

“All right, let’s go back to the beginning and walk through the steps that are the introduction to potions,” he conjured a large row of chairs and summoned Harry’s cauldron to the front of class.

Everyone sat down in the chairs and some gathered parchment and quills to make notes.

“Don’t bother. I’ll have a dictation quill take notes of what I’m telling you and give you all a copy so you can read it over later. For now I’d like to have your full attention so you can see exactly what I am doing.”

He carried on explaining the basics of Potions, demonstrating various reactions and reasons for doing things the way they had to be done as the students listened to him interested.

Even Pansy and Hermione had nothing to say as they paid close attention to what he was teaching them, for the first time ever learning something in a Potions class.
Chapter 7

Professor McGonagall walked calmly through the snow-covered courtyard. It was early on a Saturday morning but there were several students outside, enjoying themselves in the newly arrived snow before breakfast.

There had been no word from Severus Snape since he had walked out of the castle on Thursday morning in the middle of class and various attempts to track him down had no results.

Rumours about deteriorating health’s of Death Eaters locked into Azkaban spread like wildfire. The rumours of something in their Dark Marks causing them to lose their magic, killing them slowly with no clear reason.

She did not like Severus Snape and never would. But the dislike did not stop her from wondering if the same thing was happening to him and if that was the reason he had left so abruptly.

Spotting the man she had been looking for she made her way towards him, intending to speak to him to see if he knew something more about what was happening with the Death Eaters.

“Morning Professor M!” Sirius’ voice called out from a distance as he noticed her, waving from a distance before he ducked to avoid a snowball thrown at him.

“Morning Sirius,” she called back, watching amused as Sirius threw a snowball at Remus, hitting him squarely in the chest.

Remus retaliated by advancing on Sirius, holding a large amount of snow in his hands.

“No....Rem, I’m warning you...no!” Sirius laughed, quickly moving backwards to try and keep distance between them.

“Run Sirius!” George cheered from a small distance away, laughing as Remus managed to grab Sirius, lifting him off the ground one handed; without breaking a sweat and dropping the large amount of snow, which he’d been holding in his other hand, over Sirius’ head.

Sirius squealed, trying to break away from Remus’ grip and the snow now dripping down into his clothes as Remus laughed.

“Let me go,” Sirius laughed as Remus placed him back onto the ground again but didn’t let go of him, a firm grip around his waist.

“Are you sorry for targeting me?” Remus asked.

“No!” Sirius shot back, laughing even louder when Remus began to tickle him mercilessly, squirming to try and get away from the cold hands.

His movements unbalanced Remus and, slipping on the frozen underground underneath the snow, they both went down with a yelp, a cloud of snow forming around them at their fall.

McGonagall laughed as she saw them sit up almost immediately, Remus dumping a hand full of snow onto Sirius’ head again, making him laugh.

“I’ll get you for that,” Sirius threatened him as he shook his head like a dog, his hair soaked completely as he had lost his hat in the fall, mock-glared at Remus.
“And how do you plan on doing that? I’m stronger than you,” Remus laughed, raising his hands to protect himself from the snow and water coming from Sirius’ shaking.

“I’ll just wait until you are nicely tucked in tonight to extract my revenge,” Sirius laughed.

Remus’ laugh immediately turned horrified before he grinned. “You won’t dare or you will not be able to sleep warmly either!”

“I’ll just crawl into Harry’s bed then,” Sirius shot back, scrambling to his feet as Remus pouted.

“That’s not fair!”

“Nope,” Sirius cheerfully replied before yelping as Remus pushed him over, back into the snow.

Out of nowhere snowballs began to attack Remus as the twins, Harry, Neville, Seamus, Luna and Dean teamed up in an attack.

“Oi!” he laughed, raising a hand to protect himself from the sudden assault when Sirius remained low.

Flicking a wand, snowballs suddenly began to return fire on their own, making the teenagers scream and duck for cover.

“That’s cheating!” Harry called out as they all laughed.

“All is fair in love and war!” Remus called back as Sirius broke cover now that the assault had stopped.

“If it’s love and war then who’s the damsel in need of saving?” Sirius laughed, ruffling his hands through his hair to remove the snow stuck to the wet locks before putting his hat on again after drying it.

“You of course,” Remus grinned as he grabbed Sirius from behind, slipping his arms around his waist in a hug before lifting him off the ground to help him stand up while rising to his feet himself.

Sirius yelped as Remus immediately slipped once more and they tumbled backwards into the snow again.

“You’re getting heavier,” Remus commented with a laugh as Sirius struggled to get away from him, slipping on the icy underground due to his own laughter.

“Not heavy enough if you can keep tossing me onto the ground like an infant.”

“It was an accident,” Remus laughed as Sirius slipped again, falling back against him.

“Do you two lovebirds need help?” Harry asked, almost doubled over in laughter at their struggles.

Sirius sat up; eyes narrowing and a small twist of his free hand had Harry slip suddenly and land in a heap next to Sirius who cheerfully hugged him.

“Nope, no help needed.”

“That’s cheating,” Harry squealed as Sirius pressed his ice cold nose into his neck.

“Leave our Seeker alone!” the twins called out, joining the fray with a battle cry and attacking
Sirius with snowballs.

McGonagall laughed at their antics as Remus scrambled away from the incoming missiles.

“Are you joining us, Minerva?” he asked as he brushed the snow off his clothes and moved towards her.

“Heavens no. I just wondered what the racket was about so early in the morning,” she replied as she kept her eyes on the ongoing battle to avoid being hit by straying snowballs. No need to break up the playing early just because she wanted to speak with Sirius.

Meanwhile Sirius had managed to get up again and was defending himself against the six Gryffindors attacking him, surprisingly holding his ground without the aid of magic and returning fire.

She swiftly stepped aside as a snowball came her way.

“Sorry Professor!” someone yelled, running away with a scream as the twins turned with more battle cries, attacking the thrower and causing all the students outside to get involved in the snowball fight.

“It’s rather cold again, isn’t it?” Remus commented as he reached her side.

“I am surprised you notice. You don’t look cold at all and they certainly don’t.”

“I’ve applied heating charms to Sirius’ clothes to keep him from getting a cold despite getting soaked. Being so close to him kept me warm too as I forgot to add them to my own."

“A smart move. How long have you been out here?” McGonagall asked as she noted the healthy red flush on both men’s faces.

“Since five. Sirius dragged me out of bed the moment he noticed it was finally snowing again.”

“I remember how much he has always loved snow. It’s been a long time since he could freely play in it. And while I normally would advice against such behaviour from teachers, I cannot begin to care when it is such a joy to see him act this care free,” McGonagall admitted softly with a thick voice.

“He used to drag James and me out at the first snowfall, trying to catch the flakes falling before enough snow had fallen that we could build a snowman,” Remus smiled at the memory even as she could see the emotion in his eyes.

“I remember. I’m happy to see that hasn’t changed. It is wonderful to see him play, especially with Harry. I’ve never seen Harry as carefree or happy as when he’s with Sirius,” she laughed as Harry tackled his godfather, making them both fall into the snow again in laughter.

“He looks so young,” she whispered, and it was true for both of them.

Harry indeed looked younger than ever, the worry lines that had always been present in the teenager’s face were completely gone and his polite smile had become an almost permanent beam whenever Sirius was around.

He had also grown several inches and gained weight, though he’d always remain on the lean side, just like his godfather.
She turned her attention to Sirius, really looking at him as he played around with his godson and the twins who retackled him when he’d gotten to his feet again.

Sirius had always been slender, even before Azkaban had robbed him of the little bit of fat he had. But though he was still skinny it was now more on the slender side again and he’d long since lost the corpse-like image she’d seen when he had been taken prisoner at Hogwarts.

His face, though thin, was a lot fuller and he had regained some colour and his dark short hair, which was now soaking wet and mostly hidden underneath an equally soaked hat, had regained most of its former volume.

But the most remarkable change was that he was almost constantly smiling and laughing these days, a sound and sight she would never tire of.

Sirius’ smile had always been able to light up the sun as a teenager and now it lifted up most of the lingering haunted look in his light grey eyes, though it would probably never disappear completely.

And although she would always feel a pang at not seeing him side by side with James, as they should have always been, he seemed more than happy to be with his godson.

“They are good for each other,” Remus agreed, not noticing her straying thoughts at all.

“And they are both good for you. I haven’t seen you this happy in years. You look a lot younger, too,” McGonagall added softly, laughing when Sirius, Luna and Harry teamed up against Fred, George and Neville in a new snow ball fight.

“Sirius has always had that effect on people,” Remus acknowledged the change in his appearances.

“Rem! Professor M! Will you two help us build a snowman?” Sirius called out with a wave as they ceased their battle breathlessly to begin gathering snow, calling out for them to join them.

McGonagall laughed. “Don’t you think I’m a bit too old to be playing in the snow?”

Sirius shot her a boyish grin. “You are never too old to enjoy yourself.”

“If memory serves me right you are rather awful at building snowmen. Maybe I should lend my assistance to ensure it actually becomes a snowman and not a large creature that scares the students,” McGonagall nodded, secretly honoured that they wanted her to join even though she was both much older and a lot stricter, even the students were waving for her to join them.

And while she had originally come out to speak to Sirius, she decided that it would have to wait as she strode forward to join in on the fun instead of always watching on the sideline.

All the Death Eaters in the world could get what they deserved if it meant seeing them happy and relaxed.

She refused to be the one to take the smile off her boy’s lips, not now, not ever.
"Good afternoon class, today we are going to discuss the Unforgivables and their uses," Sirius greeted them cheerfully as he strode into the classroom and hopped onto the desk, letting his legs swing lightly while the others sat on top of the tables, too.

Upon arrival at the classroom they had moved the tables and chairs to the side at Harry's request and had all moved to sit on top of them, awaiting Sirius' arrival. It was not unusual for their professor to be a little late since for the time being he'd taken over Potions, at least until a more permanent arrangement could be made, and they usually took the time to read in their books as Sirius found it a waste of time to have them do theoretical work in class while they could spend it doing practical things.

"We already covered those last year," Hermione immediately informed him as the others looked at each other excited, despite having had it before.

"Is that so?" Sirius asked as he looked at her. "Tell me then, why are they Unforgivable?"

"Using any of these three curses on another human being, Muggle or wizard, will result in a life sentence to in Azkaban," Hermione immediately answered.

"Always?" Sirius asked sceptically.

"Of course, they are Unforgivable," Hermione frowned.

"Unless there is sufficient evidence that the caster was under the influence of the Imperius Curse while performing an Unforgivable. If you must sling a standard textbook answer at me then at least make sure you give the whole sentence and not just the convenient part," he sighed before turning to the rest.

"But that is not what today is about. Let's take a pretend situation."

A flick of his wand later, an obviously mortally wounded kitten was conjured out of nowhere and several of the students paled at the sight of the pained creature.

"As you can see, she is dying and in a lot of pain. No healing spell or potion can relieve her pain or make her better. What do you do?"

Hermione opened her mouth, only to let it fall shut a few moments later when nothing came to her.

"Sit with it until it dies?" Parvati suggested when Sirius turned his attention to the others after a few moments.

Another flick of his wand had the kitten wheezing pathetically with horrible gurgling sounds.
"It is five hours later and her suffering only intensified. But there is no sign of her actually dying yet. Do you still wait?"

"Put her out of her misery," Harry offered once no one came with suggestions.

"How?" Sirius asked.

"Snap her neck," Ron said with a shrug, making everyone else in the room look at him in disgust.

"So...first you hurt her more and then you break her neck, which, if you actually do it right that is, which is harder than you think, will effectively kill the poor thing," Sirius raised an eyebrow.

"It's not really killing if there is no other option than to let it suffer, knowing it is going to die anyway," Ron defended himself.

"Fair enough...how about now?" Sirius asked and the cat was transformed into a little girl. Her breathing was rattled and rapid and by her complexion alone Harry could tell that the girl was dying, though her eyes were closed and there was no visible wound on her.

"Would you still snap her neck?" Sirius looked at Ron, who paled at the sight.

"Of course not!"

"Why not? She is suffering at the same level as that cat was."

"Yeah, but that was a cat...this is a human being...I mean...she's..." Ron stuttered.

"It's a little girl," Lavender bit her lip as she stared at the conjured little girl horrified.

"It is a little girl who is dying, in immense pain and unable to end it on her own," Sirius summed up calmly. "She cannot be saved."

"Avada Kedavra," Neville suddenly said softly and they all turned to look at him.

"That's an Unforgivable," Hermione bit at him with disbelief written on her face, like she could not understand how he could have even suggested it.

"I know, but it would end her suffering painlessly and quickly without hurting her more. It can't be an unforgivable thing to stop the unstoppable suffering of someone else if there is no hope left...can it be?" He asked as he looked up to Sirius uncertainly.

"I don't believe so. And you are right. The Killing Curse would be merciful for the little girl in this situation," Sirius nodded and vanished the girl.

"Was this a real girl, Professor?" Lavender asked softly.

Sirius sighed before he nodded. "It was the image of what had once been a real girl, yes. She was one of the many casualties in the first war."

"Was she a witch?" Parvati curiously asked.

"Does it matter? She was just a little girl in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"How did she get in that condition? She didn't seem visibly hurt," Lavender asked, seemingly uncertain if she truly wanted to know.
"She was tortured because her parents openly defied Voldemort. I didn't show you her injuries because there is no need to put any of you through that sight."

As suspected most students flinched at his use of the name but Neville looked up thoughtful.

"Did someone take her suffering away?"

"Yes, it became quite the discussion, too. There were some who were of the opinion that the Killing Curse is always bad and thus accused him of killing the girl despite the circumstances. They wanted him to be send to Azkaban for his action."

"But he took her suffering away!" Lavender objected.

"He did," Sirius agreed.

"They couldn't throw him into Azkaban for doing the right thing, could they?" Neville asked. "I mean...she was suffering, what else was he supposed to do? Let her die horribly?"

"If they had their way, then yes. But the majority of our group agreed with his action and stood by him when the rest complained."

"He killed the girl; the Killing Curse is illegal for a reason. No circumstances are excusable for the usage of that curse," Hermione objected.

"You would do well in the Ministry," Sirius said and Hermione glowed and looked around with a beam.

"I don't think that was a compliment Hermione," Harry chuckled.

"Yeah, Professor Sirius believes the Ministry is filled with boot licking and corrupt idiots, led by a foolish and incompetent moron. I doubt it is a good thing when he says you would do well in the Ministry," Lavender laughed.

Hermione glared at them annoyed as Sirius laughed.

"Ten points for correctly stating my opinion of our government. Good memory you have there by the way, to remember what I said when I last...visited Hogwarts."

Lavender grinned proudly while Hermione looked annoyed.

"The Unforgivables were made just that by our government. It is the law and it should always be followed."

"Yet that same government allowed Barty Crouch Senior to legalise the curses for Aurors to use without consequences when he was the head of the Magical Law Enforcement."

"That is different, they were Aurors," Hermione protested.

"If that is what rubs you the wrong way...so was the man who cast the curse upon the little girl," Sirius simply said.

"Who was it?" Harry asked, ignoring the glare Hermione send him for not backing her up.

"Frank Longbottom."

Neville's eyes glistered in sudden pride as he answered the small smile Sirius directed at him.
without hesitation.

"My Dad did?"

"Your dad was willing to make a difficult decision and chose to end someone's continuing suffering when many weren't willing to do so. He made the right call despite the protest of his teammates and he would be proud that you would make the same decision. Twenty points for being brave enough to suggest something others would refuse to even think about."

Neville almost glowed at the praise Sirius gave his father but looked completely astonished to receive so many points, something the shy boy rarely got.

Harry smiled at his classmate, knowing how much of a low self esteem the other had. Sirius had already been good for his confidence and abilities in Potions. But he had the potential to let Neville shine in Defence too and wasn't wasting it.

"What was her name?" Harry realised Sirius had not once mentioned the little girl's name.

"We never found out," Sirius leaned against the desk and cleared his throat.

"Avada Kedavra is a Curse used to kill people; it was invented in the early Middle Ages by dark wizards to quickly and easily take out opponents. But not everyone used the curse for dark purposes.

In the later times of the Middle Ages the curse was used by Healers to end the lives of those infected with the Plague, to keep their suffering at a minimum and to prevent it from spreading through the magical community. In the eighteenth century it was classified as an Unforgivable because it was by then mostly used by Dark wizards and witches again."

"So, do we all agree that in this scenario the Killing Curse can be used for more than just bad motives?"

The class nodded, though Hermione still didn't seem happy, but Sirius waved his wand and this time the image of a man standing on the edge of a building appeared.

"Next situation, this man..."

"Baldy!" Dean interrupted with a grin and Sirius glanced at the bald man.

"Okay, he was a slimy git anyway. Baldy here is threatening to jump off the roof. He's not listening to any reasoning you are using and there is too much of a risk of him unbalancing if you use a spell to throw him backwards or freeze him in place."

He paused to let it them observe the situation for themselves.

"Now, you might think, why would I want to try and save a guy who's got a death wish and that our teacher clearly dislikes...here's the rest of the Intel," he flicked his wand and a young boy appeared in the man's arms. The child didn't look to be older than seven and wore a terrified expression on the slightly chubby face, tears running down.

"Baldy is in fact a serial killer who abducts young boys, hurts them and then tortures them to death. You; let's say you're Aurors, have finally found him after a long search. But, you are on your own, your partner has been knocked out earlier and he's holding an innocent boy hostage, threatening to jump with him. And to make things even more complicated, he's kidnapped and hidden the boy's younger brother somewhere and the child is in dire need of medical attention. But
you have no idea where the toddler is and the only one who can tell you... is Baldy."

"So we need to get him down without him dying or hurting the kid," Harry concluded and Sirius nodded.

"Correct. So Miss Granger, how would you handle this situation?"

Hermione looked alarmed at being singled out once more for a moment before she straightened. "I would stun him and then levitate them both to me before interrogating the man."

"How good is your aim?"

"What?" Hermione looked confused as Sirius stood up. He conjured a large ball and let it hover in the air.

"Hit it with your Stunning Spell," he ordered.

Hermione huffed, sliding off the table before pulling her wand and aiming it at the ball, but the moment she shot her spell a smaller ball appeared before the larger one. Her spell hit the smaller ball and it slammed into the larger one, sending both falling downwards in a spin.

"That's not fair!" Hermione bristled.

"Your Stunning Spell just hit the boy, who is suddenly dead weight in Baldy's grip and a little bit too heavy for him to keep his balance properly. Right now all you've succeeded in doing is have them both tumble down at an uncontrollable path. In the short time it will take for them both to hit the ground you only have time to save one of them. So now you have to make a choice, the man, thus having a chance at possibly saving the little brother, or saving the boy."

Hermione became angry.

"That's not fair, I aimed for the man."

"A man who saw you shoot the spell and who has nothing to lose. He knows that if he is captured he will be convicted to a life sentence in Azkaban, so even if he falls, he has nothing to lose that he hasn't lost already. This way he knows that he will leave more suffering behind as the parents will guaranteed lose one of their children, since you cannot save both."

"Does anyone else have a good idea on how to safely pull them both away from the edge?"

"The Imperius Curse," Harry spoke up.

"Why the Imperius?" Sirius turned to Harry.

"By putting the Imperius Curse on Baldy I can make him step down without risking the boy or him. And I can make him tell me where the other child is just by asking him," Harry explained.

"But what if he has a strong will and can resist the spell?" Sirius asked.

"He would need to throw it off first," Dean offered.

"Not always. I know that Harry can throw it off almost immediately and no one even bothered attempting to put one on his father because he just brushed it off immediately."

"It's worth a shot isn't it?" Neville asked. "No other spell would be safe to use and even if it fails, at least it is worth a try."
"But it's illegal," Sirius pressed on.

"It's not like we want to kill the man or tell him to kill others. We are trying to prevent him from killing others. It's like with the girl, it is the right decision to make," Lavender added to the discussion, arguing their case.

"So the four of you would be willing to use an Unforgivable once more in this situation?" Sirius asked as he looked at them with an unreadable expression.

"Yes," the four of them said immediately, full of confidence.

"Ten points to each of you. You are of course correct. The chances that the man can immediately throw off the Imperius Curse are slim. Only two percent of all the wizards ever coming in contact with it have been able to throw it off immediately. So you made the right call."

"Can you throw it off sir?" Dean asked.

"Yes."

"Immediately?" Seamus pressed.

"Someone once told me I am too darn stubborn to even let the casting slow me down. It bounces off me without me even truly noticing it was cast."

The class snickered and Harry grinned. "That sounds like something Remus would say."

"Actually your mum was the one who said it. She was convinced that I could give a mule a run for its food with my stubbornness," Sirius replied cheekily and Harry laughed.

Sirius smiled before he glanced at Neville, who straightened a little bit and took a deep breath, giving a small nod.

"The Imperius Curse was invented around the same time as the Killing Curse and was used for the purpose of enslaving another to the caster's will. Healers in the seventeenth century however have been recorded to having used the Curse to keep long term mental patients from harming themselves if they were in a fit of violence."

"The last Unforgivable is the Cruciatus Curse. This is considered the most horrible curse of all as it leaves no visible trace upon the body and has barely any defence. That...and it hurts like hell," he added as an afterthought, making most students swallow thickly as they remembered the spider the fake Moody had used the curse upon.

"There is no way the Cruciatus can be used as a good spell," Hermione said annoyed.

"There is one good use for it. Mind you, only one...well...two, but let's keep it on Wizarding level," Sirius didn't take note of her annoyed tone, speaking if she had asked a question instead of trying to pick a fight.

"When the heart of a Muggle stops due to illness, heart attack, injured badly or whatever reason you can think of, Muggle Healers; doctors, use paddles filled with electricity. They place these paddles upon the bare chest of the patient and send it through the body, causing a shock that can restart a heart again."

He straightened. "Now, does anyone know what electricity is? Muggle-born and Muggle-raised excluded," he added when Dean and Seamus raised their hands.
Ron, Lavender and Parvati shook their heads as Sirius moved to the back of the classroom with a nod.

"You do know Neville?" Dean asked curiously as he noticed the timid boy hadn't raised his hand or shaken his head.

"Yeah, the Professor told me earlier."

"Why would he tell you about it?" Hermione frowned.

"As preparation of today's lesson," Neville shrugged, looking a little pale.

"You had preparation?" Ron asked, jealousy in his voice.

"He asked me about it after my extra Potions lesson."

"But why?"

"That is between Neville and me Miss Granger, stop pestering him with questions that are not your business to know," Sirius came to his rescue as he returned with a small radio.

"This is a radio; it works with a wire in the Muggle world. They plug this end into a special network and it plays. Now, electricity doesn't work very well here, but I can cheat with magic to show you what I mean," he tapped his wand against the plug and immediately a soft tune started playing.

"Now, I would like each of you to touch this iron part with your fingertip. It will hurt, but it is not dangerous enough to inflict lingering pain. I made sure it can't, though you don't have to if you don't want to."

"That is dangerous, electricity can kill a person," Hermione protested.

"It is a radio with a plug the Professor tapped with his wand. The most it will do is painfully shock us," Dean snorted at her protests, moving forward to push his finger against the iron.

He let out a small yelp and pulled a face as he sucked on his fingertip while Harry shrugged and followed his example.

Neville moved forward and Sirius whispered; "Are you sure?"

"Yeah," Neville gave a sharp determined nod before he did the same as the others had done. He paled even more as he quickly withdrew his hand and took a deep breath before shifting to stand at Harry's side without a comment.

After him the others followed without complaints, only Hermione refusing to do so.

"That was quite the shock huh?" Sirius asked as they all sucked on their pained finger with grimaces. A muttered agreement was given.

"The voltage in the aforementioned paddles is a thousand times more than what you just felt."

"You're kidding! That must bloody hurt," Ron exclaimed.

"And Muggles use that to restart someone's heart?" Lavender asked amazed.

"Yes."
"But...we don't have anything like electricity, so how is it relevant to the Unforgivables?" Dean asked.

"We have the Cruciatus," Harry grimaced.

"Indeed we do. Did any of you know that Muggles use electricity to torture people?"

"I can imagine," Seamus frowned darkly as he looked at his no longer stinging finger.

"So you see...it can be used to torture people, but it is also used to provide Muggles with light, sound and make their machinery work," Sirius said with a small smile to Seamus as the teenager grinned at the description, knowing that from his father.

"And used to restart people's hearts," Lavender smiled.

"So it can be used for both good and dark purposes," Neville muttered.

"Yes. Now the Cruciatus cannot provide light or make things work, but it can restart a heart."

"Because the concept is the same," Harry realised. "They both inflict pain...shocking a body. So they can both also be focused on the heart alone to shock that."

"Ten points for the correct answer. And five points to each of you that actively participated in the discussion."

"Have you ever felt electricity, sir?" Seamus asked.

"Yes, I got flung into an electricity mast during a duel once."

"You would have died if you'd hit one of those," Hermione bristled.

"My heart stopped and Harry's father cast the Cruciatus Curse on me to get it started again."

They all looked at him in shock.

"How did he know it would work?" Lavender asked.

"Professor Lupin rambled about doctor's paddles and it gave him the idea," he smiled. "So you see, not even the Unforgivables are purely dark. Most spells in existence are simply grey and it is the caster who turns it with their intent."

He leaned against the desk. "Accio can slam a bolder into you, Wingardium Leviosa can let you knock someone's brains out, Lumos can blind a person and Protego can let someone bleed to death."

"How can a Protego do that?" Dean wondered.

"Hurt someone badly and then cast a shield around them, preventing anyone from helping the victim until they've bled out."

"All right, grab your wands and gather. I want you to show me one by one a spell that you believe would be usable by both sides in a battle."

Excitedly they did as he asked and the rest of the lesson was spend discussing and performing various spells.
Eventually Sirius glanced at his watch. "All right, homework. I want you to look through your History of Magic book together and give me twenty situations in which you think an Unforgivable might have been used for good intentions. Ranking from the time they were presumably invented until they were declared Unforgivable. You may use any event mentioned as long as it falls in the timeline given and it describes a situation as we've discussed today."

He smiled. "You are to present your argument before me and Professor Lupin in your History of Magic class next Monday."

"You want us to work together for this assignment?" Dean asked surprised as they all wrote the assignment down.

"Yes. You may make notes for yourself but I want you to verbally tell us the reasoning behind your choices. I want you to work together as a group and present us with a sort of case for each of the situations you have decided upon."

"How are you going to give us a grade if we don't have to deliver an essay?" Hermione frowned.

"Just focus on your task, Professor Lupin and I will focus on the grading," Sirius didn't look up from writing something on two pieces of parchment.

He folded and sealed them, passing one to Harry as the others returned the desks to their proper places again.

"Can you give this to Remus when you go to dinner?" he asked as Harry accepted it.

"Are you not coming to dinner with us? This was your last class for the day right?"

"Yeah, but I have a couple of things to take care of before I can call it a day," Sirius smiled.

"Are you busy tonight?" Harry put the note into his pocket with a nod.

"You want a rematch?"

"Yeah, but I have some questions about the Runes assignment you gave me first."

"Sure, you want to come over immediately after dinner?"

"Yeah thanks."

"No problem. All right, thank you for cleaning up my fine servants," he bowed theatrically to the class. "Thank you for the attention you have given me again today and have a nice evening. Miss Granger, could I speak to you alone for a few moments?"

Hermione frowned but nodded her consent as the rest left the classroom with various passing greetings to Sirius.

Outside they gathered a small distance away when Harry lingered.

"What is it?" Neville asked.

"I forgot my book, but I don't want to return before the bomb drops," Harry said cryptically and Ron frowned as a shrill voice could clearly be heard through the classroom door as it rose in anger.

"What's up with her?" Ron asked surprised as he recognised Hermione's voice.
"She is probably pissed that Sirius is handing her another detention," Harry shrugged.

"She had it coming. What does she have against the Professor in the first place?" Neville asked.

"Yeah, even the stupid git got more respect than he does and he's always been an awful teacher! I think none of us is sad he disappeared," Dean said honestly.

The door slammed open and Hermione stormed out, fury written all over her face.

"Hermione?" Ron asked.

"He gave me a detention, again! Me! And I have to report to professor McGonagall before dinner with this or he's taking fifty points and give me more detentions!" She held up a sealed note angrily.

"That's harsh..." Dean began, Hermione immediately interrupting him.

"I know, it is completely unfair. I have done nothing to deserve being treated like this!"

"Oh no, you deserve it, I meant it is harsh to punish the rest of us while you are the one who's disrespectful," Dean finished his sentence calmly.

"We are one house. One Gryffindor´ actions reflects upon our entire house. Sirius is a firm believer that we stand united as one. And he is right in giving you detention. You..." Harry began.

"Of course you are taking his side! I had expected nothing else from you. I am your best friend but you've been taking his side since this summer!" Hermione interrupted him angrily and Harry clicked his tongue irritated.

"Actually, he's been taking Sirius' side since they met. He decided to listen to his story despite your claims that Professor Lupin was in league with him," Ron corrected her cheerfully, despite Hermione's glare directed at him.

"Actually, he's been taking Sirius' side since they met. He decided to listen to his story despite your claims that Professor Lupin was in league with him," Ron corrected her cheerfully, despite Hermione's glare directed at him.

"Stay out of this Ronald. Sirius is treating me unfairly and you both know it!"

"Professor Sirius treats you the same as he treats every one of us. He's actually very patient with your disrespect. Any other student would have gotten a detention ages ago from the other professors," Neville argued.

"I'm not any student."

"You aren't any better than anyone else," Harry shook his head in disbelief.

"I am. I am the brightest student he has, so he should treat me with respect," Hermione snapped.

"You are unbelievable. I'm going back for my book before grabbing a bite to eat. I'm not interested in listening to your delusions any longer," Harry shook his head once more while returning to the classroom.

"You really think you are the brightest student the professor has? Harry is a much better student than you are and the Professor said last month that you only rank twenty-fifth of our year," Dean said.

"Only at Defence and because Sirius favours him," Hermione corrected him. "I've known Sirius for as long as Harry has, he should be treating me equally."
"You really think the Professor is going to favour you just because you know him personally?" Dean snorted.

"He is not Professor Snape you know?" Lavender gave Hermione a sceptical look.

"He favours Harry above the rest of us," Hermione whined angrily.

"No he doesn't," Seamus defended Harry and Sirius. "I had suspected him to do so, but he treats Harry the same as he treats us. Maybe he talks to him a bit more familiar but he doesn't treat the rest of us unfairly."

"Harry never gets told off and he doesn't call Sirius professor either. So why do I get told off for not saying professor either," Hermione shot back at Seamus.

"You are a student that he just happens to know. Harry is the professor's son; there is a big difference in your situations. I don't call my Mum madam either. And you are getting told off because you act like a complete brat to the professor," Dean answered.

"That doesn't matter. If we have to show respect to someone who doesn't deserve it, then why doesn't Harry have to do the same. And Malfoy never called Professor Snape by his first name either," Hermione argued.

"Are you really that petty that you just refuse to admit when you are wrong?" Neville asked shocked.

"Besides, Snape is a family friend to the Malfoys; there is no family bond where Harry is Professor Sirius' child. There is a big difference," Lavender added.

"Harry is not Sirius' child, he is only his godfather."

"Actually, he is. You were there when Sirius adopted Harry. For the law they are technically father and son now. Just because Harry doesn't call Sirius dad it doesn't mean he's not his father," Ron corrected her.

Hermione huffed, but it was surprisingly Parvati who spoke up next.

"That might be right, but Hermione does have a point about Harry not showing respect. He doesn't call Professor Lupin by his proper title either and he isn't Harry's guardian."

"He as good as is. The three of them live together and from what I've seen and heard Professor Lupin is basically Harry's uncle. They were already close when the Professor previously taught here and they only became closer now," Lavender shrugged.

"Besides, who cares what Harry calls the Professors? None of the Weasleys nor Luna calls the Professor by his title either and he doesn't care. It is Hermione's own disrespect towards everything else that got her detention," Dean concluded. "What do you have against Professor Sirius anyway? He is the most brilliant Defence teacher we've had so far!"

"Sirius is not a capable teacher," Hermione almost growled. "We are in our O.W.L. year, already far behind and he's not teaching us anything valuable that we will need for our exams."

A sudden snort made them all turn around to see a tall dark skinned Slytherin standing there.

"What do you want, Zabini?" Ron snapped.
"Nothing of your concern, Weasley. I just couldn't contain my amusement at Granger's stupidity," Blaise snapped back as he moved past them towards the classroom.

"So you think Professor Sirius is capable, too?" Neville asked quietly and Blaise turned to him, ignoring Ron's undignified protest as Neville spoke to the Slytherin.

"Outside the fact that Thomas is right and the Professor is a brilliant teacher, he has the grades to prove it."

"He does?" Lavender looked surprised.

"Fifteen O.W.L.'s, thirteen N.E.W.T.'s and six Masteries. Not to mention he'd have a seventh if he hadn't been thrown into Azkaban."

"How do you know that?" Dean asked.

"All the Professor's scores are on public record. Professor Sirius' scores are the third highest scores ever recorded in the history of Hogwarts, higher than any of the previous Headmasters or Dumbledore ever came close to receiving," Blaise answered calmly.

They all stared at him in shock.

"Seven Masteries...that's...," Lavender trailed off in shock.

"Impossible! A single Mastery would take years to study for. Even if he got one he's not old enough to have gotten even two," Hermione shot him down, not even beginning to comment on the absurdity that Sirius could have higher grades than Albus Dumbledore.

"Believe what you want Granger, your stupidity is not of my concern," Blaise snorted, turning around again, but before he could make it to the classroom door it opened and Harry and Sirius came out.

Sirius looked surprised to see Blaise with the group of Gryffindors but his eyes fell upon Hermione and he frowned.

"I believe I told you to report to Professor McGonagall before dinner. Dinner is in fifteen minutes, do you really want three more months of detention, Miss Granger, and gain the wrath of your house for losing them so many points?" Sirius' eyes and voice hard as he looked at her unimpressed.

Hermione huffed angrily, turning on her heels and leaving them.

"Why are you all still here?" Sirius moved towards them.

"Waiting for Harry, Professor," Neville grinned and Sirius shot him an amused smile.

"With Blaise?"

"No. I hoped to catch you before you went to dinner, sir," Blaise admitted, hesitating before holding a sealed note out to him.

Sirius looked at it suspiciously without taking it and Blaise sighed.

"I take it that you already know what it is, Sir?"

"I have my suspicions, but why don't you tell me? Unless it is a secret that you don't want your classmates to know?"
"I don't care either way. It is an invitation from my mother to join her for dinner tomorrow night," Blaise sighed.

"Cute, but I am going to have to decline, Blaise. I rather like being alive," Sirius replied.

To everyone's surprise Blaise' usually indifferent mask broke as a grin slipped across his lips.

"You seem to know my mother?"

"She was three years above me in Hogwarts and very popular with most of the male students," Sirius grimaced.

"You didn't think she was beautiful?" Seamus asked curiously.

"Not really my type and I preferred staying alive and her ...love interests have a habit of dying suspiciously."

"What do you want me to tell her? Because she won't stop trying to get her hands on you, Professor," Blaise looked apologetic, not in the least bit offended by what was being said about his mother.

"I take it that telling her I'm just not interested won't work?"

"Not as long as you are very rich and handsome at the same time," Blaise admitted.
Sirius frowned and turned to Harry. "We better keep her away from Remus then."

Harry nodded. "Remus would be too polite to keep turning her down and might fall into her trap."

Blaise looked from one to the other before shrugging.

"I could tell her the two of you are together?"

"What, Harry and I?" Sirius asked confused as he was deep in thought, making Blaise snort.

"Professor Lupin and you. She'll get off my back and you can protect the Professor from her interests at the same time as getting her off your own back."

"Most people are already convinced the two of you are together anyway so it is perfect," Harry approved.

"Outside the small little fact that we are not," Sirius frowned.

"Does it matter? You told me you are not in the least bit interested in a relationship and neither is Remus. This way you will keep everyone off your back," Harry shrugged.

"Won't they realise it's a hoax if the two of them return to their own homes in the vacation?" Dean interrupted.

"No, we live together and they share quarters here at Hogwarts," Harry revealed.

"It would work. And if it makes you feel better I could simply spread the rumour of the two of you being together. You already act like a married couple most of the time so it wouldn't be hard to make people believe it," Blaise grinned.

"A rumour like that will spread like Fiendfyre and the beauty of it is that you won't have to
confirm it because people will just assume it to be true since you do indeed act like a married couple," Lavender noted cheerfully.

"We could hold a heated discussion somewhere public about our suspicions while you could make some comments to your fellow Slytherins and let it travel the hallways on its own," she directed to Blaise who nodded.

Sirius gaped at them for a long moment before he turned to Harry helplessly.

Harry shrugged. "You both did once say that you could do a lot worse than each other."

Sirius opened his mouth to say something, but quickly decided against it and closed it again before sighing.

"Remus is going to throttle me when he finds out I'm aware of this."

"Nah, he loves you too much to do that," Harry cheekily replied, only to get a half hearted glare from his godfather in return and chuckling from the rest.

"Aww, don't worry Professor, we won't let Professor Lupin strangle you," Seamus grinned.

Sirius snorted.

"I'm feeling so much safer, knowing you'll have my back. Let's get to dinner, shall we? I'll do the things I still have to do later," he turned to Blaise. "Are you willing to join us?"

"Thanks, but no thanks. I still have to hit the library for the Potions essay you gave us so I ate early," the Slytherin declined, leaving them with a last greeting.

After wishing him a nice evening they made their way towards the Great Hall, Harry's classmates excitedly talking to Sirius while Ron sulked behind them, looking like they had done him a great wrong by being friendly to the Slytherin.
Holding the note tightly in her hand, Hermione took a deep breath and knocking on the door of McGonagall’s office she received immediate admission to enter.

“Miss Granger? What...why are you here?”

McGonagall’s eyes widened at the sight of her, not believing what she was seeing.

“Sirius sends me here unfairly, Professor,” Hermione sniffed immediately, seemingly not knowing what she looked like. “He said horrible and untrue things and he gave me detention because I refused to participate in illegal activities.”

“Sit down, Miss Granger,” McGonagall eyebrow rose at her words. “Professor Sirius asked you to participate in illegal activities?”

“Yes,” Hermione sat down.

“Let’s start at the beginning, shall we? Did he give you a note?”

“Yes, Professor,” Hermione handed the note over and McGonagall slipped a finger underneath the seal, sliding it open with her nail before unrolling the parchment, making Hermione gasp.

“Is there a problem, Miss Granger?” she asked.

“No, Professor,” Hermione stammered.

Staring at her suspiciously for a moment, McGonagall wondered briefly if she should tell her someone had pranked her before deciding to glance at the note first.

“Dear Professor M,

I’ve given this note to Miss Granger to deliver it to you.

I have added a specialised seal that will only open for you, if for some reason the seal was attempted to be undone by someone else, you will immediately see the result.

How you handle that possibility is up to you.

That said I would like to ask for your permission to take Harry out for dinner on the next Hogsmeade weekend in February, which will keep him off grounds until after curfew if he accepts. It is likely that he will spend the night at our quarters afterwards.

That asked and awaiting your answer, I would like to wish you a nice afternoon,

Sincerely,

An unqualified Sirius.”

“I see...unqualified? Why would he not be qualified?” McGonagall murmured as she now understood why Hermione looked the way she did.

She had clearly attempted to break the seal as Sirius had known she would and the Marauder had taken measures to ensure the student’s action would be revealed for all to see. The young
Gryffindor really should have known better. But that was something to discuss later, now she needed to find out why Sirius found the need to sign his note that way.

“Because he isn’t, Professor. He is a prankster, immature and he cannot teach us what we need to learn for our O.W.L.s,” Hermione didn’t hesitate to answer, unaware of her thoughts.

“And why would he be unable to do so?” McGonagall leaned her elbows on the desk, turning her attention fully to her lion.

“He refuses to follow the book. He is handling things we either aren’t due to be learning anytime soon or reviews material we’ve already had.”

“And does everyone properly know the material he is reviewing?” McGonagall asked, knowing Sirius had remarked before that most students only had a vague understanding of most of the things that had been taught so far.

“They can read the book, can’t they? He is changing all that we’ve already learned!” Hermione complained, upset. “He asks questions but then refuses to listen to my complete answer. He interrupts and tells me that is not the answer he wants to hear while it is the correct answer! The textbook says so.”

“I assume you quoted the textbook answer?”

“Of course.”

“Then that is precisely what is wrong. It is a textbook answer, not your own.”

“I say it, don’t I? “ Hermione frowned annoyed.

“In your own words?”

“No, I say it like the textbook does, because that is the correct answer.”

“Do you understand all that you read?” McGonagall asked as she looked at the young girl before her, wondering how such a bright girl could be so incredibly ignorant.

“Of course.”

“Then why can you not give an answer formed in your own words?”

“Because the textbook….” Hermione began frustrated but McGonagall interrupted her this time.

“Forget the textbook…. Hermione began frustrated but McGonagall interrupted her this time.

“Forget the textbook, teachers do not wish to hear a textbook answer. They want to see that you understood the material you’ve read and that you can show that you truly do so by wording it in your own words.”

“No teacher ever asked that.”

“And that is our mistake. We should ask for a personalised answer, but because we can see that you do the practical well enough, we let it slide. And while practical might be enough in Charms and Transfiguration, it will not help you in Defence,” she sighed.“When you are under attack you need to think on your feet. Textbook answers won’t save your life when you need to act without a thought. Has Professor Sirius never told you that?”

“No!”
McGonagall looked at Hermione sternly. “Are you absolutely sure about that?”

“Yes...I.....he never said it in those words,” Hermione defended herself.

“Then what did he say?”

“That I shouldn’t parrot standard answers at him because I won’t learn anything that way. But I understand everything I read so he shouldn’t fail me for it. He actually tore up my essay last week!” Hermione exclaimed angrily, it clearly having boiled in her mind since it had happened and she seemed happy to be able to complains about it now.

“Why did he do that?” McGonagall was surprised; it wasn’t like the Sirius she knew to do something like that without a very good reason.

“He said that it was longer than what Professor Lupin had asked for. But it was only a bit longer.”

“What is a bit longer in your definition?” McGonagall had a sense of foreboding.

“Only twenty inches.”

“Do you actually know what a required length is for, Miss Granger?” McGonagall rubbed a hand over her face, feeling despair wash over her at the girl’s stubbornness.

“Of course Professor, it is the length we must deliver.”

“Which means a teacher wishes to receive parchment of that specific length. Not shorter and not longer. I have told you this several times before.”

“No other teacher ever complained.”

“No? I seem to recall receiving countless complaints about the length of your essays from almost every teacher and I told you to cut them down.”

“And I did. It was only twenty inches over the required length. He had no right to tear it up.”

“What reasoning did he give you for tearing it up?”

“Not a good one at all and it wasn’t even...”

“The reasoning, Miss Granger,” Professor McGonagall tried to hold onto her patience with all her might.

“He said that if I couldn’t get to the point within the required length then I had obviously not understood the material and should do it over or he wouldn’t bother reading it. He didn’t even give the assignment; Professor Lupin did, so he had no right!”

“Since they share the position it means he has every right to not accept an essay. Was this the first time he’s told you your essays were too long?”

Hermione frowned. “No, but I don’t see what that has to do with anything.”

“So you were warned before to keep to the required length?”

“He always returns my essays and tells me I have to do them over. He doesn’t even try to read them all the way to see all the facts I’ve added in, he fails me completely unfairly because he only reads to the required length when he does read them. I should be receiving extra credit for my
effort, but all he does is return them with bad grades because he hasn’t read them completely. And then he told me he’d take drastic actions if I didn’t shorten it next time....he had no right to tear it up!”

Staring at her bristling form for a long moment McGonagall wasn’t quite sure if she wanted to laugh at her expression or sigh in despair because her young lion just didn’t seem to understand the point. Deciding to explain it once more she cleared her throat.

“Well, most teachers probably let the extra inches slide, Professor Sirius refuses to do so. I happen to know that he has told all the students that he wants what is asked for. You only receive written assignments at all because it is required to pass the class. If it was not you would only be doing the practical side.”

“How are we supposed to learn the background of things if he only focuses on the practical?” Hermione asked sceptical.

“By receiving verbal assignments and doing research for those assignments. Professor Sirius and Professor Lupin both want you to learn what you’ve read, not just write it down.”

“But that is illogical. How would anyone remember things that way? Neville alone is going to fail....”

“Actually, since they took on this method, ninety-three percent of the students are doing much better in Defence. Their grades have gone up enormously in the last month and they understand their theory much better than they did before,” McGonagall interrupted the distressed girl.

Hermione looked at her in disbelief.

“They just work harder to please him because they all like him. He isn’t a qualified teacher at all.”

“Professor Sirius and don’t be fooled by the easy-going nature. Sirius is a very capable and powerful wizard with every possible qualification we could only dream off.”

“He is actually much higher qualified than Professor Dumbledore is, and he became Headmaster.”

“That can’t be true! Professor Dumbledore is brilliant. The greatest wizard to live since Merlin himself!” Hermione looked outraged and McGonagall sighed.

“Yet he stood no chance against Professor Sirius when he barged into Hogwarts. A single man held down the entire student body and every teacher present, including the Headmaster, without breaking a sweat.”

“Professor Dumbledore just didn’t want to hurt Sirius.”

“Professor Sirius and don’t be fooled by the easy-going nature. Sirius is a very capable and powerful wizard with every possible qualification we could only dream off.”

“Professor Dumbledore is more powerful than anyone else,” Hermione argued heatedly.

McGonagall shifted in her seat. “I wouldn’t put such blind faith in the Headmaster, Miss Granger.”

Hermione frowned. “He is a great and brilliant man.”

“Who made many grave errors.”
“For the greater good!” Hermione exclaimed.

“He might have seen it that way, but he still repeatedly broke the law.”

“Professor Dumbledore is the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, he practically makes the laws,” Hermione said proudly.

“No, he was given the title by a vote and lost the seat last year. The Wizengamot only upholds the law, they are not above it. The Wizarding community will not accept clemency for his crimes. Not this time.”

“What crimes? He didn’t do anything wrong.” Hermione looked upset at the news.

“He took a child from his rightful guardian, who happens to be the heir of two Ancient families and to the oldest bloodline in our history, without permission and placed him in the care of specifically mentioned unfit guardians. Ignoring the fact that the legal guardian was available at the time and ready to take the infant in. He told Hagrid to take the child to him from his childhood home no matter what.”

She paused to look Hermione in the eye. “Leaving Sirius with no other option than to hand Harry over, lest harm would come to him if he’d try to force Hagrid away. Then Dumbledore failed to give Sirius a trial, despite the fact that even the worst kind of Death Eaters received one. And not once either, he could have forced a trial two years ago but failed to do so.”

“He couldn’t overrule the Minister,” Hermione countered and McGonagall wondered if the girl even realised she was contradicting herself on how much power Dumbledore had.

“The Wizengamot is above the Minister when it comes to the law, Miss Granger. As Chief Warlock he could have ordered a trial, overriding the Minister’s decision, yet he did not. The man known to give everyone several chances failed to give Sirius one twice.”

“Sirius had his chance when he played that prank on Professor Snape. He almost killed him. I looked up the record and he got off rather lightly.”

McGonagall sighed. “It is Professor Sirius, and you are speaking of a prank he never even pulled to begin with. Even then justice was not carried out despite the fact that things didn’t add up. I admit that the teachers are mostly at fault there. We saw the logical answer, heard young Severus’ testimony and formed our conclusion on that once Sirius failed to give an explanation for his actions.”

“How...Professor Lupin even said he pulled that prank and Sirius never denied it.”

“Peter Pettigrew was questioned under Veritaserum once he was captured and he admitted every crime he ever committed. That is when that truth came out; a truth none of us knew about until Madam Bones showed us the record from the interrogation,” McGonagall suddenly felt old beyond even her years.

How had she not been able to see the truth all those years ago? Surely she had known her lions better than that. How could she have believed Sirius to be guilty of crimes that did not fit with the person he had been, even back then? A boy who was extremely protective of his friends. Twice she had failed him, twice had she believed a story she knew did not fit him. She had failed him just as badly as Dumbledore had, as she should have known he would have never betrayed either James Potter or Remus Lupin.

“What truth?” Hermione asked curiously, clearly shocked to see the emotion in her Head of
House’s eyes. “What happened?”

“Twenty-one years ago three boys covered up an almost fatal accident. Letting an innocent take the blame from the culprit to protect a loved one from the harsh truth,” McGonagall answered cryptically enough that she knew that although Hermione would probably figure out the truth, she wouldn’t be able to put together all the pieces and work out what had exactly happened.

She glanced down at the note again. “But we are getting off track. Why did Professor Sirius send you here?”

“Doesn’t the note tell you?” Hermione asked her voice a bit more timid as she learned she didn’t know everything.

“I would like to hear it from you,” McGonagall shifted tiredly, knowing the note didn’t say anything at all.

“He spoke about the Unforgivables, which we already discussed last year, and then proceeded to urge us to use them!”

“Use them?” McGonagall asked in disbelief.

“Yes! While knowing they are illegal.”

“What did he want you to use them on?”

“Scenarios. He conjured a young girl who was dying of something unseen and a guy who was going to jump off a roof and his intentions were to make us use the Unforgivables.”

“He verbally ordered you to use them?” McGonagall asked suspiciously; the scenarios mentioned jogging her memory, though she wasn’t able to grip them properly.

“N-no...but he wanted us to.”

“And you are sure it was not just a discussion about situations in which their uses would be better than any alternative?”

“No. He even got an electric wire and told us to touch it!”

“Why did he ask that?” McGonagall was surprised.

“So that we could feel what it felt like. To hurt us. And he gave me detention when I refused.”

“I see. And did anyone else refuse?”

“They wouldn’t dare to. And I argued that the Unforgivables are illegal and no situation is good enough to make the use of them right. He even told Neville that Neville’s dad used it to kill a girl once and that he should be proud!” She looked completely scandalised now but McGonagall frowned as the words awoke the entire memory for her as the image of a terrified little girl came back to her.

“Frank Longbottom used the Killing Curse on a young Muggle girl who had been abducted with her parents. When the Order arrived at the scene her parents had been tortured to death and the eight year old girl had been tortured so severely that the fluids of her own torn organs were dripping out of her mouth. Her lower body was torn apart, having been used for their sick entertainment. She was dying, but doing it slowly enough to be completely aware of what was
happening to her. The Death Eaters had taken a sick pleasure in cursing her to be able to feel everything, every little pain they’d inflicted upon her. Frank made the right call.”

She took a deep breath to push the memory away again at seeing Hermione’s pale and horrified expression but did not apologise for her words. Even now she could still remember the little girl’s stuttering gasps as she tried and failed to call for her mummy.

“Although they are Unforgivables, there are some situations in which their use prevents even greater damage. It sounds like he wants you to be able to think for yourself and judge a situation for yourself,” she finally said.

“But they are illegal,” Hermione spluttered weakly; though the story had made a deep impression on her, she was still arguing.

“Yes. But so is helping a fugitive escape custody and keeping his whereabouts hidden from the Ministry. And so is helping save a convicted Hippogriff.”

“That is different, they were innocent.”

“But your actions were still illegal in the eyes of the Ministry, so why did you do it?”

“We had to, Professor Dumbledore told us to....” Hermione trailed off.

“Because....well....because....”

“It was the right thing to do?” McGonagall offered her softly and Hermione swallowed but refused to answer.

“Frank Longbottom made the call to take the girl out of her misery. Professor Sirius made the same call for her three years younger sister.”

Hermione paled even more.

“The Death Eaters were fairly fond of abducting young Muggles, mostly females and use them for entertainment.”

She closed her eyes as the memories of the things she had seen overtook her for a moment and she shuddered at the mental images before looking into Hermione’s eyes determinedly.

“Most were tortured and hurt so badly that they would never recover. Not even regaining enough function to breathe on their own.”

“That’s....” Hermione swallowed thickly.

“That is only a small fraction of the war horrors we came across. Would you have let those girls suffer for the rest of their miserable tortured lives? Only being kept alive by pain and a machine? Would you yourself want to live that way?”

“I....” Hermione took a deep shaky breath, shaking her head quickly, tears streaming down her cheeks as she looked down and for a moment McGonagall felt guilty for telling her this.

But then she remembered the broken eyes of a young man who had sat at the bedside of loved one more than once, holding their hands as they fought for survival.

A boy not much older than Hermione was now, who’d been born and raised in a war. Who had
fought and lost much too young, but had kept fighting against all odds for what was left.

A boy who had grown into a tortured but fair man, one she could see was now trying to prevent the future generations from going through the same horrors he had and not afraid to let them learn from pasts rather forgotten.

“You think Sirius is an unqualified teacher because he doesn’t match up to the mental image you have of a teacher. But the truth is that he is better suited for the position than any of the teachers you’ve previously had. Yes, even Remus. Because Sirius fought on the front lines of a war, fought in many battles and spent his entire life fighting against the darkness surrounding him.”

“Professor Lupin fought in the war, too,” Hermione protested softly.

“Professor Lupin fought by going undercover most of the time and though he indeed fought in some battles, he mostly worked behind the scenes. He is a very capable teacher but he misses that little extra experience that Sirius has and that is what Sirius is trying to teach you. Because in the field, nothing is ever simply black and white.”

“But we are only fifth year students,” a stubborn look crossed Hermione’s face.

“You of all people should know that just because you are a minor, it doesn’t mean dark wizards will not try to harm you. I would think you would have learned that much from having spent so much time with Harry.”

“But that’s Harry, he’s a special case. Most fifteen year olds aren’t targeted by dark wizards,” Hermione countered.

“James Potter and Sirius Black were thirteen year old when You-Know-Who first targeted and tortured them, and Remus Lupin was five when he was bitten because his father offended a dangerous werewolf,” McGonagall rose from her seat and picked the note up. “Don’t judge those you know nothing about.”

She stared at it for a moment before she slid it into her desk.

“The problem I see here is not Professor Sirius or his teaching methods. The problem is that you refuse to see things outside of your books. You hold such unwavering faith in them that you refuse to believe that the reality might be different. And that is the reason Sirius gave you detention, because you stubbornly refuse to listen to any information that does not fit in with your book knowledge, even if it means arguing against his every word.”

“So he wrote that down!” Hermione’s eyes shot fire, her horror vaporizing. “It is not true, no matter how often he says it!”

“So he did inform you of that repeatedly before he handed you a detention. If you keep disrespecting him, he can and will throw you out of his class,” McGonagall said disapprovingly, silently shaking her head at Sirius’ tactics.

“He cannot do that; he has an obligation to teach me.”

“He has an obligation to teach every student, yes. But if a student does not wish to listen then he is in his good right to refuse that student entrance to his classes, just like he’s refusing Draco Malfoy. You are walking a very thin line, Miss Granger, and I must say that I am very disappointed in your behaviour,” she made sure to radiate the disappointment she felt for her lion when looking at the girl.
“Twenty points from Gryffindor for disrespecting a teacher. I expect my lions to respect their teachers, even if they do not like them. Only if the teacher has given them sufficient reason to have lost that respect, then I expect my lions to report to me. And I expect even better from my Prefects. I called you on your behaviour before the holidays, after receiving multiple complaints about you and told you that if I’d receive one more complaint I would put you on official probation while I investigate if you are truly the right person for the job. Consider yourself to be on probation from this moment forth and be warned, this kind of behaviour towards one of your teachers does not speak for you.”

She moved to the door, ignoring Hermione’s sharp intake of breath but pausing when her hand touched the knob as she thought about the note. Turning she looked at Hermione’s face.

“I only have one more question to you. Did you try to open that note?”

“No,” Hermione answered quickly, too quickly for McGonagall’s liking.

“Are you sure of that?”

“Yes.”

“Very well then. I suppose a month of detention is in order above the detention you have already received. And another ten points for lying to your Head of House.”

“What? Why Professor!” Hermione shot out of the chair.

“I happen to know that you did try to open the note, despite it being private and sealed. I do not appreciate being lied to.”

“Does Sirius say I tried to look into it?” Hermione spat angrily. “He is incriminating me!”

“Professor Sirius only asked me a personal question and signed that he was unqualified. He didn’t mention you in the note beyond saying you were send here to deliver it. He hasn’t said a single bad thing about you. You incriminated yourself with what you have told me.”

She took pleasure in seeing the girls’ shock, flushing as she realised Sirius had set her up. She really should have known better than to annoy a Marauder, which reminded her.

“And one small piece of advice, Miss Granger. You should know better than to try and open a personal note written by a Marauder. He is after all immature in your eyes.”

“Why? What did he do?”

“I was going to inform you after our meeting was over, but it seems you have shown not to have any respect for a teacher that I personally appointed. So by your actions you are not only disrespecting your Defence teacher, you are also disrespecting me, so maybe it is time you were indeed taught a lesson.”

She opened the door and Hermione rose, afraid to say anything else.

“Have a nice evening Miss Granger. I will send you a note later with the time of your first detention and you will continue to do so every Friday for six weeks.”

“Six? But...” Hermione began to splutter but McGonagall cut her off, not wanting to hear more.

“It would have remained four if you had shown respect to your Professors. Despite numerous
corrections you refuse to show Professor Sirius respect. I will not punish your house by taking more points, so you will instead serve more detentions.”

She paused before an idea came to her.

“And because you love research so much, I want you to write an essay about your Professor as an extra punishment instead of taking points. From his birth to this day, involving every piece of information you can find in old Prophets or other records here. Write me his story before you claim again he is unqualified. You will have until half way March to finish it and I will allow you four rolls of parchment.”

With that she urged Hermione out of her office and closed the door behind her, letting out a deep sigh as she made her way back to her desk, torn between wanting to laugh at the way Sirius had let Hermione dig her own hole or wanting to roll her eyes at her lion’s sheer incapability to see the truth.

Hopefully the assignment she had just set her as a punishment would finally open the girl’s eyes to what she had before her.
"Darn, I have to go," Sirius suddenly announced out of nowhere halfway to the Great Hall, quickly turning on his heels to hurriedly move in the direction they had come from.

Bewildered the Gryffindors could only stare after him before they noticed Madam Pomfrey turning the corner behind them. Harry bit back a snort as her expression turned from neutral to something so annoyed it would have been comical, had it not been directed towards the hastily retreating figure Harry loved so much.

"Sirius Black, if you know what is good for you, you better not take another step or Merlin help me I will hex you!" she yelled, quickening her step and the group split to let her pass, afraid to gain her wrath.

Sirius froze mid-step, seemingly deciding if he should listen or try to make a run for it before he swirled back to face the Mediwitch.

"I…"

"And don't try to deny you weren't running because I've known you for far too long for those tricks to work on me."

Madam Pomfrey reached his side and grabbed his upper arm while waving her wand over the front of his body.

"I'm fine," Sirius rolled his eyes annoyed as he carefully tried to wiggle his arm out of her strong grip, only succeeding in making her tightening her hold.

"I will be the judge of that, thank you very much. What is it with the Potter family and their stubborn-ness? I thought Charlus was a disaster and James a terror. But you and Harry will throw me into early retirement. At least you are too old to..."

"Be dragged towards the hospital wing like an infant?" Sirius interrupted her meekly, as she had glanced at the readings her wand produced and begun to pull him with her.

"Don't get smart with me, young man, I am not above sitting on you once more if it means you'll stay put," she tapped him on his nose with her finger in warning.

"You have an unhealthy obsession with having me on one of your hospital beds, always have," Sirius whined as he tried to pull his arm free a bit more urgently while rubbing his nose with his free hand, but she tightened her hold even more.

Harry and his classmates shifted nervously as they watched the two, hesitating between trying to help their professor and staying out of the way to not catch the strict witch's attention upon themselves.
"Only because you are too stubborn for your own good. Honestly, leaving the hospital wing mere hours after being used as a chopstick and venom still pumping through your veins," she argued as she continued trying to drag him with her, but Sirius dug his heels into the ground to stop her and finally broke free.

"That was years ago!" Sirius exclaimed in disbelief.

"The amount of times you and your friends appeared on my doorstep…" she sighed.

"Mostly because either Professor M or you dragged us there!" Sirius argued.

"Yes, because you refused to show up yourself. My goodness, in the sixty four years I've worked here I have never before met anyone as stubborn as you!"

Sirius opened his mouth to argue but clearly failed to think of anything to say in return to that truth as he stuttered for a moment before sighing frustrated.

"Good, now are you going to cooperate or do I have to make you come with me?"

"For someone so concerned for my well-being you certainly seem eager to manhandle me into submission," Sirius muttered as Poppy's fingers closed around his abused upper arm once more and pulled him closer to her side.

"Are you all right?" Harry asked softly as he finally took a step forwards at his godfather's wince, having stayed at the side with the others until now to let Sirius handle it. But Madam Pomfrey's bony hands were digging into his godfather's thin arms now and he'd not let her hurt him, knowing his godfather wouldn't actively defend himself as he knew she meant well.

"I'm fine," Sirius shot him a fleeting smile and Madam Pomfrey appeared to notice just how tightly she was holding him, loosened her grip immediately, though she did not let go of him.

"I thought we established that I'd be the judge of that," Madam Pomfrey turned to Harry. "Remus can come collect him after dinner, could you please pass the message to him? It saves me from having to go find him and this one from trying to escape again. But only tell him after dinner or he'll try to act gallant and knightly and come too early. I will have to kick him out then."

"This one is standing right beside you and is not a two year old in need of a chaperone," Sirius grumbled as Madam Pomfrey still had a strong grip on his arm, despite having loosened it.

"Shush you, if you would be so kind," Madam Pomfrey shot Sirius a warning glance before smiling at Harry pleasantly.

"Erm…" Harry glanced at Sirius who rolled his eyes.

"It's okay, though if she breaks her word and hasn't released me after dinner then please act gallantly and do come save me," he winked and Harry chuckled.

"All right, I'll tell Remus after dinner that he can come pick him up."

"Good, that is settled then."

With a sharp nod towards the stunned group she pulled Sirius with her, leaving the man no choice but to walk with her, giving a little wave towards their group in defeat.

They all raised their hands automatically but the moment they were out of sight Dean blinked.
"Wow…that was….wow."

"Yeah," Harry agreed.

"Talking about stubbornness... I wonder which of those two would win in a fair fight," Seamus muttered.

"Professor Sirius would. He'd have gotten loose if he'd been serious in his escape attempt, but clearly didn't want to hurt her," Neville was sure of that and Lavender let out a giggle as they continued to the Great Hall.

"Did she really sit on him before?"

Harry chuckled despite himself. "Yeah, after we arrived once the Christmas holidays were over she dragged him and Remus to the hospital wing. Sirius tried to make a break for it but she forced him onto the bed before planting herself onto his chest and refused to move until he promised to stay put until she was satisfied with his health."

"Well, there are bound to be some health issues after such a long time in Azkaban," Neville pointed out logically as everyone else looked sympathetic.

"Is that why his teeth are now so white again?" Ron asked surprised as he looked at Harry. "They were yellow when we met him."

"Madam Pomfrey probably had to re-grow most of them," Seamus shrugged before Harry could say anything to Ron.

"Huh? Why?" Ron seemed confused.

"Living in bad circumstances with no toothbrush and horrible food, I would be surprised if his teeth did survive without major problems," Seamus snorted as they sat down.

Harry glanced at the High Table to see if he could find Remus but the man wasn't present yet so he turned back to the others, surprised to see them all staring at him.

"Why are you all looking at me?"

"Well, he is your guardian," Parvati pointed out.

"So?"

"You probably know his healing progress," she urged him on.

"I do, but I have no intention of sharing that sort of information with you lot."

"Why not?"

"What is your mother's bra size?" George's voice suddenly reached them as he and Fred appeared behind them, squeezing in on either side of Harry, forcing Lavender and Ron to move over to prevent the twins from sitting on their lap.

Ron grumbled but was waved off by Lavender as Fred spoke bluntly, leaning forward to Parvati.

"And is it true that your father is getting bald but is hiding it with potions?"

"How dare you! That are..." Parvati turned red as anger flashed over her face.
"Personal questions of no one's business other than your families?" Katie asked as she joined them, too.

Parvati looked scandalised for a moment, her eyes suddenly widening in understanding as she realised what they were doing.

"I'm sorry... I indeed have no business asking such personal questions. Especially since he is one of our professors," she turned back to Harry.

Harry nodded and Fred turned to him. "Now that that is settled... what is the matter with Sirius that his health is being discussed?"

"Madam Pomfrey got her hands on him again," Harry answered and both twin pulled sympathetic faces.

"Poor guy," they said in unison as Lavender shook her head in sympathy, too.

"I hope she will leave him alone soon."

"I doubt it. If it's anything like two weeks ago, she will most likely feed him so many potions that he'll lose all sense of balance," Fred shook his head, remembering the wobbly Marauder that Remus had to guide back to their chambers because he couldn't focus enough to not walk into the walls repeatedly.

"She's been cornering him every few days since classes started again," Harry smiled faintly, remembering the same thing that Fred was thinking of.

"Is that why his hands are shaking?" Ron suddenly asked. "Because he's nervous she'll show up unexpected again?"

Harry and the twins turned to him in disbelief.

"His hands have been shaking since long before he got to Hogwarts," Harry frowned.

"They have?"

"You really only noticed it now?" Fred raised an eyebrow.

"When should I have noticed according to you?" Ron asked.

"Noticed what?" Ginny joined them, taking a place beside Dean.

"Sirius' hands shaking," George answered.

"You've never seen him read the paper?" Ginny snorted as she looked at Ron.

"He doesn't read the paper," Ron was the one frowning now.

"Yes he does. Though he was usually up so early he was already done with it by the time you finally came out of bed," Fred shot back.

"Fine, but what does the paper have to do with Sirius' hands shaking?" Ron asked.

"He can't keep the paper still. It drove Mum crazy to hear the constant rustling the entire time it took him to read through it. The first few times she nagged at him for it, but Dad, Remus and Moody chewed her out when they heard her do so. That was the second time in life that I've seen
Dad truly mad. He must have really told her off because she never mentioned it again," Fred said.

"It is a bit annoying though, rather distracting from conversations going on," Ginny admitted. "And not just because of the sound, he also never completely sits still no matter what he is doing."

"I wonder why that is," Neville sounded sarcastic as he looked at her like he was seeing her for the first time.

"What do you mean?"

"Why do you think his hands tremble, why he can't sit still?"

"I don't know, Neville, just restlessness?" she shrugged, unbothered by his harsh tone.

Katie snorted. "Right, because the truth is not obvious?"

Harry shot her a confused glance but Ron was the one who asked the question.

"The truth?"

Katie blinked. "He spent twelve years in Azkaban. That's probably why his hands tremble and he's restless."

"What does Azkaban have to do with trembling hands?" Harry had always thought they trembled due to the abuse inflicted upon him by his relatives.

"You...you don't know?" Neville's eyes widened as Harry looked at him clueless.

"Know what?"

"I...if you don't know...then I shouldn't be the one to tell you," Neville stammered suddenly.

"Tell me...What does Azkaban have to do with his trembling hands?" Harry was aware that his voice took on a pleading tone but he didn't care as he needed to know the truth.

"You really don't know the rumours about the maximum security prisoners in Azkaban?" Katie asked.

"Katie, it's not our place to..." Neville tried to stop her but Harry shook his head.

"Please, tell me."

"I was young when I first heard of them; my uncle had gotten imprisoned for three months because of theft. He told my parents about it and I eavesdropped," Katie swallowed as Harry turned his full attention to her.

"He heard stories of what the guards did to the maximum security prisoners, those in for life."

"What did they do?" Fred whispered.

"They tortured those for fun, especially the Death Eaters," Katie continued.

"They wouldn't be allowed to hurt the prisoners in their care. It would be against the law, right?" Ron asked horrified.

"The law doesn't exist in Azkaban once a suspect is convicted. Besides, who is going to care what
happens to the Death Eaters as long as they suffer conviction or not?" Katie shot at him.

"Especially..." Neville trailed off, swallowing thickly.

"Especially what?" Fred tried to urge him on.

"Especially You-Know-Who's supposedly right hand man," it was Luna who continued when Neville shook his head, tears appearing in his eyes.

They looked up, surprised to see the petite Ravenclaw sitting beside Neville as none of them had noticed her arrival. But Harry's eyes widened; all colour drained as realisation hit.

"His right...you mean Sirius," it wasn't a question but Luna, Katie and Neville still nodded.

"They believed him to be guilty of many crimes, not just the ones he was imprisoned for. But there was no evidence for any of the families he must have slaughtered, so the rumours say the guards paid special attention to him to try and get the truth out of him," Katie continued.

Harry felt his stomach clench and his mouth turn dry, suddenly glad he hadn't begun eating yet.

"Does Remus know?" he hadn't meant to ask the question but Ron still opened his mouth to answer.

"I...don't...surely he doesn't...I mean..." Ron stuttered, falling silent when Harry shot up, pale as a sheet and ignoring him completely.

"I have to go...I..."

"Go, we'll tell McGonagall you'll spend the night there," George promised as Fred rose from his seat.

"I'll walk with you."

Placing a hand on Harry's arm for a moment to give him some sense of comfort, they hurried out of the Great Hall together without another word passing between them.

"Remus does know...right?" Ginny' voice was small as they all stared after the retreating forms.

"I don't know. We didn't know either and Dad works for the Ministry," Ron seemed surer of himself now.

"Dad knows and so do Remus and Moody. It's suddenly a whole lot clearer why they became so angry at Mum when she nagged at Sirius for his inability to keep the paper still," George suddenly shivered.

"He probably has at least some nerve damage," Katie agreed, placing a hand on his shoulder in comfort.

"Nerve damage?" Lavender's fingers twitching automatically at the thought.

"Yes. I doubt they would have stopped torturing him after a few days without getting answers. You can heal nerve damage done by the Cruciatius Curse, but only if a Healer sees you quickly and it was used for a few days at the most. Any longer time and there will be permanent damage," Luna stated sadly.

"Can you imagine the Aurors letting a Healer see one of their most dangerous and hated prisoners? Just because he might have received some nerve damage?" Katie asked.
"Well...no," Ginny admitted. "It is still hard to believe the guards would do that to the prisoners though, regardless of their crimes. And that the Ministry would even let them."

"Like the Ministry would care. They imprisoned him without ever providing him with a trial, too," George spat angrily. "And they claimed Elf magic was actually the work of a teenage boy, despite being able to tell the difference between the signatures."

"The Ministry doesn't care about werewolves or other creatures either," Luna added.

"But if they knew the truth...surely they would have intervened...right?" Parvati questioned, unwilling to believe the Ministry could be even worse than she already thought.

"Yeah, because the Ministry has such a good track record of listening to the truth," Neville snorted.

"They've sure done a fine job of believing Harry when he claimed Sirius was innocent two years ago," Ron noted and Luna nodded.

"Or believed him when he said You-Know-Who was back last year."

Ginny bit her lip. "Sirius never told any of us he was tortured though."

"Why would he tell you that?" Katie shot at her.

"He doesn't usually hold secrets from us," Ron admitted.

"You don't know that. I bet there are tons of things that we do not know about Sirius' past, including about his relatives," George said, a knowing look in his eyes.

"The Black family? They were insane, ruthless and dangerous," Neville shuddered.

"How do you know that?" Ron asked surprised.

"As the heir of a Noble and Ancient house I was taught everything about the other Pureblood families. The Malfoys are considered dark but the Blacks were the second darkest family to exist in our history after the Gaunts. The Black family members were cruel, sadistic, and absolutely uptight and deranged about the purity of one's blood. The few more accepting members were either disowned or died in suspicious circumstances."

"Not Professor Sirius though," Katie smiled proudly.

"A white sheep in an otherwise dark family. The first ever Black descendant not to be sorted into Slytherin, friends with the blood traitor Potter family and pro Muggle. If even a shimmer of the stories I've heard are true then I don't know how he managed to live long enough to run away," Neville's voice was full of admiration but also held a hint of sorrow.

"You know that he ran away?" Ginny was surprised.

"It is common knowledge among the older pureblood families and caused quite the scandal apparently. Uncle Alfie told me repeatedly how amazing it was that one fifteen year old could cause such trouble."

"What happened?" Ron asked but Neville just shrugged.

"The circumstances were kept very secretive even for their standards. But Arcturus Black disowned Orion Black, Professor Sirius' father less than a week after the Professor ran away. And Walburga Black, his mother, was confined to the ancestral Black family house a few weeks later after she
showed up here to yell at her oldest son," Alicia shared with them when Neville refused to elaborate, speaking up for the first time.

"She showed up here?" Angelina asked amazed.

"Apparently. I haven't been able to find out the specific details of it from anyone willing to share but it couldn't have been good," Alicia sighed.

"If Arcturus Black, despite having a famous history of bigotry and knowing his grandson's different views, actually disowned his oldest son after his grandson ran away then I think you are right, yes. What happened couldn't have been good," Katie said thoughtfully and Dean whistled awed.

"Exactly," Neville nodded as they all thought of the implications of Katie's words. "At least he ended up in a good place."

"You think Azkaban is a good place?" Lavender asked in disgust.

"No, I meant the Potters. They took the Professor in when he ran away."

"Well, they must have known each other well or the Potters wouldn't have made him Harry's godfather," Seamus said logically.

"From the stories I've heard James Potter and Professor Sirius were best friends, closer than brothers," Neville offered.

"As close as the Professor and Professor Lupin?" Lavender asked curiously.

"Even closer. Everyone always says they were attached at the hip..." George grinned, his eyes widened as well as his grin as he looked up.

Following his gaze, they saw Hermione coming towards them, her cheeks shining bright neon blue.

"What happened to her?" Alicia tried to suppress a giggle as other students openly stared at her.

"No idea," Dean grinned.

Hermione sat down beside Ron without a greeting, seemingly unaware of everyone's stares.

"What happened to your face?"

"What? Nothing, why?"

"It's rather blue," Alicia snorted.

"What?! No it's not," she wiped out a pocket mirror and glanced at her face. "See, there is nothing there."

"Suit yourself," Katie shrugged. "Hey Lee."

"Hey, nice one George," the newcomer nodded to his friend as he sat down.

"It wasn't me. I think it's Sirius' work."

"The Professor likes a prank?"
"He doesn't just like them, he invented half of them with his friends," they looked up to see Fred had returned and he sat down beside George, his eyes never leaving Hermione's face.

"How's Harry?" George immediately asked before anyone else could say anything and Fred tore his eyes away from her to look at his brother.

"He'll be all right, he's with Sirius now. We went to the hospital wing and upon seeing him Sirius immediately took him with him."

"That's good; did Madam Pomfrey let him go without complaining?" Dean asked.

"She immediately let him go. I think even she could see how upset Harry was," Fred revealed.

"What happened that Harry's upset?" Hermione asked.

"He just learned that Sirius was tortured in Azkaban," Ron answered, making Hermione frown but Lee shot her a glare, not even doubting the claim for a second.

"Don't even think about arguing against the truth," he held her gaze for a long moment in warning before turning to George again.

"The Professor invented pranks?" he returned to their previous topic calmly.

"Yes. Do you remember the Marauders?" George asked.

"Of course, you guys have been trying to discover their identities since first year," Lee grinned.

"Well...we found them."

"What?!" Lee's eyes widened in shock while Ron and Hermione rolled their eyes.

"Yeah, it's them."

"Who?"

"Sirius and Remus are Padfoot and Moony," Fred revealed, grinning at Lee's shock.

"No way...no...absolutely...you are serious?" he gaped as he realised they were indeed serious.

"Discovered it last summer but we couldn't tell you we had found them because it would endanger Sirius' safety," Fred apologised.

"It's okay; I still can't believe you found them! If those two were them, then who are the other two?"

"Prongs was Harry's Dad, James Potter, and Wormtail is the traitor Peter Pettigrew," George spat out the name.

"Harry's Dad was a Marauder? That's bloody amazing!" Lee exclaimed.

"We know!" Fred and George beamed.

"Who are the Marauders?" Dean asked confused.

"Just a group of silly pranksters who are their heroes," Alicia told him.

"That is not entirely true; they were a group of brilliant pranksters. Two of them belonged to the
highest praised students of all time," Luna elaborated.

"How do you know that?" Ron asked surprised.

"My Mum was friends with Sirius while they were both at Hogwarts. She told me about his group of friends, who were dubbed the Marauders by Professor McGonagall after a particular castle-wide stunt. They adopted the name after that to sign their handiwork with."

"And Professor Lupin, Professor Sirius and Harry's Dad were all part of this group?" Lavender asked for confirmation.

"Yes, they shared a dorm and were very, very close. Until Pettigrew betrayed them in the war," Ron nodded.

"That must have been horrible. I read something in the papers about Pettigrew, Professor Lupin, the Potters and Professor Sirius knowing each other, but not much. To be betrayed by such a close friend like that..." she trailed off with tears in her eyes.

"That bastard cost them everything," Ginny confirmed.

"And made another pay for his crimes," Fred took a deep breath as he was visibly shaking and they all fell quiet.

They ate in silence for a while until Fred suddenly rose from his seat, quickly making his way towards the entrance.

Looking up startled they saw Remus had just arrived, pausing as he noticed Fred coming towards him.

They watched the two converse a moment before Remus hurried out of the Great Hall again and Fred returned to the table.

"What did you tell him?" Ron asked.

"The truth. He'll go to them now."

Lavender' eyes suddenly brightened and she sighed in delight, "It is so lovely that they take such good care of each other, they make such a lovely couple."

"Who do?" Angelina was confused by the sudden gleam in the brunette's eyes.

"Professor Lupin and Professor Sirius," Lavender smiled.

"They are just friends," Hermione raised an eyebrow.

"They live together, that's all," Ginny agreed.

"People living together just as friends don't usually share a bed," Seamus murmured loud enough for everyone to hear, deciding that now was as good a time as ever to start spreading the rumour Lavender was clearly set on.

Fred turned to him suspiciously. "Where did you hear that?"

"A couple of days ago, while we had that early snowball fight. Remember when Professor Lupin dropped a load of snow over Professor Sirius' head and they went down into the snow together?"
At their nods Seamus continued. "In retaliation Professor Sirius said he might hide some snow in Professor Lupin's bed."

"That doesn't..." Ginny frowned, not having been there, but Seamus shook his head to silence her.

"I wasn't finished yet. Professor Lupin then said that he wouldn't be the only one cold then but Professor Sirius claimed he'd just crawl into Harry's bed instead. Why wouldn't he just crawl into his own bed instead if they don't share one?"

They all stared at him for a moment before a sly grin slid over Fred and George's faces.

"I bet Dumbledore wouldn't be too happy about that."

"Why would he be unhappy about that? With all his oddness I doubt he's homophobic," Ron said, annoyed he hadn't been present when they had played in the snow.

"He'd be a hypocrite if he was a homophobic. We just meant that the Headmaster has a thing for Sirius," Fred shrugged.

"No he doesn't. And the Headmaster is not gay," Hermione snapped and Ron grimaced at the implication.

"Of course he is," Katie laughed dryly.

"He is just eccentric, that's all," Hermione defended the Headmaster.

"Luna's eccentric, no offense, Professor Dumbledore is gay. No self-respecting straight person would wear clothes like that or talk like he does. Nor would they call other men their dear boy unless it was in jest, which is not the case for the Headmaster," Alicia shot back while shooting Luna an apologising glance but the dirty blond simply smiled.

"It would be illogical for me to deny the truth," she waved Alicia's apology away.

"He does have an unhealthy obsession with trying to control Sirius and Harry's lives," Ginny hesitantly admitted.

"Maybe he's got a thing for Harry too?" Seamus joked.

"It is possible, though for Dumbledore's sake I hope not," Lee agreed.

"Why for his sake?" Ron asked, the grimace still in place.

"You are all out of your mind. Professor Dumbledore is not gay!" Hermione yelled at them, making most of the student's present look up to them.

"Keep your voice down," Neville grunted. "And believe what you want, I think they are right. The Headmaster does have an unhealthy obsession with Harry and the Professor and he is definitely gay."

"Do you think he ever tried anything...you know..." Katie leaned forward.

"Not a chance. If he had made a pass at Sirius then he'd have beaten him into a bloody pulp, after Remus has ripped his balls off," George's voice didn't hold a hint of uncertainty.

"Professor Lupin would?" Colin asked; surprising everyone as no one had seen the small Gryffindor slip at the table.
"Oh yes, he is very protective of Sirius. Not too long ago he burned down an entire hallway with Fiendfyre because Sirius was being threatened," Ginny laughed.

"By a painting!" Ron snorted. "Who knows what he would do to someone capable of actually hurting Sirius."

"He would kill that person," Luna stated.

"No..." Parvati looked scandalised at the possibility.

"That is what happened to You-Know-Who isn't it? The Prophet said Sirius was injured while protecting Harry and Professor Lupin saved their lives by killing him," Luna told her.

"That might be, but Dumbledore should be more afraid of Sirius in the end," Fred noted.

"More?" Lavender asked wide-eyed.

"Yeah. While Remus will rip his private parts off if he'd try to do anything to Sirius, Sirius will rip him apart limb by limb if Dumbledore so much as looks at Harry funnily. No one touches Harry without having to answer to Sirius," Ginny agreed with a chuckle.

They shared a fond smile but suddenly Neville tensed.

"What is it?" Dean asked.

"Do you guys think Malfoy knows?"

"About the professor's being a couple?" Lavender asked confused.

"No...Azkaban."

They all tensed and Katie glanced at the Slytherin table.

"If you and I know then you can be rather certain that they know, too. It is a bit surprising he hasn't made a move against Harry with that knowledge yet though."

"He probably didn't think Harry wouldn't know with how close the Professor and he obviously are," Dean shrugged.

"That doesn't explain why he wouldn't have tried to use that knowledge against the Professor himself yet," Colin said. "Or do you think he already tried?"

"If he had I think we would have heard about it somehow. He's probably waiting to try and catch him off guard to make the deepest impact. Especially since Sirius and Remus are responsible for his father's death," George answered.

"I'd say let him try. If the git even dares to make a move to try and hurt Sirius then he is mine!" Fred growled, his eyes flashing.

"You are certainly protective of the Professor. Are you sure you don't secretly have a thing for him too?" Dean grinned, making Fred chuckle, the anger dying away from his eyes.

"Outside of Harry being our brother; thus making Sirius part of our family, Sirius is just an amazing person with a killer personality and quite lovable. He is part of our family too, besides, we owe him our lives."
"How?"

"Two years ago we ran into trouble in the Forbidden Forest, more than we could handle. We were passing out from the venom of the thing we were bitten by and would have died if someone hadn't showed up out of nowhere. He got rid of the poison and healed our wounds before disappearing again," George revealed calmly.

"How do you know it was him?" Hermione asked sceptically.

"Beside recognising his magical signature upon seeing him again? Our saviour had a peculiar scar on his wrist, the exact same one Sirius has," George said.

"Still, plenty of people might have a scar on their wrists. How could you be so sure it was him, did he take credit for it?" Hermione asked. "Because I doubt either of you would be able to focus properly if you were indeed poisoned."

"We never asked but we doubt there are many people with a particular scar like that in the world, especially hiding out in the Forbidden Forest at the same time we know Sirius was hiding there," Fred shot at her.

"What kind of a scar?" Ginny asked curiously as she had never seen any scar on Sirius before.

"Like shackles," Neville said softly.

"The Professor has a scar shaped like a shackle on his wrist?" a horrified expression crossed Lavenders face.

"On both wrists actually," Dean confirmed. "I accidentally saw them once."

"In what possible situation would you be able to see both his wrists? His sleeves are always either tight or buttoned up," Parvati frowned.

"I was out of bed after hours because I was hungry and ran into him in the kitchen. He was making cupcakes."

"Cupcakes?" various voices called out surprised.

"Yeah, he said they were for Professor Lupin, that they helped."

"Helped with what?"

"No idea, I was terrified I was in serious trouble. But we had tea and biscuits before he escorted me back."

"You didn't get in trouble? The last time I got caught I received a month of detention from Professor Flitwick!" Angelina grumbled.

"He told me off, saying that if I was hungry I should ask a House Elf to bring me something. Only those up to no good roam the castle after curfew and that I should mind the time of the month."

"The time...oh! It was the night of the full moon?" Ginny's eyes widened in shock.

"No, it was the night before. I made sure to check that before leaving," Dean assured.

"Wouldn't matter if you checked it or not. The Fat Lady and the other House entrances won't open on the full moon unless there is an emergency," Fred told him.
"How do you know that?"

"We tried to sneak out once, not thinking about the full moon. But the Fat Lady refused to open, saying it was an extra safety precaution taken."

"So we are locked in on a full moon?" Hermione asked suspiciously.

"Seeing that we aren't supposed to be out after curfew unless we have detention anyway, I'd say it is a reasonable precaution," Luna shrugged.

"But it is winter! The moon comes up much earlier than curfew," Hermione said.

"That is why it's only an extra safety precaution. The corridors to the Professor's quarters are heavily warded, too," Luna answered.

"Why don't they just go to the Shrieking Shack?" Hermione asked.

"Do you want them to be miserable for no good reason?" Lee asked.

"Or have them both catch a cold?" Katie frowned. "Really, it is like you don't care what happens to them!"

"I do, I just find it illogical that we have to mind all these precautions when they can just go to the Shack like they always used to do," Hermione defended herself.

"You shouldn't have any problem with these precautions since you are hell-bent on following the rules anyway. Only students like us, who sometimes stretch the rules..." George said.

"Or blatantly ignore them," Angelina mumbled as he spoke.

"Or blatantly ignore them," George agreed before smiling suddenly. "Actually... I think the precautions are specifically put in place for rule breakers like us. Because no rule follower would ever come into a situation in which the precautions would be needed."

Hermione frowned and opened her mouth to disagree but then hesitated as she seemed to think his words over, confusion spreading over her face as she couldn't quite believe what George had said.

"How do you think the Professor received those scars?" Parvati asked curiously.

"Probably in Azkaban," Dean mused.

"Why would they shackle a prisoner there? Won't the Dementors be enough to keep the prisoners in check?" Colin asked.

"I doubt even Dementors would be able to keep someone completely under control while they are being tortured," Katie mused darkly, shaking her head as the younger Gryffindor looked alarmed.

"Wherever he received the scars, he must have received them in a painful way, seeing as no one ever touches his wrists," Seamus noted.

"Surely people have touched his wrists before," Ron frowned.

"The Professors walk hand in hand often enough," Lavender added.

"Walking hand in hand is not the same as holding someone's wrist. I noticed that Professor Lupin never takes a hold of his wrist, always the arm or his hand," Dean sighed at their confusion before
admitting; "I watched them interact after discovering the scars, curious how he got them."

"Even if Professor Lupin never grabs his wrist, I'm sure Harry has before," Hermione shot him a sceptical glance.

"Not that I've seen," Neville spoke up. "I paid extra attention to them, too, after discovering them during an extra tutoring lesson. Neither of them ever touches his wrists, nor does any of the other Professors when they reach out to him."

"What harm could it possibly do to touch scarred wrists?" Hermione frowned.

"On a person who's been severely hurt while his wrists were bound? The reaction could be horrible if he'd react violently to the touch," Luna calmly spoke.

"There's a warning floating around the hallways to never touch the Professor's wrists because the reaction can be catastrophic," Colin admitted.

"It's just a grabbing of a wrist, how could that result in catastrophic results?" Ron looked at them with disbelief.

"It's not the wrist that would be the problem. It's the scars. Touching them would bring back memories of how there were received," George began.

"Imagine you've been tortured for ages, your wrists always bound in some way. Those being touched could have the result that the person is violently thrown back into the memories of that torture," Fred continued.

"And they'd lash out to try and protect themselves. Unwillingly hurting the person grabbing the wrist in perhaps the most innocent intention," George took over again.

"The lesson? Never touch Professor Sirius' wrists, ever," A new voice concluded and they turned to see a few seventh year Slytherins stand behind them.

"Not unless you wish to face the consequences of doing so," another Slytherin added.

"And what would those consequences be?" Katie asked sharply.

"With the amount of power the Professor possesses? You'd be lucky to walk away from the repercussion in one piece," the first answered calmly.

"Why would there be a repercussion?" Hermione asked as Ron glared at the four.

"Because it would be an instinctive reaction to defend himself. It could be a spell or a fist in your face, depending on the reaction of the person you grab," Fred said.

"Surely you are all exaggerating," Ron looked uncertain of his own words though.

"We aren't about to try and find out. Neither are the Ravenclaws or the Hufflepuffs."

"Everyone knows about the scars on his wrists?" Parvati asked surprised.

"I just know that the warning was spread around that grabbing the Professor's wrists can have devastating consequences."

"Who spread that warning?" Neville asked suspiciously.
"Professor McGonagall, Professor Flitwick and Professor Lupin. They spread it around to warn the students and protect them from doing something stupid that could hurt them."

"Smart move on their side, I wonder why it didn't reach us," Dean mused.

"Probably because you don't interact as much with the other houses," Luna shrugged.

"But could we help you?" Neville turned his full attention to the Slytherins.

"We were asked by Professor McGonagall to pass this to Granger," the Slytherin who had spoken first held out a note to her.

"What is it?" she took the note suspiciously, the Slytherin shrugging before they left again.

"The date for a detention from the form of the note," George gleefully told her.

George grinned widely at the blue cheeked glare she shot him as he and Fred rose from their seats.

"With that knowledge we'd like to bid you all a good evening as my dear brother and I have some business to attend to."

"Make sure you good little students get back to Gryffindor Tower nicely on time," Fred grinned, making many eyes roll, before they left the Great Hall.

The others fell silent after their retreat and finished their dinner in peace, various groups breaking off in small conversations before they eventually all went their own way.
Quickly leaving the Great Hall, Harry and Fred walked towards the hospital wing in silence.

Harry was grateful Fred wasn't trying to comfort him, probably knowing that only Sirius would be able to do so.

He didn't know why he was so upset about the assumed torture Sirius had gone through in Azkaban as he knew his godfather had been tortured before. There was no logical explanation for his distress and he didn't even try to understand it, he just had to go to his godfather and see for himself that he was fine and safe.

Opening the Hospital wing door without knocking he saw Madam Pomfrey stand with her back to them as she was waving her wand over Sirius, who was sitting sideward on a bed before her.

They were speaking softly but Sirius looked up at the opening of the door and his eyes widened as he caught sight of them, immediately shooting off the bed.

"What happened?!"

Harry felt his godfather's warm arms wrap around him and biting back a choke, he grabbed him tightly, twisting the fabric of clothing on Sirius' back between his fingers tightly to hold him close.

He was unable to answer his godfather right then, burying his face into the man's shoulder deeply to be surrounded by his scent.

He heard Fred assure Sirius that he was not hurt, only upset and knew he was probably scaring him but he couldn't loosen his grip.

"He just discovered something at dinner that deeply upset him and I think it would be wiser to discuss it in the privacy of your quarters," he heard Fred continue and felt Sirius nod in return.

"Thank you for bringing him to me."

Sirius' voice was soft as Harry felt himself being pulled tighter against him, relaxing him slightly as it told him Sirius wasn't going anywhere.

He was vaguely aware that the three around him spoke for a moment longer before Sirius somehow moved several steps without dislodging him even slightly.

Even as one arm disappeared from around him, the other tightened to assure him he was still there to keep him in place as Sirius made a sharp movement with his newly free arm.

A moment later he was lifted off his feet by the arm still holding him as Sirius stepped over something before the sensation of a Floo travel turned Harry's stomach around.

But as quickly as it had begun it ended again and Sirius manoeuvred him almost expertly to the couch and made him sit on it without ever loosening Harry's own hold on him.

The heat of a fire washed over Harry's back and the tell-tale sounds of pots and pans moving around in the tiny kitchen told him Sirius was making hot chocolate.
And indeed a few minutes later Sirius pried one of Harry's hands from his back to press a cup into his hands, not forcing him to remove the other that surely had to be hurting him by now with how tightly Harry was holding him.

"Someone once said that tea makes everyone feel better. I think they've never had hot chocolate before," his voice was soft and Harry gave a light snort.

"Or faced Dementors," he murmured, shifting to untwist the hand buried into Sirius' back to be able to lean against his side, not willing to release the contact completely yet, even as he winced as Sirius' tensed slightly at his words.

"Sorry...I ..."

"Don't apologise. We'll talk about what happened in a bit, but since Fred assured me you aren't hurt...and you aren't, right?"

"No."

"Good. Then I want you to drink your chocolate and warm yourself up first. You are rather cold to the touch and shaky," Sirius hushed him and Harry nodded gratefully as Sirius' arm stayed around him in comfort.

Drinking their hot chocolate in silence, Harry felt the warm liquid and Sirius' close presence calm him down and once his cup was empty he slowly shifted to sit on the couch more properly so he could look at his godfather.

Banishing the cups to the kitchen Sirius settled back, too, mirroring Harry's position.

"Now you can tell me what happened."

"Where did you learn to do that?" Harry asked amazed.

"Do what?"

"The whole calming me down with a cup and making me feel better despite not having heard the problem yet."

"Chocolate always makes me feel better when I am upset and it is easier to talk about things when calm," Sirius shrugged.

Harry nodded, indeed feeling better as he leaned back into the side of the couch.

"After Madam Pomfrey took you away we went to the Great Hall for dinner while chatting a bit and eventually Azkaban came up...," Harry suddenly hesitated.

Sirius rarely spoke about Azkaban, only bringing it up when it had to do with a conversation. Like why he had escaped, when they spoke about Crouch Jr. and when Harry had asked about tattoos upon seeing his scars.

But beside those few occasions his godfather had never spoken about Azkaban, not once. And suddenly Harry wondered if this was why, if Sirius didn't want to remember the hell he lived in for so long. So despite his own desire to know the truth, his need, he now hesitated to bring it up.

He didn't want to hurt his godfather or be the cause of even more nightmares and from the way his godfather's posture had tensed at the mere mentioning of Dementors he knew it was still a sore
subject, probably always would be.

Even now Sirius tensed again slightly, but forced himself to relax as apprehension crossed his face momentarily before it closed off completely. It left Harry unable to see what he was thinking and made him glad he hadn't mentioned Sirius' shaking hands to him as they shook even more noticeably now, even as they rested on his legs.

"And?" he asked softly, silently giving Harry permission to continue as he had clearly noticed his hesitation.

"Neville and Katie told me about some rumours that went around about what happened to certain prisoners," Harry swallowed as Sirius tensed more violently now. "Is it true...that they..."

"No," Sirius cut him off swiftly before elaborating more clearly, slowly relaxing again.

"Well, they tried but I'm protected so they never managed."

Releasing a shaky breath he hadn't been aware he'd been holding Harry frowned at Sirius' words.

"Protected?"

"Yes. In our fifth year your father used a special blood ritual to protect me from that sort of thing," Sirius admitted with an uncomfortable shrug.

"In fifth year?"

"Christmas Day of fifth year to be exact, a day after I ran away," Sirius specified.

"But...you were tortured when I was a baby!" Harry exclaimed confused. How could Sirius have been tortured if his father had used a ritual to protect him against it?

"Erm...yes?" Sirius looked at him baffled.

"How were you protected then?"

"By the same spell. James cast it to last for as long as his blood is pumping through someone's veins."

"How did that work then if you were protected?"

Sirius stared at him utterly bewildered, almost an exact match as to how Harry now felt.

"Are we talking about the same rumour?" Sirius finally asked carefully.

"There's more than one?" Harry's eyes widened. There couldn't be, could there?

"Well...yes, plenty in fact. I just assumed since you were upset... what rumour did you mean?"

"The rumours that the guards of Azkaban tortured prisoners, tortured you," Harry swallowed as he forced the words out.

"That's a rumour? I thought it was common knowledge," Sirius said surprised.

"So it's true?" he whispered, the relief he had felt at Sirius' denial earlier washing away in cold sweat and his stomach clenched painfully at the confirmation Sirius gave.
He let himself be pulled close and wrapped his arms around his godfather's neck.

"I wish I could tell you something else, but yes it is true."

"Why have you never told me?" Harry pulled back to look at his godfather.

"I thought you knew. The whole Wizarding world was all set on my guilt. They demanded answers...," Sirius trailed off.

"And you believed it to be a given that they would try to torture it out of you when you didn't tell them anything they wanted to hear," Harry concluded, clenching his hands in anger at the unfairness that was his godfather's life.

"They didn't believe I was telling the truth even after they shoved Veritaserum down my throat."

"They still believed in your guilt despite that?!" Harry exclaimed angrily. "But they would know you were telling the truth then, right? Because you can't lie through the truth serum, can you?"

"Not normally, no, but they believed I used unknown dark magic to lie through the serum. You see, when someone truly believes something it is very hard to make them see reason, even if you know you are right."

"Huh?"

"Say, what would you say frightens you more? A young man who attacks you after you took back bread he knowingly stole from you? Or a woman who, untruthfully but with her whole heart, believes that you took her child from her?"

Harry blinked at the sudden change of subject and took a moment to think before he'd answer as Sirius had taught him.

"The woman, I guess. She won't stop to listen to reason if she is truly convinced of my guilt. Kind of how I refused to listen to you back in the Shack," Harry admitted.

"Exactly. You attacked me, believing I had betrayed your parents. The guards were the same. They believed I was behind their loved ones disappearances and deaths, and nothing I said would make them see reason."

"Because they were convinced you were guilty," Harry whispered. "But I didn't torture you to get answers, either."

"No, but I must say that you have one heck of a right hook," Sirius winked and Harry shifted guiltily as his godfather rubbed his cheek teasingly.

"I never said sorry for attacking you like that."

"And you shouldn't. I wasn't exactly an innocent party either or coherent in clearing things up. It had been years since I had truly spoken to someone in an actual conversation, the small talk with Fudge not counting. It was a big misunderstanding on both our sides," Sirius comforted him and Harry sighed.

"It isn't right though. Torture is illegal, isn't it?"

"It is. But that doesn't mean people won't turn a blind eye when the need arises."

Sirius sounded resigned and Harry understood that his godfather knew things wouldn't change,
even if they would protest. His gaze fell upon his godfather's cloth covered wrists, wrists he had instinctively known to never touch.

Even if Remus hadn't warned him upon arrival at Grimmauld Place he had seen the heavily scarred wrists in Fourth Year, and known they would be sore and were most likely a trigger point.

So he had taken care to never touch them, even on accident as he had learned in primary school how survivors of war and violent acts often had trigger points that resulted in either severe flashbacks or violent reactions and that those close to the survivor always had to take care to avoid activating that trigger point.

"Is that where you got those scars on your wrists?"

Sirius covered his wrists with his hands as he pulled them towards himself almost instinctively with a small nod and Harry hesitated.

He hadn't meant to ask the question out loud as he was sure Sirius wouldn't be willing to talk about how he received them. But before he could apologise Sirius quietly spoke up, looking down at his wrists as he did.

"They were afraid I would break free and harm one of them despite their...activities and the Dementors present. So they shackled me to the floor with magical chains to ensure I'd be powerless."

"How long did they torture you?" Harry asked softly, wanting to reach forward to comfort his godfather, but knowing it would only draw him back into himself further.

"Time was always a blur. I tried to keep track of the passing time by the full moon and the seasons but after a while they all just became a blur and seasons melted into one another meaninglessly."

Harry looked at his godfather's hands, plucking at his dark blue sweater thoughtlessly and this time he did reach forward, placing his hand on his to stop him from ruining the clothing.

"How long?" he repeated.

"They showed up regularly for seven winters, occasionally after that."

Seven years.

His godfather had been tortured regularly for seven years. Harry swallowed thickly but it wasn't until the later part of Sirius' words that he felt bile rise in his mouth and he whispered, "They never stopped?"

"Sometimes there'd be months between visits, other times a few days. It depended on how bored they got and how angry they were about other things."

Sirius shifted nervously and Harry knew it was time to change tactics before he'd cross his godfather's boundaries and make Sirius push him away unintentionally to protect himself.

"So...what rumour were you talking about then?"

"Ah...well...it's not really important," Sirius suddenly looked alarmed.

"Please tell me?"

Sirius sighed, "Remember that I was protected so nothing happened. But some of the prisoners
were used as...erm...entertainment?" he more asked than said and Harry stared at him for a long moment, not understanding his words as Sirius shot him a nervous smile.

"What kind of entertainment would you need pro...they rape prisoners!" Harry suddenly understood exactly what Sirius meant and shot up from the couch at the realisation.

"They...they hurt you like that?!"

"No. Your dad made sure no one could," Sirius interrupted him before he could get truly agitated, holding his hands up in surrender as Harry knew he was radiating anger and repulsion.

"But they tried!"

"Well... they tried, yes," Sirius admitted with a wince, probably knowing perfectly well that it was likely to upset him more. But to Harry's own surprise the answer actually calmed him down as Sirius' previous words registered fully.

"But Dad's spell protected you," Harry stated as he let himself fall down onto the couch again.

"Yes," Sirius blinked at his sudden calmness.

"Why on earth would Dad cast such a spell on you in the first place?"

"To protect me."

"From what? You said he performed that blood ritual in fifth year, right after you...after...d-did..." unable to finish his sentence, Harry felt like throwing up as the implication of what Sirius had said came rushing back to him.

"They tried. At least, my father did. But I got away in time," Sirius admitted quietly.

"You got away...those sick...they tried...h-how did you get away?" his blood boiled, though he didn't know if it was in disgust or anger for what those monsters had done to his godfather and had tried to do.

"I'm not entirely certain actually. I remember only flashes of the realisation what his intentions were while I was a bloody mess on the floor and the next moment half the study blew up as he unbuckled his belt. I ran while they were unconscious underneath the rubble."

"You blew up the study?" Harry leaned forward to take his godfather's hand again, squeezing it tightly in comfort.

"I think so. I mean, there was no one else who could have, but I didn't specifically think of a spell. I just wanted to get away."

"Kind of like how you accidentally changed Dad into a bird and turned Voldemort into a bug?" Harry asked, a smile tugging at his lips despite the subject.

Only his godfather could do something like that unintentionally.

His face darkened however as he thought about how terrified and scared his fifteen¹ year old godfather must have been to actually lose control over his magic severely enough to blow something up, especially considering what a tight grip he normally had on his magic.

"Probably, I never really thought about it too deeply. I ran to Potter Manor and never returned until last year."
"Until Dumbledore ordered you to stay there," Harry heard the unspoken words and felt new-found anger at the Headmaster for forcing his godfather to stay at the house, despite knowing how much he hated it.

"Is that why you never entered the study while we were staying there?" Harry asked, suddenly understanding the significance behind his godfather's refusal to even unlock the door, despite the requests of various Order members.

"Partly. There is a hidden door behind the bookshelf there. It is where they took care of the more...severe punishments and where they locked me up whenever I rebelled too severely for their tastes, which truthfully was most of the time," Sirius tried to joke but Harry didn't laugh.

"They locked you up?" he whispered, reminded of the Dursleys locking him in the cupboard.

Sirius shrugged. "I didn't mind being locked up. Being locked up meant they weren't throwing punishments at me, screaming my ears off or sneaking into my room at night to curse me unexpectedly."

Meaning that as Harry knew him; his godfather had most likely often chosen to bait his parents into being locked up in dark solitude because the alternative was so much more horrible.

"Was that the only time they...that they...," he stumbled over his words as he tightened his hold on his godfather's hand, unwilling to finish his sentence. Like he could pretend it was all just a big nightmare that would turn out to be exactly that as long as he didn't actually say the words out loud.

"Yes. It was the first time I returned since turning fifteen. I spend the summer between fourth and fifth year at my grandfather’s house. He had decided it was time he took over my education as the heir. And the last three weeks he let me spend at your dad's house because he had other duties to attend to and I had done well enough in his eyes."

"What does you turning fifteen have to do with that?" Harry asked confused.

"Because heirs are protected against all sorts of manipulations and potions and well...that. At least until their fifteenth birthday."

"Why not after that?" Harry felt dazzled at this new information.

"Because the heir is supposed to have learned enough magic by then to protect themselves against it all."

"Your relatives were sick, insane, disgusting and I am very happy that they are dead or I would kill them," Harry spat.

Sirius offered him a small smile and used his hold on Harry's hand to pull him into a hug again. "I'm happy they are dead, too, pup."

As he leaned against his godfather's comforting body again his thoughts wandered.

From the pictures and memories Harry had seen so far he knew his godfather had been extremely handsome, even as a teenager. Briefly he wondered just what might have happened if Sirius hadn't been protected as the heir to the family. They might have tried something much earlier with his features.

Glancing up at his godfather as the man used his wand to provide them with another cup of hot chocolate, he realised what it would have meant if his father hadn't cast that spell upon him. He had
to have been gorgeous when imprisoned and the longer he was away from the Dementors effect and had had access to several good meals, he had regained most of his old looks. Something that would attract people towards him without a doubt, Zabini’s mother only being the first.

He was glad the spell protected Sirius from anyone trying to take advantage of him during the times he might be unable to protect himself but frowned as he realised something.

"You said Dad's spell protected you as long as his blood was pumping, but Dad's not alive any more."

"No, but his blood is. It is pumping through your veins with every breath you take," Sirius smiled.

"So...I'm the one who's kept you safe from...well..." Harry asked, unable to stop the pride from swelling inside of him at the knowledge that his existence had kept his godfather from being hurt like that.

"Yes. It is how I knew you were alive," Sirius admitted quietly.

"But...wouldn't they have stopped trying once they figured out they couldn't...how were they unable to do so anyway?"

"They couldn't touch me. Could torture me, but the moment they tried to touch me excruciating pain would be inflicted upon them. Even if they only got the idea in their minds they would suddenly develop enormous headaches," he hesitated before continuing. "And they did stop trying after a while, so whenever I hadn't heard a sign of you being alive for a long period of time I'd...bait them."

"You would bait them into trying...to what? Know if I was still alive?" Harry asked incredulous.

"Yes. As long as you were alive they couldn't hurt me. It was the only way I could find out since they only laughed at me if I tried to ask how you were."

"What would you have done if I hadn't been alive any more?" Harry asked softly, wanting to feel anger at his godfather for endangering himself like that, but he couldn't. Not when he knew how much his godfather loved him and how desperate he must have been to know Harry was all right to resort to baiting the people wanting to hurt him.

"Then I would have stopped fighting."

The words were spoken without hesitation and Harry knew they were true. Sirius would have given up if something had happened to him, his reason for holding on.

"Then I am glad I am alive," Harry swallowed, smiling as Sirius pulled him against his side again to press a kiss into his hair.

"So am I, pup."

They sat in silence for a few moments before Harry pulled away again to nervously look at his godfather.

"Hey Siri? Now that I'm here anyway...there's something I've been wondering about for a while now, especially the last few days and I've been meaning to ask you about it..." he trailed off.

"What is it?" Sirius asked, leaning back again too.
"The night before my birthday you said that if something would happen to you, you'd want Remus to take care of me, right?"

"Yes?" Sirius looked confused but didn't object at the complete change of subject.

"Why?"

"Why what?" The confusion didn't lift at all from his face.

"If you believed Remus to be the traitor, then why was he your first choice?" Harry had to swallow as Sirius blinked at him, a flash of alarm crossing his face before he cleared his throat.

"I guess I never changed the list, I forgot..."

"That is not like you. You'd never take a chance with my safety, not if it meant leaving me in the care of someone you did not trust completely," Harry interrupted him.

"Harry..." Sirius' voice held a pleading note but he couldn't back down now, he had to know if his suspicions were true.

"You did trust Remus didn't you?"

"It were dark times..."

"You never once believed him to be the traitor, did you?" Harry's gaze was steady as Sirius stared at him for a long moment before he gave a tiny shake of the head.

"Then why didn't you tell him of the switch? You obviously trusted him, so why wouldn't you...unless, were you trying to protect him?" Harry swallowed as his godfather's intentions suddenly seemed obvious to him. He knew how his godfather's mind worked in times like that.

"You and Dad, you didn't tell him because if he didn't know anything then he'd be safer that way, didn't you?"

Sirius didn't answer, but his inability to meet Harry's eyes was all that Harry needed to know he was right.

"Why haven't you him the truth now?" he whispered.

"How could I? We didn't tell Remus about the switch because I wanted to protect him. Because of us he was a severe target. If he were to be captured he could just let the Death Eaters shift through his memories before they killed him," Sirius' voice broke as he spoke. "If he had known, he would have tried to hide the truth behind his Occlumency shields and they would have tortured him until those broke, before killing him anyway. It would break his heart to know the truth."

"And you don't think it hurts him to believe you didn't trust him? That you believed him to be the traitor?" Harry asked softly.

"He already feels like he let me down now, despite believing that the suspicion was mutual. How do you think he will feel if he did know the truth? To know that he left me to rot in Azkaban because I wanted to protect him?" Sirius sighed.

"If I hadn't wanted to protect him, keep him off Voldemort's radar as much as possible, things might have gone completely different."

"Mum and Dad would probably still have been betrayed, but you might not have ended up in
Azkaban for so long," Harry swallowed.

"And you wouldn't have ended up with the Dursleys," Sirius added.

"Knowing that...it would devastate him," Harry continued, ignoring Sirius' words, as he understood why his godfather had chosen not to tell the truth. Especially because Remus had to know what had happened to Sirius in Azkaban. The truth would completely devastate Remus. But if Sirius had tried to protect him...

"If you were so protective then why did you send Snape after..." taking a harsh breath when Sirius abruptly broke eye contact.

"Please tell me you were in fact responsible for that disastrous prank," he pleaded hoarsely.

The refusal to look at him confirmed Harry's suspicion and he felt his heart break.

"Then...what happened if you didn't pull it?"

Sirius shifted while taking a deep breath.

"There was going to be a total lunar eclipse at the end of the month so it could mean two transformations."

"Why..."

"Because the moon would disappear during the eclipse and it might have meant he'd change back and transform again. He's always more edgy and irritated if there's a blue moon, but with an eclipse it could make him.....

"Annoying?" Harry offered as Sirius searched for the right word.

"Aggressive," Sirius' pained expression made Harry frown, but he refrained from asking anything as he knew his godfather would explain.

"I don't think any of us could have known what would happen. We were in the library on a Sunday in May when I noticed Remus' eyes were turning amber. We dragged him out of there to figure out what was happening when he suddenly began to transform. I managed to lock myself up with him in the first classroom we came upon before he could complete the transformation. James and I sealed the door and he and Peter were supposed to create a diversion to lead people away just in case, taking our places."

"Your places?" Harry was horrified by the story Sirius was telling. He realised his godfather had locked himself up in a small classroom with an outraged werewolf that was completely out of control from what he said before.

"Yeah. We had been brewing the Polyjuice Potion for other uses so they used some of our hairs to Polyjuice into us, making it seem like nothing was out of the ordinary," Sirius smiled faintly. "Of course we had no idea that you can't Polyjuice a werewolf...and well, James..."

As he trailed of Harry winced, remembering Hermione's episode with the Polyjuice. His Dad had to have been a sight to behold.

Sirius smiled faintly. "He managed to undo the effects fairly quickly. Anyway, Peter was send out disguised as me to lure people from that area of the school and didn't tell James of what he'd done until the evening of the actual full moon two weeks later."
He sighed. "I was able to spend the entire day in the Shrieking Shack with him without anyone
missing me due to my schedule, being the only non-natural prey of the three of us."

"Did the lunar eclipse..."

"No, he remained a wolf throughout it. It just made him more aggressive that night."

"So you kept him company on your own," Harry stated both relieved and worried. He didn't bother
bringing up that just because Padfoot wasn't natural prey it didn't mean Moony wouldn't take his
aggression and violence out on the dog that night.

From the closed off expression on Sirius' face he knew his godfather was well aware of that, too.

"James managed to pull Snape back and I took on Moon so he couldn't go after them. You know
the rest of the story."

"Why didn't you tell the truth? Surely you got into trouble with the professors?"

"How? First of all, we were using the Polyjuice Potion for illegal uses. Secondly, they would want
to know why Peter changed into me, which would lead to them discovering about Remus' sudden
transformation."

"What made him transform in the first place?"

"We think it had to do with the partial solar eclipse that happened that day. The timing and length
of his transformation was consistent with that event. But the point of the matter is, he transformed
without the presence of a full moon," Sirius held Harry's gaze long enough that he understood the
implication.

If Remus had transformed without a full moon, regardless of the circumstances, he would have
been imprisoned or executed without questions asked.

And not just Remus either, who knew how many werewolves had suddenly changed without any
warning in advance in the middle of the day during the eclipse.

Harry wondered how many people had been turned or killed that day, though he didn't realise he
had asked the question out loud before Sirius answered.

"None as far as we know. Werewolves have always been very isolated from the Wizarding
community, shunned and mistrusted. We kept a close eye on the paper and to what the Professors
were discussing over the course of the next few days to see if there was any indication something
had happened. But nothing came up so we figured that no one had gotten hurt," he paused.

"I don't know for sure about the Muggle word, though. We listened to what news Muggle-born and
Half-bloods got from home, nothing indicating a massacre. Although I admit it might just not have
made the paper and been written off as rabid dog attacks," Sirius rubbed a hand over his face.

"Even though Remus never had the same problem during similar occasions so we believed the
liquid that got spilled over Remus earlier that day might have had something to do with his
transformation, though we never managed to prove it."

Sirius sighed. "Anyway, if they had learned about Remus' transformation, they would also have
realised that I kept him company, which in the best case scenario would have led to me being
imprisoned until the next full moon to ensure I hadn't been changed and Remus expelled."
"And the worst case scenario?" Harry asked, despite already expecting the answer.

"They would have discovered I was an Animagus and I'd have been on an one way ticket to Azkaban while Remus would be executed."

"That is so not fair. Like Remus could help what he is and you only became an Animagus to help him...would they not see reason and lighten the sentence?"

"Willingly taking the side of a werewolf is already considered a crime. Becoming an Animagus for one would only make things worse in the Ministry's eyes," Sirius answered.

"But why doesn't Remus know the truth about this?"

"He has no memory of that day. James suspected that it was the combined shock of transforming unexpected and the violence he produced as a result of it that blocked the event from his memory. He has no idea how close a call it was."

"Meaning that you didn't want him to know that he could have torn the entire library apart before anyone could have stopped him...and more importantly, you didn't want him to know he tried to tear you apart," Harry concluded by reading between the lines.

He knew that if Moony had been outraged while locked in a small classroom, he would have taken his aggression out on the only creature in there with him, Padfoot.

His godfather would have borne the brunt of the attack and Harry wondered if any of the numerous scars littering Sirius' body had been caused by Moony on that occasion.

He hadn't mentioned it, but if it was a secret he wouldn't have told him and probably indeed bore some.

"So, to keep his actions a secret to not make him loath himself, you couldn't tell him the truth about the prank either. Because it would lead to questions you couldn't answer without causing him to hate himself," he added and Sirius nodded.

"So, you took the blame for Peter's actions. Dad actually let you?"

"Yes. Your dad was angry with Peter for telling Snape, especially for doing so while disguised as me so I would be bearing the consequences. But he agreed that nothing good would come from telling Remus the truth. The little self-worthiness he had gained would have been destroyed again."

"Did Peter ever tell you why he told Snape the secret?"

"No. I was rather angry with him at the time and never asked for an explanation. I had enough on my plate with the Professor's punishments and Remus' disappointment in me."

"What was their punishment for you?"

"No Hogsmeade visits for the rest of my years, no Quidditch game visits either and detention twice a week for the rest of the term, too. Though I sneaked off to Hogsmeade and visited the matches your dad played as Padfoot whenever I could."

Harry whistled at the harsh punishment. "No point loss?"

"No. Dumbledore didn't want to draw attention to the situation to protect Remus. He placed a Tongue-Tying curse upon Snape to ensure he wouldn't be able to speak of what had happened."
Though Remus told me that Snape revealed his secret to the students after I escaped from Hogwarts, so he must have released it again."

Harry growled, remembering Remus resigning because of Snape's petty behaviour.

"And Remus?"

"After the initial outburst of anger when he found out the supposed truth he never mentioned it again. He shunned me for a few days before we talked and he acted normally again, though I knew he was disappointed in me. I suppose that is part of the reason why he suspected me to be the traitor in the first place. He believed I had voluntarily sold him out to an enemy once, what was to say I wouldn't do it again if provoked?"

Harry bit his lip as Sirius' words made sense.

"It is still unfair though. You were punished twice for something Peter did."

"Life isn't fair, pup."

"Are you ever going to tell Remus the truth?"

Sirius sighed, rubbing a hand over his face.

"I should, he deserves to know the truth some time," he let out a dry chuckle. "But I wouldn't have the foggiest on how to even begin to explain after all this time."

"You don't think there's no use in telling him the truth after so long?" Harry asked a bit surprised.

"There is always a use in telling the truth, no matter how many years later it might be."

"You just need to find the right time?"

"Is there ever a right time for something like that?" His grey eyes shone with tears. "We were supposed to tell him the truth after we'd settled in after Hogwarts, but well...you know how that worked out."

Knowing exactly what he meant, Harry moved closer to pull his godfather into a hug.

"For what it's worth...I think it is really amazing what you did, just to protect him."

Sirius tightened the embrace for a moment.

"Withholding the truth might be done to protect someone, but it often leads to devastating consequences."

Harry nodded, not needing to hear more to know just what his godfather meant and knowing his godfather had learned that lesson the hardest way possible.

"I will tell him tomorrow," Sirius suddenly said after a few moments of silence and Harry looked up surprised.

"That soon?"

"Yes, secrets have ruined our lives enough as it is. He deserves to know the truth."

"Even if it will hurt him?" Harry couldn't help but ask, aware just how much it would hurt Remus
to discover the truth.

"He should learn the truth from me, not discover things by adding the pieces together like you did," Sirius let out a wry laugh. "Besides, it doesn't matter what I do, I always seem to end up hurting him in some way."

"That's not entirely true, Sirius."

Remus' voice made them both jump and Sirius tensed.

"Rem..."

"Could you leave us alone for a while, Harry? I need to talk to Sirius alone," Remus directed at Harry, his voice commanding and leaving no room for argument but Harry still hesitated to leave them alone when it was clear Remus was upset and Sirius' entire body had tensed.

A small nod from Sirius however had him swallow any objection he had in mind and he nodded.

"I'll return to..."

"Just go to your room for the time being, you don't have to leave," Remus interrupted him sharply and with a quick nod Harry left to his bedroom, closing the door behind him with a shaky breath.

From Remus' tight voice he knew the man must have overheard at least the last part of their conversation and he silently cursed himself for pushing Sirius into telling him.

This was not how either of them had wanted him to find out.

It was his fault both men were upset now and he bit his lip as he realised he couldn't hear any sound coming from the living room, knowing Remus had probably cast a Silencing Charm.

Would Remus be yelling at Sirius now? Or would he be disappointed and speak to him in that quiet voice that he knew Sirius hated?

Although Harry knew Sirius was more than capable of holding his own in any situation and Remus wasn't usually the type to become violent when angered he knew this might just be one of the few situations in which he would and Sirius wouldn't try to defend himself when he believed he'd been in the wrong.

And that worried him. Would his own persistence to learn the truth change things between the two Marauders?

Harry couldn't imagine the two to be any different than they were and was used to their closeness. What if this knowledge, if his desire to know the truth changed their friendship, broke their closeness apart?

What if the secrets should have remained exactly that in this case? Because he knew his godfather had only lied to protect Remus, to keep him from being hurt by the truth.

Sliding onto the ground and wrapping his arms around his legs Harry knew he could only wait until Sirius came to him to know what had happened between them. 

Chapter End Notes
A/N: I find it very hard to believe that Sirius would betray Remus' secret to Snape of all people, no matter how provoked he might be. It doesn't fit with the kind of man Rowling sketched in PoA and GoF. The man we got to know there would sooner die that betray his friends and very capable of keeping secrets. And with his relatives he'd always have a clear mind, even when mad.

So no, I do not believe Sirius pulled the Prank, not even unintentionally. It left me wondering to what else might have happened and when I saw there had been both a solar and lunar eclipse that month...it got me thinking and this is the result.

¹, I am also aware that most people believe Sirius was sixteen when he ran away, but he never said he actually was sixteen, his exact words in OotP, chapter 6: The Noble and Most Ancient House of Black, page 103:

"You ran away from home?"

"When I was about sixteen," said Sirius. "I'd had enough."

As I set his birthday on April 4th 1960 he'd have been fifteen during Christmas of fifth year, 1975, when he ran away in my universe. As his birthday is four months later it would make sense he would say he was "about" sixteen when he ran away.
The following morning the students arrived in the Great Hall to find several darkly clad wizards and witches standing on both sides of the High Table.

Harry had arrived late, only just taking a seat along the whispering students when Professor McGonagall rose, making everyone fall silent.

"Good morning everyone. As you can see we have visitors today from the Auror Office. They are here because of the ongoing investigation of Hogwarts. They will take a look around and ask a few questions to you all. Because of this classes for today are cancelled and I would like you all to remain here until your name is called."

She paused as the students looked at each other nervously.

"I would appreciate it if you would answer all their questions honestly and if there is something you would like to get off your chest then please be sure to mention it, no matter how unrelated it might seem. Thank you."

With a nod Kingsley stepped forward and began to read a few random students names off a list, telling them they should go with the Aurors, leaving the Great Hall.

"What do you reckon that is all about?" Ron asked softly.

"Didn't you listen to Professor McGonagall? They are investigating Hogwarts," Katie frowned at him.

"What is there to investigate now that Umbridge is gone?" Parvati wondered.

"The running of things perhaps?" Harry suggested softly. "I mean, Hogwarts record isn't exactly clean, is it? People died here, a teacher lost his memory and a Death Eater impersonated another for a full year. A Ministry official used torture devices on students and who knows what I'm forgetting."

"Students were petrified and Sirius broke in here three times," Fred added as he glanced at Harry.

"And that's just the last five years," Harry gave a tiny shake of the head to tell him they'd speak later.

"I wonder why they didn't investigate before," Katie mused. "I mean, the Professor broke in two years ago, twice! And although no one got hurt on either occasion it showed that Hogwarts isn't even remotely as safe as we are led to believe. Why didn't they investigate then?"

"Because Fudge was still in charge and he was corrupt," Harry answered. "He was taken out of office and is facing charges for multiple crimes now. But back then he was still in control and he ate out of Dumbledore's hand at the time."

"I've read the articles in the Prophet, but surely he would have to investigate when the Professor escaped after being captured here at the end of the year?" Parvati asked.

"Why would he? That would reveal that Sirius never received a trial and that Fudge was made aware of that but didn't take action," Harry snorted.
Parvati opened her mouth to reply but closed it again almost immediately, knowing he was right.

"Who's Minister now, actually?" Ginny suddenly asked curious.

"There are elections going on right now between Rufus Scrimgeour and Kingsley Shacklebolt. But Madam Bones has been appointed Acting Minister for the time being," Harry answered.

"How do you know that?" Ron asked surprised.

"Sirius holds several seats in the Wizengamot as Lord Black. He was asked to show his support to Rufus Scrimgeour during a sitting to discuss the elections," Harry shrugged. "He told me because, as my proxy, he is entitled to vote for me until I become of age and wanted to know my opinion."

"Your proxy?" Ron echoed confused.

"Yeah, my family holds a seat too, though no one voted for it after Sirius was locked into Azkaban. So the seat fell into slumber until I would become of age and take my place there."

"Didn't they ever try to find out who your guardian was and take a hold of the seat?" Neville asked.

"No, they figured that Dumbledore became my caretaker after Sirius' supposed conviction, since my parents had only named Sirius as my guardian. And a caretaker cannot take the place or name a proxy so the seat remained empty."

"But surely they would have realised something was off when Dumbledore didn't become your guardian after your godfather's imprisonment?" Dean asked.

"No. Because Dumbledore placed me with the Dursleys and everyone simply assumed they became my guardians. And since Muggles cannot take a seat in the Wizengamot, even as a proxy, it remained empty and they thought nothing of it because I, as a minor wouldn't be able to name a proxy either, out of manipulation protection reasons," Harry bitterly replied.

"But what about the Black seat then?" Ginny asked. "Wouldn't that one have fallen into the hands of the Malfoys? I mean, they are directly linked to the Blacks and with Sirius locked up Draco Malfoy would be the next in line...right?"

"No, because I'm Sirius' legal heir."

"But Sirius didn't adopt you until a few weeks ago," Ron frowned.

"That only made me legally his son. He blood adopted me before I was twenty four hours old; making me his legal heir in case something happened to him. Even if they had realised there had been no trial I'd still have been next in line, not Malfoy," he explained to Ginny.

"Actually, it's Arcturus Black's fault that no one tried to look into that. He was the Lord Black until his death in nineteen ninety-one and refused to allow anyone but Sirius to be his heir, despite his imprisonment. It was written in his will that Sirius inherited the title and the seat and on the circumstance of Sirius' death, the seat would pass to Sirius' chosen heir."

"Which was you. How did Arcturus Black even know Sirius had an heir?" Ron asked.

"Because it is automatically made known to the Wizengamot when an Ancient Family heir decides upon a heir, though for their protection the identity is kept a secret until they become of age or the Lord reveals it himself," Neville answered.
"So no one would have known it was you until you would become of age," Lavender breathed out.

"Which is when my name would be revealed and they'd have realised then that I was unable to take the seat," Harry nodded.

"Huh?" Ron asked but Neville nodded in sudden understanding.

"Of course. Upon your seventeenth birthday your status would have been revealed, but at the same time they'd discover that Professor Sirius was never convicted because you wouldn't have been able to take your rightful place at the Black seat. Only the current Lord can take a seat and since there was no trial, the Professor hadn't been stripped of his Lordship."

Harry nodded sadly and Katie swallowed. "The Professor would have been freed then because we all know he is innocent."

"Yes, it was what he was holding on for all those years, knowing the truth would come out after I had become of age. Until I was endangered, then he escaped ahead of plan," Harry added almost as an afterthought.

They all swallowed thickly as they knew the changes Sirius had made by escaping.

"What's Scrimgeour like?" Hermione asked suddenly, only having half followed the conversation as her attention had been focused on a group of Ravenclaws.

Harry briefly wondered why her cheeks were a faded blue, but as no one batted an eye, he didn't mention it to her so she'd not yell at him.

"No idea, Sirius calls him an ambitious and stupid baboon who's as bad as Fudge is and, though a better person to lead, he cares more about reputations than the truth even if it ruins innocent people's lives. He said that Scrimgeour, Crouch and Fudge are prime examples of power hungry idiots who only acknowledge the truth if it benefits them and won't listen to reason."

"But he supports him for the elections," Alicia exclaimed surprised.

"No, they wanted him to do so but he laughed in their faces and used all his votes for Kingsley instead," Harry grinned at their amazed faces.

"He laughed in the faces of the Wizengamot members?" Hermione asked horrified.

"Yes. Quite loudly too," Harry fondly remembered the memory Remus had shown him. "And told them that electing the guy showed just how little the Wizarding world was ever willing to change for the better."

"The Professor is quite mental, isn't he?" Dean said wide-eyed, though he looked more awed than horrified.

"No, he just doesn't believe in boot licking and taking the easy way instead of doing the right thing," Harry smiled proudly.

"Where is the Professor anyway? I haven't seen him or Lupin yet today," Katie admitted.

"They were summoned to the Ministry early this morning for questioning," Harry revealed, clutching the piece of parchment hidden in his pocket.

He had found the note on his bedside table when he woke up at the alarm clock, surprised to
discover he'd been undressed and tucked into bed. It had been placed on top of his glasses so he couldn't miss it.

And although he appreciated the warning Sirius had given him of their hurried leaving, it said nothing about how things had gone between them, though they had left together so that said something.

And while he logically knew Sirius was free and Remus would never let his godfather be thrown back into Azkaban without a fight, he still had little trust in the Ministry no matter how often Sirius had to go there for official business.

It always worried him sick whenever Sirius had to go there, no matter the reason.

"Harry, they are calling you," Katie warned him softly, startling him out of his worried thoughts.

"Sorry," he muttered, rising from his seat and moving to the Aurors.

"I'll take him," a deep voice commanded the pale Auror, who had stepped forward to take Harry with him. Turning slightly Harry saw Kingsley approach and the other wizard gave a small nod out of respect before moving to another student that had been called upon.

"If you would follow me, Harry," Kingsley said kindly and Harry followed him to one of the unused offices a few meters from the Great Hall.

"Sirius asked me to tell you to stop being a worry-wart, he's fine. Although he thinks it might be wise to have a cup of tea ready for when they get back because Remus is saying the Ministry tea should be considered illegal with how awful it is. Wotcher Harry," Tonks' voice greeted him cheerfully as they entered and he relaxed slightly at the sight of her familiar bright pink hair.

"When did you speak to him?" he took a place at the table across of her.

She had grey eyes for the occasion, just a shade darker than Sirius' and they further set his mind at ease. Even if the Ministry would try something, he knew Kingsley and Tonks wouldn't leave him in their hands. He wondered if Tonks had done so on purpose, knowing the familiar colour would set him at ease, but the woman's expression revealed nothing.

"At seven this morning. Remus was complaining about the tea and Sirius was concerned about you so he asked me to tell you he's fine."

"You forget to mention that Remus was rather cranky at being woken at the crack of dawn without getting a decent cup of tea to make up for it," Kingsley reminded her amused.

"No kidding. I had no idea the man could be that moody. I feared for my safety at his glare," Tonks laughed.

"It's not really like Remus to be moody upon awakening though. I've had enough early shifts with him before and he wasn't like that before," Kingsley frowned.

"He's become used to a domestic life," Harry said wryly. "Not having to always watch out for himself and be alert for attacks. Someone at his side who's both capable and caring. And always gives him a cup of tea whenever he feels like having one," he added almost as an afterthought as Sirius constantly provided him with them no matter if the man had asked for it.

"Domestic life huh," Kingsley' brown eyes sparkled in amusement. "I've had several students in here who commented what a lovely couple those two make. I guess your father's prediction did
"What prediction?"

"That they could always simply marry each other if they'd not find someone," Kingsley laughed at Tonks' widening eyes.

"Yes, once it became clear that Sirius and James were never going to become an item despite their obvious closeness, the general mass at Hogwarts became convinced that Sirius and Remus were together. Which they unknowingly fuelled by often walking hand in hand and never dating while getting a flat together after leaving Hogwarts."

"That sounds like them, yes. They are both brilliant, but completely naive when it comes to the reactions their behaviour causes in others," Harry couldn't help but laugh, sneaking a glance at Tonks.

"And they are indeed very close; the students might actually be on to something."

He knew it was complete bullocks as they were not at all attracted to one another, but he couldn't help the possessive streak in him as he'd overheard Remus complaining to Sirius that Tonks kept flirting with him. He wanted the three of them to stay together like they were now, without anyone trying to come in between.

As Kingsley chuckled at his words, Harry bit his lip, wondering if it would cause suspicion to ask how they had behaved that morning.

"You are still worrying. They were both fine, though tired," Kingsley noted softly.

"Were they..." Harry trailed off, uncertain of exactly what he was trying to ask.

"They were their usual stubborn selves, at least Remus was. The Aurors wanted to question them separately but Remus absolutely refused to leave Sirius' side. Actually went as far as to magically stick their hands together when the Aurors objected," Tonks commented.

"What did Sirius have to say about that?" Harry tried to suppress a relieved sigh. If Remus remained so protective of Sirius, it was unlikely their bond was cracked.

"He seemed rather amused by the situation as Remus stuck their hands together, simply entwining their fingers and saying they'd be idiots to piss Remus off," Kingsley looked at him curiously, but to Harry's relief he didn't question him.

"No matter how nice it is to just sit and talk with you after such a long time, we are here to ask some questions."

"Go ahead," Harry's worry about his guardians lessened by their words.

"I'd like you to answer truthfully. They involve both your experiences here at Hogwarts and your interactions with your Headmaster and the teachers. There will also be some questions about your godfather and Remus," Kingsley warned in advance.

"What kind of questions?"

"As their child you are always allowed to refrain from answering some questions if you feel they are in violation with their privacy. But it are mostly questions about your interactions with them here at Hogwarts two years ago," at Harry's nod Tonks activated a Dicta-Quill to record what they
"Just for the record, your name is Harry James Potter, son of James and Lily Potter and adopted
son of Sirius Black?" Kingsley began.

"Yes I am."

"When did you receive your letter?"

"The first one a week or so before my birthday," Harry answered.

"The first?" Tonks asked.

"Yes..." Harry explained the story behind his many letters and finally Hagrid's arrival at the small
hut Vernon Dursley had taken them to the day before his eleventh birthday.

The two Aurors shared a glance before the questions continued, more in-depth this time.

Why did Hagrid bring his letter and not the Headmaster or Deputy as was normal for Muggle-
raised wizards?

Why did he not know how to cross to the platform after getting Muggleborn pamphlets, since he
was raised by Muggles?

Why was he made Seeker in his first year, what did he know about the Forbidden Forest and why
it was forbidden?

Why had the third floor been off limits in his first year? Had there been anyone guarding the floor
to ensure first year students did not go there by accident, likely not knowing the castle well.

On and on it went as the duo walked him through his Hogwarts years and the events that had
happened in them. They asked about meeting Sirius and Remus and the Triwizard Tournament,
Dumbledore and Sirius and Remus barging into Hogwarts a few days before Christmas.

Harry felt quite drained by the time Tonks stopped the Dicta-Quill to indicate they were done.

"Now I understand why Sirius suggested we'd ask you about your acceptance letter's arrival,"
Tonks blew out a tired breath as she tucked his statement away.

"Sirius told you to do so?"

"He requested Madam Bones that we'd be the ones to question you as he held no trust in the other
Aurors, both to treat you fairly due to your fame and as his child. When we agreed he suggested
we'd start questioning you there," Kingsley admitted. "I had no idea just how badly Dumbledore
messed up even your re-introduction into the Wizarding World."

"It sure explains why Sirius is so unbelievably mad at Dumbledore," Tonks agreed.

"These questions... the information gained by them will be used in the trial against Dumbledore,
right?" Harry asked Kingsley, rather certain of it.

"Yes. He has been in Ministry custody since the start of our investigation, which started the day
after Voldemort's dead body was delivered at the Ministry. We've just kept it quiet to be able to
investigate properly without pressure from the general public."

"That reminds me, congratulations on the adoption, cousin," Tonks grinned suddenly. "And though
you both owe me dinner for not inviting me, I'd like to officially welcome you to our family."

"Thanks," Harry smiled; realising that the friendly Auror was now indeed related to him through Sirius.

Kingsley glanced at Tonks.

"Could I have a moment with Harry alone?"

"Of course, I'll wait outside," she readily agreed, leaving the room immediately.

"I don't know if you are aware, but when we captured Pettigrew he was interrogated under use of Veritaserum."

Tensing at the name, Harry took a deep breath. "Okay?"

"Some things came to the light that I am not sure either you or your family is aware of yet," Kingsley trailed off.

"I already know about what he did in their fifth year," Harry revealed quietly. "Although I don't know the reason why."

"He was jealous of their closeness. He knew he couldn't drive a wedge between your father and Sirius, but he thought it was the perfect opportunity to try and drive Sirius and Remus apart. He had become jealous of the tight bond they shared."

Harry slowly nodded, that fit with what he had thought about the reasoning.

"But that is not what I meant. I don't know if your godfather ever told you about your grandparents?"

"They died in a Death Eater attack, shortly before Sirius and I were targeted," Harry answered, apprehensive of what was to come.

"Yes. I've read everything I could find about Sirius when I was put in charge of the hunt on him. Apparently the wards of Potter Manor had not been breached during the attack and it led the Ministry to believe upon his arrest that Sirius had been responsible for their deaths."

"No!" Harry' fists clenched in anger.

"Yes. It turns out that Pettigrew gave them access to the Potter's fireplace, getting them in without the wards being alerted to their trespassing. Meaning your grandparents never saw them coming."

"So he was responsible for my grandparent's deaths?" Harry swallowed, pushing back the tears threatening to come out. If it already upset him, Sirius would be devastated to learn this.

"Yes, and he gave the Death Eaters your godfather's address; where he was attacked, knowing he was babysitting you. He warned them that Sirius would try to escape with you to Potter Manor, walking right into a trap set up in advance without being alerted something was wrong by the wards."

"Is there something the bastard isn't responsible for?" Harry choked out.

"From the looks of it not, no. He was responsible for leaking many missions to Voldemort, several of which led to the deaths of many good people."
"Why? Why did he betray them?" Harry whispered.

"Jealousy, hungry for power and the need to be at the most powerful side," Kingsley answered softly.

"He loathed the strong bond between James and Sirius and when he realised he couldn't break their unwavering trust in Remus, he decided to sell your parents out. He knew that would shatter the bonds completely, unintentionally being given the perfect opportunity when he was made Secret Keeper," Kingsley took a deep breath.

"Death Eaters were supposed to break into Sirius' hiding place and kill him, making it seem like he'd given the secret up under torture and allowing Pettigrew to remain a spy in the Order after your family's deaths."

"But Sirius checked up on Pettigrew..."

"Ahead of schedule, discovered he was gone and hurried to your parent's house, yes. Then you defeated Voldemort and Pettigrew discovered Sirius wasn't dead. You know what happened after that."

"Pettigrew got away because the Ministry failed to do their job properly," Harry spat.

"Yes, something that Madam Bones and I are working hard to ensure will never happen again. I didn't tell you to upset you, but Madam Bones is telling Sirius and Remus all this today, too."

Which meant that Sirius would blame himself for everything even more than he usually did.

And Remus; suddenly Harry felt glad that Remus had overheard them yesterday, knowing Sirius had wanted him to learn the truth from him. Although the situation hadn't been ideal, at least he had indeed learned the truth from Sirius and not from strangers at the Ministry.

"Who else knows about what Pettigrew revealed?"

"Some Aurors, Minerva and Flitwick among others."

"Professor McGonagall knows?" Harry asked surprised.

"Yes, though she has agreed to keep the information quiet until Sirius and Remus were briefed personally. She wished to be present for Pettigrew' interrogation since she happened to be there when he was brought in."

A small hesitant smile curled around Kingsley's lips. "Snape knows, too. He was called in for questioning some time ago and Tonks couldn't resist showing him that part of the interrogation."

Harry's eyes widened. Snape knew the truth, too?

"How did he react?"

"Hard to say which emotion had the upper hand. He was both horror-struck that they had deceived him and livid at the truth."

"I bet," Harry snorted. Snape would be livid to know the Marauders had deceived him like that. He had always hated Sirius for almost trying to kill him and Harry's dad for saving his life. To learn weak little Pettigrew had managed to deceive him so well would have been a blow to the man's status as double spy.
"Is there any trace of him yet?"

"No. We've been to his house in Spinner's End and any known former addresses but there was no trace of him, nor did he take any of his possessions with him when leaving here. But even so, we have little hope of finding him alive," Kingsley revealed.

"What? Why?" Harry asked curiously.

"It's been kept quiet but since the death of Voldemort the health of all the Death Eaters imprisoned in Azkaban has deteriorated rapidly. They've lost their magic and have slowly been dying one by one. And not just in Azkaban, about thirty wizards outside of it have perished the same way, all revealed to be Marked."

"How is that possible?" Harry asked; though he did not feel sorry for their deaths, he was curious to know how it had happened.

"We aren't sure. We were hoping to ask Sirius today if he has any idea as to what might be the reason."

"And you have little hope of believing Snape is still alive because he's Marked too. D-did Pettigrew die too?" Harry asked softly.

"Yes. He was the second longest Death Eater to hold on, despite having been Kissed after his trial. But he perished yesterday afternoon, mere hours before Bellatrix Lestrange. The news will be officially brought out after Madam Bones has been able to speak to Sirius. She wanted to get his view on things before everyone would start speculating."

"Am I a bad person for being relieved that Pettigrew is gone?" Harry asked softly.

"Not unless I am too," Kingsley placed a hand on his shoulder.

"I should let you go so you'll be there when Sirius and Remus arrive back from the Ministry."

"And you can continue questioning other students before you will be here all day," Harry smiled.

"With the rate we are going I'm sure we will be done before Easter," Kingsley said without much enthusiasm and Harry laughed.

"You rather than me," he only replied, saying his goodbye as he opened the door, making Tonks look up from where she was patiently leaning against the wall.

She shot him a small smile before squeezing his shoulder. "I just received word; they are on their way back."

"I'll hurry back to their quarters then, thanks," Harry hurried back, wanting to be there when Sirius arrived.

He had just made it to the fifth floor and to their quarters when an amused voice reached him.

"Aren't you in a hurry?"

Tripping over his own feet in his sudden twist at the familiar voice, a warm hand shot out and effortlessly caught him mid fall.

He was pulled tightly against an equally warm body as arms wrapped around him.
"Hey pup."

"You're back," Harry wrapped his arms around his godfather in return, holding him close.

"Sorry, I needed a hug from you," Sirius pulled away, but Harry refused to let him go, tightening his hold.

"Don't ever apologise for hugging me, I like it when you do," Harry admitted as Sirius returned the embrace.

"Even by the time you will be in your fifties and your grandchildren will see you being hugged randomly by a seventy-something year old man?" Sirius teased him.

"Those grandchildren will be entirely too used to the constant hugs from their great-gramps to even bat an eye at seeing him and their gramps hug," Harry shot back, his heart warming at the knowledge that one day Sirius would indeed be there to hug his grandchildren, if he ever had any.

"I'm sorry I left without a proper warning," Sirius' warm breath tickled Harry's ear as he spoke to him, but Harry didn't care as he buried his nose into Sirius' shoulder.

"It's all right, you are back now and that's what counts."

"Were you interrogated yet?"

"Yeah, Kingsley and Tonks just let me go so I wanted to hurry back to be here before you."

"You are just in time then, we just arrived back," Harry pulled back a little at the mentioning of the word we to glance at Remus, who was patiently leaning against the wall beside them.

"Hi," Harry greeted him, not the least bit embarrassed by the display.

"Hi," Remus returned amused. "Are you two done so we can go in for a decent cup of tea?"

"You didn't have to wait for us," Harry apologised as he and Sirius broke apart.

"I kind of had to, you were blocking the entrance," Remus grinned, though he didn't look sorry that they had as he ruffled Harry's hair.

"I think we could all use something better than tea, don't you think?" Sirius opened the door and they followed him as he entered.

"Why don't you take a shower while I make us some chocolate and have a word with Harry?" Remus suggested, brushing a hand over Sirius’ cheek as they removed their shoes.

"Are you all right?" Harry asked as he noticed just how pale and tired his godfather looked as he briefly closed his eyes at the touch.

"Just tired," Sirius squeezed his shoulder, smiling before he disappeared into the bedroom.

"Remus?" Harry asked quietly as the man indicated he should follow him to the kitchen.

"I'm sorry I was rather harsh with you yesterday," Remus apologised softly as Harry sat down while he began making hot chocolate.

"It wasn't that bad, you were upset."
"That was still no reason to speak to you the way I did. But that's not why I wanted to speak to you alone for a bit," Remus took a deep breath. "Thank you."

Surprised Harry blinked at him, not having expected that.

"For what?"

"Seeing an inconsistency and calling Sirius upon it. If you hadn't, I don't know how long it might have taken for him to tell me the truth, if he'd ever have done so."

"How much did you overhear?" Harry wasn't sure just how much Sirius and he had discussed the evening before.

"Pretty much everything. I arrived as you asked him about his wrists and thought it wiser to wait before entering. I..." Remus paused for a moment as he swallowed thickly before admitting quietly, "I hadn't known about prisoners being used as entertainment either."

"He wasn't hurt like that though," Harry assured him, though he expected Remus already knew that.

"I know. I knew he was protected against that since he was fifteen."

Harry nodded; of course Remus would have known that.

"So you aren't mad at Sirius for not telling you the truth? About either occasion?" he asked carefully.

"It was never Sirius I was mad at. I am livid at Peter for both his actions and what he forced Sirius through in order to hide the truth for my protection. And while I am upset that James and Sirius didn't tell me the truth, I know they just wanted to protect me. I forced him to show me the true memory..." Remus took a deep breath and Harry bit his lip, knowing it couldn't have been pretty.

"I understand perfectly why they chose to withhold the truth from me. It doesn't make me any happier about it, but I do understand."

"Was it that bad?" Harry couldn't help but ask.

"Worse than you are imagining," Remus chuckled wryly. "And I never even put things together from the additional scars he suddenly had because he kept them hidden until after the full moon, when I was aware Moony had been extra tense due to the lunar eclipse."

"No one could ever say Sirius doesn't think most things through to the last detail."

"No doubt about that," Remus had to admit. "And before you ask, no, I am also not mad at him for letting me believe he thought I was the traitor either. I wish he wouldn't have tried to spare my feelings so much, especially since he was the one who was hurt, but I am not angry."

"He tried to protect you," Harry said.

"I know. If he hadn't wanted to protect me, they might never have used Peter and things might have gone completely different. But that is all speculation," Remus sighed.

"It hurts to know that I fell for Peter's lies and lost my trust in Sirius while his never wavered. And it hurts more than I can say that I believed in his guilt despite the fact that I should have known better. I left him in that hell, where..." he trailed off with a shaky breath.
"I will never forgive myself for letting him rot there, for not being brave enough to face him and demand answers. If I had done that...but I didn't and I cannot undo the hell they put him through, that I put him through."

Remus angrily brushed away the tears that gathered in his eyes.

"I failed him three times in my life. But for some insane reason he's still here, accepting and trust me despite not having been given any reason to do so. I vowed I would never let him down again after learning I'd been a fool and I will not break that word, no matter what."

Harry nodded, knowing Remus had mentioned in the fight against Voldemort that he would never let Sirius down again. Harry had believed him then and he was happy to know the man's view hadn't changed and was unlikely to ever do so.

"Kingsley said they had discovered the truth about several things during the interrogation of Pettigrew," Harry changed the subject as Remus didn't seem to have anything more to say about the subject.

"Yes. Many things that were painful to hear. I don't know how much Kingsley told you?"

"He told me about the things Pettigrew did; about my grandparents."

"Sirius took that news very hard. That's another reason why I wanted to take you aside for a moment."

"I have no memory of them," Harry admitted sadly.

"I know, but Sirius has always blamed himself for their deaths, even more so with this knowledge."

"But it's not his fault," Harry protested.

"We both know that and I think that deep down he knows too, but that doesn't stop it from hurting. Peter sold the elderly Potters out because that is where Sirius would go if he was attacked. It was the perfect location for the Death Eaters to await him."

"In their hunt for me," Harry whispered.

"It's not your fault either, it's Peter's. But Sirius was very close to your grandparents and loved them very much. Their murders devastated both James and him."

"You took me apart for his benefit, not mine. So that he can have a moment to grieve alone," Harry suddenly realised.

Remus didn't deny it but cleared his throat.

"He's done showering," he said softly and Harry straightened slightly as Remus poured the chocolate into three cups.

"Shall we go to the living room," he suggested as he slipped a potion into Sirius' cup.

"He's not going to be happy that you are drugging him again," Harry noted, though he made no move to stop him as he knew Sirius wouldn't sleep without a bit of help.

"It's a slow working variant so he won't drop off immediately. We didn't sleep much last night, too caught up in our conversation to take note of the time and then we were summoned at five in the morning to come to the Ministry as soon as possible."
"Because of the Death Eaters dying?" Harry asked.

"Good riddance," Sirius answered as he came out of the bedroom, dressed in his pyjamas.

"Are you planning to go to bed this early?" Harry asked surprised at the sight as it was only just after lunchtime.

"No, but I'm sure Remus spiked the chocolate to ensure I get some rest, so I figured I'd make myself as comfortable as possible in advance."

Remus shot him a guilty smile, not denying it and Harry grinned as Sirius joined them, leaning against Remus, accepting the cup handed to him without comment.

"Do you know why the Death Eaters are all dying?" Harry asked.

"I've done some research into the Dark Mark at Grimmauld Place a while back, so I have a theory, yes," Sirius took a sip from his chocolate.

"From what I could find Death Eaters entered a sort of contract when accepting the Mark. In return for their complete loyalty the Mark gives them a boost of power, making them capable of magic they would never be capable of otherwise."

"What's the downside?"

"It links them to their master, Voldemort, mentally and their very magical core. He can use the Mark to hurt them if they aren't loyal or disappoint him. The Death Eaters all lost a lot of power when he first fell. It only took four Aurors to overpower Bellatrix Lestrange when she was cornered at the Longbottom house, where before Voldemort's fall it would have taken more than ten."

"So their power was linked to Voldemort's strength. So when he died they lost all their power?"

"More than that, when Voldemort died the Dark Marks became inflamed and sucked all the magical power out of their bodies, tearing their magical cores apart as punishment for not protecting their master."

"So they became squibs?" Harry asked curiously.

"Worse. If a wizard irreversibly damages his magical core it is only a matter of time before they die as their entire body shuts down."

"Is our magical core that important to our survival?" Harry looked at his godfather amazed.

"It is part of our soul, damaging a magical core is the worst thing that can happen to a wizard. The loss is ...devastating for the mind and fatal for the body."

"Have you ever damaged your core?" Harry asked softly, recognising the first-hand knowledge Sirius was showing here unintentionally.

"Not irreversibly, but they tore my core apart as is custom to do to prisoners in for life to avoid resistance in the first few days until the Dementors have them in their hold."

"They broke your core in Azkaban?!" Harry choked out.

"Yes, that is why it took me so long to gather the power to change into Padfoot to lessen the effect of the Dementors even more."
Harry took a deep breath, forcing himself to remain on the subject they'd been before he'd upset his godfather even more than he already was, though he was hiding it remarkably well.

"So...their cores were torn and that's why they are dying?"

"Yes. Though I don't think they knew exactly what they were giving away when they signed up for the Dark Mark so willingly," Remus added to the conversation as Sirius swallowed the last sip of his drink, taking the empty cup from him.

"I should go to bed before I drop down here."

"Will I see you when you wake up again?" Harry rose from his seat to give his godfather a hug.

"Of course, though from the dose I tasted I suspect it won't be before morning."

"I should hope not," Remus muttered softly before clearing his throat. "Why don't you walk with him to make sure he does in fact make it to the bed?"

Sirius stuck out his tongue but returned the hug Remus pulled him in before accepting Harry's hand to make their way to the bedroom, where Sirius quickly brushed his teeth while Harry pulled back the sheets.

Harry smiled as Sirius let him tuck him in without any fuss and he sat on the edge as his godfather made himself comfortable.

"Are you going to stay here?" Sirius teased in an obvious effort to cheer Harry up even as he curled his fingers around Harry's.

"Until you are asleep. I don't want to leave you alone right now," Harry admitted softly.

"I'm all right, pup, tired and a bit upset but I'll be fine."

"I know, I just want to sit with you until you fall asleep for a change," Harry dropped his voice as his godfather's eyes began to droop steadily, the potion beginning to take full effect.

"I love you, you know that, right?" Sirius murmured, curling up and Harry smiled.

"More than anything, I know. And I love you, too. Go to sleep and I'll see you when you wake up."

He carefully brushed the fringe out of his godfather's face as his breathing evened out.

But even after Sirius fell asleep Harry didn't move from his spot, softly brushing his thumb over the hand he was holding loosely, content to watch over his godfather as he slept for a while.
A few days after the Aurors had come to visit, the news Kingsley had told Harry about was revealed in a large article of the Daily Prophet.

Malfoy and several other Death Eater children were quite shaken as Remus was proven right, those who had taken the Mark clearly hadn't known what they had signed up for, nor had their families. They were often found whispering together, though no one felt sorry for them, knowing Sirius had indeed told Malfoy the truth in Potions that first lesson.

The Death Eaters truly had signed their death warrants the moment they willingly joined Voldemort, something none of them could deny any more as the proof was laid out before them. Even if Lucius Malfoy had not died in the battle against Voldemort two and a half months ago, he would still have died now because it had been proven he had been Marked. The knowledge of that seemed to have given the younger Malfoy a lot to think about.

And although he didn't become any more pleasant, the revealed truth seemed to have changed something in Malfoy as he no longer pranced through the hallways like he owned them. He kept his mouth shut and his head down to avoid drawing attention to himself.

The knowledge that Bellatrix Lestrange had died however, seemed to have taken an invisible weight from Neville's shoulders instead. And although his parent’s fate became public knowledge, due to the article describing the crimes the Azkaban casualties had been imprisoned for, he seemed to be more at peace than ever before. The knowledge that his parent's tormentors were either dead or dying, combined with Sirius' efforts had given him a confidence boost and let him shrug off the whispers behind his back instead of being crumbled down by them.

No one knew what had happened to Snape but Harry couldn't care less as life at Hogwarts was much more relaxing without the git present.

With the continued absence of Snape and the apparent trouble of locating a suitable teacher, Sirius continued teaching Potions along with Defence as Remus had become otherwise occupied and unable to take over his classes.

The two had originally used most of the Defence homework to combine it with History of Magic, trying to bring at least the fifth and seventh years up to speed in time for their respective exams.

But Sirius, finally fed up with Binns after many attempts to get the ghost to teach properly, had summoned the board and Remus had volunteered to take over the classes of the fifth and seventh years completely until a long-time solution could be found for the other years.

It left both men with tremendous workloads as they also helped McGonagall with several of her original deputy tasks and Sirius had to attend meetings of the Wizengamot while he also tutored Harry and Neville privately in several subjects.

And although both men gladly did so if it meant students would be able to pass their exams, Harry was worried it would be especially taxing on his godfather, whose health still wasn't the greatest. But they both kept assuring him that they were fine and it was only temporarily, though that did not stop them from becoming exhausted despite their seemingly endless energy.
A few times the students even caught Sirius beginning to doze off in the middle of class, only to startle awake again almost immediately.

On one such occasion Neville looked at him worriedly, as most students were alarmed by the visible exhaustion on their otherwise energetic teacher, but no one knew how to bring it up.

Neville however did now. "Professor? Don't you think you are doing a bit too much? You look exhausted and Professor Lupin isn't doing much better."

Sirius smiled through a covered yawn, rubbing his eyes as he stretched, moving from his seat to prevent himself from dosing off again, leaning against the desk instead; "It is only for a little while longer. Professor M has found two substitute teachers who are willing to take on Potions and a new History of Magic teacher. They will all arrive at the beginning of April."

"Why so late?" Dean asked.

"They still have a few affairs to take care of before they can come over."

"What do the new teachers look like?" Lavender asked curiously.

"And why two Potions teachers?" Dean added.

"Because I've found that all years are pathetically far below the average on Potions. It's Defence all over again. So Professor M decided to get two teachers for the upcoming few years. One for the lower years and one who can focus completely on the later ones to get them up to date so they’ll have the opportunity to graduate with decent N.E.W.T’s."

"Like you and Professor Lupin do?" Seamus grinned.

"Exactly, although our arrangement isn't temporary while theirs will be. And to answer your question Lavender, one of them is called Professor Horace Slughorn. He's in his early eighties, baldish and has light green eyes," pausing, Sirius thought for a moment.

"He is also known for having had favourites for various reasons and pulling them into a club with him at the centre. The freaky part is that he had an uncanny knack for picking out those who would stand out in later life, making connections for them and benefiting from it by getting sugary treats and free tickets."

"Is he like Snape?" Seamus asked disgusted.

"No, not at all. He is a good teacher and fair to every student, no matter what house they are from or what blood status they have. The only thing he cannot stand are dark wizards. I am just telling you this so you will be warned in advance that he might try to...collect you."

"You think any of us would be worth collecting?" Lavender asked.

"I believe anyone can become great if they put their mind to it. I am just warning you so that you know what to expect. Usually the children of known families are invited the first time to see if they share the greatness of their relatives and those he sees potential in are collected."

"He's going to try and have Harry join then," Ron sounded jealous.

"He'd have to get past me first," Sirius calmly told him as if Ron hadn't spoken under his breath and the others chuckled as Ron turned red. They often forgot just how excellent their teacher’s hearing was. "While Harry's mother was part of the club I've never really liked the guy. And if he
tries to recruit Harry only for his fame he'll have me to answer to."

"I doubt he'll dare to even try," Harry snorted.

"Why is that?" Seamus looked at him.

"With Sirius and Remus' reputations? Slughorn is sooner to wet his pants than do anything that might get him on their bad side. He taught him and Remus for seven years and knows exactly what the Marauders are capable of," Harry grinned, making Dean whistle approvingly and Sirius chuckle.

"What will happen to the rest of us if he would try to recruit us and we are unwilling to join?" Lavender asked.

"Then you say no. And in the unlikely case that he would continue to pester you then you go to your Head of House," Sirius shrugged.

"I'd rather come to you," Neville admitted softly, a bit uncomfortable like he already knew he'd be picked out.

"Don't worry," Sirius smiled. "You are my ward while at school, remember?"

"Why is he your ward?" Hermione frowned.

"My gran had it put on record that she allows the Professor to make educational decisions for me when needed. When the Professor wrote to the board about the unfairness of Professor Snape towards me, he also sent her a memory of a lesson and she realised that he was in a position where he could look out for my well-being. So she put me under his guidance and he pulled me out of Potions immediately," Neville smiled at Sirius.

"Which every teacher knows, so Slughorn is bound to leave you alone too," Harry grinned and Neville looked relieved.

"I made it sound like Professor Slughorn is a real terror while in fact he's a good teacher. But you won't have to deal will him much at any rate, he'll only teach the first to fourth years," Sirius chuckled.

"Will he take over as the Head of Slytherin House?" Parvati wondered.

"No, the teacher that will take over from fifth year will take on that," Sirius smiled.

"But what about Snape?" Parvati mused. "If he returns, won't he want his position back?"

"He won't be coming back even if he is still alive. The board has decided that his actions as a teacher and his overall behaviour towards his students for the last fifteen years mean he is not qualified as a teacher. He was already going to be fired when he disappeared and the second Professor will take over permanently. Professor Slughorn is only coming back for a few years to help put Potions back on track for her."

"What is the other teacher like?"

"Wouldn't you want to know?" Sirius laughed at Dean's pout.

"The other Professor is named Andromeda Tonks. Forty-three years old, strict but nice. She doesn't accept anything but your utmost devotion but if you are failing while she can see you have been
trying, she'll move mountains to help you succeed."

"It sounds like you know her well," Lavender noted interested.

"Her full name is Andromeda Tonks nee Black and she is my favourite cousin."

"Does she look like you?" Seamus looked hopeful, making the others snicker and Sirius to look at him confused.

"Have you seen the picture of Bellatrix Lestrange in the Prophet last week?" Neville spoke up before Sirius could think of an answer.

"What does she have to do with our new Professor?" Lavender frowned in distaste.

"Bellatrix Lestrange was her older sister and they closely resemble one another at first appearances," Neville explained. "Though Professor Tonks has light brown hair instead of dark brown and softer brown eyes."

"How do you know that?" Lavender asked.

"The Professor asked me to meet her before she'd arrive here," Neville hesitated for a moment before admitting honestly; "Because her older sister was one of the three people responsible for the torturing of my parents, he asked me to meet her so I won't be alarmed by her appearance here."

"That's...kind," Hermione spoke up.

"Is she nice?" Seamus rolled his eyes at Hermione's surprise.

"Yes. It is only the first glance where she looks a lot like her sister. But she is very kind. Stern but friendly. She reminded me of Professor McGonagall," Neville smiled as he glanced at Sirius who nodded agreeable.

"Will you and Harry continue to take lessons with us when she takes over or will the Professor give you private lessons again?" Dean asked interested.

"We'll follow regular classes again," Harry glanced at Neville, who nodded.

"Yeah, that is why the Professor asked me to meet Professor Tonks. To see if I'd be willing to continue following regular Potions classes under her tutoring and I am. I am comfortable enough around her that I'd like to try."

"Does she have favourites, too?" Dean blinked when both Harry and Neville chuckled while Sirius smiled faintly.

"Only the Professor himself. I was actually afraid she would snap him in two with how fiercely she hugged him when we arrived there," Neville joked.

Nodding satisfied Dean turned to Sirius again, "And the other teacher?"

"Professor Edward Tonks. I don't know very much about him but I've been told he is a historical expert."

"Tonks...is he related to Professor Tonks?" Dean wondered.

"Yes, he is her husband."
"Then how come you don't know much about him?" Hermione asked at the same time Ron noted; "But you know Tonks very well!"

"Because before last week, we've never had a chance to actually meet. They went into hiding to protect their newborn daughter from the war shortly after I started at Hogwarts and I was imprisoned before they came out of hiding again. After that there was never an opportunity to meet up," Sirius answered Hermione before he turned to Ron.

"And you know very well why I do know Dora."

"Who's Dora?" Seamus asked when Ron and Hermione looked down embarrassed.

"Their daughter. Nymphadora was the pink haired Auror we saw last week," Harry revealed. "But don't ever call her that, she hates her given name."

"Can you truly blame her?" Sirius snorted.

"No, though you shouldn't complain. She never threatens you with bodily harm upon calling her anything but Tonks," Harry complained as Sirius simply smiled.

"What does he look like?" Parvati and Lavender broke in.

"I suppose that saying he looks like a guy won't satisfy your curiosity?" Sirius teased and the girls eagerly shook their heads.

Tapping his wand against his lips in thought, he straightened slightly and with a flick of his wand an image rose from the glass of water on his desk.

An image of two people appeared, a tall man with short light brown hair and blue eyes. He wore a dark robe that did nothing to hide his large belly. Next to him stood a woman who undeniable looked like the picture of Bellatrix Lestrange everyone had seen.

But as they leaned closer they could see the differences between the two easily.

"That is Professor Tonks and ...are we supposed to call them both Professor Tonks or will we call her by her maiden name?" Lavender asked as she studied the two.

Sirius shook his head, "Never call her by her maiden name. She hates the Blacks almost as much as I do and will not appreciate it at all. I assume one of them will be called by their given name."

"What will happen to Professor Binns?" Seamus asked.

"He will be allowed to stay as a ghost if he wishes to, but he will not be allowed to teach anymore," Sirius answered.

"But getting back to class, how far are you all with your practices?"

"We are in History of Magic sir," Dean wasn't the only one chuckling as Sirius looked down at the book surprised.

"Why..."

"Remus had to teach Defence to the fourth years and you take over this class whenever it collides like that," Harry shot him a worried look as his godfather stared at him blankly for a long moment before his eyes cleared.
"Ah...that's right, sorry. Where were we?" he picked up his book.

"We were reading about the first Wizarding War," Neville answered him softly.

"Right...what have you learned about what you read?"

"Not much, you dozed off before we've read so much as a passage and then we turned the conversation to the new teachers," Dean cheekily noted.

"Well, that won't do, will it? What do you know about the first war without looking in your book?" Sirius let his gaze travel over the students.

"Lavender?"

"The war started in nineteen seventy and lasted until October thirty-first nineteen eighty-one. You-Know-Who rose to power and gathered many followers in his attempt to kill the Muggles and take over."

"Why nineteen seventy?"

"What?" Lavender blinked, caught off guard by the question.

"Why did the war start in nineteen seventy and not earlier? Tom Riddle left Hogwarts in the nineteen forties. Why did he not start the war then? Why wait almost thirty years before declaring war?" Sirius wondered.

"I...I don't know?" Lavender admitted.

"Because he was gathering followers and gaining strength first," Neville answered.

"For thirty years? Why would he waste thirty years to gather followers when so many agreed with his views?" Sirius asked. "Hermione?"

"Because...I... don't know," she admitted softly.

"That is because no one knows for certain why he waited that long. But there is the assumption that he wanted to learn from Grindelwald's failure and did act in the chaos of the Muggle Second World War to test his powers. No one would have noticed if he had committed murders at that time. But mind, that are only theories as no one knows exactly why he waited so long."

"What do you think, Sir?" Dean looked at Sirius.

"I don't know what to think. I do know he was trying to find ways to become immortal as his biggest fear was death. So maybe that kept him busy, who knows."

"How do you know that?" Ron asked with wide eyes.

"During a Death Eater raid on Diagon Alley we fought against him and several of his Death Eaters. One of our own blew up a cupboard for cover and a Boggart landed directly beside Voldemort and turned into his own corpse. His shock gave us just enough time to break through the anti-apparition wards and get everyone away."

"My parents never speak about the war. Was it really that horrible?" Parvati bit her lip.

"It was. In the first war he had many supporters, but no one truly knew just who they were as they wore masks. You didn't know who was working for him in secret and who wasn't. He used the
Imperius Curse to make people do horrible things without being able to stop themselves. People were scared for their lives, terrified for their families," Sirius took a deep breath.

"Every week there would be new deaths revealed. People would either disappear or be tortured to death. The Ministry of Magic was clueless on what to do. They were trying to keep everything hidden from the Muggles while they were being slaughtered, too. The Death Eaters destroyed whole families, slaughtering them while making the parents or children watch and no one dared to trust each other for fear that the other was a secret follower," Sirius swallowed.

"You see, back then those opposing Voldemort had no idea that most of his followers could be identified by the Dark Mark. There was nothing more terrifying than to see the Dark Mark hanging above your house, knowing someone you loved had been killed. No one knew it was what they used to identify themselves with among each other and that they used it to communicate. And none of the Death Eaters were forthcoming with that knowledge; even those that claimed to be on our side in the end so more deaths could have been prevented."

Sirius sounded bitter and they knew he was referring to Snape.

"It was a time of pure panic and chaos as everyone was terrified," Sirius concluded after a moment of silence.

"But people also fought," Dean spoke up.

"Yes. There were people who stood up against the Death Eaters and their leader. There was a group called the Order of the Phoenix, brought to life by Dumbledore. They fought against Voldemort and his lackeys with all their might, though many of them died in the war. But they were hardly the only ones opposing them as others fought more anonymously, like your father," Sirius admitted.

Dean smiled.

"Does any of you know why people originally began to call him You-Know-Who?" Sirius asked suddenly.

"Because they were so frightened of him?" Parvati suggested.

"That came later. He cast a jinx upon his name to be able to track down the people who would stand up to him. The jinx allowed his followers to track anyone saying the name quickly. A side effect of it was that it disabled weaker protective magical enchantments so there was no protection when the Death Eaters suddenly appeared before your nose."

Sirius shifted.

"Not many people laid the link between his name being said and Death Eaters almost immediately appearing as it is not a known curse he used. But the stories added terror to the already frightened people and soon they learned to fear even his name, playing into the curses workings of singling out defiant people."

"Fear that somehow they'll bring his followers before them by even thinking of the name," Lavender shuddered.

"But Professor Dumbledore always said people should say the name as there is no power in it," Neville objected.

"Yes. I've always wondered about that, especially since he knew he wasn't gone for good," Sirius admitted.
They glanced at one another but as Dean opened his mouth to say something the bell rang and he closed it again.

"Well, that was it. Homework; read the paragraph about the first war and you'll discuss it with Professor Lupin again next time. Oh, and check the message board in your break," Sirius called out as the students collected their stuff, waving as they left, knowing they'd see him after break time for Potions again.

"What do you think is on the message board?" Ron asked Harry as they made their way towards it.

"The Hogsmeade date. It's been rescheduled to coming Wednesday instead of the weekend," Harry answered.

"Sirius told you that?"

"No, I walked past the notification board this morning before class. I don't think Sirius is aware of the changed date," Harry smiled cryptically.

"What is so special about this trip that it's been rescheduled to a Wednesday?" Hermione frowned as she joined them.

"It's Valentine's Day Wednesday and Professor McGonagall believed it would be nice to allow students to go out on this special occasion and give the other Professors a chance to catch up with the many changes," Harry answered.

"I think she secretly just wants to give Professor Sirius and Professor Lupin a break," Seamus grinned.

"They do deserve and need one. They work much too hard as it is," Neville said as they gathered with the others students on break around the message board where Harry was indeed proven right as there was a notification that the Hogsmeade date was relocated to the fourteenth of February, two days from then.

"Hey Harry," a familiar voice had Harry turning to see Cho standing behind him.

He hadn't spoken to her any more since that disastrous kiss just before Christmas as the DA lessons has ceased completely since Sirius and Remus had started teaching. He hadn't tried to single her out since then and she hadn't made any attempt to talk to him until now either, so he wondered what she wanted from him.

"Hey."

"Could I speak to you for a moment?" she moved away from the others without waiting for an answer and Harry followed her, annoyed that she clearly expected him to follow her without argument.

"Have you seen the notification yet?" Cho asked as she stopped, making Harry frown as he was certain she had to have seen him walk to the board as she called him while he was looking at it.

"Yes. It will be nice to have an extra break like that in the middle of the week," he answered evasively.

"It will be. Have you noticed the date on which the visit is?"

"The fourteenth," Harry answered apprehensive as he suddenly understood what she wanted from
him. But he kept quiet as she nervously shifted her weight and ran a hand through her long hair. An action that a two months ago would have set his stomach in loops, but did nothing but annoy him now.

"It is a special visit isn't it?"

"I suppose," his attention was caught by his godfather and Remus' appearances at the end of the hall as they spoke softly as they made their way towards them.

"Look Cho, I have..."

"We could go together," Cho interrupted him suddenly, looking at him expectantly as he turned his attention back at her.

"Sorry but I already have plans," Harry swallowed as her expression fell.

"Oh, with Hermione?" Cho's voice suddenly became higher and several people turned around to them.

"No, why would I ...I made plans with my family," Harry said irritated at her making a scene.

"Oh, you made plans with your family on Valentine's Day?" Cho stared at him in disbelief.

"Yes," Harry suppressed a sigh.

"And you can't reschedule those plans?"

Harry was certain that if Sirius learned he had plans he'd immediately reschedule their plans to a later date and that was the last thing Harry wanted.

It would be the first time his godfather would go out of the castle and be in casual contact with wizards again. And although he knew that Remus would be with him and have his back, he wanted to be there himself; too, knowing Sirius wouldn't be at ease.

But more selfishly, he wanted to spend Valentine's Day with his most precious people and just have fun. He glanced at the approaching Marauders to see if they were in hearing range yet, but Sirius looked occupied with something in his hands while Remus spoke to him. Neither gave any indication of having overheard their conversation but Harry didn't want to take a chance and chose his words carefully.

"I have no intention of doing that," he was alarmed to see fresh tears appear in her eyes.

"I'm sorry, but I've been looking forward to this visit for ages now," Harry apologised, even if it wasn't entirely true. Sirius had only asked him if he'd be interested in going to Hogsmeade together a short while ago, but Harry had no intention of letting her know that.

"I just don't see why you can't reschedule your plans. There never is a Hogsmeade date on Valentine's Day itself and I thought...well..." suddenly she burst to tears and brushed past him, running away with her hands before her eyes, leaving Harry standing there with everyone looking at him.

Shaking his head at her dramatic behaviour, he made his way to Sirius and Remus.

"Hey, have you seen this?" Sirius asked as he held out a piece of parchment.

Automatically accepting it, Harry instead kept his eyes on his godfather.
"What is that on your head?"

"Spectrespecs," Sirius grinned, sliding them from his head and slipping them onto Remus' face, making his eyes look like those of a multicoloured owl.

Trying and failing to suppress a snort Harry accepted them as Remus handed them to him to look at.

"Where did you get them from?" he asked as he moved them before his own glasses, making him see his godfather's grin in various colours.

"Luna gave them to me to pass them on to Sirius," Remus rolled his eyes as Sirius accepted the cardboard Spectrespecs glasses back, sliding them before his own eyes.

"Why would she give this to you?" Harry asked as he glanced at the parchment in his hand and saw it was an article of the Quibbler about Wrackspurts, whatever those were.

"Thought I'd like the article, the glasses are funny."

Glancing at his godfather he smiled, seeing the man was genuinely happy with them. Unsurprisingly, they didn't make Sirius look half as ridiculous as Remus had looked. But then Harry was also fairly sure his godfather would still look handsome in just about any ridiculous outfit.

Reaching out to slide the Spectrespecs back onto the top of Sirius' head again, Remus smiled. "So, do you want to talk about what the scene with Cho was about?"

Harry groaned, having hoped against odds that the two would have been just out of hearing range.

"Sorry," Remus apologised.

"She asked me out for Valentine's Day," Harry truthfully told them.

"Why did you say no?" Sirius asked.

"Because I already had plans with the two of you."

"We're going to Hogsmeade Saturday aren't we?" Sirius asked confused.

"The visit was rescheduled to Wednesday to give the students some amusement for Valentine's Day," Remus revealed.

"Why didn't you say so? We could have rescheduled without a problem. Or just gone Saturday as you'd be in the company of two teachers and therefore allowed to leave the grounds."

"We could, but I didn't want to. I want to go to Hogsmeade with you guys Wednesday."

"But its Valentine's Day," Sirius objected.

"A day meant to spend with loved ones, so I think it is the perfect opportunity to go to Hogsmeade with you guys," Harry smiled as his words drew a smile from both men.

"If you are sure?"

"I am," Harry handed the article back. "We should make our way to Potions before the bell rings."
"You have a free period until after lunch, don't you? Any plans?" Sirius asked Remus as he put the article away, but kept the glasses on his head.

"I was thinking of joining you for Potions and do some grading work there," Remus admitted and Sirius nodded.

"Let's go then."

They made their way towards the dungeons, chatting comfortably with the fifth year Gryffindors and Slytherins, who joined them on their way, all of them curiously asking about his new headwear.
Chapter 14

The morning of the Hogsmeade visit, Harry woke early.

Excited about spending the day without classes, he quickly showered and dressed before slipping out of the dorm without waking the others to make his way to what the twins had begun to call Marauder Headquarters.

He had told Neville that he would be gone early as he had no intention of getting into yet another argument with Ron and Hermione.

It would probably be unavoidable upon his return, but at least he would be able to postpone it until later.

He knew it wasn't Gryffindor behaviour, but he could always blame the Marauders' cunning side rubbing off on him. After all, why would he willingly ruin his good mood at the morning of what was bound to be a beautiful day.

Muttering the password and placing his hand against the wards to let them recognise him, Harry snuck into their chambers, not entirely sure if they'd be awake yet.

A quick glance at the dark living room told him they probably weren't so he made quick work of removing his shoes and sneaking towards the bedroom door, opening it just enough to be able to peek in.

Smiling at the obviously sleeping forms curled together he closed the door again, setting out to prepare breakfast.

"What in the name of Merlin's pants are you doing?" Remus' voice was strangely loud compared to Harry's quiet clattering around and he swirled around surprised, not having heard him approach.

"Did I wake you?"

"What is wizard's obsession with the poor man's pants?" Sirius slipped past Remus to sniff at the pans, wrinkling his nose in disgust as he took a seat. "The smell of food made Remus' tummy rumble. Why exactly are you making breakfast at five-thirty in the morning?"

"Five?" glancing at the clock in the darkened living room Harry blinked, surprised to see it was indeed just after five-thirty.

"I thought it was a lot later than that, I thought I was being quiet though?"

"You were, but you forgot how strong our noses and ears are," Remus teased. "And although he doesn't like sausages in the early morning, I am more than happy to see it."

"Do you want me to take the first shower?" a yawn was his only answer and chuckling Remus made his way back to the bedroom.

"Did you have a nightmare?" Sirius asked quietly as he pulled Harry into a brief hug.

"No, I hadn't realised it was this early or I might have gone back to sleep."

"Good. Well, since we are awake anyway, what can I do to help until the shower's free?"
Setting his godfather at readying the kitchen table, Harry chuckled as the man yawned again.

"How much sleep did you get?"

"A few hours. Remus fell asleep while we were still marking essays so I finished on my own before dragging him to bed."

"And what time was that at?"

"A little after midnight," Sirius admitted.

"Do you want to return to bed for a few more hours?"

"And let the two of you have all this lovely breakfast together?"

"We'd save a few scraps for you," Remus emerged from the bedroom fully dressed and freshly shaved with Sirius' stubble remover salve, taking the cutlery from him.

"If you don't I might just have to take a bite out of you," Sirius threatened as he made his way to the bedroom for his shower.

"Then you'd have a less warm cuddle buddy!" Remus called out.

"You are a big enough teddy bear that a small chunk won't matter!" Sirius' laughter echoed back to them and Remus grinned.

"Teddy bear?" Harry asked curious.

"Sirius has always been lean, even as a teenager and you know Gryffindor Tower winters are always cold, so we usually cuddled together so that he'd be warm. Upon learning in fifth year he'd never had a teddy bear I kind of declared myself to be his personal teddy bear."

"Of course you did," Harry couldn't help but snort at that. "I feel kind of sorry for my Dad, having to deal with you two."

"You do know he cuddled with Sirius much more often than I, right? And was twice as tactile as me."

"All right, then I feel sorry for Mum."

"Don't, she enjoyed cuddling with your godfather too," Remus laughed. "Especially when she was pregnant with you."

"Happy to know I take after my parents in that."

"So, what are you nervous about?" Remus changed the subject.

"Is it that obvious to see?"

"Only because I know you well. I am just not entirely sure if it's Hermione and Ron you are nervous about, or if it's something else..."

"I've decided to call upon my hidden Slytherin side and slip out this morning so that I didn't have to see them. Although I now realise I didn't really need to do any sneaking."

"Not for Ron anyway, that boy sleeps like the dead. So what are you nervous about then?"
"Well, Sirius is still settling into Hogwarts properly and Hogsmeade is always very crowded at visits."

"You do realise he's been to the Ministry repeatedly on his own, right?"

"I know I'm being silly and he's probably not even remotely nervous, but I can't help it," Harry sighed, leaning against the counter top.

"There is nothing silly about it, you love him and therefore you worry about him. And you are not entirely wrong because he is nervous," Remus squeezed his shoulder. "He is just very good at hiding it."

Smiling Harry squeezed his hand in return for a moment before he turned to slide the sausages onto their plates, giving Sirius a few more pieces of bacon than them to make up for the lack of sausages.

"That smells really nice, pup," Sirius ruffled his hair, slipping into his seat as he returned from his shower, also freshly shaved and dressed.

"Thanks, so what are the plans for today?"

"We need to pick up some clothes for all of us for when the weather gets warmer."

"You're not taking this opportunity to pick up a gift to apologise to Neville?" Remus asked.

"What do you need to apologise for?" confused Harry looked at his godfather.

"It is my fault he got banned from Hogsmeade visits two years ago and unfairly got a detention. I would like to make up for that."

"Because Crookshanks stole that sheet of passwords from his side table him," Remus reminded Harry.

"Yeah. He loves Herbology and told me all about it so I ordered a book about rare plants that he mentioned being interested in. Just have to pick it up at Tomes and Scrolls."

"He'll like that," Harry agreed.

"Yeah, and you get to pick out a present too so keep your eyes open while we're out there."

"What am I getting a present for?"

"Do I need a reason to spoil you?" Sirius teased, rising to his feet to clean up when they are all done. "You prepared breakfast so we'll clean up."

"I made a mess," Harry protested as Sirius pushed him back into his seat.

"Your definition of a mess is very different from our own," Remus picked up a dishcloth. "Where would you like to go when we're in town?"

"I could use some parchment, but other than that I don't really need anything."

"We can take it easy as I just want to visit the bookshop too, so we can just sightsee a bit."

"Where do you want to have lunch? The Three Broomsticks or Hog's Head Inn?" Sirius pulled the drain out.
"The Three Broomsticks," Harry grimaced as he remembered the shady bar.

"What's wrong with the Hog's Head? Beside its shadiness, that is."

"The place is really run down nowadays, dirty and disgusting. Aberforth doesn't really bother keeping it clean any more," Remus revealed at Sirius' confusion.

"Bit different than I remember then."

"You came there often?"

"I worked there during my last two years here," Sirius leaned against the counter top as Remus put the last dishes away. "It was clean back then though, very shady and dark, but clean."

"Why did you work there?" Harry asked curiously.

"Because I didn't want to be a bother to your grandparents after all they'd done for me and wanted to earn my own living for when I'd get a place of my own. Of course then I suddenly inherited money from Uncle Alphard when I was seventeen and didn't have to worry about expenses any more so to the relief of your dad, I quit after graduation."

"James wasn't the only one relieved when you stopped working there," Remus admitted.

"It wasn't that bad, I made good money and Abe always ensured the customers left me alone or he'd throw them out."

"After you had already hexed and cursed them into oblivion. Would you like to grab a butterbeer there to say hi?"

"That would be nice, would you mind, Harry?"

"I don't mind, the bartender was really grumpy though."

"You'd be grumpy, too, if over twenty students suddenly showed up in your usually deserted bar," Remus teased.

"Abe's always been a bit of a stuffy old sod, but he's nice enough if you get to know him. And at any rate, I always got along with him better than with Dumbledore," Sirius shrugged.

"What does he have to do with Dumbledore?"

"Abe's his younger brother."

Harry looked at Remus, surprised by that information.

"All right, I admit that I am curious."

"I might have to knock some sense into him though, if the place is truly as run down as you say it is."

"We could go there before we start our shopping, knowing him the Hog's Head is already open," Remus suggested as they made their way to the living room.

"Sounds like a plan, if we leave now we'll avoid the initial crowd leaving the castle."

It didn't take them long to get ready and as they walked through the hallway Harry was surprised to
see a few students making their way to the Great Hall for breakfast.

"What time is it?"

"Just after eight. We took our time in eating breakfast," Sirius answered, nodding to the students greeting them.

"Don't I need to wait for Filch?" Harry asked as the two men walked through the front doors.

"No, I send a note to McGonagall a few weeks ago, requesting permission for you to be out after curfew so she knows you are with us. And the front doors can verify our passing should they wonder."

"Because the doors are sentient and take stock of who's passing through them?"

"The entire castle is sentient, pup. It has a mind of its own and acts that way, too."

Accepting that answer, Harry simply followed his godfather and Remus down the road to Hogsmeade and sooner than expected they stood before the Hog’s Head Inn.

"What on earth happened here?"

Harry couldn't suppress a grin at Sirius' first reaction upon entering as the place looked exactly as he remembered.

"Oi, you stuffy old goat! What did you do to this place?"

"Who the bloody..." the old bartender appeared from a side door, anger written all over his face before his eyes fell on them and he froze.

Harry automatically reached for his wand as the man's bright blue eyes flashed, but the defensive spell died on his lips as the man shot past him, faster than lightning to lift Sirius clear of his feet in a hug.

"Sirius Black...I'll be damned."

"Hello Abe," Sirius grinned as Aberforth let him go again, staring at him in shock.

"The bloody hell are you doing here, son?"

"Seeing for myself what I didn't want to believe to be the truth. What happened here?"

Aberforth made his way to the bar to pick up a filthy rag. "Ah, you know me, Siri. I am too old to be bothered. Those wanting to do business come in regardless of the cleanliness of the place."

"But you are not going to retire with your goats yet?"

Bright blue eyes stared at Remus for a long moment before two dusty butterbeers were slammed down in front of them and a green drink Harry didn't recognise before Sirius. "You've always been too bloody cheeky for your own good, Lupin. And you drink up, you are too thin."

"Thanks. Abe, why haven't you hired anyone to help you out here?" Sirius tapped the bottles with his wand to clean them off the dust before taking the dirty rag from the man to clean it too.

"Not everyone can be trusted like you were," Aberforth muttered, wordlessly accepting the now clean rag back and a wave of warmth rushed over Harry as he suddenly realised the grumpy man
missed his godfather's company.

"I hadn't expected you to ever return here though."

"Why not?" Harry looked between his godfather and Aberforth, surprised to see the guilt in the older man's eyes.

"That fool of a brother of mine is the reason you didn't get a trial. I didn't think you'd want to come in here again after that."

"A grumpy old goat once told me that the action of relatives doesn't define your own," Sirius' voice was soft and Aberforth snorted.

"Must have had too much firewhisky when the idiot said that."

"Probably, yes. But I do believe that he was right."

They stared at each other for a long moment before Sirius glanced around.

"What about a House Elf? She would leave you alone and I'd feel better to know there's someone looking after the Inn. One who could make the beds and do the cooking as I know you've always hated that."

"If you can find a reliable House Elf who's willing to work in here then by all means, go ahead. Always were too stubborn for your own good," Aberforth rolled his eyes at the change in subject.

"I don't know about reliable, but I do know a House Elf who is absolutely miserable at her current workplace. She'll keep quite busy here from the looks of it."

"And where would you find that little fellow?" Harry was surprised to see Aberforth actually looked interested now.

"At Hogwarts. Her name is Winky and she used to serve the Crouch. She's a bit of a mess right now, with being freed and everything, but I think you'd be good for each other."

"All right, send the little one by and we'll see," Aberforth agreed.

Harry smiled, knowing even Winky, in all her misery, would be unable to step a foot in here and not want to care for the old man, grumpy as he might be.

They chatted for a while and Aberforth showed Harry around while telling a few stories about his godfather’s adventures while working for him, aided by an amused Sirius.

Eventually they returned to their coats as Remus announced they had more shopping to do.

"Don't you dare pull out your money," Aberforth bit out as Sirius reached into his pocket. "You and your company will never be paying as long as I'm in charge here."

"Okay, thanks. Don't forget that I'll come by Saturday with Winky, all right?"

"Yes, yes, now leave before I'll put an apron around your waist and force you behind that bar," he threatened, swatting his now clean rag at him.

Harry let his godfather guide him out of the building with a short goodbye and he breathed the fresh air in deeply.
"Well, I hadn't expected him to give in that easily," Remus commented as they made their way towards the shops to buy parchment.

"He's rather strange," Harry couldn't help but admit and both men laughed.

"That he is, but he's a good man."

"I didn't know you knew Winky," Harry smiled at the fondness on his godfather's face.

"You were the one who told me about her while I was hiding. So when we began teaching here I sought her out to see if there was anything I could do."

"Do you think she will be interested?"

"She's told me she was unhappy at Hogwarts as she didn't feel needed there so I promised her I'd keep my eyes out for a better place. I think she will like it in the Hog's Head."

"I agree," Harry smiled.

After they had bought parchment they made their way to a clothing shop where Harry had a lot of fun holding out the most outrageous clothes for Remus, to the man's horror and Sirius' amusement.

But eventually they made their purchases and Remus suggested they'd go for a cup of tea to a small tea shop.

Readily agreeing, Harry missed the glint of amusement in his godfather's expression and thus following calmly when Remus led them to a place called Madam Puddifoot's Tea Shop.

He didn't even get suspicious as Remus let him enter first, but taking a step inside Harry spotted the wall covered with frills and bows, and immediately turned around, only to realise neither Marauder had actually followed him in and were shaking with suppressed laughter a few meters from the shop.

"I deserved that," Harry acknowledged with a shudder as he reached their side again, glaring at his godfather. "Why didn't you warn me?"

"And miss that face?" Sirius burst out in laughter. "It was brilliant!"

"That's...what on earth was that?"

"A place most girls love and enjoy going on dates to," Remus wiped his eyes.

"Boy's actually follow them inside?" Harry stared at them in disbelief.

"Your mum took your dad there, though she admitted later that she had only taken him there to test his sincerity," Sirius smiled.

"And Dad went in there with her?" Harry wasn't sure if he should be awed or horrified by their nods. "Okay fine, my Dad was crazy. Doesn't explain why you dragged me to a place couples go to though."

"It seemed appropriate as I've heard that's what we apparently are," the expression on Remus' face was enough to make Harry crack a smile.

"Apparently? So are you denying your love for me now, Moony?" Sirius couldn't quite suppress the wide grin splattered on his face as he wrapped his arms around Remus' waist.
Remus didn't miss a beat in wrapping his own around Sirius in return, pulling him close. "You know my heart only beats for you, my love."

"You two are horrible!" Harry couldn't stop laughing and Sirius frowned.

"Shush, can't you see we're having a romantic moment here?"

"Could you have that somewhere far from the cheesy tea shop?"

"Let's go to The Three Broomsticks. We were going to meet Luna and Neville there around noon right?" Sirius slipped away from Remus to ruffle Harry's hair.

"Just need to make a quick stop at the bookshop for Neville's present."

They met up with them in front of The Three Broomsticks where Neville was surprised by the gift presented to him. He laughed as Sirius told him about his reasons, telling him he'd honestly thought he had lost the passwords. He was delighted by the book once Sirius had gotten him to accept it and they spend a good amount of the lunch discussing various plants.

All through the lunch, Rosmerta tried to flirt with Sirius, but to Harry's great amusement his godfather barely paid her any attention. Seemingly unaware of her intentions as he participated in the conversation with her and Luna, which Harry was secretly happy about.

"What's got you smiling?" Remus asked in a low voice.

"Nothing...just that I like that he's not responding to her flirting," Harry admitted as Remus raised an eyebrow.

"You know he's completely oblivious to it, right?"

"I know and even if he did realise it, she doesn't stand a chance with him."

"But it bothers you that she's even trying?" Remus asked knowingly, Harry sighed and gave a small nod. "I don't like sharing him like that."

"Let me discourage her from ever trying again then," Remus shifted in his seat, slipping his right hand over Sirius' resting on the table and casually leaning into his personal space to steal a slice of pineapple from his plate.

Sirius' fingers automatically curled around his, not even glancing at him as he responded to Luna, Rosmerta looking decidedly put out by the intimate action while the blond smiled, not batting an eye at the action.

"Smooth," Neville whispered as he leaned in and Harry had to bite his lip to suppress a smile. "I can't even tell if Professor Sirius is aware of what he's doing or if he's just automatically responding to Professor Lupin's body language."

They watched as Sirius leaned back mid sentence so that Remus, who was trying to steal another slice, could reach his plate easier.

His shift made him lean directly into Remus' personal space and clearly having expected that, Remus shifted so that Sirius could lean against him comfortably despite their separate chairs.

Harry watched amused as Remus slipped his left arm around Sirius' waist, resting his hand on the man's hip, an extremely intimate move that Rosmerta clearly noticed as she flushed bright red.
"I think it's completely unconscious, it's why so many people think they are a couple," Harry chuckled as Sirius absent-mindedly stole Remus' drink, taking a few sips before holding it up to him so that Remus could drink from the straw too, never once looking at him as he did all of that.

Harry leaned back satisfied as Rosmerta's eyes widened in shock before leaving them with a quick word, clearly put out and Remus winked at him as he popped a cherry from Sirius' plate into his mouth.

"What's got the three of you grinning so satisfied?" Sirius shot them a suspicious glance as he noticed their wide smiles.

"Just marking territory," Luna commented and Sirius' expression cleared into understanding as he realised how close Remus was sitting to him.

"Why didn't you tell me she was flirting?"

"Because this was more fun," Remus grinned, leaning back and releasing his hand to steal back his own drink, but not moving away.

"It certainly was," Neville laughed as Sirius shrugged and continued eating what was left of his lunch.

The rest of lunch passed relatively peaceful and afterwards they split up again.

"Why don't the two of you calmly make your way to Zonko's while I pop back into the bookshop for the books I'm looking for and catch up to you?" Remus suggested.

"Might be a smart idea," Sirius agreed but Harry frowned.

"We're splitting up?"

"No, I just need to talk to you for a moment and Remus is trying to be attentive and give me an opportunity to do so," Sirius smiled. "Can you pick up a few books for me while you're at it? You know what I like."

"Of course, do you want anything?"

Shaking his head with a chuckle Harry and Sirius waved as Remus disappeared into the book store and Harry followed Sirius as his godfather calmly continued on his way.

"What did you want to talk to me about?"

"McGonagall came by yesterday eve. Dumbledore's trial will be soon and she will officially become Headmistress then," Sirius began and Harry nodded.

"She asked me to take over as Head of Gryffindor House."

It took Harry a moment to process the words, but then a huge smile crossed his lips.

"That's great!"

"You think so?" Sirius seemed sincerely surprised by his enthusiasm.

"Of course, you are great for the position and the students respect you."

"I'm sure they simply tolerate me, pup. I've only been teaching for a little over a month now," the
scepticism in his godfathers voice made Harry roll his eyes.

"They genuinely like you, even the Slytherins, because you treat everyone the same way. You're a good teacher and the students won't hesitate to come to you if they're having trouble."

"You sound like Remus; he kept on urging me to say yes."

"You mean you haven't accepted yet?" Harry asked surprised.

"Of course not. I wouldn't accept a position like that without discussing it with you first. Besides, teaching is one thing, but I can imagine you'd not be happy with the idea of having me as your Head of House."

Harry's heart warmed at Sirius' words, knowing the man would always put him before anything else and wouldn't just decide things without discussing them with him first.

"What would change in your workload?"

"Not much, Remus and I are already performing most of those duties to help Professor M out. It would just give me an official title and a pay rise. I might be able to treat you to an ice cream now," Sirius teased.

"Oh goodie, maybe even a carbon cup to put the scoop in?" Harry tried to pull off hopefully batting eyes.

"It might even be a horn instead of a cup," Sirius expression was thoughtful.

They stared at each other for a moment before they both burst out in laughter at the ridiculousness of Sirius getting a pay rise.

"It is evidence that you are a good teacher though, I don't think I have ever heard of anyone getting a pay rise within a month of starting."

"But what do you think of the offer?" Sirius snorted.

"I guess I could live with it. It would be more difficult to sneak out at night and I suppose it means I'd have to be on my best behaviour," Harry mused, eyeing the other man from the corner of his eye to see him roll his eyes. His own lips breaking into a smile, Harry reached forward to hug him.

"You are a daft idiot; of course I would love to have you as my Head of House."

"Where did you pick up that kind of language?" Sirius asked as he returned the hug.

"Remus is a bad influence."

"I'll need to have a word with him, calling you a daft idiot."

"He used it to describe you," Harry laughed.

"Ah, then it's all right."

"Of course it is. So, are you going to say yes?"

"If you are sure?" Sirius slipped a hand in his and squeezed.

"I am. But if McGonagall becomes Headmistress, will she still have time to teach?" Harry asked as
they continued their way to Zonko's.

"Yeah, she's been doing most of Dumbledore's job since before we went to school. She claimed she's never had it easier than since we took over her duties as Head of House."

"And who will be her deputy? Since she'll become Headmistress," Harry wondered, frowning when Sirius hesitated.

"Might as well get it all over with now. Flitwick refused, saying he doesn't feel up to the task so McGonagall held a meeting in which there was a vote."

Nodding, Harry couldn't help but agree with that. He liked the man, but he'd not have the necessary hold over students to successfully run a school. He tried to think who else would be qualified to take over that seat but could only come up with one person.

"They want you, don't they?"

"Yeah. I have until the end of March to think about my answer to that one."

"Why so long?"

"I initially refused. Head of House, fine, but to actually run the entire school one day? It is a huge responsibility and I'm not sure it is something I want even if you'd support me in it."

"You've taken action when everyone else just accepted how things were run, unwilling to change things even if they weren't in the student’s benefit. You took charge and began to change things from the start, knowing just how lacking our educations were. That's the making of a good Headmaster," Harry smiled.

"So you're saying I should take the position?" Sirius turned to him, a thoughtful expression on his face.

"It has always rubbed me wrong that one person can be completely in charge of a school this large without anyone truly monitoring their decisions unless someone places a complaint by the board. I'm rooting for you taking the position, partly because I know Remus will be at your side and you'd seek his council while looking at things from all sides before making a decision. But mostly I know it will be good for the school to have an incorruptible leader."

"And personally?"

"McGonagall isn't going to retire any time soon, so I'm not worried about losing your constant company for a long while yet. That would be my only objection as I don't want to share your attention on such a large scale yet. Other than that I think it would be good for you, too. I think everyone can see you plainly love to teach and I can see you blossom to your full potential while interacting with the students," Harry grinned.

"You love it here and although I'm sure you'd be more than happy to remain teaching all your life, in the end you will want to spend more time with your family, becoming Headmaster would allow you to combine both the things you love as you can simply remain teaching, like McGonagall is doing but also have the free time to spent with those you love."

Harry's stomach jumped as he realised Sirius was listening intently to what he was saying and not just nodding along. He truly was taking into account what he was saying and using it to form his decision.
"What does Remus think?"

"I haven't discussed it with him yet. He was there for the meeting and participated in the vote but we haven't actually spoken about it yet."

"Because you wanted to run it by me first?"

"Kind of. I'll talk with him too; take what you've told me into account and think about it some more. I have the time so I rather use it than to make a decision I don't full stand behind."

Nodding at the wisdom in that Harry startled when something wet hit him on the chest, Sirius bursting out in laughter as he'd ducked in time.

All thoughts of their discussion fled from Harry's mind as Sirius scooped up a large amount of snow to return fire to his unseen attacker, causing someone unseen to yelp as he hit someone.

Sirius held up a new snowball, a question in his eyes and grinning Harry accepted it, taking charge with a battle cry that made three heads, one with black dreadlocks and two identical red heads, pop up from their hiding place and scramble for their own ammunition.

Their snowball fight lasted until Remus joined Sirius and Harry almost half an hour later, Lee declaring a ceasefire fairly soon afterward.

They went on their separate ways with a wave, no need for words as they were all laughing.

"So, did you actually get to have your conversation or were you ambushed before you could?" Remus asked while Sirius rooted through his bag to see what kind of books he'd picked up.

"I called him a daft idiot for not having accepted yet," Harry grinned as Remus laughed.

"And where exactly did you pick that language up?"

"He said he picked it up from you."

"I apologise. I had no idea I was such a bad influence," Remus bowed theatrically to Sirius, who managed to keep his stern expression intact for five seconds before a smile twitched at his lips and he turned to Harry.

"For your continued use of unacceptable language you are to remain in our chambers tonight," he paused. "Is that a good enough reaction of a guardian?"

"I think it will do," Harry tried, and failed, to keep his expression straight as Remus blinked confused. "Ron was complaining that Sirius never becomes angry with me or grounds me when I misbehave, said his mother would wash his mouth with soap for some of the things I occasionally say."

"So now you are grounding him, so that he can complain to Ron about it?" Remus asked.

"It's just the excuse he can give tomorrow when Ron will undoubtedly whine about his absence. And it tones Hermione down a little from giving Harry difficulties about my so called horrible parenting skills because I never punish him."

"Sometimes I wonder why you couldn't have gotten yourself normal friends," Remus shook his head in disbelief. "But for what it is worth, I'm sorry I got you grounded."

"Ah, I deserved my punishment," Harry sighed overly dramatically, making both men chuckle.
"To make up for it, you can pick something out at Zonko's," Remus bargained with a wink that made Harry chuckle. "Just don't tell your godfather."

"Is that how we're going to play it?" Sirius pouted. "Keeping secrets from me, I thought we agreed we were going to draw one line in how we raise him."

"Favourite uncles always spoil the kids behind their guardian's backs. It is an unwritten rule," Remus proudly announced and Harry tried very hard to hold his laughter as Sirius didn't miss a beat.

"That may be, but you are not just an uncle. You are his guardian too; therefore the unwritten rules don't apply for you."

A smug smile spread over Sirius' lips as unable to think of a response, Remus spluttered.

Harry finally lost it, laughing until tears rolled down, a wide grin spread on both Marauder's lips as they shared a high five.

"So, shall we continue on our way to Zonko's? I'd like to stop by Honeydukes to stash up on my chocolate before we order dinner."

"Where are we going?"

"Nowhere. You mentioned a few weeks ago that you've never had Chinese take-out before, so we're going to place an order at Yuri's when we return to our chambers," Sirius smiled.

"Yuri's?"

"Yuri Yum-Yum Chinese Take-Away. It is a Wizarding Chinese restaurant that delivers at home by Floo, when we were still in school your dad would occasionally order there whenever we'd make it really late on a Saturday."

"And McGonagall allowed that?" Harry asked incredulous.

"She had no idea. I don't think anyone had ever truly thought about it before Sirius pointed it out while security was discussed."

"You've been using it to communicate with me for two years," Harry pointed out.

"Yes, though the Gryffindor Floo has been more secure than any other. Sirius warded it in our first year, afraid one of his relatives would come through. After he finally told us about it in third year, your dad added his own protective warding to ensure no one would ever be able to come through. It is possible to Floo call, but not actually travel through," Remus revealed.

"Those wards were the only thing keeping you safe in your dorm, so I wasn't about to break through them to show up in person during our Floo calls. The same kind of warding has been applied to the other Common Rooms now too," Sirius added.

"I never thought about it, but it would indeed have been possible for a Death Eater to come through that way," Harry shuddered, returning to the original subject.

"So we are going to have Chinese take out tonight?"

"While we're going to play Cluedo," Remus decided.

"If we've got a murder to solve tonight, we better get going," Sirius said. "You still have to pick out
"I think I'd enjoy a large bag of candy as a treat," Harry decided. "Still have to pick up some owl treats too, though, I'm almost out."

"We'll pick up those first and then check out the new goods at Spintwitches before making our way to Zonko's and Honeydukes."

Nodding to Sirius' suggestion they continued on their way; and as Harry watched Sirius prank Remus in Zonko's he couldn't help but think this had been one of the best Hogsmeade visits he'd ever had.
In the days that followed after the Hogsmeade visit, Hogwarts slipped into a pattern to relieve some of the workload of their favourite teachers.

Most of the older years took the time to help the first to fourth year students with their homework and ensured their own homework was well enough that they wouldn't have to bother the Professors with doing it over again, which would mean more work for them to read over.

Harry often helped the other students with their Defence work in the evening and other students too rose up to form study groups to lift the load of extra tutoring out of their professor's hands.

Often students from different houses mingled as they joined the study groups, trying their best to ease the workload for their professors.

And not just the students tried to help the two out, Professor Flitwick took over History of Magic for the sixth years while Remus taught the fifth and seventh years, having agreed to let Binns continue to teach the first to fourth years until the new teacher would arrive since those years did not have to be brought up to speed with the same kind of urgency as the others.

Professor McGonagall arranged a temporary Potions classroom located near the Defence classroom so that Sirius didn't have to wear himself out running from the third floor to the dungeons and back several times a day.

It took some getting used to for the students, but not many complained as they grasped any chance to make things easier for those two with both hands.

And it worked, because although the workload was still immense, both Sirius and Remus seemed a bit more rested and settled into the new routine easily.

It was about two weeks into the changes that Harry sat in the Common Room on a Sunday afternoon to work on his homework, looking up surprised when an owl flew in through the cracked window and landed on his book, bringing in a cold wind with him.

"Are you looking for me?" he asked with a shiver, carefully sliding his still wet parchment aside so the owl wouldn't destroy it with its claws.

He freed the animal of its letter and felt around in his bag for an owl treat before quickly skimming over the letter, frowning before folding it again and slipping it into his pocket.

Collecting his books and parchment he tossed it all into his bag before slinging it over his shoulder and locating the one he wanted to speak to immediately.

"Ron, could I speak to you for a moment?" he asked, moving towards the portrait and stepped into the cold hallway when Ron nodded, pulling his robes a bit closer while pausing to give Ron time to catch up. He was not surprised as Hermione followed them.

"What is it?" Ron asked confused as he shivered. "Why are we out here in the cold?"

"I meant to speak with you alone," Harry might not have been surprised, but that did not mean he wasn't annoyed as he walked some distance from the common room.

"We've never had secrets from one another before," Ron shrugged off her presence.
"Fine. Tell your mum to back off. I've already told you that I am spending the Easter holidays with my family, so there is no use in her attempting to invite me again and again."

Ron shrugged. "She would just really like you to come. And the invitation stretches out to the summer vacation too. She expects you for both."

"And I told you both that I'm not going to come for either. This is my first Easter with Sirius and I want to spend it with him and Remus."

"Why? You see him every day. Mum's suddenly not good enough for you any more?" Ron asked annoyed.

"I appreciate what she's done for me, but can't either of you understand that I want to spend time with my family?" Harry asked, feeling irritation rise but tried to push it down violently.

"We are more your family than Sirius has ever been," Hermione frowned.

"Sirius has always been my family."

"He wasn't exactly around for most of your life though," she snapped.

Harry's eyes shot fire and he had to choke down his anger, though he couldn't stop himself from snapping back at her, "That wasn't exactly by choice and you know it!"

"He chose to leave you behind and go after Pettigrew," Hermione argued.

"Yes, because Hagrid refused to hand me over on Dumbledore's orders despite knowing Sirius was my guardian. He couldn't exactly take me from Hagrid without risking harm to come to me."

Harry didn't know why he was even attempting to defend his godfather. It didn't seem to matter what he said or did, they both seemed to have completely turned against Sirius.

"Even if that might be true, he still left you again when you needed him most. It was my Mum who comforted you after the events last year," Ron sounded indignant. "Sirius left on that mission for Dumbledore. He left you right when you needed him most."

"Actually he was there," Harry revealed before he could stop himself.

"Yeah at first, but then he left," Hermione agreed with Ron.

"And came back an hour later, wearing my invisibility cloak. Held my hand in silence until you all left half an hour after that on Madam Pomfrey's orders, thinking I was fast asleep."

"Surely you imagined him being there. You had been given a Dreamless Sleep Potion..." Hermione began with a frown but Harry cut her off.

"A potion that already didn't work properly when I first took it since I woke up rather quickly again. Sirius figured he'd have about an hour before I'd start waking up once more and he was there when I did."

"But you didn't say you were awake!" Hermione spluttered scandalised.

"I didn't want to speak to anyone," Harry shrugged.

"But you spoke to Sirius?" Ron looked annoyed.
"I didn't. He just sat with me in silence the entire night, holding me close," Harry smiled faintly at the memory of re-awakening to feel a warm hand on his own but unable to see anyone the hand could belong to.

In his foggy mind he hadn't been able to understand what was happening around him right away, but he had kept silent and pretended to be asleep. He hadn't felt like communicating with anyone. The hand had been comforting and strangely familiar on his own and once the others had left and Madam Pomfrey had settled for the night, Sirius had pulled back the cloak far enough to reveal himself.

But he hadn't spoken to him, something Harry had been immense grateful for as tears had build up in his eyes, knowing his godfather had come back. And the older man had slipped onto the bed beside Harry and held him in silence as he had cried his heart out for a second time, the comfort of his godfather warmer and steadier than Mrs. Weasley's had been.

"But Dumbledore ordered him to warn the old crowd!" Ron exclaimed looking impressed despite his anger, to learn Sirius had defied Dumbledore's direct orders to be at Harry's side that night.

"He warned Remus on this magical device they both had and Remus warned the others while Sirius made a detour to the Gryffindor Tower to pick up my cloak before returning to me in secret."

"He disobeyed direct orders," Hermione gasped scandalised.

"Because he knew I needed him," Harry grimaced at the shocked realisation that had rushed through him at what Sirius had told him once dawn had arrived.

"He should have listened to Professor Dumbledore," Hermione shook her head in disbelief. "I cannot believe he didn't do as he was told to do."

"He didn't fancy being cursed or killed," Harry frowned at her tone.

"Professor Dumbledore wouldn't..."

"No? He send a believed mass murderer to warn a crowd of extremely skilled duellists. All who believed him to have betrayed them and what they stood for. The mere sight of him would have gotten him killed. Sirius asked Remus to warn them, knowing he wouldn't be attacked upon sight," Harry interrupted her.

"That's...I never even thought about that before," Ron's eyes widened.

"I don't think anyone but Sirius did," Harry bit out, still feeling angry that the Headmaster hadn't thought that one through.

"How long did he stay with you?" Hermione asked suspiciously.

"Until the next morning. He left to go to Remus when he heard you guys approaching. Though he kept in contact through letters," Harry smiled.

"You rarely got a letter from him," Hermione frowned.

"Not the usual way no," Harry had no intention to divulge to them about his special little communication box. Not with how they had been acting towards Sirius lately.

"Then how did you communicate and why didn't you tell us?" Hermione demanded to know.
"That is between us."

"But..."

"Leave it Hermione," Harry bit.

"That all aside, I still don't get what you won't come for Easter. It is the first time we are actually going to return home for the holidays. You can see Sirius any time!" Ron sounded hurt.

"And I just want to see him then, too, so get your mum to back off," Harry finally snapped, turning his back on them and, spotting the twins coming towards them he quickly moved to intercept them.

"Harry! Just the guy we were looking for!" George greeted him cheerfully.

He slapped a hand on Harry's shoulder, sliding it across to his other shoulder and began steering him away with him.

"Where are you taking him?" Ron asked annoyed. "We were talking."

"You can talk later. Business is being done here," Fred grinned.

"You are going to ask him for money, aren't you?" Hermione narrowed her eyes.

The twins snorted in unison, walking away without another word and Harry almost sighed in relief as they took him with them. Even if he had sought Ron out for this specific conversation.

"What did you need me for?" he asked once they had gotten some distance between them.

"Not money at any rate. Like we would ever dare to think that."

"I didn't think it would be," Harry grinned to show them he knew they weren't like that.

"We just thought that we'd save you before you exploded in anger," George shrugged.

"Good call. So you weren't truly looking for me?"

"Well, we did have a question for you, but it was just out of curiosity, not out of need," Fred smiled.

"After saving me from yet another argument you can ask me almost anything," Harry sighed.

"We were wondering if we could take a peek at your Marauder's Map for a moment," Fred admitted.

"Sure."

He took it out of his robes and handed it over, watching Fred activate it before both brothers bend over it.

"Do you see him anywhere?"

"Who are you looking for?" Harry asked curious.

"Sirius," George answered.

Raising an eyebrow Harry tapped the map with his wand. "Prongslet wishes to know where
Padfoot is."

Immediately a name lit up in a corridor and the twins' eyes widened.

"How did you do that?"

"Sirius taught me a few tricks in the use of the map. If you want to find someone specific you have
to state your name along with whom you are looking for and they'll decide if they want to help you
out or not."

"Wicked," they said in awe before blinking.

"We were right!"

"About?"

"About his name. We came across some records during a detention and we noticed that his name
is…"

"Potter-Black," Harry interrupted them and smiled when they looked up surprised.

"Dad performed a blood ritual when they were fifteen with my grandparent's support. It legally
made Sirius his younger brother and though the official records didn't change Dad changed the
records at Hogwarts."

"McGonagall mentioned that, but she said they changed them back, didn't she?" Fred frowned.

"They couldn't change them completely. They now read Potter-Black," Harry explained with a
grin.

"And no one ever noticed because on our lesson schedules he's called by his given name, not his
surname," Fred realised.

"Exactly."

"Hmm...How does the map decide if it wants to help you find someone?" George stared at the map
with a frown.

"I'm not entirely sure. Sirius said the map is infused with their personalities and DNA. You need to
use your wand to open the map so they can identify you and then choose just how much they want
to help you based on your personality and qualities."

"That's...rather sneaky. So if someone they are not particularly fond of tries to ask for their help
they can just refuse," George grinned, looking down on the map again. "They deleted the traitor
somehow, didn't they?"

"Remus did. He invoked a special charm, I didn't really understand completely what he meant but it
comes down to it that Wormtail was removed from the map's properties because he has proven
himself to be a traitor to the Marauders' bloodlines."

"Good. The rat doesn't deserve being part of something so amazing," Fred looked hostile at the
place where Wormtail's name used to be.

"So where is Sirius right now?" Harry asked, making Fred shift his gaze.

"Third floor. His dot is just sort of standing there in the middle of the corridor," Fred said.
"I wonder what he's doing there," Harry asked curious.

"Why won't we go and find out? We have nothing specific that we need to be doing right now and Sirius doesn't look very busy just standing there alone," George suggested.

"I'm in no hurry to return to Ron and Hermione so I'm all for it," Harry sighed at the memory of their latest argument.

"What were they whining about this time anyway?" George asked softly as they made their way towards the dot on the map, Harry hiding the map inside his sleeve for easy reach.

"I got a letter from your mother, basically telling me she's expecting me to come over for Easter and the summer holidays," Harry explained, wondering for a brief moment if the twins might get offended, too, that he didn't want to come.

"And Mum and Ron can't accept that you want to spend both holidays with your own family?" Fred asked, snorting at Harry's surprised expression.

"Honestly, it's rather predictable you would want to spend it with Sirius and Remus. It is the first time you can truly openly be together as a family," George shrugged.

"Not to mention that it is your choice where you wish to spend your time off, neither Mum, Ron nor Hermione have any say in that as it is your life," Fred added.

"Besides, if they have any respect for you and your family they would have asked Sirius for permission before asking you. As is the normal way to go about such things, but I doubt Mum asked him anything," George frowned.

"I doubt it, but I will have to ask to be sure. I have plans for Easter with them."

"Sirius' birthday is at the beginning of April, isn't it? Just before Easter?" Fred asked.

"The Fourth of April yeah. So I was hoping we would be able to celebrate it during the Easter weekend," Harry smiled, surprised but happy that the twins at least knew when his godfather's birthday was.

"Even if it wasn't his birthday, it still makes sense you'd want to spend it with him. So, what are you getting him?" George grinned.

"I want to get him a cat," Harry admitted shyly.

Fred chuckled approvingly. "He's crazy enough about them. And not in the way dogs like to chase cats way either, he's truly fond of them. It's always adorable to see him play with the various cats walking around here."

"It is," Harry agreed, having spotted his godfather kneeling in the middle of a hallway often enough to play with the various cats walking around the castle.

"Well...if you are going to get him a cat, then that might make our present choice so much easier, too," George smiled.

"You guys are getting him a present?"

"Yeah. He's investing into our little business as a silent partner and is helping us research several properties we've had our eyes on in Diagon Alley. So we'd like to thank him for that and all he's
done for us. What better way to ensure he cannot decline by giving it for his birthday."

"Smart because he would indeed refuse otherwise. So what are you going to get him then?" Harry asked.

"Well, since you are getting him a cat, maybe we could get you to agree to let us buy some cat supplies?"

"Such as?"

"A litter box for in Marauder Headquarter, bedding, scratching post and perhaps some toys," Fred summed up as he thought out loud.

Chuckling, Harry shook his head. "I don't think Remus will be happy if you two take away everything he could possibly add."

"We'll leave the scratching post and some more toys for him then," George bargained.

"As long as I get to buy the collar and the cat itself then it's fine by me. You'll have to bargain about the rest with Remus. He promised to take me out to a shelter on April third, when Sirius will be in classes all day. Maybe the two of you would like to come along then?"

"A shelter?"

"Yes, it is a place where deserted pets are left by Muggles. We figured he'd love one of those more than a healthy kitten from a magical pet shop. Besides, shelters often have kittens too," Harry told them, confident in his godfather's wishes.

The twins nodded approvingly.

"If Remus doesn't mind then we'd love to join. We could even pick appropriate equipment for the little fellow then."

"We'll be in his hearing range soon," Fred warned softly, making George and Harry follow him silently towards the third floor from which Sirius' dot still hadn't moved since the last time they checked the map.

"He's...not here," Harry blinked perplexed once they reached the corridor.

"Impossible, the map never lies," Fred exclaimed astonished as he glanced down at the map once more. "It says he's right here."

"Who are you looking for?" Sirius' voice joined them and startled they turned around to see him standing behind them.

"Where did you come from?" All three of them asked at the same time.

Amused Sirius indicated behind him.

"But...we just came from that direction and we didn't see you," George eagerly looked around, understanding they were learning something new about Hogwarts.

"Not every hidden entrance is shown openly on the map. There's some that you can only enter if the makers allow you to."

"But I asked your location and the map showed me immediately," Harry blinked confused.
"That would be because I'm not trying to hide from you. But because the place I was at isn't on the map it showed you the closest possible location to where I was."

"Like it doesn't show the Room of Requirement?" Harry asked.

"Not exactly. The Room of Requirement is an Unplottable room that couldn't be added. You simply disappear from the map altogether when you enter there. The room I was in isn't on the map because we chose not to add it."

"Why not?" George asked curiously.

"We chose to keep some secret hideouts spread throughout the castle where we could stay if we needed to hide and the map fell into the wrong hands."

"So, why are you hiding in one of them now?" Harry asked.

Sirius hesitated. "It is sort of a secret."

"But?" the twins asked as they all sensed a but in his words.

"I am kind of at a dead end and I can't figure out where I'm going wrong. So when I heard your footsteps I thought that maybe you might be able to help out."

Sirius sounded very much like he was admitting defeat and Harry bit his lip.

"I'd be happy to help and I know the twins won't reveal your secret, whatever it is."

"Remus can't know..." Sirius admitted, though a hopeful look crossed his face.

"Why not?" Harry asked carefully, aware of the other secrets Sirius had kept from the man before.

"Nothing like that, I just don't want to get his hopes up when it might not work," was the quickly reassuring answer.

"We promise not to tell him anything or reveal what you are doing," the twins immediately promised but Sirius raised an eyebrow.

"You promise? That's not really the Marauder legacy's way."

Confused they glanced at one another before Harry chuckled. "We solemnly swear we will not tell Remus anything..."

"Or reveal what you are up to," Fred and George immediately caught on and finished Harry's words.

"That's better," Sirius smiled as he tapped the wall he was standing beside with his wand before disappearing through it.

The three teenagers followed him, before looking around surprised.

"This is rather bigger than I would have thought," Fred breathed out in awe as they glanced around the largish room in which several cauldrons stood above fires and a small desk was pushed to the wall, littered with papers.

"It is. You are brewing here because you don't want Remus to find out?" Harry asked as he glanced into the cauldrons to see the same green potion in all of them.
Sirius moved towards the table to grab something. "Yes. I'm trying to make a potion that will allow him to transform without the accompanying pain."

"You aren't looking for a cure?" George asked confused.

"He's not sick," Sirius frowned as he handed Harry a small notebook.

Harry couldn't help but smile at that answer as he accepted the notebook. To Sirius, Moony was just a part of Remus and there was nothing wrong with his friend other than the pain the transformation caused him.

"No he isn't, but the transformation always leaves him ill before and afterwards doesn't it?" George elaborated his earlier words as Fred moved to Harry's side to look through the notebook with him.

Sirius nodded. "Yes, but that is exactly what makes it difficult. I want to make it one potion that prevents the pain and helps against the illness at the same time."

"Why don't you make two separate ones?"

"Because a side effect of the Wolfsbane potion is that it leaves him extremely nauseous. Not only does the potion have to work in combination with that one, but he also needs to be able to actually take it without immediately throwing it up again," Sirius explained.

"So by trying to combine them you attempt to ensure he will be able to take it?" George clarified for himself.

"Yes. And I want to try and make it with cheap and common ingredients to ensure it will be affordable to make."

"Because generally werewolves cannot afford potions," George stated more than asked. "You want them to be able to make it for themselves?"

"I doubt that would be possible since werewolves have such a sensitive nose," Harry commented distractedly before Sirius could answer as he turned another page.

"Sirius..." Fred called his name softly, having kept silent as he stared at the new page. "How long have you been working on this?"

"A while. James and I started it as a side research the day after we discovered Remus' secret."

"You've been trying to find a way to help him since you were twelve?" Harry asked in awe.

"Of course. Becoming Animagi was only supposed to be short term solution. It would keep him from hurting himself every full moon while we continued to look for a long term solution that would take away the excruciating pain and the lingering sickness. It just took us longer than expected to succeed in even the short term solution."

"I still think becoming Animagi at the age of fifteen is amazing," George muttered.

Sirius shrugged. "If we could have found proper guidance we would have succeeded a whole lot earlier."

"That's my point. You and Harry's dad managed to become Animagi without any proper guidance. We've seen the notebook you guys kept and the details are amazing. You figured everything out on your own through research and trial and error," George glanced at his brother who nodded.
"And didn't give up when many others would have."

"And you were younger than we are now when you succeeded!" George finished.

"It might sound amazing, but I can assure you for us it still took way too long. Time in which we could do nothing to help him as he tore himself apart every month."

"Which is why you and Dad started this research?" Harry asked as he gestured at the notebook in his hand.

"Yes. We've come as far as having figured out how to prevent the pain with a variation of the Polyjuice potion."

"How would that work?" Fred asked interested.

"The Polyjuice potion lets you transform into another human being, but the one we've developed allows the user to transform seamlessly into an animal, like the Animagus transformation. We managed to remove the accompanying discomfort that the Polyjuice causes when changing your body because that is rather uncomfortable, too..." Sirius trailed off as all three of them grimaced, having tasted the potion before.

"If that works, then why haven't you given that to him yet then?" Harry asked.

"Because taking this potion has the same nauseating effect that the Polyjuice has. He wouldn't be able to keep it down long enough for it to work properly, not in combination with the Wolfsbane."

He sighed. "Originally we had the idea to transform him into a wolf moments before the transformation began but that didn't work. It turns out that you cannot transfigure a werewolf. Almost bit our heads off before we managed to transform ourselves."

Sirius nodded at their sympathetic winces.

"Yeah...then we thought about helping Remus become an Animagus, so that he could shift before turning. But we decided to do some more research before attempting to drag him through the long progress that was already giving us enough trouble. Found an old Japanese man who had come to the same conclusion and taught himself the skill."

"Didn't it work?" Harry asked.

"It did. The transformation didn't hurt him at all as a wolf and a werewolf have the same bone structure. But where an Animagus normally keeps his mind, he lost his completely. He became even more bloodthirsty than ever before and tore his younger Muggle sister, also a werewolf, apart."

"But I thought werewolves aren't dangerous to other werewolves or animals," Fred swallowed thickly at the mental image.

"Normally they aren't. But where the werewolf normally recognised his kin, with the new transformation he only saw the other wolf as unnatural. And when his sister was dead he tore into himself, feeling the same unnaturalness inside of himself. He destroyed both his legs and tore a hole into his arm before the night was over."

"That's horrible!"

"We shared that opinion so we decided to not even try it with Remus," Sirius said dryly.
"Which is how you got this idea. Have you tested any of it yet?" Harry asked as he glanced down at the notebook again.

"Yes, I found someone willing to co-operate with us shortly after Remus' secret came out. I re-approached him while on the run and he was interested in participating in my research once more."

"He didn't attack you upon sight?" Harry asked surprised.

"No, he was willing to give me the benefit of the doubt and hear me out when he learned why I was there. Although I can't deny that it probably helped a lot that I showed up the morning after a full moon, so he was rather exhausted and not so inclined to try and even lift a finger to attack me," Sirius sounded more sad than happy about that, though Harry couldn't blame him as Remus was usually the same after a harsh full moon and rarely had any energy left to do anything but sleep.

"You are testing it on a human being?" Fred asked surprised.

"A willing participant who has always known the risks but finds them worth it for a chance of a normal life. He is forty-five years old and already his life span is lessened enormously because his body can't handle the stress the transformation puts him through any more. Garth decided to use his remaining time to try and help other werewolves as much as he could."

"And it did work when you tested it?" Harry asked.

Sirius sighed. "The times he could keep it down long enough it worked perfectly. But most of the time he only threw it up again within moments of taking it."

"What's in it?" Fred asked.

"Dittany, Mandrake root, Powdered Moonstone, Murtlap, Nightshade and Wormwood among other things. I'm having trouble combining the Dittany with the Star grass and Boomslang Skin. James worked out exactly how much time had to be between adding the Dittany and Star Grass, but I can't get it to bind properly. I've already worked various variables into it but it keeps smoking and boiling."

"And these numbers are Dad's work?" Harry asked as Fred placed the notebook on the table so they could all look at it.

"Yes, the top ones are James' calculations on the measurements. Down below are my own, combining them in the actual testing," Sirius confirmed.

They looked at them in silence for a long moment before Harry frowned. "I'm not that good at potions, but I am good with numbers. Isn't this five supposed to be a six? The first few calculations are correct, but if you add these three together they should turn into a six, not a five."

Sirius reached for another piece of paper and copied the top calculations before fixing the supposed error and calculating further down himself.

"It would make a five second difference...it couldn't be..." Sirius muttered, grabbing the two ingredients and moved to one of the cauldrons. He let one ingredient begin to drip into the potion before he counted to five and began to add the other as well and immediately the colour changed from a deep green to a pale blue.

"No way..." Sirius stared at the potion in utter disbelief before he stirred twice, adding the rest of the drips the same way, turning the potion dark blue.
"Did that work?" Fred asked as all three of them had moved closer while he stirred.

"We'll know the day after tomorrow but it hasn't exploded yet so it looks good. I'll give the potion to Garth tomorrow and then all we can do is cross our fingers for it to work that night as it's the full moon then. Great timing, you guys have solved my problem."

He looked up at Harry with shining eyes before abruptly pulling him into a tight hug.

"Thank you...all of you actually. I would never have thought to check his calculations."

Letting go of Harry he surprised the twins by pulling both of them into a hug, too.

Beaming they answered his spontaneous hug almost immediately.

"Our pleasure. If it works, you'll be able to help werewolves all over the world!"

Sirius smiled, his eyes shining in happiness. "It would be nice to end that horrible suffering."

"You are going to ask for a patent on it, right?" Fred confirmed.

"Yes, though not for the money. The plan was that if we could get it to work then we'd form a foundation which will distribute the potion free of charge to all those who cannot afford it," Sirius nodded. "This is why we wanted to make it with cheap and common ingredients."

"Understandable. But how will you ensure that the right people got it and not werewolves like Greyback?" Harry asked.

"They had a whole plan written down," Fred answered before Sirius could, pointing to the last page in the notebook that he had taken with him from the table.

"Yeah, we had the plan that everyone who'd like to receive the potion had to take an oath to have never willingly or purposely tried to attack another human being. As long as they kept to their oath they would receive the potion every month," Sirius confirmed.

"And the oath would be binding?" George asked as they watched Sirius add the changes he had made into the notebook before he handed them bottles to bottle the potion up in.

"Naturally. And it would have a protection spell woven into it that if a werewolf was about to break his oath he'd be locked into a Sigil and the foundation notified automatically."

"That is very complicated magic," George whistled impressed.

"We didn't want the potion to be abused by wrongdoers," Sirius shrugged.

"What will you name it?" Harry asked.

"If it works, then you guys can think of a name," Sirius smiled.

"But it is your creation," Fred argued.

"And it would have taken me years before I'd even spot that error. James was always better with numbers than me so I never would have thought there might be an error in his calculations." Sirius admitted.

Harry looked through the notebook again. "What about Wolfspoly?"
Sirius snorted. "I was really banged up on potions when I suggested that one to James."

"It's a good name though," Fred and George said.

"It is exactly what it sounds like it is, which won't let people be confused about it," Harry grinned excitedly.

"All right, I'll accept Wolfspoly unless something better comes to you guys."

He placed the bottles into a potion's bag before turning to them, "How can I ever thank you guys?"

"We were happy to help, but if you are really looking to thank us then you could join us for dinner," Fred laughed.

"I think I can do that," Sirius smiled as he looked at them fondly before blinking.

"Were you looking for me for any specific reason by the way?" he asked suddenly, making the other three burst out in laughter at his very delayed question before pulling him along to the Great Hall.
Chapter Notes

A/N: Although it has now been revealed by Rowling on Pottermore that James' parents were named Fleamont and Euphemia; I refuse to use those ridiculous names and will hold onto Charlus and Dorea, despite the fact that it is no longer canon.

My apologies if that upsets you. I don't know what the woman was thinking or what she was on when deciding on those names, but urg...just no.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry smiled as Sirius held in his step to walk in line with him as they made their way down the corridor after dinner.

His godfather had completely ignored protocol and had joined him and the twins at the Gryffindor table for dinner. Whenever someone asked about his presence he’d claim he was fulfilling a request made to him after he had received help. It never ceased to make the twins crack up as they knew it had been them who had asked him to join them.

The other Gryffindors had been more than happy to make room to have him present and they chatted animatedly with their Professor during dinner.

It was only after dinner that Sirius and Harry had split ways with the twins, who insisted on them spending some quality time together.

"What had Remus look so surly during dinner?" Harry asked with a grin.

"He might think I am avoiding him because I won't tell him what I want for my birthday," Sirius laughed.

"But it's still a month away," Harry's heart skipped a beat as he thought for a moment that Sirius had overheard his conversation with the twins after all.

"You know Remus; he likes to be prepared in time. He's been pestering me for days now," Sirius shrugged as Harry relaxed again. Sirius gave absolutely no indication that he had overheard anything and logically he knew he couldn't have as they'd stopped speaking about it before they got into his enhanced hearing range.

"And you won't tell him what you want," Harry chuckled.

"It's not that I don't want to tell him. There is just nothing I really want."

"No wishes at all?" Harry asked surprised.

"Not really. I have all that I want."

"You do?" Harry looked at his godfather sceptically.

"Yeah. I have you, my freedom, a nice house, Remus and a fun job," Sirius summed up. "I'm happy
Nothing he could wish for that he could actually get, Harry read between the lines of what he was saying. He gave a small nod; not voicing what he knew had to be lingering in the back of the other man's head, even if he himself was not aware of it.

"So there is nothing we could make you happy with?" he asked instead.

"It would make me happy if the potion would work. Then I could give it to him the next full moon. To see him transform without any pain..." Sirius trailed off with a small smile. "It would be the best birthday present I could wish for."

"How would that be a birthday present?" Harry wondered confused.

"Because the full moon of April is on my birthday."

Harry's eyes widened. "If it does work and you can give it to him next month..."

"Then his first remotely normal transformation would be on my birthday," Sirius finished for him.

"Then it just has to work!"

Sirius hummed in agreement as they turned the corner to see Luna pinning something on the notice board.

"Good evening Luna, what are you doing?" he asked, changing the subject as they moved towards the petite blond.

"Hello Sirius, Harry. I've lost most of my possessions," she explained as she indicated towards the board. "It is not unusual for people to take and hide them and normally I only try to retrieve them at the end of the school year, but they've taken my Defence book and I really need that back for the homework Professor Lupin gave us. So I am hanging up signs."

A wave of pity washed over Harry for the friendly girl, even if she herself didn't seem all that concerned.

"Why would people hide your stuff from you?" Sirius asked confused as he took the list from the notice board to get a proper look at it.

"They think I am odd so they believe it is funny to take away my things when I act more oddly than that they like," Luna shrugged.

"Being different is no excuse for them to be taking your things without your consent," Harry frowned, biting his lip to try and keep the anger out of his voice before she'd believe it was directed at her.

"Oh they will return them like they always do in the end."

"They shouldn't be taking them in the first place. Who takes your things?" Sirius asked as he rolled the parchment up and slipped it into his sleeve.

"Just the other Ravenclaws. The other houses usually only make fun of me but they have never actively taken my possessions from me."

"I'll get your belongings back and I will be having words with Professor Flitwick about his Claws. Also, I want you to come to me if they try to take any of your belongings again."
He raised his wand and something big and silver shot out, disappearing into the hallway as Sirius turned around, indicating that Luna and Harry should follow him.

"Was that your Patronus?" Harry asked.

"Yes, it can be used as a messenger, too. I alerted Professor Flitwick that I'd like a word with him at Ravenclaw Tower immediately."

"Oh no, you don't have to talk with Professor Flitwick about me, I wouldn't want to cause any trouble," Luna apologised, even as she moved to follow him.

"Nonsense, I won't stand for behaviour like that. Not to mention that your mother would be very upset with me if I'd let her daughter be treated like this without doing something about it."

"Mum would be?"

"Of course, have you never mentioned about what happens here?"

"Mum passed away a few years ago, before I started Hogwarts," Luna said softly, making Sirius almost lose his balance as he swirled around to her.

"Pandora died?" Sirius whispered shocked.

Harry felt a lump form in his throat. He had known Luna's mother had passed away as she'd told him last year, but his godfather was clearly taken aback by the news.

He wondered just how well his godfather had known Luna's mother as Luna nodded.

"Yes. She liked to experiment with spells and one day one of them went rather wrong. I was nine when she passed away."

"She was an extraordinary witch, but she did always love her experiments," Sirius smiled sadly. "I'm sorry to hear she passed away, you must miss her terribly."

"Yes I do. But I still have Dad," Luna nodded before her smile became more genuine again. "Mum always spoke very kindly of you. She refused to believe anything they said about you, saying it was outrageous to even suggest that you of all people would join You-Know-Who or betray James Potter."

Her silvery grey eyes didn't move from Sirius' own light grey ones as she spoke.

"She said that you would have died before letting any harm come to the Potter family."

Harry swallowed thickly at her words, knowing how true they were and knowing just how much these words would mean to his godfather. The knowledge that there had been someone who had firmly believed in his innocence.

"I'm happy that she believed in me when hardly anyone else did. Your mum was one of the kindest women I've ever met and I can see her in you," Sirius cleared his throat, obviously touched by her words as Luna beamed at his own.

"She tried to push for your freedom, saying your trial must have been a laughing stock for you to come out guilty. She never knew you never received one in the first place," Luna apologised but Sirius shook his head.

"She wouldn't have been able to do anything with the Ministry refusing to listen. But I am touched
"She always kept telling me that you were the kindest boy she had ever met. I grew up on stories of how you used to stand up for her whenever she was bullied by her dorm mates. She even told me of the time she was locked outside of the Ravenclaw Tower in nothing but her underwear."

She was giving him a mischievous smile now and Sirius choked on something between a sob and a laugh as he recalled the memory, making Harry gaze at him curiously.

"It wasn't funny at all."

Catching Harry's expression Luna turned to him. "In Mum's first year the girls of her dorm waited until she was changing one day before pushing her outside of the Tower in her underwear. Distressed and terrified she wasn't able to solve the riddle provided and was forced to stay outside."

Harry couldn't stop the anger that boiled inside of him at the thought of an innocent girl being humiliated like that, especially by her own dorm mates.

"She told me that Sirius found her outside, having come to investigate after hearing rumours of the weird girl having been locked outside the Tower almost naked. After covering her with his outer robes, he broke into the Tower to retrieve her clothes, scolding the ones who had stood by and done nothing," Luna smiled.

"And the ones responsible? Her dorm mates?" Harry asked curiously, pride for a younger godfather washing over him.

"I hexed them and forced them into the crowded corridor before Vanishing their clothes, asking them if they enjoyed being humiliated like that," Sirius admitted, his expression shifting between guilt and anger at the memory.

"He left them standing there and took Mum with him to the Gryffindor Tower. Professor McGonagall and Professor Flitwick tried to get him to return her to her House, but he refused to hand her over until they had solved the distasteful bullying heaped upon her, backed up by James Potter. Even when they threatened with detentions and points loss they refused to back down," her smile widened.

"After that incident no one dared to bully her again, not wanting to gain the wrath of Sirius Black and James Potter."

Harry laughed, "You took her hostage?"

"Not really, she went to class as usual, just not with her own House. Your dad and I refused to let her be bullied like that so we took her with us. It's not like our classes were any different since we were in the same year. And at night she slept with the girls of our year until Professor Flitwick had sorted things out with his Claws," Sirius shrugged. "If there is one thing I hate then it is bullying innocents."

Harry chuckled as Luna nodded fiercely.

"She told me a few stories about your parents too. How your mum was really kind to her and took her in while she was staying at Gryffindor Tower and that other students only had to see your dad to leave her alone."

She looked really proud and Harry smiled at the fondness in her voice, realising just how happy Luna was to be able to meet someone her mother had clearly looked up to.
Sirius laughed. "She didn't know that James used to hex anyone who looked like they were going to be mean to her. Was really sneaky about it though. Your mum used to have the biggest crush on him and he didn't want to encourage her."

Harry blinked. "Dad hexed people sneakily?"

"No, he hexed them openly left, right and centre. He just acted like it was because he was bored and not because he was actually defending Pandora or another unfortunate bullying victim. It made people believe he was an arrogant toe-rag, but he couldn't care less about what other people thought of him," Sirius elaborated before smiling. "Except your mum of course, but she discovered the truth behind his actions in sixth year."

Harry smiled relieved, understanding without Sirius having to tell him that that was why his Mum had started to see his Dad in a different light.

"Mum knew, but she pretended that she didn't. She knew it was a silly crush and how uncomfortable it made him," Luna revealed laughing and Sirius grinned before he stopped as they reached the Ravenclaw Tower, Professor Flitwick arriving from the other side with hurried steps.

"Sirius...what is the urgent matter that you needed me for?"

"I just came across young Luna here and learned that her house-mates have been taking her possessions from her," Sirius handed him the parchment and Professor Flitwick immediately unrolled it, glancing at what was written before frowning.

"Miss Lovegood, how long have you been missing your things?"

Luna shrugged a little.

"Miss Lovegood," Professor Flitwick' squeaky voice held a warning tone as he looked at her with a stern gaze.

"Since the start of the year. They like to hide them but usually leave them somewhere where I can find them when I ask for them at the end of the year. I just needed my Defence book now," Luna's voice was smaller than usual and Harry realised that although she rarely showed it, she was bothered by it.

"And they haven't only taken your things, have they?" Sirius urged her softly on as he placed a hand on her shoulder.

A quick shake of the head was all the answer Luna gave.

"I see. And how long has this been going on?" Professor Flitwick sounded sad as he sighed.

"Since I was sorted," Luna answered truthfully at Sirius' nod.

"This had been going on for four years?!" Professor Flitwick looked outraged. "Why have you not come to me before now?"

"I know that I am odd. It is only natural for people to treat me differently because I am," Luna softly admitted.

"That isn't true Luna. You might be a bit different than others, but that does not give them the right to bully you, call you names or take your possessions away from you. They should treat you with equality, even if they do not understand you," Sirius used his hold on her shoulder to carefully turn
her to him and lifted her chin to make her look him in the eyes.

"No one deserves to be bullied, especially not without a really, really good reason and all other options failing. Is that understood?"

She stared at him in her usual unblinking way for a long moment, her large eyes widening slightly before she slowly nodded.

"Good," Sirius smiled, his expression hardened again as he turned to the entrance. Harry spotted a knocker in the form of an Eagle as Sirius moved closer to it.

"I need to enter," he simply said, surprising both Harry and Luna as the Eagle immediately revealed the entrance, letting Sirius through.

"You don't have to answer a riddle?" Luna asked surprised as they quickly followed him.

"I don't have the patience to answer stupid riddles right now," Sirius answered calmly.

"I more think that the Eagle is terrified you will blow him up again," Professor Flitwick corrected him bemused. "It took us two weeks to repair the damage you inflicted upon it in anger when you broke into the Tower in your first year."

"You blew it up back when Luna's mum was locked out?" Harry asked amazed.

"It got in the way when it refused to open immediately and I refused to waste time trying to figure out a riddle," Sirius confessed before they walked into the Common room where most students were gathered now that it was close to curfew.

Harry hesitated to follow for a moment, but when neither Sirius nor Professor Flitwick told him to stay behind he quickly followed Luna inside.

Upon noticing both Professors, the students immediately rose respectfully.

"Good evening, we shall keep it short so that you can return to your activities," Professor Flitwick said. "Where are Miss Lovegood's possessions hidden?"

Turning his attention from looking around the wide circular room, very different from his own Common Room, Harry turned to see the Ravenclaws reactions.

"Professor, I don't know what you are talking about," Anthony Goldstein, a fifth year Prefect, answered smoothly.

"It would be wise to answer the question truthfully," Sirius spoke softly, but his tone of voice was sharp enough to make most students shift restlessly, though no one spoke up.

"I thought as much. When it comes to bullying, people are always brave in ganging up on a single victim. But when it comes down to admitting their actions, they become a bunch of the greatest cowards there are."

Sirius didn't even try to hide the disgust in his voice.

"Yes, and I am ashamed to learn that it happens in my house once more. I will give all of you one single chance to retrieve what you've taken from Miss Lovegood before I will let Professor Sirius take it back by force and take points from every student involved in the theft," Professor Flitwick frowned. "I don't need to remind any of you that theft is something not tolerated at Hogwarts. And
being caught doing so will have consequences."

More students shifted uncomfortable as they glanced at each other but no one moved and Harry felt a lump form in his throat, being forcefully reminded of his second year when everyone had stood together as one against him, all but a few. It looked like Luna didn't even have those few to stand up for her.

Sirius' expression tightened as he waved his wand and immediately multiple items appeared on the ground before him. Another sweep and several students' hands started glowing brightly yellow.

They tried to hide them immediately but Professor Flitwick's wand had all students' hands forced out before their bodies.

"Let's see...that is twenty-two of you who were involved in the theft so two hundred and twenty-two points from Ravenclaw and the whole House will serve detentions for the upcoming month," Professor Flitwick decided.

"Professor! Why is everyone punished for something only a few did?!" Cho complained about the points lost and the detention given.

"You are all being punished because everyone is involved. It is true that most of you did not take her possessions, but clearly you were aware of what was happening and did nothing to stop it. And don't try to claim you didn't know because absolutely no one of you was surprised when Professor Sirius asked for Miss Lovegood's possessions," Professor Flitwick looked around the group, most of whom looked down at the truth being thrown at them.

Sirius kneeled down to pick up the Defence book Luna had mentioned before, straightening with it in his hand as his gaze went over the group.

"You are all part of the same house, the same family. This means that you stand together as one. One Ravenclaw's actions reflects back to the rest of you. If one of you misbehaves and the others stand by and do nothing about it, then you are all guilty of the act. You single out one of your own because she does not fit the picture you want her to represent. None of you alerted a teacher to what was happening," Sirius handed the book to Luna, who accepted it quietly and held it against her chest.

"And that is why you are all being punished. For your inaction to put a stop to this horrible treatment," Professor Flitwick added softly. "Bullying will not be tolerated in my house. If I ever hear about any of you treating another of your house differently again, there will be severe consequences."

"But Professor Sirius used to bully Professor Snape, too! My father told me about it repeatedly," Anthony huffed.

"What played between Professor Snape and me when we were teenagers is something completely different to this situation," Sirius calmly said.

"How is it different?" Anthony raised his chin defiantly.

"I don't know what you have been told, but Professor Snape has never just been bullied, it came from both sides. But where my friends and I targeted him openly and in public, he acted when our backs were turned and no one could see what he was doing," Sirius' eyes were hard as he held Anthony's gaze.

"Snape made it his priority to try and get us in trouble no matter what we did. He would single one
of our own out and attack him with either a group of Slytherins or dark spells in deserted corridors."

His gaze crossed over the group once more.

"I freely admit that there has been bad blood between Snape and me since the moment we met and I have never tried to work things out with him. But I can proudly say with my head held high that no one of my little group has ever singled him out without being provoked or it being retaliation against previous attacks from him. We might have stood together but we have never, not even once, attacked him together."

"Also, we aimed to change his clothes, throw him into the air or make fun of him while he actively used spells in an attempt to harm us, even once almost killing my best friends with a spell he learned from my relatives and claimed as having invented himself. He singled us out, we retaliated."

"Harry's never retaliated against Malfoy's bullying," Cho spoke up, smiling at Harry but Harry didn't pay her any attention as Sirius spoke again.

"Which most likely makes Harry a better person than me, even if Malfoy never actively sought out to try and kill him like Snape repeatedly tried to do. I have always refused to hold my tongue when people I love were being hurt. And I have always made sure to retaliate harsh in my counteractions to ensure they’d think twice before trying to harm my loved ones again."

"Like you retaliated against Umbridge when you discovered she was hurting Harry?" Luna asked bluntly and Sirius nodded.

"Exactly. And it might sometimes take a few days before I retaliate, but I can solemnly swear that I have never bullied a single person without having been given a very good reason. Now tell me Mister Goldstein, can you give me one very good reason as to why you and the other Ravenclaws have been making Luna's life difficult?"

The blond' left eye twitched underneath Sirius' cold stare before he finally ducked his head and slowly shook his head, speechless at the blunt openness with which Sirius had spoken about his feud with Snape.

"You, as a house, should be proud of Luna for who she is. She is smarter than most of the people in this room, her grades are the highest of her year and she has an open mind. So instead of looking down upon her, you might want to consider learning from her," he turned to Professor Flitwick.

"I'll leave the rest to you."

"Thank you for bringing this to my attention, I am ashamed that you once more had to take action to stop my Claws in their distasteful behaviour. I swear that I will keep a better eye on them and will not allow this situation to continue any longer," Professor Flitwick vowed.

Sirius nodded before he took Luna's bag from her, tapping it once and a single sweep of his wand had all her possessions disappear.

Handing it back to her he gave a nod. "All your possessions are in your trunk now, I've put anti-theft charms on them and your bag. Will you be all right staying here or would you rather come with us?"

"I...yes, I will be fine. Thank you Sirius," Luna smiled softly as she slipped her bag back onto her shoulder.
"Just doing the right thing and repaying a debt at the same time."

"Oh?" Luna looked at him innocently as Sirius smiled mischievously.

"It's not use feigning innocence, I know perfectly well that you knew exactly who I was back then, yet you helped me and never revealed my secret to anyone, keeping me safe."

"What are you talking about?" Harry frowned as Luna blushed.

"Two years ago, when I came to watch you play Quidditch as Padfoot during that storm, I got into trouble with the Dementors as I went after your broom. Luna saved Padfoot, hid him and took care of him in the days that followed."¹

Everyone stared at him in shock as they listened to his words, even Professor Flitwick, though his expression softened as he looked at them.

"How did you know that I knew who you were?" Luna asked curiously.

"You called me Padfoot," Sirius smiled in explanation.

Luna chuckled, understanding the explanation even if no one else did. "I knew you were innocent and definitely not here to kill him like everyone thought. How could I walk away after all you'd done for my Mum? The least I could do was trying to help you when no one would have."

"And I could never properly thank you for it," Sirius smiled warmly. "But I can do something now."

He raised his wand and conjured a wrapped package. "If anything comes up then I want you to use this to contact me or Professor Lupin. You'll know how to use it when you see what it is."

Luna accepted the small package with wide eyes.

"And I do mean anything," Sirius berated her, making her smile. "I meant it Luna, if anyone makes things difficult for you, you tell me. Because no one makes the people I care about miserable without regretting it."

"I will," Luna nodded and Harry had to suppress a smile at the nervous shifting the other Ravenclaws did at the blatant admittance from Sirius that Luna was one of his loved ones.

"Promise?"

"I promise, thank you," Luna readily agreed before she surprised everyone by wrapping her arms around Sirius' waist, hugging him.

Sirius startled before he relaxed and squeezed her shoulder before she let go of him again.

"I...thank you," he smiled before nodding to her.

"Have a nice evening. Professor Flitwick," with a nod to the baffled Professor he placed a hand on the small of Harry's back and directed him out of the Common room with him.

They walked towards Sirius' chambers in silence, both lost in thoughts as they entered and took their shoes off before Harry settled on the couch while Sirius made them some tea.

"You were hurt weren't you?"

"Hmmm?"
"When Luna took care of you. The Dementors had hurt you didn't they?" Harry swallowed.
"Yes," Sirius readily admitted.
"You never gave any indication of knowing her parents or her personally when you hinted to me that I should seek her out, last year," Harry accused with a smile.
"I didn't know how to bring it up."
"But you brought it up now."
"Yes. It seemed fitting to thank her while letting her house mates know just how special she is."
Harry nodded. "How did she know about Padfoot?"
"Luna has a very special ability, one only very few in the Wizarding world have. She can detect things other cannot see. It's kind of how some people are capable of speaking Parseltongue, only few were able to do so."
"Yeah, but I had the ability because of the Horcrux."
"You did, but Luna inherited it from her mother, though hers is a lot stronger than Pandora's ever was. She actually freaked Remus out after her first Defence lesson."
"What happened?" Harry asked bewildered, knowing not much freaked Remus out.
"She walked up to him after class one day and informed him she now understood why his nickname had been Moony."
Harry winced. "That's sure to freak him out, as well as open painful wounds."
"Yes. Remus told me he was beyond horrified. And then she said that she was happy to meet him, but disappointed."
"Why disappointed?"
Sirius shrugged. "Remus knows what she meant and talked to her again after we returned."
Harry glanced at Sirius, knowing he knew more than he let on and debating if he should press for information or not. But even as he made up his mind Luna's earlier words came back to him.
"Mum always spoke very kindly of you. She refused to believe anything they said about you, saying it was outrageous to even suggest that you of all people would join You-Know-Who or betray James Potter."
And suddenly he understood why Luna had been disappointed in Remus. Her mother had believed in his godfather's innocence unconditionally. She had believed in Sirius.
Remus was a lot closer to Sirius than Luna's mother could have ever been. And yet he had lost his faith in his friend, believed the impossible and thought he had betrayed Harry's father.
She had been disappointed that Remus hadn't trusted in their friendship, had betrayed Sirius' trust and let him rot in Azkaban.
Even if there had been nothing he could do for his friend, he could have believed in him, believed in the boy he had known. But where her mother had stood behind Sirius mentally, Remus hadn't
and that was why Luna had been disappointed when meeting him.

"So she knew instinctively who you were because she knew Remus was Moony?" Harry swallowed his intended question, knowing that if he understood Luna's words then Sirius definitely would.

He knew Remus was more than aware that he had betrayed Sirius and the man would never forgive himself for that for as long as he lived, probably even longer.

Especially after learning the distrust had not been mutual as he had originally believed and the Marauder had vowed to never let Sirius down again, even if Sirius seemed to have forgiven him immediately and completely for his lack of believing in his friend.

"I assume so. She'd have known about our nicknames through her mum's stories and seeing Remus and realising what he was she'd have put two and two together and realised the truth. And upon seeing me she'd have linked what she knew with what she was seeing and realised who I was."

"Did her mum know about Moony?"

"No, not as far as I know. But your mum knew about Moony long before she revealed to us that she did, so who knows."

Harry nodded, taking a sip of his tea while peeking up at his godfather shyly.

"Did you like her?"

"Sure, she was nice and not at all stuck up like most Ravenclaws acted."

"No...I mean like, like her," Harry bit his lip.

"Like? Oh! No, she was just a friend. Kind of like a little sister even though she was a few months older than me."

Harry chuckled. "Kind of how you are really protective of Remus and he's older than you, too?"

"Only a month," Sirius protested. "Speaking of liking, Cho was rather eager to speak up for you."

Harry shrugged as Sirius took a sip of tea. "I guess."

"I thought you liked her?" Sirius lowered his cup again.

"I do...I did...it's just..." Harry hesitated to continue.

"Just what?" Sirius asked softly, making Harry realise his godfather already knew what he was going to say.

"I never knew what to talk about when I ran into her. She either started crying after a few words or she kept trying to talk about Cedric."

Sirius nodded. "I've noticed. She was having a lot of trouble coping with his death..."

"That doesn't mean she had to keep trying to get me to talk about him," Harry interrupted him.

"When you are grieving it is usually the one overwhelming thought in your mind. She wanted to know exactly what happened to the person she is grieving about."
"And because I was the only one there she kept asking me. But I didn't want to talk about it to her," Harry bit his lip. He had eventually spoken about it with Sirius during one of their many nightly meetings at Grimmauld Place. And though it had helped him to give it a place, he still had no desire to talk with anyone else about it, least of all Cho.

"I know. And she learned the exact circumstances of his death when seeing that memory just before Christmas. We arranged that she is getting professional help from a specialised Healer now. We contacted her parents to inform them she wasn't coping well at all with what had happened. She was slipping away and no one even noticed why her grades lowered so much."

"Should I have talked to her about it? Harry asked, suddenly feeling guilty that he kept brushing her off.

"No, that is and never has been your responsibility. The school should have provided counselling for those who needed it, but as usual they trusted Dumbledore had arranged everything. But he believed they would be perfectly fine handling everything on their own and left them to rot."

Sirius shook his head in disbelief before he cleared his throat.

"But talking with her has become easier now she knows what happened, right?"

"Not really. I still don't know what to talk about with her outside Quidditch."

Sirius hummed. "What do you like about her?"

"She is pretty and nice. She didn't hate me when my name was pulled out of the Goblet and has always treated me fairly..." Harry trailed off.

"And?" Sirius prompted, making Harry sigh as he knew his godfather once more knew exactly what he was feeling, but wanted him to voice it for himself.

"And I've realised that we just don't have anything in common outside Quidditch. She hates my friends and I dislike hers."

"You might get along with her friends if you get to know them better."

"I know, but I don't want to. All Cho ever makes me feel is ..." Harry paused as he tried to find the right words to explain what he felt.

"Like you are a substitute for Cedric," Sirius provided him with the exact words he'd been looking for.

"Yes."

"Not really a good ground to start dating on, is it?"

"Not really."

"And being able to talk to each other is rather important too if you want to get a relationship that actually works."

"I know. Which is why I know it would never work out. I still like her and she is still a nice girl, but we just don't have enough in common to be more than friends. Besides..." Harry looked up at Sirius with a shy smile.

"Right now I just want to spend as much time as I can with you. There will be plenty of time to
meet someone in the future if they come along."

"You do realise I will still be around even if you do meet someone, right?" Sirius chuckled.

"You better be. Besides, if I get my way then we will be around each other for a very long time."
Sirius cocked his head at him curiously and Harry smiled nervously.

"I've decided on what I want to become. You said that we have to choose the profession we'd like to pursue in fifth year. So I've been giving it a lot of thought."

"And?"

"I want to become a teacher. I liked teaching in the DA and I love assisting you in class now and then. I would like to keep teaching people in the future."

"What changed your mind from becoming an Auror?" Sirius asked, his expression becoming neutral.

"You did, actually. It was kind of the only profession that made sense with Voldemort after me. With the Aurors I'd learn all I could to be able to fight back. But then you came along and taught me that I can learn how to defend myself properly without having to join the Aurors," Harry elaborated at Sirius' confused expression.

"It made me realise that there is no reason for me to become one just to be able to fight back. And with Voldemort gone I've realised that I don't want to fight more just because it might be what people expect of me. I just want to do something that I would like to do."

"And that is teaching?" Sirius asked his expression still completely unreadable.

"Yes. Do you...would you..." Harry trailed off nervously.

"Mind if you follow your own dream? I'm actually relieved and really proud of you. I've never wanted you to become an Auror," Sirius face broke into a brilliant smile and Harry relaxed.

"But you've never tried to stop me!"

"No. Because it was what you wanted and I respected your choice," he chuckled. "I don't want you to fight ever again. Or for you to have such a dangerous job. But if it was what you truly wanted, then who am I to try and stop you from following your dream?"

"My godfather and my guardian. Why have you never told me? I would have..."

"Given up your dream if you knew I wasn't happy with it. Never stop doing what you want to do just because others disagree with your choice. No one has a right to take your dreams from you."

"Mrs. Weasley tries to stop Fred and George from following theirs because she disagrees with theirs."

"Molly Weasley is not exactly an example I'd look at. Everyone can see Bill and Charlie are very happy with their career choices, yet she still complains."

"She is happy with what Percy does."

"Yes, and look how that turned out, he was degraded to message boy and is unhappy," Sirius replied dryly. "No, I want you to do what makes you happy."
"Even if it would turn out to be a mistake?"

"Making mistakes is part of growing up. You learn from them and do things differently from there."

"Like how Divination was a mistake?" Harry laughed.

"Yes. You realised it was a disaster and dropped out to pursue something that you did like."

Harry looked at his godfather for a long moment before he reached forward and squeezed his hand.

"Thank you."

"What for?" Sirius' fingers curled around his automatically, making Harry smile.

"For letting me make my own choices."

"I'd be a horrible hypocrite if I wouldn't," Sirius snorted.

"Because you choose your own path?" Harry asked.

"Yes. But enough serious talk for now. We've got a score to settle I believe, or do you still have homework left?"

"I did most of it earlier this week and only need to put the finishing touch to my Potions essay."

"Which isn't due until Friday. So are you willing to continue our game?"

"Of course. Will Remus join us this time?" Harry rose to clear the table while Sirius moved to the small kitchen to make more tea and grab some snacks.

"He had some paperwork to finish in his office. We can always start over if he wants to join later."

Harry nodded, retrieving the game of Ludo they'd been playing for the last few days, their tokens still in place all over the board.

"One of the first year Hufflepuffs showed me a small book with all kinds of games in it. I wrote down a few of them that seemed interesting to play, we could look into them for a new game to play next week?" Sirius suggested as he returned.

"Sure, it would bring some variation in our gaming evenings. I've always found it odd that the magical world has so very few games where the Muggle world has hundreds," Harry agreed as he settled across from where Sirius usually sat.

"I know. And they are so much fun too," Sirius grinned, placing a filled plate and their cups onto the table.

"I believe it was your turn?" Harry asked as Sirius settled onto the ground as well.

"Isn't it always?" Sirius laughed as he accepted the dice from him and rolled it, signalling a nice evening of gaming.

Chapter End Notes
¹- The events mentioned here can be found in the story An Unexpected Friend.
"Harry!"

The few people already down for breakfast looked up as Fred came bursting into the Great Hall early that Wednesday morning.

"Fred?" Confused Harry looked up, half rising from his seat at the sight of the sweaty, distraught form of the older Weasley twin¹.  

"You've got to come...it's Sirius!"

"What happened?" Harry exclaimed, almost tripping in his haste as he ran towards Fred, who looked beyond terrified.

"I don't know. We saw Remus carry him into the castle. There was blood everywhere."

Harry ignored the sharp intakes of breath from the other students present, several also having risen from their seats at Fred's appearance.

Not wasting his breath on them or ask more questions he followed Fred, running all the way to the hospital wing, ignoring the alarmed students that had to jump aside as they didn't slow down.

George was waiting for them at the entrance, equally as pale as Fred was, and as they came nearer Harry could hear Remus' raised voice as he was yelling at someone.

But throwing the doors open he ignored him as his eyes immediately sought out Sirius and his heart stopped.

There was blood absolutely everywhere. Sirius was covered in it as were the sheets and even the ground around the bed was splattered. The coppery smell of it and the realisation that it was clearly his made Harry nauseous. But he suppressed the urge to throw up and to panic as he forced himself to focus on his godfather instead of the too much blood surrounding him.

His godfather's eyes were closed, though Harry wasn't certain if he was unconscious or not as his expression was pained but he made no indication of having heard Harry arrive as he usually did.

He was paler than the pillow underneath his head and there was a blue tint to his bloodied lips that told Harry the man had difficulties breathing without hearing the pained gasps as he drew shaky breaths.

His eyes caught on the blood soaked clothing again, though Harry realised he couldn't see any visible injuries that could have caused this much blood loss.

Although he wasn't sure if they might have been healed already or were just hidden underneath the clothing clinging to his godfather's slender form.

Madam Pomfrey was leaning over him, her wand waving over his body in rapid complicated patterns and Harry swallowed, forcing his attention from Sirius to Remus to find out what had happened.
He knew the man had taken his Wolfsbane so he wouldn't have attacked Padfoot like this, not willingly at least. It was only then that he noticed Hagrid's presence, too.

"What happened?" he asked as his eyes widened as the sight of Sirius' blood covering Remus' robes.

They had fallen silent as he had slammed the doors open, but now Remus' eyes shot fire.

"Ask this dim-witted fool!" Remus snapped gesturing at Hagrid violently, who looked rather ruffled as if he had just gotten out of bed and was still wearing hideous yellow clothing that probably had to pass for pyjamas.

"Hagrid?" Harry was surprised, Remus rarely got mad and what did Hagrid have to do with Sirius getting this badly injured if he had clearly still been asleep.

"I dunno..." Hagrid muttered but as Remus growled he fell silent again.

"No?! Then I will tell him because of all the stupid, foolish things you've done in your life, this...this ...he could have killed him!"

Remus looked ready to start screaming at Hagrid again so Harry cut him off before he could, wanting to know what had happened as Sirius' shallow and rattled breathing stocked for a moment before continuing again in the same pattern.

"What happened!"

Remus turned back to Harry, shooting Hagrid one last angry look.

"We heard there was something in the Forbidden Forest that was scaring the animals away so we decided to investigate during the full moon. Moony and Padfoot wouldn't call attention to themselves, just two more creatures there. We were just walking around when Padfoot was suddenly plucked from the rock he was standing on. If he hadn't...do you know what plucked him from the ground Harry?"

"N-no," Harry stammered as Remus stared at him, his eyes a weird mix of their usual green and Moony's amber ones in his anger so soon after the transformation.

"A bloody giant! A real, freaking giant! And do you have any guesses as to who brought him here?"

"He don' hurt a fly," Hagrid muttered and Harry felt his stomach sink. Was that why Hagrid looked so beaten up since returning? Had he brought a giant back to Hogwarts from his mission?

"And your mutilated face really backs that up," Remus seemed to share Harry's opinion as he shrieked at Hagrid and his eyes widened even more as his nostrils flared. "He tried to crush Sirius to death!"

"He don' know his own strength'. Completely harmless," Hagrid tried to defend the giant but it was the wrong thing to say to Remus right then.

"I'd say! That thing broke his spine like it was a toothpick!"

"Broke his spine?" Harry choked out as he turned back to Sirius horrified, catching Madam Pomfrey's gaze who gave a silent nod. She was smart enough not to speak up while Remus was this pissed off and didn't stop Harry as he carefully knelt on the bed.
He didn't dare curl his fingers around his godfather's as his eyes fell upon the unnatural position of both the wrist and the arm, but hoped his presence would let his godfather know he was there.

"Oh yes! I could hear bones break when he grabbed him. But that wasn't enough...noooo...he tossed Padfoot into the air. And...and Sirius transformed back mid-air to get a remote chance of defending himself. But the giant was faster and caught him again. Do you know how giants catch things?!

Shaking his head mutely Harry stared at his godfather, still struck with horror that his godfather's spine had been broken before forcing himself to focus back on Remus.

The man's eyes were burning as he breathed heavily and Harry wouldn't be surprised if he was in hysterics, not that he could blame him.

"They slam their hands together. Completely harmless, ey, Hagrid?!"

Hagrid paled as Remus' full anger was returned to him again, but Harry couldn't bring himself to feel sorry for his friend, not this time.

"And you know what I could do, Harry? Absolutely nothing! I bit him with all the strength I could but he didn't even feel it, brushed me off like I was an annoying twig!"

Remus' hands were twitching uncontrollably and Harry had the uncanny feeling he was tempted to strangle the half-giant.

Desperately he tried to think of something to say, anything to prevent Remus from doing something he might regret once he'd calmed down, when a small moan turned everyone's attention to the bed.

The change in Remus was immediate, his entire posture losing the anger he had been radiating, turning it into concern and he was at the bed in a heartbeat. His fingers folded around Sirius' injured right palm carefully as grey eyes blinked rapidly upon opening.

His expression immediately tightened even more as Sirius gasped out in pain, breathing out Remus' name between gasps.

"Shhhh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to upset you," Remus whispered softly as he caressed the sweaty and blood soaked hair out of Sirius' face before brushing the fresh blood from his lower lip and Harry suddenly realised that Remus hadn't just been livid, he'd been absolutely terrified.

Suddenly he could see just how scared Remus had been by what had happened, by how close he had come to losing Sirius.

"He's fine, it didn't follow us, he's on your other side," Remus answered an unspoken question Sirius seemed to have asked, pulling Harry's attention back.

A lump formed in his throat as fingers found his hand and semi-curled around his fingers, forcing a small smile onto his face as pained grey eyes tried to focus on him.

"Hey."

Sirius tried to return the smile but it turned into a pained groan instead as Madam Pomfrey did something with her wand before summoning a potion.

"Take this, love," she ordered softly, easily helping him take it by easing his head up a little.
"What was that?" Harry asked as Sirius' eyes almost immediately closed again.

"Something to properly knock him out. The procedure I am about to use is very painful so it is better if he's not awake for it."

Harry frowned, wanting to ask why she hadn't done that immediately, but a new voice interrupted the question he'd been about to ask.

"How is he?"

Turning a bit, he could see McGonagall stand beside Fred and George and he wondered for a moment how long she had been there.

"I've reattached and healed his spine as it had been fractured in two places. I'm still healing his ribs, which were all broken and healed his punctured lung. The internal bleeding is still being stopped but I need to reset the bones in his arms and legs before I can finish the last of that as there might be pieces of bone stuck in his torn organs," Madam Pomfrey answered her.

"I thought you could mend broken bones in a second," Harry frowned, trying not to dwell on the severity of the injuries his godfather seemed to have.

"Yes, when they are not shattered in forty-five pieces," she replied harshly before softening her tone. "I have to fit the fragments together before I can heal them. His internal organs, ribs and spine were all more urgent to heal as much as I could before he'd regain consciousness."

Harry swallowed to prevent the bile he felt rising from coming up and grimaced.

"Will it be painful?"

"Not while he's knocked out," she sighed. "I have to rearrange the fragments underneath his skin. The slightest wrong movement can have the torn fragments cut through his muscles, vessels and tendons again if I am not extremely careful."

"Why don't you simply re-grow the bones?" Remus asked softly. "You've done it before."

"His bone structure is still so fragile that I cannot be certain I truly Vanish every fragment of the shattered bones. If even one of them remains, it can cause a lot of damage and even more pain. It is more difficult this way, but safer in the end."

"Will he be all right?" Harry rubbed his thumb over Sirius' hand carefully, relieved he'd not be able to feel any pain right now.

"Yes, I believe he will be. Thankfully Remus got him out of the giant's reach and here in time."

"I didn't," Remus admitted. "When he threw him into the air for the third time Buckbeak was suddenly there, catching him before the giant did. I don't know what would have happened if he hadn't shown up. He got Sirius to the ground before attacking the giant, distracting him so that I could pull Sirius away."

He rubbed his free hand over his face tiredly. "I was completely helpless to do anything for him. The only thing I could do was get him the hell out of there. I transformed back halfway to the castle and then ran here."

"A giant threw him into the air?" McGonagall apparently hadn't been there to hear that, her eyes widening in shock as she paled even more.
"Like a ragged doll. And the worst part was that the bloody thing wasn't even an adult and probably just playing," Remus revealed, not noticing her shock at the revelation.

"Playing?" Harry asked numbly, Sirius' injuries didn't look like he had been played with.

"Yes. Giants tear their victims apart. They don't laugh and toss them into the air repeatedly," Remus bit back a sob as he glanced down at Sirius' beaten form.

"The Order fought giants before. Half of them got smashed in the process of fighting one. Your dad's head was almost bashed in and Sirius was pierced against the cave wall by a piece of rock once. And they were the ones who got off lucky," McGonagall explained, pulling out of her shock.

"They were the lucky ones?" George asked incredulous.

"Yes, three others were killed. Giants are overall brutal and violent. What were you thinking to hide one of them so close to a school?" McGonagall turned to Hagrid, putting things together as to how the giant had come to be there.

"He's meh brother," Hagrid admitted quietly, making the others inhale sharply.

"Your...brother?" McGonagall could only stare at Hagrid in shock.

"Well - half-brother," Hagrid admitted. "Me mother took up with another giant when she left me Dad, an' she went an' had Grawp."²

"And you brought him back here. We will be discussing this later," McGonagall promised angrily as she shook her head in despair.

"Yer can' send him back," Hagrid begged her. "He was bein' kicked aroun' by all o' them - I jus' couldn' leave him..."³

"We will see about that, but we are going to have a serious talk about this. Go get dressed and I will meet you in my office in two hours," McGonagall interrupted him, a thunderous expression on her face.

Hagrid sighed with a sharp nod. He glanced back at Sirius one more time before he left with a muttered apology towards Remus, though he was completely ignored.

"There, his bones are rearranged and mended and the internal bleeding completely healed now. Help me remove his sweater," Madam Pomfrey suddenly said, having worked in silence while they spoke. She had cut his torn sweater further open with her wand and Remus and Harry quickly helped her to peel the soaked material from under Sirius' body, tossing the ruined pieces of garment on the ground.

"Is that..." Fred whispered, unable to finish.

"Where his ribs and spine punctured his skin, yes," Madam Pomfrey confirmed as she applied a solution to the horrible looking wounds, causing fresh skin to grow over them almost immediately, making the injuries look several days old.

"Is that Dittany?" Harry recognised the brown liquid from Sirius' Potion Ingredient identification lessons.

Madam Pomfrey nodded as she applied it to several of the deeper cuts, too.
"Are all those from his bones shattering?" McGonagall asked as she eyed the wounds with morbid curiosity.

"He was slammed into a tree once or twice, too," Remus admitted as he removed a small twig from another cut.

"Right," McGonagall nodded, swallowing tightly and a new silence fell as Madam Pomfrey treated the various wounds on his torso.

"Can you turn him onto his stomach so I can take care of the wounds on his back?"

"Won't that cause him more pain?" Harry asked, eyeing the forming bruises on his godfather’s torso.

"Not if Remus holds him half up," she promised him and Remus slipped onto the bed to turn Sirius around, manoeuvring him so that he rested against him in a semi comfortable position and she could still reach his wounds easily.

Immediately she began to apply the Dittany to the various cuts and wounds there, moving around his body to do so. A sharp inhale had Harry glance back and he tensed to see McGonagall and the twins stare at Sirius with identical horrified expressions.

"Merlin," Fred breathed out as he blindly reached for his brother, pulling George closer to him. Both had lost all hints of colour as they stared at Sirius' back and even McGonagall seemed affected by the horrible scars revealed to them.

Remus glanced up sharply as he realised what they were seeing, too, but before he could do anything, the twins abruptly turned their backs on them, clearly belatedly trying to give Sirius some privacy.

Biting his lip Harry was torn between trying to say something to them and keeping his attention on Sirius, the latter winning as Madam Pomfrey had Remus return Sirius to his back.

His attention was caught on a deep wound in Sirius' left side, low enough that half of it hadn't immediately caught their attention and Remus' breathing stocked as his eyes caught it too.

"I..."

"Here. You don't want him to wake up to you looking like that," Madam Pomfrey suddenly trusted a clean robe into Remus' hand, momentarily distracting him.

"I...Sirius..."

"He won't be alone while you change clothes, get into something clean and compose yourself," she sounded horribly stern all of a sudden as she forced Remus towards her office.

"Yes...I..." Remus cleared his throat as he glanced back to the wound.

"Change your clothes, Lupin. Now would be preferable," she ordered again as McGonagall took a sharp breath, having moved closer to see what was going on.

"I'll...yes, let's get you changed shall we?" she suddenly took charge, wrapping an arm around his shoulders and steering him into the office.

Fred and George turned slightly to share a bewildered glance with Harry, who felt as confused as
they did but didn't dare to ask anything as Madam Pomfrey immediately moved into action when the door of her office closed.

"Don't...please don't," she whispered as she cut Sirius' trousers up to examine the wound more closely that had drawn their attention.

Taking a deep breath she probed it carefully, seemingly measuring something before applying Dittany and moving to the other wounds, making quick work of treating them and finally vanishing the blood and cleaning Sirius up before turning to Harry.

"If I lift his arms, can you pull the sleeves over them?"

"Of course," Harry picked up the gown and together they made quick work of dressing Sirius in the gown before lowering him on the bed again.

She checked the wound again before letting out a sob, moving the blanket up to his hips but leaving the wound in view.

Remus returned, leaving McGonagall to dump his ruined robe by Sirius' clothing on the ground, as he hurried to his side.

"Is it healed?" he breathed out.

Madam Pomfrey slowly shook her head. "But don't despair yet, deep wounds can take a bit longer to close so there is still hope."

"What are they talking about?" Fred asked as they joined them again now that the scars were hidden from them again.

"You think you might have bitten him?" George asked as he stared at the wound, figuring it out.

"I might have," Remus breathed out, looking terrified as he bit his lip.

"Everything was happening so fast and I had to get him out in a hurry after Buckbeak arrived. I grabbed him unthinkingly..."

"While you were transformed and he human," Harry suddenly realised what was going on and his breathing stocked as he stared at the wound, suddenly terrified of what they were implying.

"I hurt him," Remus whispered, sounding absolutely positive.

"You can't know that for certain. Is there a way to test it?" Harry asked.

"Dittany can't close werewolf bites because it's dark magic," McGonagall revealed softly as she rested a hand on Remus' shoulder in quiet support.

They fell into silence as they stared at the wound, Harry willing it to close before their eyes, swallowing back tears when nothing happened.

"I turned him," Remus choked out, eyes full of tears. "What have I done?"

"You were trying to save his life," George tried to comfort him.

"For what? To condemn him to hell?" Remus bit out.

"It beats dying right?" Fred backed his brother up.
"No, it doesn't," Remus answered without a moment of hesitation. "That pain, I can't...if he...I rather kill him with my bare hands than force that upon him, not him."

The twins stared at him in shock but Harry looked down at Sirius' sleeping form. Sirius had told him that it would be the best present to be able to take that pain from Remus.

He had thought he understood what his godfather was talking about, but seeing Remus' despair he realised he had no clue about what transforming truly meant, not even after having seen it himself once.

He stared at the wound as he tried to imagine how Sirius would feel when his eyes caught something.

"It's closing," he spoke, snapping five faces towards the wound again.

Madam Pomfrey moved to his side, checking the wound. "It is. Slowly...but it is closing."

"Does that mean he's safe?" Fred asked, even as Remus broke down in relieved sobs, all the tension in his body releasing as he buried his face against Sirius' motionless arm, tightening his hold on his hand.

"Yes, werewolf bites won't heal with Dittany, no matter how much time passes," she breathed out as she leaned against the wall, relieved.

A collective breath was released at her words as the tension disappeared. McGonagall tightened her hold on Remus' shoulder to comfort him and Harry leaned forward to wrap a hand around Remus' wrapped around Sirius' in support.

"Do you think he is still in pain?" Fred asked softly once Remus' sobs had subdued and he was more composed again, brushing the tears away.

"I've given him a pain relieving potion the moment he arrived. He shouldn't be able to feel anything right now," Madam Pomfrey told him as she fussed over Sirius some more now that Remus had straightened again.

"Is there anything we can do to help him?" they asked in unison as Remus' squeezed Harry's hand.

"Not really, but thank you," Remus leaned back a bit, but not enough to break contact with Sirius completely.

"I will inform the necessary classes that Defence and Potions are cancelled for the day. Mr Potter is of course excused from classes today," McGonagall announced suddenly as she placed a hand on Harry's shoulder.

"Thank you Professor," Harry murmured.

"Just stay with him, and Poppy, you will keep me posted, won't you?"

"Of course. There is not much more than I can do for him now. He just needs plenty of rest."

"If rest is all he needs now, I'm sure you wouldn't mind if I brought him to the privacy of our quarters?"

Harry wasn't the only one who had to suppress a smile at those words as it was no secret that both Marauders hated the hospital wing deeply, feeling the open area left them undefended when not at
their strongest. And so Remus' eagerness to get Sirius back to the safety and comfort of their quarters did not come as a surprise to any of them.

"As much as I would like to keep him here, I think it would be better for his recovery if he's somewhere he feels safe. So yes, you can take him back to your quarters. But I will come by to check on him twice a day."

Remus nodded. "I can live with that."

"But how are we going to get him there without everyone seeing and gaping at him?" Harry asked. "Putting him on a stretcher would make him too tall to hide underneath my cloak properly without people walking into it."

Remus looked at him. "I'm a Marauder, leave that to me."

"You are going to create a diversion," George suddenly grinned.

"With your help, yes."

"I shouldn't be hearing this," McGonagall shook her head. To everyone's surprise she leaned down to place a kiss on Sirius' forehead before straightening again, brushing the hair out of his face with a soft smile.

"Take care of him and I'll come by to see how he is later. Mr and Mr Weasley, you are both excused from classes until after lunch," she nodded to them before swiftly leaving the hospital wing, leaving them all stunned.

"Okay...what do you need us to do?"

Leaning close together they listened to Remus' plan before they were on their way to arrange things.

"Are you sure it will work?" Harry asked as they waited.

"Yes. The teachers might immediately know what is happening as we've used it before, but they won't be able to undo it before we've reached our quarters."

"You've used this prank before? How long did it take them to clear things up then?"

"Three days. We had created them a bit more powerful than we meant so they bounced around until they eventually vanished."

"And whose idea was it to have bouncing balls running amok in the castle?" Harry asked interested.

"Your dad's. It was a surprise for Sirius' seventeenth birthday because he loved them so much," Remus smiled at the memory.

"And did he like the surprise?" Harry asked, having no problem picturing his godfather's reaction to the surprise.

"Oh yes, absolutely loved it. Your dad gave him a multicoloured bouncing ball to keep and he played with it all the time."

"Didn't it drive you guys crazy if he played with it all the time?"
"It should have, but Sirius was so happy with it that it was hard to get annoyed."

Hurried footsteps alerted them to the twins' return and as they slipped inside Fred handed Harry his invisibility cloak.

"The second period ends in five minutes. So we should hurry if we want to use that cover to do this," George said as he pulled out his wand.

"Do you all remember the spells?" Remus asked as Madam Pomfrey moved forward to tap him on the head with her wand, his body immediately changing colours as it took on the texture and colours of the bed he had just moved from.

Slipping his wand into his sleeve, he pulled back the blankets and knelt onto the bed to move Sirius' arms to rest on his stomach.

"Keep the blanket around him. He has lost a lot of blood so you should keep him as warm as you can," Madam Pomfrey ordered as she pulled the thickest blanket loose from another bed and tucked it around Sirius.

With a nod Remus carefully lifted the sleeping form into his arms; he manoeuvred him so that his head rested against Remus' shoulder securely.

Madam Pomfrey tucked the blanket underneath Sirius safely once he was secured, "Every time he wakes up he should drink and eat something."

Harry and George threw the invisibility cloak over them, even as Remus nodded, adjusting it quickly to ensure that at least Sirius was completely hidden underneath it as the cloak only reached to just below Remus' knees when he straightened.

"You are too tall to be hidden properly but the Disillusionment Charm works perfectly. If I didn't know exactly where you were then I wouldn't be able to spot you," Harry confirmed satisfied.

"Good, then I will follow you back to our quarters. Are you guys ready?" Remus asked.

The twins raised their wands, quickly casting the spells Remus had taught them earlier.

Handing Harry a bag Madam Pomfrey moved to the door, even as the sound of something bouncing could be heard echoing through the hallways.

"That sure brings back some memories," she suddenly laughed as she peeked around the door before turning serious again. "There are a few pain relieving potions inside. I don't expect him to wake up before dinner, but if he does before I come by then he can have one and then one every three hours after that. I know I said to make sure he eats, but be careful with what it is that you give him. His stomach was torn apart and might be extra sensitive despite being healed so give him something light like lukewarm soup at first."

"It's time," George warned them and Harry slipped the bag onto his back as screams began to fill the hallway.

"I'll remember that, thank you."

Quickly slipping outside, the twins led the way as they hexed the many small yet soft bouncing balls that bounced around to travel in every direction while Harry subtly used his wand to send the ones approaching from behind away from Remus and Sirius.
He walked quickly, the diversion working perfectly as students were either running everywhere or were staring at the hundreds of coloured balls from the safety of doorways in awe.

Fred and George had fallen back, walking a little behind Harry to ensure no wayward student could accidentally run into Remus.

The bouncing balls caused enough chaos and distraction that they made it to the stairway near their destination before someone finally noticed them.

"Fred, George! You caused this, make it stop!" Hermione shrieked and the twins shot Harry a grin as they stopped to face her.

Quickening his pace a little as his ears picked up Remus' footsteps right behind him, Harry used the cover of the bouncing balls to open a hidden passageway.

Waiting until he heard Remus pass him he slipped through as well, closing it behind him.

They continued their journey to their chambers uninterrupted and Harry quickly moved forward to give the password to open the door. And more feeling than hearing Remus pass him he entered too, closing the door behind him.

Dashing forward he opened the bedroom door and pulled back the sheets on the bed before narrowing his eyes on the ground, finding Remus' feet and pulling the cloak off, throwing it over the chair for now.

Remus gently lowered Sirius onto the bed before tapping himself on the head with his wand, cancelling the Disillusionment Charm.

"That went rather well," he breathed relieved as he examined Sirius' bandaged wounds to make sure none had reopened.

"Better than I expected. How is he?"

"Paler than I'm happy with but none of his wounds have reopened."

Placing the bag on the table and emptying the potions out of it to arrange them on the night stand Harry spoke up.

"You should get some sleep. Madam Pomfrey warned that it will probably take hours before he'll wake up and you haven't slept since yesterday. Combined with the transformation you must be exhausted."

"I am," Remus hesitated. "I could have lost him today."

"You didn't."

"But it was close."

Harry turned to Remus but he wasn't looking at him, caressing Sirius' bangs out of his eyes.

"You got him to safety," Harry told him, moving forward to rest a hand on Remus' arm.

Taking a shaky breath Remus gave a watery smile, moving away from him and to the cupboard. "I should go to sleep. Will you be all right if I do?"

"Of course. I still have some homework that I need to do so I'll take the time to finish that and keep
an eye on him," Harry nodded, not forcing the matter, knowing Remus would need time to work through his emotions, something he would need Sirius' support in.

Glancing at Sirius' still form one more time he turned to give Remus privacy as the man pulled his nightclothes out of the cupboard, quickly changing into them as Harry pulled his homework assignments and parchment out, setting everything ready in quick reach so that he didn't have to make unnecessary noise.

"Will you wake me when he wakes up?" Remus asked as he slipped into the bed.

"Of course," Harry nodded, dimming the lights a little so they wouldn't keep Remus awake and would be less painful on his godfather's eyes when he woke up.

"Thanks," Remus muttered, the exhaustion clear in his voice now as he turned onto his side, facing Sirius.

Harry moved his parchment and books around a little until Remus relaxed more, shuffling closer to Sirius to wrap his fingers into the hospital gown sleeve and resting his forehead against the top of his shoulder, quickly drifting off to sleep once he'd done so.

Smiling at his actions Harry waited a few more minutes before moving to the bed to tuck them both in a bit more properly.

Satisfied he returned to the desk where he started his homework while keeping an eye on his family as they slept.

Chapter End Notes

¹: It was officially confirmed by Rowling to a fan that Fred is the older of the twins. One of the very few things I've always agreed on with her as George always felt younger.

²: Line directly taken from OotP chapter 35 Grawp.

³: Line directly taken from OotP chapter 35 Grawp.
A low moan made Harry look up from the book he'd been reading.

"Sirius?"

Eyes widening as light grey eyes slowly fluttered open, he dropped his book on the table and rose to shake the man sleeping on the chair beside the bed.

"Hm?"

"Sirius?" Leaning over the bed Harry smiled as the grey eyes shifted to him almost immediately.

"Harry?" his voice broke over the single word and Remus hurried to grab a glass of water from the night stand, helping him raise his head enough so that he could hold the glass to his lips.

A few sips later Sirius licked his lips and Remus returned the glass to the night stand.

"How are you feeling?"

"Clouded."

They both smiled as he blinked several times to try and clear his mind.

"You've been asleep," Remus informed him softly, leaning forward to caress the fringe out of his face.

"How long?"

"Four days. You've been conscious a few times, but never truly aware," Harry explained at Sirius' confusion.

"What happened?"

Trying to sit up proved to be a challenge as his expression immediately tightened in pain upon moving, but Remus caught him before he could slide down again and gently stuffed a few pillows behind him so he could semi sit up, taking a seat on the bed edge when Harry settled into the chair.

"You were badly injured," he revealed once Sirius seemed to settle without pain.

"Injured?"

"We ran into a giant." Remus tried to jog his memory, but Sirius stared at him blankly.

"You don't remember?" Harry asked softly.

"No..."

"What is the last thing you do remember?"

Sirius was silent for a long moment as he tried to remember.

"We went into the Forbidden Forest because the animals spoke of something disturbing their nests."
"And then?" Remus encouraged him.

"Moony screamed into my mind." Sirius slowly answered, blinking several times as he tried to clear his mind more so they waited to see if he'd continue, which he did after a long moment.

"I couldn't breathe and everything was on fire. Only flashes after that."

"How is the pain now?" Remus asked, accepting the half-memories without probing further.

"My chest hurts," another pause. "As does my leg."

"Nothing else? You can breathe properly?"

Sirius fell silent again as he seemed to catalogue his own feelings.

"Wiggling my toes is rather painful and sets my legs on fire so I assume I hurt my back?"

"You broke your spine in two places," Harry nodded.

"Oh, so a good thing I can wiggle them then."

It was clear that he hadn't meant it jokingly but they both smiled nonetheless.

Remus placed a hand on his forehead to measure his temperature.

"No magic?" Harry asked at the action.

"Magic will tell me his temperature but not if his skin is clammy from cold or fever," Remus explained as he shifted his hand to Sirius' neck.

"I feel fine."

"That is because your fever hasn't broken completely yet. If you didn't have one you'd be freezing."

"So I lost a lot of blood then," Sirius concluded as he merely shifted his head to the side to give Remus better access.

"Most of what was in you. We've been feeding you blood replenishing potions every few hours."

"Oh."

"Yeah, oh," Remus agreed, silence falling as he went to retrieve another blanket while Harry helped Sirius to drink some more water.

"So...four days?"

"Yes. You really scared us. When you wouldn't wake up they were worried you might not make it," Harry confessed as he returned to his chair.

"I'm sorry I worried you."

Sirius raised an arm and Harry smiled as he took his godfather's hand, being careful not to apply pressure to it as he brought their hands down to rest on the bed.

"Just don't do it again," he teased, bringing a small confused smile to his godfather's lips.

"I'll do my best pup," he gasped as he tried to move forward, quickly leaning back again in his
"Does it hurt badly?" Harry asked worried.

"Hmmm, what did we run into again?"

"A giant."

"What's a giant doing...never mind," Sirius sighed. "I guess that is why I vaguely remember Rem yelling at Hagrid."

"He was upset that Grawp tried to turn you into a toothpick."

"Grawp?"

"Hagrid's half-brother," Harry explained.

The look on his godfather's face made Harry bite back a laugh.

"Do I want to know?"

"Not right now. I'm still not sure I shouldn't just strangle him," Remus said as he returned with a thick blanket, which he spread out over Sirius, and a cup of broth. "Right now you should try to eat this, take some potions and rest some more."

"But I've been resting for four...what day is it?!" Shooting up, he cried out as pain flared through him, making him gasp out.

"Easy, you are far from fully healed," Remus carefully pressed him back into the pillows, helping him swallow a pain relieving potion once the pain had subdued.

"Why does everything still hurt so much if four days have passed?" Sirius breathed out as he closed his eyes against the wave of nausea that overwhelmed him.

"Poppy asked a Healer to come by and have a look at you after you didn't wake up when she expected you to. She found some remaining internal bleeding and applied magical internal casts to your arms and legs to keep them in place until they grow stronger again. But your muscles received a massive blow, which is why it hurts right now. And your ribs are still bruised so they'll feel tender for a while longer, too," Remus sighed as Sirius slowly nodded, accepting what he was telling him.

"I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault; I was the one who wanted to investigate. I took you into the Forest with me."

"You couldn't have known there would be a giant there, neither of us could have. It is not your fault and I'm pretty sure I'm only alive because you got me out of there," Sirius tried to comfort him, reaching out to take his hand.

"Buckbeak was the one who got you away from him," Remus admitted, entangling their hands together.

"A combined effort then. Is he all right?"

"Yeah, Minerva had Hagrid ensure that he'd gotten out safely. Your friend is fine, not a scratch on him," Remus assured him as he lifted the cup up again.
"Good," Sirius smiled before allowing Remus to help him drink the rest of the broth and leaned back more heavily into the pillows once he'd been fed several potions.

"So, what day is it?"

Rolling his eyes Remus smiled. "I think there are more important things to worry about than the date, Siri."

"Not when it is the day I think it is."

"It is," Remus finally gave in.

"Happy birthday then. Harry, would you retrieve his present? It is in your bedroom, bottom shelf of your closet. Watch out because it's big and very heavy."

"Why there?" Harry asked confused as he rose from the chair.

Sirius shrugged a little before immediately deciding it was a bad idea as he winced. "He never comes there."

"You shouldn't be worrying about presents, I'd rather have you get well again," Remus sighed as Harry left the room.

"But it's your birthday."

"So?"

Sirius only looked at him blankly until Remus sighed again.

"The only thing I wanted was for you to wake up; I already have all I wanted."

Sirius sighed, using the light grip Remus had on his hand to try and pull him onto the bed, something Remus made easier for him by moving to sit on the bed immediately.

"I'm sorry I worried you."

Harry stopped just outside of the door on his way back, keeping his distance as his ears caught the silent admittance Remus replied with.

"I thought I had bitten you in my hurry to get you out of there."

"If you had then it would have been an accident," Sirius spoke firmly, but Remus shook his head.

"I could have condemned you to...to..." he trailed off as a sob escaped him.

"Maybe, but I don't think that is the worst fate in the world if it meant you'd be safe," Sirius softly said.

"How can you say that after all you've seen," Remus bit out.

"Exactly because of everything I've seen I can say that. I knew the possibilities of being turned when I changed back."

"What?" Remus stared at him with wide eyes.

"I don't remember a whole lot of it, but I do remember being attacked by something and I also
remember the risk I was taking when transforming back."

"I could have bitten you, turned you into...into..."

"A werewolf. Yes, I know. But that was better than the alternative."

"What alternative?" Remus whispered.

"Most creatures are naturally attracted to attacking humans before other animals. If I had remained Padfoot it would have become bored quickly and just taken me out before attacking you..." Sirius swallowed as Remus' expression turned horrified as he realised the truth.

"You turned back so that his attention would remain on you, ignoring me. Why," Remus choked out.

"I knew the moment that I was plucked from the ground that there was little to no chance for me to get out of there alive. Not with the ease I was tossed into the air. But I could give you a chance if I'd manage to keep whatever it was distracted. And if by some miracle you might have been able to get me out of there, too, then I was willing to take the risk of being bitten if it meant you would have a better chance."

"Don't you ever think like that again," Remus choked out before he leaned forward to pull Sirius into a hug.

"If anything happens to you...if you...I can't lose you again...I can't...," he trailed off as he shook with sobs, unable to finish his sentence and Sirius wrapped his arms around him in return, pulling him close.

"I'm sorry," Sirius repeated softly. "But I would do it again in a heartbeat if it meant you'd stand a chance at surviving and taking care of Harry."

Harry took a deep breath, leaning back against the wall just outside of the door as the older man broke down completely in Sirius' arms.

The idea that he could have bitten him had devastated him, the relief he'd felt upon learning he hadn't, had been enough evidence of that.

But even though he had said he would have rather let Sirius die than having turned him, Harry would never forget the moment Madam Pomfrey had hurried to retrieve a Healer as Sirius failed to wake up that night.

The knowledge that Sirius was dying, that he was bleeding internally and at death's door had changed something in Remus and he'd become distant and tense.

Harry had realised back in the hospital wing that Remus had been terrified to lose Sirius as he had lashed out at Hagrid. But even he hadn't realised just how deeply Remus loved his godfather, even if it wasn't sexual like most of the students were convinced off.

And suddenly he had no qualms about what would happen to Remus if Sirius had died, if his godfather hadn't made it, Remus wouldn't have had the will to go on and quickly follow him in death, no matter Sirius' thoughts or wishes on the matter.

He swallowed thickly at that realisation as Remus continued to sob in Sirius' arms, his entire body shaking with emotion as he poured his heart out of all the fear that had tightened their hold on him during the time Sirius had been unconscious.
Taking another deep breath he moved away from the door, deciding on taking a shower to give the two a bit of time alone so that Remus could put himself together again without feeling embarrassed.

After an extra long shower he made his way back to the bedroom, glancing inside before entering.

"Hey," Sirius greeted him quietly with a tired smile, clearly having waited for him.

"Is he asleep?" Harry whispered as he took a seat on the chair again, placing the present he'd retrieved on the nightstand with the help of magic, as it had indeed been extremely heavy.

"Out like a light," Sirius smiled, "come here."

"I don't want to disturb him," Harry softly said, glancing at Remus, who was curled up at Sirius' left side, his head resting against his shoulder as Sirius had slid down into a lying position again while he'd been away. One of his hands wrapped around Sirius' and the other rested lightly on his stomach as if to assure himself of the breaths being taken.

"Just come here."

Harry hesitated before moving onto the bed on Sirius' other side and carefully leaning against his shoulder too, trapping his godfather's arm between their bodies.

"Is the pain better now?" he asked as Sirius tangled their fingers together.

"A lot, I'm mostly numb right now and just tired," he admitted.

"Why don't you try to sleep some then?"

Sirius smiled, moving his head to press a kiss against Harry's forehead before lifting Harry's hand onto his stomach, placing all three of their hands together.

He used his newly freed hand to effortlessly take Harry's glasses off, then wiggling it underneath Harry's side, making him chuckle.

"Are you comfortable?" Sirius asked as Harry shifted deeper into Sirius' embrace, giving up on not trying to put pressure on the arm underneath him as Sirius stubbornly pulled him closer.

He nodded, taking a deep breath, as he settled in his godfather's gentle embrace.

He hadn't been aware of just how tense he himself had been until he felt himself relax in his guardian's embrace, carefully shifting even closer until he was pressed against his godfather's side.

"Try to sleep a little," Sirius whispered breath ghosting through Harry's hair as his thumb caressed his lower back slowly.

The repetitive movement relaxed him even further and he felt his eyes close as he was burrowed in his godfather's warm scent, safe in the knowledge of whose arm was around him. And though he was aware that it had to hurt him, he couldn't bring himself to move out of the warm and loving embrace again.

"I love you," he murmured as the stress of the last few days caught up to him, a few silent tears escaping slowly.

"I love you too, pup," Sirius whispered, tightening his hold, letting Harry realise his godfather had known exactly that this was what he had needed, but hadn't had the chance to give him the comfort
before as Harry himself had kept his distance, afraid to hurt him.

"I'm sorry I worried you," he whispered back, letting his godfather comfort him as he knew his behaviour had to have worried him.

"Just don't do it again," Sirius' breathy laugh made Harry smile as his own words were returned to him and he curled his free arm between their bodies to let it rest against his godfather's side, aware that slipping it underneath Sirius would hurt the tender spine more than he'd be able to ignore for the sake of comforting him.

They fell into a comfortable silence as they both drifted off, joining Remus in a comfortable healing sleep.
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

This is one of the two chapters that inspired me to write this story and my personal favourite, hope you’ll enjoy it!

The fifth year Gryffindors looked up expectantly when the Defence classroom door opened, only to be disappointed when it was Remus who entered instead of Sirius that following Thursday, Harry following close behind him.

"Professor Lupin?" Lavender asked, a question in her voice.

"Good morning class, he's at St Mungo's right now for a check-up and if everything is well he'll return to teach tomorrow," Remus smiled in understanding as Harry quickly took his seat beside Neville.

A collective cheer echoed through the class as most students relaxed.

Everyone had heard about what had happened after Professor McGonagall had called for attention during dinner the evening of the events and they had all been supportive and worried about their professor in the days following.

"If I didn't know any better I'd say you guys really can't wait to get rid of me," Remus noted amused.

"We just want to see for ourselves that he's all right, Professor," Lavender hurriedly explained. "He hasn't been seen since it happened!"

"He's gone to St Mungo's alone?" Dean suddenly exclaimed in disbelief, waving Lavender off.

Remus smiled at his scandalised expression. "No, Professor McGonagall went with him."

Breathing out reassured Dean nodded, warming Harry's heart at the obvious care for his godfather displayed by his classmates.

"And how are you today, Sir?" Seamus asked as Remus leaned against the desk, unintentionally copying Sirius' usual behaviour.

"Better, but not entirely myself yet, so, seeing the good news I thought it would be appropriate to bail on the lesson plan and play a game."

"What kind of game?" Seamus asked curiously.

"We can't just bail on the lesson plan! We need to use every possible hour to try and catch up on what we need to learn," Hermione complained, breaking the relaxed atmosphere.

"Contrary to what you believe we are already caught up, Miss Granger," Remus' lips thinned as he pressed them together in an effort to remain calm, something that was becoming harder every time he had to deal with her.
He had adopted the way Sirius referred to her, the familiarity of her given name out of every conversation they had as he too had begun to create a distance between them, fed up with the way she was treating Sirius.

"We couldn't possibly be caught up already. Sirius barely taught us anything. I've worked through some old exams and he's hardly taught us anything of what's in there," she argued, either not noticing or caring that she was wearing his patience thin.

"He had no need to. Harry's tutored everyone in this class, teaching you all that you needed to know for this year," Remus admitted.

"You know about the DA?" Parvati asked surprised.

"Of course. Professor Sirius and I have lived together since before last summer, and even longer before his arrest. He's actually taught Harry several spells during the summer break that Harry in turn taught in the DA and they discussed teaching methods and what best to teach through their letters."

"Harry never received letters from Sirius, I would have known if he did," Hermione interrupted him.

"It's Professor Sirius and owl post is not the only way to communicate for a Marauder," came back the cryptic answer as Remus frowned at her. "Are you going to keep arguing with me or can I get on with today's class?"

Dean and Neville snorted in amusement at his blunt question but Hermione only glared at them.

"Harry couldn't possibly have taught us everything we need to know this year. We've never been told to get new books and we never go over new things. We only revise old material! How can we learn if we don't have books?"

"You are being taught what you need, to get an understanding of what you've learned so far and will need to pass your OWL," Remus' frown deepened.

"As for the book, only the first and second years were requested to buy a new book. Hogwarts wrote to everyone else's guardians to inform them their children needed to bring the book prescribed two years ago when I was originally teaching. It worked fine for every year as it is only used for research as you can't learn everything from books."

He leaned back against the desk.

"What we are teaching you here is not the standard textbook way, true. But we've found that our way of teaching brings much better results and lets the students absorb the information given much easier. We teach you the practical in class and set the homework in such a way that it will provide you with the necessary information needed without it becoming too boring."

"But your way will not teach us what we need to know!" Hermione bristled at his words. "You are just as bad as Sirius is...we need to..."

"If that is what you believe then there is the door," Remus interrupted her calmly.

"What?" Hermione blinked surprised as Remus swiftly moved to the door and opened it.

"Go on, since you believe that Professor Sirius and I are such horrible teachers then you are no longer welcome in our classes."
"You can't just kick me out!"

"Professor Sirius believed you might change your rude and disrespectful behaviour if he just threw you out of class often enough and although he set an ultimatum for the end of the month, I will not wait for that. You fail to listen to anything I've said so far and have always refused to participate in the classes we've set. So I draw the line early. I will not have one misbehaving and disrespectful student continue to disrupt our classes."

"I only want what's best! I know what we need to learn and we're not learning anything from Sirius!"

"You are a sixteen year old girl who has absolutely no idea of what needs to be done. You believe that you know everything, but the truth is that you know nothing at all. You don't know what level your classmates are at and you know nothing about what you have and haven't learned from him because you've let yourself be removed from this class more often than not. The truth is that you are the only one who is behind, with perhaps the exception of Draco Malfoy, because you refuse to even give him a chance to teach you. And I've had enough."

Remus waved his wand and all of Hermione's books packed themselves again.

"From this day forward, you, Hermione Granger, are no longer welcome to any of the classes given by Professor Sirius or me. Your name will be removed from the lesson plans and your Head of House will be notified. You are to report to the Deputy Headmistress, who will notify your parents of your removal from our classes," Remus said, his voice loud and clear in the deadly silent classroom.

Hermione gaped at him. "But that's three classes!"

"You can either leave on your own right now or I will use force to kick you out," Remus told her shortly as she made no move to leave.

"You can't kick me out of three classes; Sirius teaches two of those, you are only substituting..."

"We share our classroom, Miss Granger. Maybe the new Potions and History teachers will accept you back in April, but right now I am entirely entitled to kick you out. Professor Sirius set an ultimatum but I do not have half the patience he has to wait until the end of March to see if you'll change your ways. You have been disrespectful, rude and disobedient since the start and I am sick of your behaviour. Do not let me become angry by continuing to test what little remains of my patience. We both know I am not a nice person when I'm angry."

Hermione spluttered.

"I can behave...I won't...I'll..."

"You should have thought of that before I kicked you out. The banishment stands. Now get out of my classroom," Remus interrupted her sharply.

Her lower lip trembled as she seemed to realise that Remus was deadly serious. She glanced at Harry and Ron pleadingly as she slipped from her seat. But Ron was avoiding her gaze while Harry shook his head, showing her that she had brought it upon herself.

"Now, Miss Granger."

Flinching Hermione quickly left the class, almost running in her haste to get away, Remus closing the door behind her with a sigh.
"I'm sorry," he said as he looked directly at Harry.

"You didn't do anything wrong. Everything you said is true; she has been disrespecting and rude to Sirius since the start. He's given her enough leeway in the past because she's helped save his life and knows her obsession with studying. But we've all seen this coming," Harry said softly.

"Too much leeway, I always thought that he gave her chance after chance because she is your friend. But if she's helped save his life then it is easier to understand why he's been trying to give her some slack," Dean spoke up.

"How did she help save his life?" Parvati asked.

"In third year Hermione and I helped Sirius get away after he was captured here at Hogwarts," Harry told her honestly. "She possessed something that allowed us to rescue him from being wrongfully Kissed by Dementors and helped him flee."

"That still doesn't give her the right to act like she has been acting," Neville frowned.

"It isn't fair that the professor treated her differently from the rest of us because of that," Parvati said.

"He didn't treat her differently; he just gave her chances where she shouldn't have gotten any. We don't know if he'd treat us differently because we aren't disrespectful towards him," Lavender disagreed.

"Yeah, he's been strict with her whenever she was disobedient. He just let her return again the next class...did you really kick her out for good, Professor?" Dean asked, directing the last bit to Remus.

"Yes, what I said officially removed her from the class list. She won't be able to return this year, at least not to Defence. Professor Sirius might decide to allow her to join again for NEWT class if she successfully gets her OWL for Defence."

"She can get an OWL for Defence despite being kicked out?" Parvati wondered.

"Theoretically she can. You don't have to sit in a class to be able to receive an OWL for it."

"I'm taking the Arithmancy and Ancient Runes OWL's without ever having followed a class for it," Harry revealed.

"But how did you learn everything you need to know?" Ron asked curiously, only now learning of Harry's extra subjects.

"In Harry's case his guardian is teaching him privately but I received my NEWT for Potions only because my friends taught me what I needed to know after I dropped it after Fifth year."

Dean stared at him in shock for a moment before grinning. "So I can drop out of Potions if I don't like the new teacher and still go for my OWL?"

"Theoretically you can, if you've received permission from both your guardians and Head of House with a good reason to drop out."

"But Harry and Neville dropped out of Divination without a good reason!" Ron complained.

"Yes, because Trelawney is absolutely mental," Harry shot back. "And Sirius thinks dropping Divination is always a good reason in itself because the whole subject is stupid."
"And since Gran put me under Professor Sirius' guidance while at school, he pulled me out of there at the same time," Neville said happily.

"Lucky gits," Dean muttered good-naturedly and they both grinned at him.

"But I thought we were going to play a game?" he continued with a grin to Remus.

"Yes. It will have to be in line with this class, so how about a game of Tickling tag?" Remus proposed.

"Tickling tag? What is that?" Dean asked confused.

"It is just like a regular game of tag, only in Tickling tag you are supposed to avoid low levelled Tickling hexes and if you are hit, you have to try and get free of the hex, or be rescued by someone who hasn't been hit."

"I've never heard of that game," Lavender admitted.

"That is because it is a game my friends invented in our third year, both to entertain us when we were restless and help us practice our spells."

"How is it played, Professor?" Dean asked as they moved the tables away and piled them against the wall with their wands, having learned the spell from Sirius after their second time clearing the room of any furniture.

"Because it is such a small group there will be one Tickler, the rest of you are Targets. The Tickler tries to hit every Target with enough Tickling Hexes to get them down while the Targets run around; using protective spells to try and deflect the hexes. But they have to protect themselves without firing spells back at the Tickler," Remus explained as he moved the teacher's desk aside too, shrinking everything to give them even more space.

"Every game lasts five minutes and if the Tickler has everyone down in laughter he wins. If one or more Targets are still standing, the Targets win. After five minutes we take a small break to catch our breath and switch Ticklers."

"Can we deflect the hexes to other Targets?" Dean asked.

"If you wish then you can use that tactic, but remember that the Tickler wins if all Targets are down. All right, are you all..." Remus trailed off as there was a knock on the door.

"Yes?"

"Good morning class, Remus. I am here to collect Mister Longbottom," McGonagall greeted them, raising an eyebrow at the class' set-up.

"We are about to play Tickling Tag," Remus explained, making McGonagall frown for a moment before her face lit up as she realised what he meant.

"Ah, I remember when Sirius and James would play that with you and Peter to help practice your defensive spells and response time. I do hope you will confine the playing area to this classroom and not start a castle-wide tickling war again?"

"That was purely accidental. I couldn't have known Sirius would duck instead of deflecting my hex," Remus protested.
"I'm fairly sure Mister Fenwick disagreed on it being accidental," McGonagall replied dryly.

"Benjy certainly didn't seem to mind being pulled away from Dorcas Meadowes with how quick he was to counter-attack," Remus snorted.

"Sirius is back at our chambers?"

"No, he's still at St Mungo's. He wanted to visit someone," McGonagall caught his eye and Remus took a deep breath.

"I see. You said you were here to collect Neville?"

"Yes, if he could come with me. Mister Potter, would you be as kind to return Mister Longbottom's school supplies to your dorm? It is unlikely that he will return for the rest of the classes."

"Of course," Harry said as Neville shot him a nervous smile before following McGonagall out of the door.

"What's going on, Professor?" Neville asked as he followed her down the hallway.

"Nothing bad, I promise you. Professor Sirius has just been his usual stubborn self again and has decided that it is time to involve you."

"Involve me?" Neville asked confused, wondering what on earth the professor could have done that would involve him.

His mind tried to think of anything but when they reached her office he was forced to admit he was coming up empty-handed.

McGonagall didn't walk to her desk but moved on to the fireplace, picking up the box of Floo powder standing on the hearth.

"We will travel to St Mungo's," she explained at his confusion. "You will learn more there."

"Okay," he accepted as he took a handful of Floo Powder and travelled through, thinking that he might even be able to sneak away to greet his parents for a moment.

Stepping out of the fireplace he moved out of the way to give Professor McGonagall room to arrive.

"Follow me," she ordered.

"Where are we going, Professor?" he eventually asked as they bypassed the Welcome Witch without pausing.

"You will see," she replied shortly and Neville bit his lip as they reached the fourth floor, only to widen his eyes at the sight of his grandmother standing there.

"Gran?"

She turned to him, tears shining in her eyes and Neville quickly moved to her, forgetting all about Professor McGonagall.

"Gran? Are you...what are you doing here?" Neville asked, heart clenching at the sight of her tears.

"I'm visiting your parents. Will you join me? Thank you, Minerva," his gran nodded to Professor McGonagall.
McGonagall, who returned her nod.

Neville swallowed. "Why are we going to Mum and Dad? Are they all right? Did something happen?"

He didn't wait for his grandmother to answer and immediately rushed forward to force the door to the Janus Thickey Ward open, not caring that he was technically illegally using his wand to do so, and ignoring his grandmother calling out to him he ran to where his parent's beds were.

Only to find both beds empty.

"Where are they?!" his heart clenched as the Healer, Miriam Strout, quickly moved to him.

"Neville..."

"No! Where are my parents?"

"Not here..." Miriam tried to calm him down.

"Not...where are they! Are they hurt?"

"Your parents are perfectly fine, Neville," his grandmother interrupted him and Neville turned to her.

"Then where are they?"

"They've been moved, if you just follow me," she turned around.

"Moved? Why would they be moved? They haven't been moved in fifteen years, where are they?"

"They are at the normal ward for now...Neville!"

Neville didn't wait to listen to what else she might have to say as he dashed away again, only pausing long enough to ensure that he closed the door to the closed ward properly before running to the other ward and pulling the door open.

He glanced around at the various beds before his eyes fell on the table in the middle of the ward, where Professor Sirius was sitting with his parents.

Letting out a relieved breath he slowed and gazed at his parents confused.

His mother was moving something around on the table, her gaze on the Professor. But when he came near she suddenly looked up to him and his breath caught.

She wasn't just looking towards him; she was actually seeing him, clearly recognising him as she smiled.

"M-mum?" he whispered confused as she rose from her seat.

"N...Nev..." his mother's lips formed the first segment of his name in a croaky and hoarse whisper, but it was the most beautiful sound Neville had ever heard.

Tears shot into his eyes as he realised that not only had his mother just tried to speak for the first time in his life that he could remember, she had recognised him. Actually recognised exactly who he was.
She slowly shuffled towards him, her eyes shining with tears as they never wavered from his face, never losing their recognition and by Merlin, she was actually recognising him!

In his shock it took a moment before he realised thin arms were slipping around him, making his vision explode in tears as he realised his mother was hugging him.

His parents never initiated any physical contact. And why would they do so with someone they didn't even know?

But here his mother was, clearly knowing who he was and pulling him into a hug.

With a choked sob he carefully wrapped his arms around her thin frame, terrified that this would just be a dream and he'd wake up if he dared to hold her tighter.

His mind exploded. What had happened? What had made his mother, who was so completely lost to the world after the horrible torture she had endured, suddenly able to recognise him, to say his name?

"Professor Sirius has just been his usual stubborn self"

Swallowing he hesitantly held his mother tighter, burying his nose into her neck, inhaling her scent deeply and feeling her silky soft hair.

Had they just given her a shower, he irrelevantly wondered as thoughts flashed though his mind.

Professor McGonagall had said Professor Sirius had just been his usual stubborn self. Had he done something? Had he managed to do something that no Healer had ever been able to do?

Sensing a movement on his right he blinked away the tears he hadn't been aware he was shedding to look up straight at his father, less than an arm's length away.

"Dad?" Neville whispered even as he tightened his hold on his mother, unwilling to let her go.

Clear eyes looked back into his without hesitation and a lopsided smile formed on his father's lips.

"Son," his voice held the same horrible crack as his mother's had, but that one word, spoken by his father, formed a lump in his throat and new tears rapidly fell down as he choked.

Warm arms wrapped around him, pulling him into a thin but firm body without dislodging his mother from him and Neville helplessly sobbed into his father's shoulder.

He slipped one arm from around his mother's frame to tighten it in the fabric of his father's hospital gown, twisting the material into his fist as his father tightened his hold.

He had no idea how long he stood there like that, in his parent's embrace for the first time since he could remember, until his mother pulled back slightly to touch his cheek.

"M-my Neville," her eyes shone, even as tears still slid down her cheeks.

Carefully Neville brushed them away with his fingers, laughing and crying at the same time as he did.

"Mum...Dad."

"Neville," his father answered him with a big smile.
"How?" Neville asked, slightly turning to glance at his grandmother, who was openly crying and Professor Sirius, who was softly patting her shoulder with bright eyes.

"I should go, let you catch up..." he softly spoke up.

"Don't you dare," his grandmother bit at him before she choked on another sob. "This...this is your doing...my son...you should...I want you to stay."

"I really shouldn't..." the professor objected.

"Siri," Neville turned his gaze back to his mother, surprised. She was smiling warmly at the professor and reached out with a hand. "Stay."

"Alice..." automatically he took her hand.

"Stay," she repeated, more firmly now and the professor sighed as she squeezed it.

"All right, shall we sit down then?" he asked.

Neville nodded, his mother slipping a hand into his and squeezing lightly while his father's fingers curled around his arm.

They sat down, Neville between his parents, refusing to be separated from them as he sorted through the million questions in his mind while continuing to stare at them.

"How did this happen?" he eventually settled on the easiest question.

"I approached your grandmother shortly after we first met, asking her permission to conduct an experiment with your parents. After discussing my plans she consented and I've been working with them twice a week ever since."

"This is the result of an experiment? What did you do?"

"I used a combination of Legilimency and Occlumency," Sirius answered. "I entered your parents' mind to find out exactly what was going on in there and try to find the problem to fix it."

"If it was that simple then why has no one ever..." Neville started, but was interrupted by Healer Miriam Strout, who had clearly followed them.

"No Healer would ever dare to attempt doing what Lord Black has done."

"Why not?" Neville asked as his father squeezed his hand.

"When a person uses Legilimency, they form a connection with the other person. The sort of connection needed to enter the mind of a mentally unstable person would mean completely opening yourself up to the terrors the patient has seen," she shuddered. "You would see everything they have seen, feel everything like it is happening to yourself right that instance."

"In your parent's case, the one undertaking such a connection would be undergoing the same torture, the same levels of pain that your parents experienced."

"I'm not afraid to experience pain if it means I have the chance to do the right thing," Professor Sirius said. "Frank and Alice are my friends; I wasn't just going to leave them like this just because it might hurt."

"You risked to lose your mind by breaching theirs the way that you did. That terror, it should have
driven you insane to experience their pain," Miriam berated him but the professor only shrugged.

"And you didn't even do it once. You entered two separate minds that have been through similar trauma repeatedly. I don't understand how you've come out unharmed."

"I used Occlumency to shield myself against their experience. It is tricky to use both at the same time, but if there is anything my relatives taught me, it's cunningness."

"And...It worked?" Neville asked, distracted as his mother brushed her hand over his cheek and he smiled at her.

"To a certain extent, yes."

"You could have destroyed your own mind! You should have," Miriam sounded disbelieving but as Neville stared at his teacher he knew that if there was one person who'd be able to successfully pull it off, it would be the man sitting across of him.

"You experienced what they've gone through?" he asked softly.

The Professor only shrugged, reminding Neville of the rumours that he'd heard about the man and his time in Azkaban. It wasn't unrealistic to believe that the man had gone through similar pain, only to come out with his mind intact despite the duration by which he had to have been tortured. Somehow his teacher had managed to keep his sanity and survive through years of torment and hell, only to willingly go through a whole lot more pain in an attempt to help his parents.

"And what did you do while in their minds?" Neville asked interested, his heart burning in awe for this amazing man.

"The mind isn't an open book. There are multiple layers there...compare it to a book or dungeon. There are many memories; most are sorted into different rooms. A room filled with memories of family, one with friends and school stuff, you get the general idea right?"

Neville nodded.

"The experience that your parents went through was so overwhelming that it crashed through every layer in their mind, damaging the structure and paralysing their minds. I merely reconstructed the layers in their minds."

"Locking their memories back into each room?" Neville asked as he understood what the Professor was trying to tell him.

"Sort of. I locked all of their memories into a single room and closed the door, locking it. It gave them the chance to rebuild their structure and reset their different rooms. Once they had done that I've begun to pull out one memory at a time, letting them catalogue everything again slowly."

"But wouldn't that just drive them into insanity all over again if you gave them back the memories of being tortured?" Neville asked confused, gripping his mother's hand tighter.

"If I had given the memory to them completely in one go it probably would have. But I broke it into a large puzzle and gave them a small piece at a time, letting them handle the one memory of pain before giving them several good and comforting memories, letting them know they were safe."

"Giving them a chance to give it a place in their structure without being overwhelmed," his grandmother concluded with a warm smile, her eyes never leaving her son, who was still sitting
with an arm wrapped around Neville.

Leaning into his father Neville frowned.

"What happens now? Why wasn't I informed until now?"

"I asked her not to tell you until I could see permanent results. I didn't want to get your hopes up, only to have them torn down if I'd fail," he admitted.

"And these are permanent results?" Neville asked.

"Yes. They've been asking for you for two weeks now, since the moment they were given the last piece," the Professor nodded.

"Don't be mistaken, they still have a long way to go. They will be plagued by nightmares now and then and will need a lot of care..."

"But?" Neville asked, his heart slamming in his throat.

"But I think that with time and both physical and speech therapy, counselling and guidance they will regain their sense of normality," Sirius said softly after a nod from Miriam.

"Meaning?" Neville asked as he tightened his hold on his parents.

"Meaning that if they continue to improve as they are doing now, you will be able to truly get to know your parents," Sirius smiled. "Converse with them normally and perhaps even play board games with them. It will be slow steps, but it will be steps forward."

"I don't know how to thank you," Neville swallowed, trying to keep his tears in check as they threatened to overwhelm him again.

"They should never have been left like this. I can't turn back time and undo what has been done," he sighed. "Your parents will always carry a mental scar of what they've gone through, as do you. But at least they have a chance now and you will have a chance to get to know the wonderful people that your parents truly are."

"Why...why would you go through so much trouble for us?" Neville whispered.

"Every child deserves a chance to get to know their parents. I will never be able to give my godson the chance to meet his, but I could try to give you your chance," the professor softly admitted and Neville felt his heart burst in gratitude, remembering that Harry's parents were this man's family and he'd lost them. But despite losing those he'd loved he'd done this for Neville.

"You gave me so much. You've shown me so many memories of my parents, told me stories about them. You've let me get to know them as they truly were, not how others saw them. And now, now you've given me my parents back. I..." Neville choked out, unable to stop himself from bursting into tears once more as he felt two sets of arms wrap around him again in comfort.

"Don't thank me for doing the right thing," Sirius smiled. "I should get back to Hogwarts before Harry and Remus become worried about what's keeping me."

Neville nodded through his tears. "Professor..."

"Siri, Neville," his mother happily smiled, making them both chuckle.

"Your mum is right, how many times do I have to keep telling you to call me Sirius?"
"Probably a few times more. Pr...Sirius...thank you."

"Give those two a big hug from me, too. I'd do it myself, but I think they'll be occupied by smothering you for the next few days," he teased gently.

Neville grinned before his eyes widened.

"What about school?"

"I'm excusing you from following classes until Sunday. I don't want to see you back before then," Sirius smiled as he nodded to Neville's grandmother.

"You can do that?" Neville asked, surprised when Sirius turned to him again.

"As your new upcoming Head of House, I am giving you permission."

Neville felt his mouth fall open. "My new..."

"The news won't be revealed until Friday, so don't spread the word around yet. Outside the teachers and Harry no one else knows yet," Sirius winked and Neville closed his mouth with a warm smile.

"I couldn't think of a better replacement for Headmistress McGonagall."

Sirius look surprised before he nodded. "Madam Longbottom, I will see you, Alice and Frank Tuesday. Neville, I'll see you arrive Sunday afternoon."

He gave a small wave, which was answered by everyone in Neville's family as he leaned against his parents again, watching Sirius walk away.

Leaving the four of them to reconnect after so many years apart.
Exiting the Ward, Sirius noticed Professor McGonagall waiting just outside the door.

"Were you waiting for me?" he asked.

"I promised Remus that I would escort you, he never indicated that it meant one way," she answered as they made their way to the Floo to travel back to Hogwarts. "When you told me you wanted to visit an old friend, I never would have expected this."

"It was the least I could do," Sirius shrugged before they travelled through.

"No, it's not. No one would have ever expected anything from you, least of all this. Is it true what that Healer said? That you could have destroyed your mind with what you did?" McGonagall continued their conversation the moment she came through so Sirius took a seat before he answered her.

"No. Well, if I had never come in contact with torture, it might have been true. But I have so I knew exactly what to expect when I started this experiment."

"And were Harry and Remus aware of your activities?" she asked apprehensive as she took a seat, too.

"I discussed it with them, laid out what I had planned before contacting Madam Longbottom."

McGonagall turned to him. "And they both agreed to your plan?"

"In a heartbeat once their concerns had been addressed," Sirius smiled. "Their main concern was that I'd be subjected to torture, but after I had demonstrated my plan, their worries were mostly laid to rest."

"How did you demonstrate it?" McGonagall asked curiously as she conjured two cups of tea for them.

"Thank you. By using Harry's memory of the graveyard in the same way I'd tackle their minds and then giving them both access to mine so that they could see I only felt a fraction of the pain Harry had experienced at the time," Sirius answered as he picked up his cup.

"But you would still feel pain, If I am not mistaken," McGonagall frowned.

"Yes," Sirius didn't see the point in trying to deny the truth.

"And yet you were still determined to try and help them despite knowing that?"

"I don't see how experiencing some pain is a good excuse for me to leave two extraordinary good people to suffer when I can do something about it."

"You wouldn't, no," McGonagall agreed with a small smile before she turned solemn again. "But you are all right?"

"Right now? Or after the experiments?" Sirius teased, making her roll her eyes. "There were no
lasting effects after the experiments, the plan worked perfectly."

"And right now?"

Sirius hesitated. "I could do with a potion or two right now."

"Your chest hurts?"

"And my leg," he admitted at her knowing look.

"Shall we make our way to your chambers then so that you can take your potions?" McGonagall suggested, both finishing their tea. But before they could even rise from their seats, someone knocked on the door.

"Enter," McGonagall called out and Remus poked his head around the door.

"I thought I heard voices when passing by and was hoping the two of you had made it back yet. How did it go?"

"They hugged him and said his name," McGonagall answered, her eyes suspiciously bright as she beckoned him inside.

"How did he react?" Remus smiled.

"Wouldn't let go of them, not that I can blame him," Sirius grinned as Remus settled in the chair beside him, handing him a pain relieving potion with a knowing smile.

"I'd love the see the memory of it some time," Remus smiled as Sirius drowned the potion before turning back to McGonagall.

"Oh, I told him he'd be excused from classes for the rest of the week. I hope you won't mind?"

"I don't mind," McGonagall smiled. "It was a good decision and though he'll be a bit behind on school work when he returns, I think it will be worth it to be able to spend time with his parents."

"I've peeked at everyone's lesson plans and used his extra tutoring lessons the past few weeks to get him a bit ahead of schedule so he wouldn't be behind."

"You had already planned to bring him in today?" McGonagall asked surprised.

"I was planning to bring him on Friday, as I normally visit them on Tuesdays and Friday's. But since I had missed two visits, I wanted to see how they were doing today before deciding what to do. They've been asking for him for two weeks now, but I wanted to be sure the results were lasting and he'd not get false hope. Seeing them today, I decided to bring him early."

McGonagall nodded, but another knock on the door interrupted what she might say.

"Yes?"

"Minerva, Madam Bones just Floo-called to warn you that Dumbledore's trial has been rescheduled to tomorrow morning," Flitwick entered, continuing when he saw who were present.

"What? It isn't supposed to be until Friday, what happened that it was moved a day?"

"The case is ready and the general public is pushing for answers, so the Wizengamot has decided to reschedule it," he closed the door behind him.
"What time will it start?" Remus asked as he grabbed another chair and brought it to the desk for their colleague while McGonagall conjured tea for them all.

"Nine o'clock. Thank you."

"But I have classes tomorrow morning," McGonagall protested as she looked in her bag for her class schedule.

"I could take over Transfiguration for you until you return," Sirius offered.

"Are you sure?" McGonagall asked as she looked up to him.

"Sure. I'm going to take over your first to fourth years eventually anyway so it might be good practice."

"That is true."

"Actually, Madam Bones would like you to be there for the trial too, though mostly just as back up as she knows you cannot sit in as a Wizengamot member," Flitwick shot Sirius an apologising look as he immediately paled considerably at his words.

"I'm sure she'll accept it if you send someone in your stead," Remus placed a hand on his shoulder.

"I..." Sirius seemed unable to continue so Remus nodded.

"There's no need for you to be there in person. I can just go there with a phial of the necessary memories and since I've been involved in almost everything, answer any questions they might have left as your representative."

"Are you sure?" Sirius asked softly.

"Yes. Either I go or I'm going with you. And if you go then Harry will insist on going, too, and neither of us wants him to be in there if we can help it. And if you deny his insistence to join he'll just make himself sick with worry or sneak out to follow us and get into trouble."

Sirius smiled faintly. "You could just say that you don't want me anywhere near those things as we both know they'll be there to guard Dumbledore. No need to use Harry to try and guilt-trip me in staying here, especially since I'm already shaking at the mere idea of having to see them, let alone sit in a room with them for who knows how long the trial might take."

He took a shaky breath.

"But even if I'm terrified of facing those things, I'm not at all happy about the idea of you going there, either."

"I'll be with him the entire time," McGonagall promised with a soft smile. "I agree with Remus that I'd prefer it if you remained here, far away from them. Not only can you take over my classes if needed, I also know that the students will behave if I leave you in charge."

Sirius stared her into the eyes and McGonagall nodded as she read his unspoken request, promising him wordlessly that she would not leave Remus alone anywhere near the Dementors or the Ministry workers.

Relaxing, Sirius nodded. "Okay. Thank you."

"Any time, and I'm sure Harry will be relieved to hear I'll be going," Remus nodded and Flitwick
smiled, neither having missed the request that had been asked.

"But even if Remus goes and Sirius takes over your classes, we'll still be in trouble, won't we?"

"Not necessarily. We've cancelled classes before; we just have to ensure that classes for the fifth and seventh years continue because they cannot afford to miss classes. Who have Transfiguration, History and Defence tomorrow?" Sirius asked.

McGonagall looked through her schedules. "The seventh year Gryffindors have Transfiguration the first hour, fifth year Ravenclaws have History at the same time, the fifth year Gryffindors have Potions and Defence while the seventh year Slytherins have History that afternoon."

"So I could teach the seventh years Transfiguration and then take the fifth years for their normal lessons, I might run a bit late but I doubt they'd mind," Sirius nodded.

"Pomona has a free period tomorrow morning, if she would be willing to take on the Ravenclaws for History then I could take on the seventh year Slytherins in the afternoon for some extra Charms instead of History alongside my fifth years Ravenclaws," Flitwick proposed. "It would mean I'd have to deviate from my lesson plan a little, but I'm sure I could work something out to keep them both pre-occupied."

"That would be perfect. It means no classes would have to be missed for anyone," McGonagall breathed out relieved as she glanced at all the plans to make sure she wasn't missing anything.

"And I doubt the Slytherins will object to getting Charms instead of History," Remus chuckled.

"Now that that is settled I suppose the official announcements will have to be made tomorrow at dinner instead of Friday," McGonagall sighed.

"I don't think it will make a lot of difference if it's announced tomorrow or the day after," Remus shrugged.

"I know, but I still haven't decided what to do with the Gryffindor fifth year Prefects. The others have all been informed of the necessary changes by now, but I've not decided on those yet."

"Speaking of Gryffindor, I threw Hermione Granger out of class permanently today," Remus shared conversationally, smiling faintly at their shocked expressions.

"All of ours. She is banned from Defence for the rest of the year and at least until April for Potions and History of Magic. Andromeda and Ted might give her a chance but I´m fed up with how she´s treating you, sorry."

"Don't be. You know I said I'd give her until March to change her behaviour or I'd ban her from class, so you didn't do anything I wouldn't eventually have done, too," Sirius sighed.

"I swear it is as if the girl has gotten a completely different personality since Christmas," Flitwick sighed. "She's constantly complaining and in a foul mood whenever either of your classes is coming up or you are mentioned."

"I think we all saw this coming," Sirius admitted.

"Well, I suppose that is definitely the end of her Prefect career then, too, since she was already on probation for her behaviour. That leaves two* other choices," McGonagall said.
"I think Lavender would be the best choice. She might giggle a lot but I've seen her help other students where she could when needed and she's kind and compassionate. If I'm completely honest I would have preferred her over Hermione from the start because Lavender holds the respect of most students even if she's a bit childish at times," Sirius said.

"Hermione isn't respected by the other students at all," Remus agreed. "She is bossy and treats even her closest friends inferior when she believes she's right. She might have the best grades of the three girls, but her general superior behaviour makes it hard to like her."

"And we cannot even blame that behaviour on the presence of you two as she has always been like that. We've only begun to notice it now because the older students won't stand for her behaviour anymore," McGonagall sighed. "Not to mention that the younger students have begun to file complaints to their Head of Houses since they've noticed her classmates aren't even tolerating her any more."

"Miss Brown might not have the highest grades of her year, but she always does her best and she will take her responsibilities seriously without going overboard," Flitwick agreed.

"That is settled then. That only leaves me with the replacement for Mister Weasley as he is just as unqualified for the position as Mister Malfoy is," McGonagall wrote Lavender's name down on her list.

"That is easy, Mister Potter of course," Flitwick immediately said.

"No...," Sirius started.

"He has the best grades, is sensible and kind to other students," Flitwick argued, interrupting Sirius immediately.

"He is, but..."

"But what? He is the most sensible choice to become Prefect. The fact that he is your child and it might be considered favouring is absurd because every student knows he is an excellent student and always willing to help others," Flitwick continued.

"If you would let me finish then you would know that is not at all the case. It is true that Harry is all of these things and he'd make a brilliant Prefect. I am very happy that you would argue on his behalf like this, but he doesn't want to be one," Sirius patiently told him.

"He...doesn't? But it is an honour!"

"It is, but we already spoke to him about it when Professor M approached us and he is not interested. He said he wants to completely focus on his studies. Between lessons, extra tutoring and Quidditch practices, he really doesn't need the extra workload that being a Prefect entails," Sirius explained.

"He could do it," Flitwick pressed on, knowing the boy was more than capable.

"He could," Remus agreed. "But the main point is that it would mean he would barely have any time left to spend with Sirius, and that is something he absolutely refuses to even consider at this point."

"He's told you that?" Flitwick asked surprised.

"No, but it isn't hard to read between the lines of his refusal. He does have a full schedule, but he
has the brains and wits to be able to pull it all off without being overwhelmed now that he is truly applying himself to his studies. But the simple truth is just that he doesn't want the position because it would take away from the time he can spend with his godfather," Remus said.

"I had expected as much," McGonagall admitted with a sigh. "He'd be the perfect candidate and I have no idea why Dumbledore chose Mister Weasley despite my recommendation, but Remus is telling the truth. He simply isn't interested in the position, not since he's begun to take his studies seriously and you've begun to teach here,' she directed at Sirius.

"It's not only that though, he also simply doesn't want the attention or the spotlight that being a Prefect would drag him into and I respect that. He's been through enough as it is and just wants a quiet time here. I am not going to force him to do something he doesn't want to do, simply because he'd be good at it."

"Understandable. But it does leave me short one fifth year Gryffindor Prefect," McGonagall said.

"Well, who else do we have in that year? Mister Thomas..." Flitwick peered at her list.

"What about Neville Longbottom?" Sirius interrupted, making them all look at him surprised.

"Mister Longbottom? He's not exactly the first choice that comes in to mind when thinking of a Prefect," Flitwick admitted.

"Maybe not, but he is kind, friendly and always has an open ear for any student. He is not prejudiced towards the other houses and will take the duties seriously," Sirius argued his case.

"That is true but I am afraid the other students will walk all over him, the boy hardly has any confidence at all," Flitwick frowned as McGonagall pulled up his file.

"Something that he will never get if we don't show any faith in him. He's always been timid and shy, but I've noticed he's gained a lot of confidence since he's begun receiving extra tutoring," Remus backed Sirius up.

"That may be, but will he have the upper hand over the other students without being walked over," Flitwick repeated his worries.

"He doesn't need to have the upper hand. Most of the students like him because he is friendly and honest. It is exactly that quality that would make him a good Prefect. They respect him for who he is, know he listens to them and doesn't judge without hearing all sides of the story. That quality will make him a great Prefect even if he's shy," Sirius said.

"Very well, you will be Gryffindors Head of House soon, so tell me why the other boys won't do just as well or better," she smiled.

"Seamus is nice, but he forms his own conclusions without always listening to both sides of a story. His grades are good, but he simply doesn't have the patience to deal with other students for a longer period of time. He'll brush them off if they come to him with problems because he'd rather cause mayhem."

"And Mister Thomas?" McGonagall asked.

"Dean has good grades, too, and he does listen if something is up. He is well liked among the students and has patience to help others. He would make a good choice," Sirius said.

"Why would Neville be better than Dean since you obviously stand behind that choice?"
McGonagall asked.

"Because if a student from a different house comes to them with a problem, it is Neville who will go out of his way to help them while Dean wouldn't even think to do so. Neville is the one who stays up long beyond bedtime with Harry to help younger students with their homework while Dean goes to sleep on time. And it is Neville who is encouraging younger students to do their very best and stops any hint of bullying he comes across."

"How do you know all that?" Flitwick asked amazed. "I've never seen him do anything of that sort."

"I keep my eyes open and listen to what is being said in the hallways," Sirius smiled.

"You really believe he will be up to the challenge?" McGonagall looked him in the eye.

"I believe he will shine at it if we give him the chance," Sirius said firmly. "He just needs us to have confidence in him to do so and he will."

"Very well, Mister Longbottom it will be," she smiled.

"What would have been your choice?" Sirius asked curiously.

"The same as yours for exactly the same reasons. I just wanted to see how you would make your case," she admitted, making him laugh.

"Well played, Headmistress."

"I am not officially Headmistress yet. Not until he's been declared guilty. Although there is not a shred of doubt in my mind that he will be," McGonagall sighed.

"I'm sorry. I know he is your friend," Sirius reached forward to squeeze her hand.

"He has betrayed my trust multiple times and was willing to condemn you and Harry to death to get his way. I do not count someone like that among my friends," she returned his squeeze.

"Maybe not, but that doesn't change the fact that it hurts like hell," Remus wisely noted, smiling faintly as Sirius caught his gaze before looking down.

They sat in silence for a long moment, all lost in their own thoughts before Sirius cleared his throat.

"Was there more to be discussed? Because if there's not I'd like to return to my quarters to get some rest before preparing for classes tomorrow."

"That reminds me, I meant to ask if you are sure you are ready to begin teaching again," McGonagall asked worriedly.

"I'll probably have to take it easy for a while and keep the use of my magic at a minimum while I'm still on so many potions. But I think I'll be fine," Sirius answered honestly.

"That restricted use of magic is going to make it difficult to teach isn't it?" Flitwick asked, aware his control would be wobbly due to the influence of the potions.

"Not really, I have the seventh year Gryffindors for Transfiguration first thing in the morning and then the fifth year Gryffindors for the rest of the day. They won't cause me any trouble at all," Sirius smiled fondly.
"Even if most students weren't like mush in your hands then the twins and Harry would ensure none of their classmates would dare to trouble you," Remus laughed.

Sirius chuckled. "I doubt the students are mush in my hands, but it is true that outside a select few, none has ever given me much trouble."

"Not even the twins misbehave in your class," Flitwick grumbled good-naturedly. "They've always pulled pranks and caused general mayhem."

"They tried once in our second lesson, I just pranked them back twice as hard," Sirius laughed.

"What did they do?" McGonagall asked curiously.

"They charmed my wand so that every time I used it, bright pink bubbles would appear," Sirius explained.

"And in response you changed their hair purple and let multicoloured bubbles appear whenever they breathed out through their mouths. It made it impossible to understand them for the rest of the day as the bubbles burst apart in their faces every time they tried to speak, covering them in soapy substance," Flitwick suddenly realised as he linked events together.

"Oh! I had wondered what had happened but thought it smarter not to try and find out," McGonagall recalled the event just after the start of classes.

"Your approach to the sight of harmless pranks clearly hasn't changed since our time here," Sirius chuckled as McGonagall laughed. "They told me later that it took them hours to figure out that they had to use the soap from the bubbles to return their hair back to normal as I made it resistant to any other spell. They never tried to prank me again."

"They weren't mad though," Remus grinned at the memory of two delighted seventeen year olds. "Practically begged you to teach them how to do that."

"They will be more than happy to see you back in class," McGonagall remarked.

"They are good boys," Sirius smiled.

"A bit too Marauder-like, but good boys indeed," she agreed readily.

"There is no such thing as too much," Flitwick snorted at Sirius' words but made no other comment as they rose from their seats to go their separate ways.

McGonagall was tracking down Pomona Sprout to ask her to teach History early in the morning, Flitwick going to lunch and Remus accompanying Sirius to their quarters, ignoring the dark-haired man's claims that he'd be fine on his own.

"The students won't care if I'm a little late for class. The Gryffindors actually berated me when they thought I had let you go to St Mungo's on your own this morning."

"They did?" Sirius looked surprised.

Remus nodded and they walked in silence for a short while until he looked up to Sirius again.

"Do you truly believe Neville can do it?"

"You don't think so?"
"I have to admit I am a bit worried he'll be trampled by Ron and Hermione. You know they can be extremely bossy."

"That may be, but when it matters he'll stand up to them. He's done so before," Sirius shrugged.

"He has?" Remus asked surprised.

"When Harry and those two went after the Philosopher's Stone Neville tried to stop them to protect the House."

"Didn't he fail at that?"

"Maybe, but he made the effort despite them being much more advanced than him."

"You really believe in him, don't you?" Remus realised as he stopped walking.

"You know what I see when I look at him?" Sirius asked, turning to him as he stopped, too.

"No."

"I see you. Everyone always underestimated you because you weren't forceful in practising your position. And yet people listened to you when you did use it."

"You guys didn't," Remus snorted.

"Just because we didn't always listen doesn't mean we didn't hear you. And you did influence our decisions in more ways than one. Neville just has one advantage over you," Sirius replied.

"Which is?"

"He doesn't have Moony holding him back from daring to take the spotlight and have people risk finding out his secret."

Staring at Sirius for a long moment, Remus suddenly smiled, "McGonagall made the right call, you know?"

"About?" confused Sirius cocked his head.

"Wanting you to become Deputy. You always see the potential in people who are unable to see it in themselves."

"Head of House is one thing, but actually leading the entire school one day?"

"You'd do a great job you know?" Remus pressed on, making Sirius laugh.

"Did Professor M set you up to try and make up my mind?"

"No, she's accepting your answer that you needed to think about it. But I still think you'd be perfect for the position."

"And I don't understand why she asked me and not one of the other professors," Sirius frowned.

"All of them have worked here longer and have a lot more experience."

"And yet they all unanimously voted for you during the meeting about it. Flitwick and Sprout both said they didn't feel up for the task of the position and immediately rooted for you. Every teacher believes you're more than capable. Everyone does, except for you."
"I still believe you'd be a better choice," Sirius argued, looking unsure of himself.

Remus squeezed his hand as they reached their quarters, closing the door behind them before pulling him into a hug.

"You have so much confidence in others, yet so little in yourself when it comes to it. Harry and I both believe in you, as does everyone else. So have some confidence in yourself, too."

Pulling back he smiled again. "Besides, it will be years before Professor M will retire, if she ever does. So you still have years to get used to the idea and learn about the function, and if it makes you feel better then you know I'll be at your side."

"I could just name you Deputy Headmaster when the time does come and shove all the dealing with idiots to you."

Remus groaned.

Sirius smiled before pulling him into a hug again. "Thank you."

"What for?" Remus asked amused as Sirius let go of him again.

Sirius only smiled, his eyes widening. "That reminds me, here."

He handed Remus a small wrapped present from his pocket.

"What's this?" Remus asked as he accepted it, turning it over in his hand.

"Your birthday present."

"You already gave me a present," Remus looked surprised, even as he began to unwrap it, knowing it was useless to try and argue against the extra present.

"Those books? They were just a little something extra because you won't be able to use your true present any time soon yet and I wasn't able to receive confirmation in time," Sirius frowned.

"I don't call the complete works of Jules Verne a little something, Siri. You know how much I love his work but that I've never been able to afford buying his books," Remus shook his head fondly before frowning as he opened the small box, revealing a potion inside. "What is it?"

"Something that I want you to take with the Wolfsbane potion the day of the full moon."

"What for?" Remus asked curiously as he turned the potion around in his hand, trying to identify it but being unable to.

"You'll see when the time comes," Sirius answered cryptically before he moved to the kitchen, leaving Remus to follow him as they prepared a quick lunch before he'd have to return to class again.

Chapter End Notes

*. I am aware that according to the class list there’s at least one more student in Gryffindors fifth year, Fay Dunbar. But I’ve decided to act like the class only has the
students we’ve been informed off in the books because those are the only Gryffindor character’s ever mentioned in the books and Rowling’s insistence to add more and more inconsistencies to her story annoys me. My apologies if you like Fay.
I am aware that Rowling has finally made it known that Sirius' birthday is on November 3rd 1959, but I will not be following that now 'canon' act for two reasons.

First of all, I've been working on this series for over two years now and as I've set his birthday on April 4th 1960, it would mess up the entire storyline so I've decided to keep his birthday on that date.

Secondly; I have always seen Sirius as the youngest of the Marauders. The way he talks about James sounds like a guy who adores his big brother and the way he listened to Remus in both PoA and OotP always made me feel he was just that tiny bit younger.

I am aware I might be alone in that, but it just feels right to me that he is younger, no matter what Rowling might have decided.

My apologies if you dislike me doing so, but I've found myself disagreeing with a lot of Rowling's decisions (James' parents for example...honestly?) and it is called fanfiction for a reason.

"Welcome back, Professor!" several voices called out in greeting as Sirius opened the Defence classroom late in the morning the next day.

"Good morning, class," Sirius smiled as he moved inside, not paying any mind to the gasps of the students as he was followed in before closing the door.

"Is that a Patronus, sir?" Dean asked awed as a silver wolf leaped onto the desk to curl up there beside Sirius when he pulled himself up to the desk as well.

"Yeah it is," Sirius confirmed as he ran a hand over the wolf's head.

"What is it doing here? Is it yours?" Lavender asked as they all smiled at the affectionate lick the wolf gave their Professor's hand in return.

"He is Professor Lupin's, not mine and he is here because his master is an overprotective mother hen," Sirius chuckled at their surprised faces. "I'm not supposed to use much magic at the moment so Professor Lupin ordered his Patronus to keep me company and protect me if for whatever reason it should be needed."

"You aren't supposed to use magic? Why not?" Dean frowned confused.

"Because I'm still on several potions a day at the moment and it is not wise to use magic in such a situation as it can influence your ability to use and control your magic properly."

"So you are unable to use spells?" Ron asked.

"Oh I can use spells, but because my mind is clouded right now it is unwise to do so. I could
accidentally hurt people because my normal control is slipping."

"But how will you teach us then?" Ron continued with a frown.

"I'm not, Harry is. Before the Christmas holidays started he told the DA members he'd start on some big stuff, most of which you've already learned by now. Except for one thing," he paused for dramatic effects as everyone leaned forward curiously, before gesturing at the Patronus wolf beside him. "The Patronus Charm."

A cheer went through the classroom.

"Now, who can tell me what a Patronus truly is?"

"A Patronus is a projection of your most positive feelings and the only defence there is against Dementors," Lavender answered.

"And Lethifolds," Sirius nodded.

"A what?" Parvati blinked.

"Lethifolds. Creatures that kind of look like a rippling black cloak that seems to float just above the ground. They are assumed to be related to the Dementors. Lethifolds attack people at night when they are asleep and devour them alive. There is no other defence against them than a Patronus," Sirius shuddered.

"Have you ever seen one?" Dean asked curiously about his reaction.

"They are very rare and only live in the tropics as far as it's known as they can't stand the cold. So of course I was unlucky enough to come across one while hiding in Puerto Rico."

"Why were you hiding in Porto Rico?" Ron asked while the others all winced.

"Because I had the crazy idea that Dementors didn't like hot weather," Sirius admitted easily, to the amusement of the students.

"And did they?" Seamus asked with morbid curiosity.

"They didn't seem bothered by it, their mere presence destroys any bit of light there is around them," Sirius shivered, looking a bit lost in thoughts for a moment before he visibly shook himself.

"Anyway, Patronuses. The Patronus Charm is extremely difficult to learn and not many are capable of forming a fully corporeal Patronus. Even being able to create a non-corporeal one is generally considered amazing."

"What's the difference between a corporeal and a non-corporeal Patronus?" Ron frowned.

"A non-corporeal Patronus usually looks like a burst of silvery smoke while a corporeal one takes the shape of an animal."

"Do all Patronuses look the same or can you choose what it looks like?" Dean asked.

"A Patronus usually takes the shape of the animal which whom you share the deepest affinity. Because you use the strongest and happiest memories you have to perform the charm it is possible that your Patronus might change when you fall in love or go through a very emotional event. But you cannot consciously choose what form your Patronus will end up being," Sirius answered. "The only indication to what your Patronus might be is if you've found your Animagus form, they are
usually the same form."

"Do you have a corporeal Patronus, Sir?" Lavender' couldn't keep her eyes from the wolf at his side.

"I do, my Patronus has always been a stag."

"But your Animagus form is a dog!" Ron exclaimed.

"I did say usually, though I admit that I don't know of many Animagi, and the ones that are registered and known to also know the Patronus Charm have been recorded to match. So it could just be me," Sirius shrugged.

"So your Patronus matches Harry's?" Dean asked interested.

"Technically his father's, but basically yes," Sirius nodded.

"Wicked," Seamus grinned before looking at the wolf Patronus, who was resting his head on Sirius' thigh now. "And Professor Lupin's Patronus is a wolf because he is a werewolf?"

"We think it might be," Sirius agreed before nodding to Harry.

"All right, let's move everything aside so we can get started," Harry ordered as he rose, the other students immediately doing as he asked as Sirius made himself comfortable to keep watch and call out a few pointers to the students when needed.

After a chaotic but interesting double lesson they all fell down to the ground, too exhausted to return the tables back just yet.

Seamus huffed out a tired breath. "To think I could have missed this because I was an arrogant sod."

"Well, you realised you were and apologised," Harry shrugged from his own place on the floor, his back resting against his godfather's legs.

Seamus nodded, looking serious. "I should have believed you from the start. I knew you weren't one to lie."

"Why are you bringing this up now?" Dean turned to him.

"I don't know, the thought just crossed my mind," Seamus shrugged.

"I would have expected happier thoughts to be running through your head right now," Sirius chuckled as he leaned forward to brush a hand through Harry's hair automatically, messing it up even more.

"Can't help what I'm thinking," Seamus didn't look the least bit apologetic, making Sirius smile.

"True. Well, you're all doing very well and I suspect that in a lesson or two you'll have come further than most witches and wizards have gotten in their entire lives," he complimented them.

"That's because we have much better teachers than they had!" Parvati laughed.

"Who taught you, Sir?" Dean asked as they began to straighten from their slumped positions.

"Books and self study. Professor Lupin, Harry's father and I learned most of what we know from
researching things in our spare time," Sirius answered.

Ron suddenly groaned. "Hermione's going to be pissed she missed this lesson."

"Probably. Especially when she learns that all the fifth years and up are going to be taught the charm as well," Sirius smiled wickedly.

"But how will you teach them if you aren't supposed to use magic?" Lavender asked worriedly.

"I won't start their lessons until I'm off the potions and even then I'll have my assistant help me out with those classes."

"I feel sorry for Neville though, he's missing a lot," Dean sighed.

"Don't worry, Neville already had a head start at this charm with Luna and they'll continue them when he returns next week," Sirius promised.

"That's good to hear. Will you tell us why he's not at school?" Lavender asked, bashing her lashes overly dramatically at him in an attempt to get an answer.

"Not my place to tell," Sirius only laughed, used to her playful tricks by now and sticking out his tongue as she pouted, making her laugh, too.

"But he is all right though?" Dean asked.

"He is perfectly fine, just spending some time with his family," Sirius answered patiently, having been warned by Harry in advance after his godson had been bombarded with questions at the dinner table the night before when Neville had failed to return.

Accepting that answer the students pushed themselves from the ground before restoring the classroom to its normal settings as the bell rang.

"Well, that concludes today's lesson. Shall we make our way to the Potions classroom?" Sirius suggested with a smile as he slipped from the desk, the Patronus wolf flanking him.

"Professor Lupin truly is overprotective, isn't he?" Dean laughed at the animal's behaviour.

"He's not the only one," Sirius commented as Harry picked up his bag when he reached for it.

"Shush, I get to be overprotective for now," Harry grinned as Sirius shook his head, letting him do as he wished.

"Better listen to him, Professor, Harry can be very stubborn when he wants to be," Seamus chuckled.

"Don't I know it?" Sirius mumbled.

"I do wonder who I inherited that from," Harry grinned at him mischievously, laughing when Sirius swatted at his arm half-heartedly before they left the classroom, stopping when the Patronus wolf suddenly vanished from his side.

But before he could react a different Patronus appeared in the hallway.

"Sirius, we need you at the Ministry right now!" Kingsley's deep voice silenced any sound the Gryffindors had been making as they stared at the Lynx in shock as it vanished again.
Sirius turned to Lavender "Could you tell the Slytherins that Potions has been cancelled?"

"Of course," Lavender immediately agreed.

"Dobby!" Sirius turned to Harry. "I don't know what is going on, so I want you to stay on guard and do whatever is needed to protect yourself."

"You're not going to try and stop me from coming with you?" Harry asked surprised as the little elf appeared before them immediately.

"Would you stay put if I asked?" Sirius asked turning to Dobby as Harry shook his head.

"Take us to Kingsley."

The Elf nodded and with a big bang they disappeared from the school, appearing in the middle of a courtroom.

Harry raised his wand, quickly taking in his surroundings upon arrival even as he knew their House Elf friend would never have let go of him if it wasn't safe enough.

The courtroom appeared to be in chaos as they arrived in the middle of it and Harry wasn't sure what he was expecting, but this wasn't it.

Aurors were everywhere, ushering the last of a crowd away and the stale scent of blood filled Harry's nostrils, making him gag. Quickly turning away from it he spotted Tonks as she was with several other Aurors and appeared to be trying to hold someone down and failing miserably.

"What's going on here?" Sirius' voice rang through the courtroom as he strode towards the group of Aurors. "Release him."

"Sirius," Tonks breathed out as she quickly stepped towards him to intercept him.

"He's out of control, we can't... she broke off as Sirius' brushed past her without even acknowledging she had spoken and the surrounding Aurors immediately scrambled aside as he approached, giving Harry a clear view of what they were doing.

Gasping, he realised Remus was being held down by five Aurors, but even their combined body binds were not enough to keep the clearly enraged werewolf down completely as he visibly struggled against the invisible bonds, almost succeeding in freeing himself despite their constant recasting and holding him down personally as well.

"Release him," Sirius growled.

"He is dangerous, he could have harmed us. He rip..." one of the Aurors stammered as he caught sight of him and they all scrambled back from Remus at Sirius' enraged expression.

"I will do more than rip a body part off if you do not release the spells on him this instant," Sirius spat out and the Aurors all flinched, backing up at the anger in the Marauder's voice.

Sirius swiftly disarmed all of them even as they backed up, the spells holding Remus immediately vanishing and he stumbled at the sudden lack of resistance as he tried to get up.

"I'll kill him," he growled as he struggled to his feet.

"You aren't killing anyone today, not until you've calmed down," Sirius said while still approaching.
It would have been comical to see how fast Remus' head snapped to his best friend as he realised he was there, and the Aurors tensed even more.

But Remus knocked the ones in his path aside to slam into Sirius, knocking the breath out of him and ending up having to lift him off his feet to prevent them both from being overbalanced.

"He knew," he whispered as he buried his face against Sirius' neck once he'd steadied him and clung to him.

"Who knew what?" Sirius asked, calmly wrapping his arms around his friend in return, letting him pull him close and ignoring the Aurors gaping at them in shock at the ease with which Sirius handled the angry werewolf.

"Dumbledore. He...he knew you were innocent from the start. He testified under Veritaserum that James contacted him three days before their deaths to inform him of the switch as a back up security to protect you should things go wrong. He's known from the beginning and made sure you wouldn't receive a trial upon being arrested!" Remus choked out as he tightened his hold on Sirius.

"What?" Harry choked out, not believing what he was hearing even as Sirius asked a completely different question.

"Why? What would he gain from me being locked up?"

"He knew you would become Harry's rightful guardian on the event of their deaths and that You-Know-Who wasn't truly gone forever. He knew that Harry would be seen as a hero and that he would need to use him for the greater good of things, something you would never let happen as you were far too protective of him," McGonagall answered as Remus shook his head, unable to continue and Harry swirled around, surprised to see her and Kingsley having approached without him noticing.

"He knew that you wouldn't see things the way he did and that you would keep Harry away from him. He refused to let you interfere with his plans like that, so he gave a false testimony to incriminate you, to get you out of his way."

Harry wasn't sure what to have expected to come forward at the trial, but he would never have suspected that Dumbledore had been aware of Sirius' innocence and had ensured he'd be imprisoned. Was it true that Harry was the real reason why Sirius had been left to rot in Azkaban?

He glanced at his godfather with his heart hammering in his throat, surprised to find him looking back at him with a raised eyebrow that clearly told him to stop thinking stupid thoughts.

Moving forward he rested his hand on Sirius', knowing the man would want him close but needing to be there for Remus too. He was proven right when fingers curled around his immediately and knew it was his godfather's silent way to let him know he didn't hold him responsible for what had happened. In his eyes he could easily read that there was only one person to blame and Harry breathed out relieved, leaning against his godfather's side.

"Dumbledore knew that the three of you hadn't told Remus of the switch to keep him safe and used that to raise doubt to your possible innocence. He had everything planned, from having Hagrid pick up Harry from Godric's Hollow to your arrest. He was aware that by ensuring you wouldn't be able to look after Harry you would go after Pettigrew and hoped you would kill him as he knew he was the spy," Kingsley trailed off.

"But upon arriving at the street you were arrested in, he knew that you hadn't been responsible
since you would never have let innocents be caught in the middle, not even when out of your mind with grief. But the Ministry workers didn't see that logic and he saw the perfect chance to get you out of the way without too much trouble. He planted doubt in the people that might have believed in your innocence, like Remus, Alastor and me, using your disappearances during what were secret missions to plant doubt in them and backed Crouch up when he wanted to toss you into Azkaban immediately without awaiting a trial," McGonagall sighed.

Sirius gave a small nod, his expression completely closed off as he softly rubbed Remus' back with his free hand almost unconsciously while the one tangled with Harry's squeezed slightly.

"Is that why he didn't arrange a trial once I learned of his innocence?" Harry asked softly once he realised Sirius wasn't going to ask the question.

"Yes. He realised that even though you'd been separated for twelve years, the bonds between you were impossibly strong again in mere moments after being reunited. He knew that he had to keep Sirius separated from you so that he'd be unable to take control and thwart his plans. Claiming that he couldn't give him a trial would force him to keep his distance to protect you both and to keep Remus from becoming a suspected fugitive harbourer," McGonagall nodded.

Sirius stared at her from Remus' embrace, taking a slow and deep breath as he was processing all he was hearing.

"He condemned you to that hell knowing what would happen," Remus whispered as he finally seemed to get a control on his anger and loosened his grip, though not completely.

"He knew what was happening in Azkaban and did nothing to stop it," McGonagall clarified as Sirius looked confused.

"Is that why you ripped his arm off?"

Harry blinked, not immediately registering the words as his godfather seemed too calm at the new knowledge.

"Wait...ripped...whose arm?" Harry felt stupid for asking but he didn't understand.

"He ripped Dumbledore's arm off," Tonks explained, coming out of her stupor as she nodded towards a spot where a large puddle of blood rested. "The trial was over and Dumbledore was being led away when Remus managed to break through the line of Aurors and attacked him."

"I should have ripped his throat out," Remus spat out angrily, his clenched fists shaking.

"No, you shouldn't have," Sirius said softly, brushing his hand over Remus' cheek to try and calm him down again.

"Why not?!"

"Because he is not worth leaving us behind for," Sirius shrugged as Remus stared at him for a long moment before nodding, pulling him into another hug and taking a deep breath that Harry was sure allowed him to inhale Sirius' comforting and familiar scent to help ground him further.

Separating again after a long moment, Remus slipped a hand into Sirius' as the man turned to Amelia Bones, who Harry hadn't even realised was present but was approaching them now as well.

"What consequences will this have?"
"He will need to pay a fine for disrupting court like that," she hesitated before looking at Kingsley. "But other than that I think his reaction under the circumstances was to be expected."

"Yes, I would have tried the same thing if it had been one of my loved ones Dumbledore had done that to," Kingsley admitted. "The Wizengamot will understand and probably not take more action, considering your reasons for attacking him. And paying the fine without complaint will satisfy those that might complain a little."

Sirius nodded. "I'll pay the fine."

"Siri, I did this," Remus objected.

"You were only here because of me so I should pay the fine," Sirius waved his objection off.

Remus sighed before relenting, surprising the Aurors once more into openly staring at them as Remus rested his forehead against Sirius´ shoulder.

Harry couldn't stop a small smile from spreading over his lips at their shock as Sirius simply reached back so brush a hand over Remus' head affectionately.

"Sirius..." Tonks stepped forward and reached out to catch Sirius' attention, but before her hand could make contact with Sirius' sleeve, Remus suddenly slammed his palm into her chest, forcefully pushing her back.

With a feral growl he pulled Sirius protectively against his side as Tonks tripped over her own two feet and landed hard onto her behind a few feet away.

The other Aurors scrambled further backwards as Sirius warningly rose his wand while allowing Remus to pull him closer.

"What's your problem?" Tonks bit out angrily, wincing and out of breath as she sat up again.

Harry winced at the pain in her voice, aware Remus was still agitated and would not take kindly to anyone trying to come near Sirius right now, nor be holding back his superior strength while protecting him.

"Don't you dare touch him," Remus growled, anger clearly taking over again as he possessively tightened his arm around Sirius' waist even as the other turned in his hold.

"Honestly, Tonks. I would have thought an Auror would be wise enough to realise it is not smart to reach out to the pack mate of an already agitated werewolf," McGonagall shook her head disapproving as she, Kingsley and Madam Bones had stepped back as one when Tonks had come too close. "Especially when it is known he is overly protective of his mate on even a good day."

Tonks' eyes weren't the only ones who widened and Harry bit back a grin at the blatant assumption that the two were lovers, something Sirius didn't make any better by having pulled Remus' trembling form against him as the other turned in his hold.

"Professor M, could you keep Harry with you? I'll be taking Remus out so he can get rid of this anger."

"I'm not leaving you," Harry protested, aware that he might be standing too close to Sirius for Remus' current state of mind, but the man made no indication of being bothered by his direct presence, even when he'd been touching Sirius.
Watching as Sirius pushed Remus' face into his shoulder, he knew his godfather was trying to calm Remus by surrounding as many of his senses with his own familiar scent as they both knew it comforted Remus.

"Yes you are. I want you to stay with McGonagall and help her evacuate Grimmauld Place," Sirius said as he looked at Harry over Remus' shoulder.

"Evacuate...why?" Harry blinked.

"Just a precaution. The best way for him to blow off steam is by destroying something. What better to take your anger out at than that place."

"We will," McGonagall promised as she reached out to pull Harry back by his sleeve, taking care not to move into Sirius' direction and although Harry wanted to protest, he knew it wasn't smart to stay with Sirius right now.

Remus would never hurt Sirius on purpose, but his godfather would still need all of his attention to ensure he'd not hurt either of them accidentally, especially when Sirius was still injured. If Harry went with them, his surrogate uncle would remain tense and on edge and they'd both risk hurting themselves in their attempt to keep him safe.

"Be careful," he allowed himself to be pulled backward, surprised when Remus tensed as he moved back, but Sirius seemed to anticipate it and placed a hand on Remus' cheek to keep him focused on him.

"Professor M is going to look after our boy so we can go blow off some of that anger. Want to go blow something we both hate up?" Sirius reassured him softly, pulling back slightly to locate the little elf that had stayed out of the way the entire time but hadn't left.

"Dobby?"

The small elf wordlessly moved forward, placing a hand on Harry's and McGonagall's arms to Apparate them both to just outside of number twelve Grimmauld Place so they could begin evacuating the street before the elf returned to Apparate Sirius and Remus to the house.

Leaving the Aurors staring at the spot they just vacated dumbstruck before Kingsley and Amelia Bones put them into action to assemble and travel to Grimmauld Place to go assist Harry and Minerva in evacuating the street.
Wild speculations travelled through the hallways of Hogwarts that afternoon after Professor Sirius was called to the Ministry in a hurry. Though the fifth year Gryffindors had attempted to keep it quiet it was soon spread as Pansy told Malfoy, who then spread it further to other students.

Some even joked that Dumbledore had escaped and the Aurors had needed their Professor to give them tips on how to find fugitives, something which quickly became one of the more popular rumours that made many laugh.

But no one was quite certain exactly what was going on, though everyone agreed that his hurried departure had everything to do with Dumbledore's trial that had been taking place around the same time.

Even now, hours later, they had gathered in the Great Hall, murmuring theories in small groups.

The Gryffindors too sat close together, discussing events among themselves and speculating about what had happened.

Only the twins weren't participating in the discussions, glancing repeatedly towards the entrance hall and the Head Table with worry written upon their faces.

They were the ones who spotted a newly arriving McGonagall first and both took a deep breath, sharing an anxious glance when they realised she was alone.

As more and more students noticed her they fell silent and as teachers rose from their seat at her approach, the Great Hall fell into a suspenseful silence.

She motioned for the teachers to retake their seats, stopping before the Head Table and turning to the students.

"Good evening everyone. I am sure you are all aware of the trial that took place this morning," her voice was calm but all the students could see the weariness on her face.

"A little after noon today, Albus Dumbledore has been found guilty of all charges against him."

Loud whispering broke out at her words, some students like Hermione shocked, but others simply grimacing, already aware of what the verdict would be.

"His sentence is to spend the remainder of his life in Azkaban, with his magic bound and Dementors constantly at his side. Due to a situation that arose shortly after the verdict was given, his transportation to Azkaban has been delayed until later this evening."

The whispering increased after this and someone called out. "Why wasn't he Kissed if he was convicted?"

"Because the Wizengamot decided that being Kissed was too kind of a verdict for the crimes he committed," McGonagall answered truthfully. "They wanted him to be able to feel the full effects that Dementors have for as long as possible."

She looked at the students, who were clearly wondering what crimes their old Headmaster had committed to warrant such a cruel punishment. Remembering the conversations she had caught pieces of while entering the Great Hall, she came to a decision and cleared her throat.
"I am certain that rumours have been travelling around fast since Professor Sirius was called away with urgency earlier today and half-truths spreading like Fiendfyre. Though the truth will probably be written in the Prophet tomorrow morning, I wish to inform you now so that you will know the true story, before the rumours twist it."

She sighed as everyone fell silent again. "Albus Dumbledore has been charged with several crimes, the full extent of which I shall not get into right now. One of those charges however has everything to do with what happened this afternoon so I shall share it with you."

Stepping forward she cleared her throat.

"He was charged with withholding a trial for Sirius Black, after learning of his innocence a few months after his escape on these very grounds. However, during the questioning under Veritaserum it was revealed that he was aware of his innocence since before his arrest fifteen years ago."

She paused as shock rippled through both the students and the teachers alike, renewed whispers breaking out.

Fred and George shared a horrified look, dread filling them as she raised her hand to call for silence again to clarify her words.

"On November first, upon his arrest, Dumbledore was already aware Sirius Black had not been the Secret Keeper for the Potter family, having been informed by James Potter of the switch three days earlier, but he kept this information to himself because he knew Sirius was their son's rightful guardian upon their deaths."

She took a deep breath, her eyes automatically finding the two Weasleys, who stared at her with grim expressions. Forcing her eyes to travel over the other students present, they came to a rest on Hermione, who was pale as a sheet at what she was hearing, for a long moment before raising her eyes again.

"He was willing to condemn an innocent man to Azkaban because he was aware that he would stand between him and his plans for the Potter's son. So he ensured Sirius would be unable to take in his godson, having someone basically kidnap the child to provoke him into going after the true traitor, effectively playing right into his plans."

"However, upon arriving at the scene of his arrest, he realised that Sirius had not killed Peter Pettigrew and twelve Muggle bystanders, aware that even out of his mind with grief, the young man would never harm innocents. Knowing this would come out in his trial, he planted the idea in Millicent Bagnold, Bartemius Crouch and Cornelius Fudge's minds to transfer Sirius directly to Azkaban, without a trial taking place."

She sighed, her eyes finding the Weasleys again among outraged Gryffindors. Both twins were pale as a sheet but did not indulge in the whispering around them as they kept staring at her. Their gaze made her realise that they knew there was a reason she was taking the trouble to inform them of this personally and were dreading what she was getting to.

Knowing what she did, she couldn't help but feel her heart clench, knowing how much those two boys cared about the youngest Marauder. And not just them either, she was aware that most of the students and even teachers present were more than fond of the two young teachers. To learn that their old Headmaster had condemned one of them to Azkaban, fully aware of his innocence was outrageous and they began to understand why the Wizengamot had demanded such a cruel punishment.
She let them whisper among themselves for a few moments, aware that they didn't even know the most horrible part. Calling for attention again as she noticed Harry slip into the Great Hall, she allowed him to slide in between the twins unnoticed to all but them as everyone was focused on her. Both boys squeezed his shoulder in silent comfort, but they didn’t ask him anything.

"The reason I am informing you of this part of the trial is because Professor Lupin was present for the trial and learned that Dumbledore knowingly condemned an innocent Sirius to that hell, aware of what would happen once he was imprisoned there."

She could have kicked herself for letting the last part slip and in the moment she mentally berated herself a young Ravenclaw spoke up, probably intending to just ask her friends, but due to the sudden lack of her voice, it rang clear throughout the Great Hall.

"What happened when Professor Sirius was imprisoned?"

"He was tortured there," a Slytherin answered her before McGonagall could deny or confirm anything.

"Those are just rumours, right?" another student questioned before they all turned back to McGonagall, who locked her gaze with Harry.

The boy sighed but gave a short nod in consent.

Letting her eyes travel back to Hermione for a moment, she stared into the shell-shocked girl's eyes. Aware that the girl was horrified to learn that everything she had believed had been wrong. Realising that her hero hadn't just failed to provide her best friend's godfather with a trial, but had imprisoned an innocent man because he was in his way.

McGonagall was aware how much it must be breaking the girl's heart to learn that her hero was in reality a villain and she was not surprised when the teenager broke eye contact, staring at the table in pure terror.

"Rumours which are true, unfortunately. The culprits have been found and faced their own trials for their actions a few weeks ago, but that does not take away the truth that yes, he has been tortured repeatedly while imprisoned in Azkaban," the revelation of what had happened to her former lion had broken her heart and she let commotion break out as her thoughts wandered for a moment.

She couldn't imagine what he must have felt while imprisoned, believing himself to be abandoned by everyone and having lost his family, tortured for years for information he didn't have to begin with.

It amazed her that he had managed to keep his sanity, his will to fight, though she had no doubt it had been Harry her boy had been holding on for all those years. The love between them was strong and unbreakable and she blessed the little family he'd made for himself after all that had happened with whole her heart as she could see a similar strong bond with Remus and even rapidly forming with the twins, Longbottom and Lovegood.

Shaking herself out of her thoughts, it still took her several minutes to regain the attention of the furious students.

"Which is what brings me to the reason I'm telling you all this. Professor Lupin was there and upon learning that Dumbledore was aware of that and did nothing to stop it, especially considering he knew he was innocent, Professor Lupin lost his temper."
"What did he do?" Susan Bones called out.

McGonagall glanced at Harry again, who was staring at the table before she caught Fred's eyes as he wrapped a hand around his shoulder, unable to shift her attention as his brown eyes burned in anger and anticipation. "Enraged he broke through a line of Aurors and managed to rip his arm off before they managed to subdue him enough to move Dumbledore out of the courtroom."

A shocked silence fell and a chill ran down her spine as the older Weasley twin nodded grimly, satisfied with the answer.

"Upon being unable to calm him down, the Aurors called upon Professor Sirius for help. He managed to calm Professor Lupin down again and they shall return to classes tomorrow."

She let the significance of her words wash over the students as they slowly realised that their return meant he had not been arrested for his action, something that to her surprise calmed most students.

Seeing that there were no questions she allowed the noise to rise again, the students all leaning together to discuss this latest news as she turned to the shocked teachers, informing them of what had happened at the trial more in depth.

"Can you imagine?" Seamus asked, eyes wide as the Gryffindors gathered closer together.

"What?" Ginny asked warily, taking a sip from her drink.

"That Professor Lupin ripped off his arm."

"Yeah, I can," Ginny nodded grimly. "I've seen him mad before so I have no problem imagining it."

"The amount of strength needed to rip someone's arm off, without magic..." Parvati trailed off with a shudder.

"Who said he didn't use magic?" Ron frowned.

"When a trial is in session magic is annulled. None of the viewers are able to use magic to prevent people from taking matters into their own hands when enraged. Only the Chief Warlock and the ones leading the trial are able to use magic," Lavender explained. "So Professor Lupin wouldn't have been able to use magic to do what he did. He had to have done it with his bare hands."

"Well, he is a werewolf so his strength is superior to any of ours," Dean shrugged, not as shocked as the others at the revelation. "At any rate they could probably fix it in mere moments."

"No, they can't. Professor Lupin is a werewolf, you can't heal wounds caused by them," Katie corrected him.

"What?"

"Katie's right. Werewolf wounds are like dark magic, the wounds cannot be fully healed and will leave scars," Angelina confirmed.

"Yeah, but Remus wasn't a werewolf when he attacked Dumbledore," Ginny piped up.

"Doesn't matter, any wounds caused by an untransformed werewolf still have the same result," Angelina shook her head.

"I've heard stories of victims who looked horrible after being attacked by an untransformed
werewolf, scars all over their body from the attack," Katie told them. "They won't be able to reattached or re-grow Dumbledore's arm."

"The Professor should have ripped him apart," Lavender growled.

"And leave Professor Sirius behind? It's a miracle he wasn't punished as it was, though I can completely understand why he attacked Dumbledore," Seamus said.

"The bastard got what he deserved," Dean nodded. "I have to admit that I am more shocked to learn that Dumbledore planned everything to get Professor Sirius out of the way."

"What do you mean?" Ron asked.

"Didn't you hear Professor McGonagall? He withheld Harry from Professor Sirius to ensure he'd go after Pettigrew, basically kidnapping him to ensure he would."

"Why would he have planned that?" Ginny asked.

"More importantly, how did he plan that? Between You-Know-Who's defeat and Professor Sirius' arrest was less than half a day," Dean said.

"What are you saying?" Parvati wondered.

"He's saying that Dumbledore is guilty of more than what we've just learned," Seamus interrupted.

"How?"

Tuning out the conversation, Fred turned to Harry, who had been trying to blend in uncomfortable and remain unnoticed.

"Shall we get out of here?" he suggested quietly.

Harry nodded, rising unnoticed by the occupied students, and they quickly made their way through the students seeking each other out and out of the Great Hall.

Outside Harry let out a relieved breath as no one followed them. "Thanks."

"No problem. Are you all right?" George asked.

"Yeah."

"Are they?"

Harry began to nod before he swallowed at the identical concerned gazes and changed it into a shrug. "I don't know. How many times can someone be trampled upon before they can't take it any more?"

"They are tough," George took a deep breath.

"They are, but even tough people have their limits," Harry insisted, leaning against one of the large windowsills. "Remus was furious; it took seven Aurors to even attempt to keep him down when we arrived."

"Can't say I didn't expect that," Fred nodded.

"Me neither. But Sirius remained calm. He was utterly calm when learning what Dumbledore had
done, not a single emotion visible as he calmed Remus," Harry sighed. "Like he just didn't care any more."

"Well, a lot has happened the last few months. Maybe he just needs some time to process things?" Fred offered.

"No, it's more than that," Harry shook his head, debating if he should say more.

"He's tense and withdrawn. Has been since the giant attack last week," George spoke up.

"Yes, how did you know?" Harry asked surprised.

"I use my eyes. You are restless and so is Remus. You both notice he's not entirely himself so you aren't entirely yourself either," George explained.

Harry sighed. "I don't know what to do to help him. I know something is wrong but he's not talking about it."

"If he doesn't want to talk about it then you can't force him. All you can do is be there for him," George said.

"How?"

"Just spend time with him, be there."

"How about you go play in the snow with him?" Fred suggested suddenly.

"What snow? There hasn't been snow since early February," Harry looked at him like he had grown a second head.

"The snow that is falling right now," George's eyes widened as he moved to the window as well.

"Its halfway into March," turning Harry spotted the slowly falling snow with surprise.

"Well, what are you waiting for? Sirius loves snow, doesn't he? Let's go get him," Fred grinned, making Harry smile.

"Yeah, let's go."

They hurried through the hallways to Marauder Headquarters; Harry let them in.

"You are back early," Sirius' voice greeted him before he noticed Fred and George. "Oh, hey guys."

"Hey," the twins returned the greeting, nudging Harry forward as he hesitated.

"Will you come with me?" Harry asked as he stepped forward.

"Sure," Sirius let the papers he'd been looking through fall back onto the desk and Harry eyed them warily.

"Are those marriage proposals again? I thought Dobby was taking care of those?"

"Normally he does, but these are from so called wealthy houses who won't take an automatic refusal for an answer so I have to decline those personally," Sirius indicated the papers scattered over his desk.
"You're still getting marriage proposals?" George asked surprised.

"You'd think that people would have gotten the message by now that he's not interested," Harry grumbled. "But as long as he doesn't wear a ring around his finger, people are going to try."

"But, doesn't everyone think you're involved with Remus?" Fred frowned.

"Most do, but not everyone," Sirius sighed as he rose to his feet and made his way to them. "Remus got a few, too. But he can get away with just ignoring them."

"Does Remus know you're still getting these?" Harry asked.

"Why do you think he's been extra possessive in public?" Sirius chuckled. "He's not so subtly trying to tell people to back off, but it doesn't always convince people. So where do you want to go?"

"I want to show you something," Harry said evasively, letting the subject drop for now.

"All right, lead the way then," Sirius readily agreed, not asking any questions as he made his way towards them.

"Where's Remus anyway?" Fred glanced around.

"Asleep. He was pretty exhausted when we returned."

"I'd say, he's blown up most of Grimmauld Place," Harry snorted as Sirius wrote a quick note before following them out into the hallway.

"Blown up Grimmauld Place?" George chuckled.

"Most of it," Sirius acknowledged. "It was a lovely view to behold."

"I bet. Had to blow off some steam?" Fred asked knowingly.

"Yes. It was a lot of fun," Sirius grinned suddenly. "Especially when things started to explode."

"But how did he destroy things? Aren't there wards on everything? And what about the Fidelius?" George frowned.

"There were wards, until I removed them all."

"If you could, then why have you never done so before?" Fred asked curiously.

"Because the darn house was both needed for Order business and our research to Horcruxes and it was the safest location there was. But it isn't needed any more now and as the Head of House I can remove any charm or ward placed upon what is rightfully mine, regardless of what others place upon it."

"Because the ancient laws of magic ensure that no rightful owner can be kept from their own property, no matter what protections are placed upon their house, meaning you could annul the Fidelius charm and not even the Secret Keeper would be able to stop you," Fred realised.

"Exactly," Sirius confirmed. "It is a protection placed upon most magical households. It prevents people from hiding or warding your own house from you. So even though Dumbledore was the Secret-Keeper for the Order, I could overrule the Fidelius if I chose to do so."
"And you took it down at the same time as the wards?" George asked.

"Yes."

"But...are all those protections lost now, then?" George continued.

"No, I have put the same protections upon our new house to ensure our privacy. It is just as safe and Unplottable as Grimmauld Place ever was and much nicer to live in. Watching Grimmauld Place be destroyed was lovely."

"You were cheering and throwing whiskey bottles into the fire to make the explosions bigger," Harry chuckled. "Completely mental."

"Maybe," Sirius grinned and the twins chuckled as they had no trouble imagining his joy at seeing Remus destroy that horrible house.

"And when he ran out of liquor to throw in he began to add chairs and other flammable objects to keep the fire going," Harry laughed, having enjoyed seeing his godfather cheer like a little boy at every explosion. "Kreacher was in hysterics when Sirius gave him a direct order to grab his own personal stuff and get to Hogwarts."

"I can imagine, didn't he try to save anything regardless of that order?" Fred laughed.

"No, I gave him a direct order and he couldn't disobey that," Sirius told them.

"But you let him collect his own stuff before you let Remus loose on the house?" George raised an eyebrow.

"Why wouldn't I?" Sirius asked confused, making both boys smile and Harry grin, aware not many would even consider giving their house elves the chance to take their stuff into safety. And that were the ones who actually liked their house elves and didn't hate them, like Sirius hated Kreacher.

"Don't look out of any windows," Harry suddenly ordered more seriously as they entered another hallway, slipping a hand in his godfather's as they walked on and squeezing it lightly as he felt how cold the skin was.

"Did you take your potions?" he asked as he glanced at his godfather's tired expression, half masked by his continued grin.

"Yes Mum," Sirius chuckled, returning the squeeze. "All except the pain relieving one."

"Why didn't you take that one?" Harry asked, stopping as he turned to his godfather.

"Because it makes me sleepy and I wanted to be certain I'd be awake until you safely returned," Sirius readily admitted.

"You're an idiot," Harry smiled affectionately as he led his godfather through the hallways to the back of the castle.

"Don't you want to blindfold me?" Sirius asked as he noticed they were coming near an area with large windows.

"You wouldn't mind?" Harry blinked surprised, the thought having crossed his mind, but he wouldn't have dared to suggest it, knowing how much his godfather disliked the dark.

"Not if you want to keep whatever it is you want to show me a surprise. I'd keep my eyes closed
but I can't promise I won't accidentally open them if you'll keep speaking to me," Sirius smiled.

Harry nodded at his logic. "All right, we'll ensure you won't walk into something."

Conjuring a cloth he quickly covered his godfather's eyes even as he closed them, before taking his hand again and leading him on, the twins flanking Sirius' left side.

"It's cold," he commented with a shiver as they began to pass the windows.

"You didn't grab your jacket or robe," Harry commented as he glanced at his godfather.

"I wasn't aware I needed one. The three of you aren't wearing coats either so I assumed we wouldn't go far," Sirius admitted.

"We should have picked up our outer robes, too," Fred realised as they glanced at their school robes.

"I could run back and grab them," George offered as they stopped walking.

"Why go through the trouble when you can use magic to transfigure your normal robes into warmer ones?" Sirius asked, a small teasing smile playing on his lips.

George opened his mouth to answer that before closing it again almost immediately as he realised Sirius was right.

"That's...I'd have run back to our dorms."

"Most would," Sirius admitted as they quickly transfigured their robes into warmer ones.

"We'll have to go outside now so there will be a few steps," Harry warned Sirius, turning so that he could help his godfather down the frozen steps without him slipping.

"Here," George stepped forward to take Sirius' other hand and together they led him down the steps.

"Your hand is freezing," he commented as he rubbed Sirius' hand between his own in an attempt to warm it.

"They won't get warmer like that, but thank you for the effort," Sirius smiled.

"Why not?"

"Because it's not the cold that makes my hands so cold. I'm still suffering from anaemia, which is why I tire so easily, too," Sirius explained.

"And are still so pale?" Fred realised.

"And you are so short of breath when just walking around?" George asked as Sirius was indeed out of breath despite their slow walk.

"Exactly. And I'm easily dizzy," Sirius admitted.

"Can we do anything to help?" they both asked.

"Not really, but thanks. Harry and Remus are making sure I'm taking plenty of fluids and iron rich food above the potions Madam Pomfrey gives me," Sirius assured them.
"He only misses his tea," Harry grinned.

"Why?"

"Because tea actually lowers the absorption of iron," Sirius pouted, making the twins laugh.

Stepping further forward, Sirius shivered again.

"It's gotten a lot colder quickly. If this keeps up it will...oh."

Harry had taken the time they spoke to clear a path further into the Courtyard from the fallen snow to prevent it from crunching underneath their shoes and take away the surprise.

He knew the potions meddled with his godfather's senses enough that it would take time for him to be able to smell the snow. George had taken the precaution to silently raise a shield above his head so he wouldn't be able to feel the snow fall down, either.

But now, as Harry removed the blindfold, George let the shield drop and snow calmly swirled down, surrounding them from all sides.

"Surprise!" the three of them grinned at the childlike joy that lit up Sirius' eyes as he watched the snow fall all around him.

Raising his hands to let snowflakes gather inside them his entire posture seemed to slowly relax as a small content smile spread over his pale lips.

"Do you like it?" Harry asked softly as his godfather remained silent for a long moment, just standing there in the snow.

"I love it," Sirius whispered before he turned around and pulled him into a tight hug, which Harry answered only too happily before he was let go again.

"Thank you, all of you," the Marauder smiled before surprising both Fred and George by pulling them into a hug, too.

"You're welcome," they smiled in unison, not hesitating to return the hug despite their surprise.

"When did it start snowing?" Sirius asked as he pulled back again, looking up to the falling snow once more.

"About twenty minutes ago," George answered with a smile.

"I know Padfoot can't play in it right now, but we figured you'd like to see it fall," Harry beamed, more at ease now as Sirius seemed more relaxed right now than he'd been all week.

"I do," Sirius hesitated before turning to Harry, his short hair already sticking to his neck as snowflakes rapidly turned his black hair white. "I've worried you, haven't I?"

"A bit," Harry admitted quietly, unable to look away from the soft grey eyes looking at him.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to."

"I know."

"We should go, leave you to talk," Fred interrupted as Sirius shifted.
"No. It is all right, I don't mind if you two stay, you're family and it's not..." Sirius sighed before looking back to the sky.

"I knew."

"Knew what?" Harry asked confused, signalling the twins to remain where they were as he felt the two of them were part of this, too and Sirius was right in that they were part of the family.

"That Dumbledore was aware of what was happening in Azkaban," Sirius admitted quietly.

"How?" The three of them asked at the same time before Harry added another question.

"Why didn't you say anything?"

"Because I wasn't a hundred percent sure I wasn't mixing up reality with nightmares."

"How would you mistake Dumbledore knowing about what happened in Azkaban with a nightmare?" Fred wondered.

"Because I sometimes dreamed that Dumbledore was there during some of the earlier interrogations."

"Doing nothing," Harry finished bitterly.

"No," Sirius hesitated. "Checking their progress."

"You mean he was urging them on?" Fred asked disgusted.

"No, not urging them on, at least not as far as I remember. He wanted to know what they were learning and I vaguely recall him trying to break into my mind, searching for something. But when I would be coherent enough again to truly be aware of my surroundings he was never there and I couldn't know what he'd been looking for in my mind as my shields hadn't been broken."

"Which is why you thought you had been dreaming," Harry nodded.

Sirius returned the nod before shifting his gaze back to the sky.

"But there is more, isn't there?" Harry continued.

"Just suspicions, nothing solid."

"Tell us anyway," George urged him on.

"I suspected that he knew I wasn't the Secret-Keeper long before we ever told him the truth."

"How?"

"There was something he said during one of those interrogations. I remember repeatedly telling the guards that I wasn't a Death Eater and hadn't betrayed my family. On one such occasion there was something Dumbledore said that for some reason stuck with me. I didn't think much of it at the time, preoccupied with other things. But I never forgot."

He looked down at his hands, watching the snow collect in them but none of them tried to urge him on now. Harry had the suspicion that his godfather was in truth staring at his covered wrists but he couldn't bring himself to distract him, not when he knew his godfather needed to get this off his chest.
"He said that there was no living soul left who could vouch for my innocence."

"Well, not taking Pettigrew into account that was technically true, wasn't it?" George asked.

"No it's not. It struck me as odd that he'd say that while there was someone else who knew about the switch, though I doubted anyone had asked him despite my requests to do so."

"Why not?" Harry asked surprised to learn there had in fact been someone else who had known the truth. "Why didn't he come forward if he knew of the switch?"

"Because you were only a toddler."

"How would I have known about the switch if I was just a toddler?" Harry asked confused.

"Because the secret had to have been told to you for you to be able to see the house," Fred realised with wide eyes. "It wasn't your property yet so the Charm would work to hide the house from you."

"Exactly. Harry knew Peter was the Secret-Keeper as he was there when the Fidelius was activated. Aurors could have simply asked him," Sirius said.

"But Dumbledore whisked me away before anyone could come near me," Harry said bitterly.

"How did he even know there was someone to be whisked away in the first place?" Fred frowned.

"Better question, how did he know where the house was. It was under the Fidelius," Sirius' words snapped all their heads back to him.

"What?"

"The Fidelius Charm was placed upon the house, not the residents. Meaning that upon your parents deaths, it was not lifted. It was something I realised when we went to visit your parents grave."

"How did you realise that?"

"Remus told us how it had taken five years before he had been able to go collect what items had been left in the house due to the Fidelius not having expired before and he wasn't in on the secret," Harry remembered.

"It took the Ministry five years before they were able to locate the house and erect that statue in the garden before making it Unplottable for Muggles too," Sirius added.

"So how could Dumbledore have known where to find the house if the secret hadn't been told to him?" Fred wondered.

"Or Hagrid, who arrived at the house even before I did," Sirius added.

"They couldn't have. Not unless they had been told the secret," George concluded.

"He knew about the switch so it is likely that he simply asked Pettigrew to tell him the secret after your dad told him the truth," Fred mused.

"He also knew that Peter was the traitor and it was only a matter of time before he'd betray James and Lily as he was jealous of the bonds between you all," a new voice joined theirs, making all but Sirius jump in surprise.

"How long have you been there?" Harry asked surprised.
"Long enough. Here, you are shivering." Remus shrugged out of his outer robe and placed it over Sirius' shoulders, his hand lingering on his shoulder.

"Thanks. So he probably had ways to keep an eye on the house without their knowledge and was able to put his plans into motion immediately upon Voldemort's arrival there," Sirius mused as he shot Remus a grateful smile.

"You aren't upset?" surprised Fred turned back to Sirius.

"I already had my suspicions that things didn't make sense. Hagrid's mere presence there should have raised every alarm in my head as I was the only other one who knew the secret."

"Your whole world had just collapsed underneath you, no one can blame you for not noticing things like that at such a time," Harry objected.

"And you didn't have any proof of Dumbledore's actions to back up your suspicions once you did notice things didn't add up," Remus squeezed his shoulder. "Don't blame yourself for his manipulations."

"Doesn't stop me from wondering if Harry could have had a normal childhood if I had realised something was wrong though. I wouldn't have been able to prevent their deaths, but I could have hampered Hagrid from taking Harry away from me," Sirius admitted quietly as he pulled Remus' robe tighter around himself with a small shiver.

"Is that what's been bothering you?" Harry was baffled for a moment before he realised that was exactly something that would trouble his godfather. It was just like him to not care about what happened to himself as long as his loved ones were all right.

The knowledge that everything might have gone completely different if he had just realised something wasn't right would indeed eat at him. And Harry knew Sirius was very good at bottling things up inside himself and hiding them if he believed it would keep others from being hurt.

"You are an idiot," Remus sighed, stepping aside as Harry moved forward so he could pull his godfather into a hug.

"You aren't to blame for Dumbledore's actions. Everything you've ever done has been to try and protect us. Everyone trusted Dumbledore, he managed to fool and manipulate us all," Harry murmured into his ear.

"You weren't to blame for Dumbledore's actions. Everything you've ever done has been to try and protect us. Everyone trusted Dumbledore, he managed to fool and manipulate us all," Harry murmured into his ear.

"You should have realised something was amiss upon seeing Hagrid holding you," Sirius insisted as he returned the hug, pulling Harry close.

"I should have realised something was amiss upon seeing Hagrid holding you," Sirius insisted as he returned the hug, pulling Harry close.

"You were devastated and terrified. I don't think anyone ever realised things didn't add up," Fred comforted him.

"I know I didn't," Remus admitted. "I never questioned how Dumbledore knew to send Hagrid to pick Harry up. Or how he even knew there was a child left alive to collect. Or even how Hagrid knew the secret if Peter hadn't told him. You shouldn't blame yourself for something none of us would ever have thought to ask questions about."

"And if it makes you feel better, you broke out of Azkaban the moment you realised Pettigrew was close to me, in the perfect position to harm me should it be required. And every action you've taken since then has been with the intention to protect me. To take care of me, so don't you dare blame yourself for something that is not your fault," Harry pulled back slightly to make his godfather look at him, pulling him down a little so he could rest his forehead against his.
Sirius sighed, closing his eyes as he pulled Harry back into the hug, holding him close for a long moment before stepping back with a small watery smile.

"If you do we'll just have to prank you to make you realise you're being an idiot," Fred grinned.

"Maybe we can write idiot on your forehead to ensure everyone knows," George mused.

"Or maybe the two of you would like to walk around with purple hair again," Sirius threatened them, ruffling their hair up with a laugh before ducking as a snowball was thrown his way.

"Maybe green would be a better punishment," Remus mused as he swiftly stepped forward and wrapped his arms around Sirius' waist, pulling him back against him as Sirius' expression tightened and he staggered.

"Is he hurt?" They immediately moved to their side as Sirius sagged against Remus, eyes closed.

"Chest pain and sore ribs, he shouldn't have ducked like that," Remus answered for him as Sirius' was too focused on breathing evenly to react.

"I'm sorry," Fred apologised, horrified to see what he'd caused.

"S'okay, should have known better," Sirius breathed out slowly, restoring his balance but not moving away from Remus' embrace or opening his eyes yet, leaning back to rest the back of his head against Remus' shoulder.

"I think it is time to return inside. The snow is getting worse," placing a hand on his godfather's arm to let him focus on something until the pain slowly faded again, Harry looked up to the increasingly falling snow.

"Let's return to our quarters. I can make some hot chocolate for us all," Remus offered.

"What about curfew?" George smiled as Sirius moved to stand on his own again and patted Fred on his head with a teasing smile, effectively erasing the tension out of his twin's posture.

"I will accompany the two of you back to Gryffindor Tower if it might become later than curfew, but we have a good two hours left before curfew," Remus assured.

"Maybe we could hold a sleepover this weekend," Harry suggested, grinning as Sirius snuck an arm around Fred and tucked him briefly against his side.

"Would McGonagall allow that?" Fred chuckled as he automatically wrapped an arm around Sirius' midsection as he was pulled close.

"I think she will let your Head of House decide if he's going to allow that," Remus chuckled as both looked up surprised.

"Our...McGonagall is not our Head of House any more?" George asked as Fred moved to his side again.

"She has officially become our Headmistress this afternoon. Sirius took over as Gryffindors Head of House," Harry proudly announced.

"Congratulations!" both twins cheered.

"Why haven't we heard anything about that at dinner?" Fred wondered.
"Probably because we left early and McGonagall only made the announcement after she let the events of the trail sink in a little," Harry shot him an apologetic smile.

"It was worth it," George leaned against Sirius as the man pulled him close for a long moment, too, wrapping his arms around him with a smile.

"It was," all of them agreed as they watched the snow fall for a moment longer before Sirius slipped a hand into Harry's and lead them back inside for a cup of hot chocolate.
Chapter 23

It was a little before dinner the next day that the twins managed to catch Harry as he left the Herbology Greenhouses.

"Harry, just the person we needed," Fred grinned as he slapped a hand on Harry's shoulder.

"What did you need me for?" Harry was relieved as the twins gave him an excuse to leave his current company, Ron brushing past them annoyed and Hermione with her head down, as quiet as she'd been all day.

"Have you noticed anything weird about Hagrid this morning?" George didn't look phased by the brush of from his own brother as they began to make their way towards the castle slowly.

"Not really, why?" Harry frowned.

"Just something we noticed at breakfast. Would you say that Hagrid is avoiding Sirius and Remus?" Fred pulled out his wand to clear a path in the snow for them when the snow became too thick to walk steadily.

"You only just noticed that now? He's been avoiding Remus all week and Sirius since he was finally well enough to leave their chambers."

"Because of what happened with the giant?" George asked.

"Yes. Remus told me that McGonagall really chewed Hagrid out for what happened. And not just because of what might have happened if it had been a student who had entered the Forest," Harry explained.

"But she contacted Madam Bones to have the Aurors remove the giant, didn't she? At least that is what Professor Flitwick told us at dinner last Friday."

"She did. But that doesn't change the fact that Hagrid hid a giant in the Forest without telling anyone about it, despite knowing that Padfoot and Moony run around there most full moons," Harry answered Fred's question.

"It could have killed Sirius if Remus and Buckbeak hadn't gotten him away when they did."

"Almost did. It's been seven days and even with all those potions Madam Pomfrey gives him he's still not back to normal," George commented.

"He's not," Harry agreed before sighing. "And the fact that there was a giant in the Forest isn't even why McGonagall tore him to pieces, but more that he didn't tell anyone. Sirius almost died because
Hagrid kept it a secret."

"That explains why he's been keeping his distance from McGonagall, but why is he keeping his distance from Sirius? He hasn't yelled at him as far as we know," Fred wondered.

"Sirius doesn't need to yell to get his point across but to be honest, Hagrid is probably avoiding him because Remus is so overly protective of Sirius and still mad about what happened," Harry sighed.

"He's awfully nervous whenever they are around at mealtimes," George agreed.

"Nervous enough to knock over the pumpkin juice and the entire table when Sirius leaned over to try and help him clean it up," Fred grinned.

"Is Sirius angry with Hagrid?" George asked quietly.

"He says Remus is angry enough for the two of them."

"Hmm…say, what happened with his brother after the Aurors picked him up?" Fred asked as they reached the castle and began to make their way to the Great Hall for dinner. "Flitwick only informed the students that he was relocated, but not where."

"He was transported to a giant reservation in Asia, near the Himalaya area."

"A giant reservation?" Fred asked confused.

"Yes, Sirius told me there is a gigantic area in Asia that wizards warded against Muggles. Giants moved there after the war ended and they were hunted down by British witches and wizards for what several of their kind did during it."

"So they saddled other countries with the giants after the war?" Fred frowned.

"Only a few countries are as prejudiced against magical creatures as Britain is. Asia offered refuge to those not fighting back and they've been staying there ever since," Harry explained.

"And Hagrid's brother is there now, too?"

"Yeah, Sirius actually arranged that the wizards holding watch over the area keep Hagrid updated now and then about his brother's life there and he can visit."

"That is rather kind," Fred mused.

"Remus called him a sentimental sod," Harry laughed. "Although I'm pretty positive that he meant it affectionately despite his grumbling at the time."

"I bet."

"How have people been treating you today?" George asked as they made their way into the Great Hall. "With what McGonagall told us yesterday and all."

"As usual. I have to admit I had been more afraid they'd behave differently towards Remus after what happened."

"But they haven't, have they?" Fred grinned.

"Not even the slightest. There are some who've been a little nervous at breakfast but that disappeared quickly enough," Harry chuckled.
"Between Hagrid upsetting the table and their usual breakfast behaviour it is hard to be nervous of Remus no matter what he might have done, not with Sirius there," George mused.

Harry smiled as they walked to Gryffindor Table. George was right. Harry, worried as he'd been about the students' reactions, had paid more attention than usual to the Staff Table. Sirius and Remus had been seated beside each other as usual, a game of chess their choice of game for the morning as they ate.

Remus was being thoroughly beaten by Sirius, when Hagrid had knocked the pumpkin juice over, so he cheered when Hagrid accidentally overturned the table as he jumped to his feet when the juice splattered McGonagall, Flitwick and Sirius.

Of course Sirius had smugly retaliated by picking up the now empty bread basket and putting it upside down onto Remus' head and laughing at his pout even as Hagrid had stammered an apology and returned the table to its normal position again.

Their actions had relaxed the slight tension in the few unsure students, once more making the two the topic of many conversations.

A raised voice echoing through the open doors, pulled Harry out of his thoughts.

Most students that were also present early looked up from their own conversations; the volume of the voice high enough to quiet them all down as they curiously listened in.

"Don't you dare walk away from me in the middle of a conversation, Sirius Black! I am talking to you!"

Harry cringed, recognising Molly Weasley's voice just outside the doors and sighed as he realised the woman had clearly moved on from sending Howlers, deciding to show up in person now as she must have realised Sirius had reset his anti owl wards and her letters kept returning to her unopened.

"I wouldn't classify what you are doing as speaking when the volume of it hurts my ears. Nor can I call it a conversation when you rudely barge into my classroom unannounced, disturbing the lesson. And only to start shrieking at me for no particularly good reason."

Most students grinned at his reply and Harry relaxed, knowing his godfather could handle himself perfectly well, even when he sounded exhausted due to the amount of potions still in his system.

"You are ruining the future of my sons!"

"I don't see how supporting a good business plan ruins anyone's future."

The twins tensed, glancing at each other nervously as they realised they were the topic of the current argument. Fred sighed as people turned towards them curiously, many of them aware of the basics of their plans.

"They will get a job at the Ministry, a respectable..."

"Position among corrupted, worthless and bigoted colleagues," Sirius finished for her. "Yes, I remember how well that respectable position worked out for your other son. The one who actually enjoys being bossed around like an infant."

The two of them became visible through the open doors as Molly blocked Sirius' path and Harry couldn't stop his grin as he saw Molly flinch at Sirius' harsh tone.
"You will not give my sons charity!"

"If I wish to invest my money in what I believe is a fantastic business plan, then that is my decision. The only charity I have ever committed for your family was letting you join them in staying at my house last summer despite having heard stories about you from your brothers. And that is not a mistake I will ever make again."

Fred and George both grinned at Sirius' response, though Harry noted they looked a little embarrassed at having their mother scream at Sirius publicly.

"You have no right!"

"I have very right. In case you have forgotten, I have absolutely no reason to listen to you."

"Dumbledore would be very dis..."

"Albus Dumbledore is a manipulative old goat who can rot in jail for all I care. I wouldn't listen to him even if he was the last person on the planet."

"He is our leader. He told you not to support that rubbish dream of theirs. They will be respectful Ministry workers with a bright future..."

"And completely miserable," Sirius interrupted her again. "First of all, Fawkes was our leader, not Dumbledore. Order of the Phoenix, remember? Last time I saw the fool he was not a beautiful rare creature that I am very fond of. Therefore he was never my leader and I would not answer to him even if he wasn't convicted for his crimes and rotting in Azkaban where he belongs."

Sirius snorted. "Secondly, sometimes you make me wonder if you actually know anything about your twins as the persons they are. You keep claiming I don't see the difference between my brother and my son, but it seems to me that you wish to see perfect copies of your brothers. They are not Fabian and Gideon."

"How dare you!" Molly foamed. "I know my sons perfectly well!"

"Then why do you try to force your brother's dreams upon your sons, despite knowing theirs is very different? If you truly love them, then why do you keep trying to cut them off at every turn in following their dreams?"

Molly spluttered. "They cannot be profitable in making pranks!"

"Evidently they can as they are clearly proving to be both capable and efficient in their plans. But their dream is not mine to discuss. I made the choice to invest in their plan as I do see profit in it and I only informed your husband because it was the decent thing to do, not because I was asking for permission. We are all adults and you have absolutely no say about our plans. Now, if you will excuse me, I am tired and really not in the mood to let your shrieking ruin my day any longer."

"You can't just walk away from me Black!"

"Don't try my patience Prewett," Sirius snapped. "Go home before you embarrass your children even more with your banshee act."

Sirius moved past her and made his way into the Great Hall, too annoyed to look up as everyone was still quiet. Therefore he did not see several students rise from their seats as Molly stormed in after him, clearly livid at being brushed off like that.
Harry's breath stocked as she seemed to reach out to Sirius in slow motion and he tried to get a warning out to stop her, but his voice was lost under the sudden noise as several others attempted to do the same thing, benches being thrown backwards in their sudden hurry to get up and stop her from grabbing him.

Sirius stopped, surprised by the sudden volume of noise and turning at the same time Molly's hand locked around his right wrist.

A burst of magic immediately slammed into Molly, brutally tossing her backwards across the Great Hall while a shockwave rippled through the rest of the Hall. It crashed into the students, knocking them off their feet, several tumbling over the benches and each other as the tables overturned under the sudden force.

Harry, the twins and several others whom had been further away managed to raise a shield in time to protect everyone, though even they themselves were pushed backwards several feet, many losing their balance in the process from the sheer force of the wave as it seemed to crash through the shield like it wasn't even there.

Groaning Harry sat up, noticing the Staff Table had been overturned, too, though most of the teachers present had managed to find their footing again. His own slide backwards had thrown him against the Slytherin table and dazzled he tried to get his bearing while hurriedly seeking out Sirius among the chaos.

Surprised he noticed both Remus and Peeves were with his godfather.

Remus hadn't been present in the Great Hall during the argument and Harry had no idea how he had gotten to Sirius' side during the magical backlash, but he was relieved to notice the man was there beside Sirius now as his eyes found him.

Sirius' entire being was trembling with power, his form blurry as magic swirled around him like electricity, crackling in the air. The power he was radiating was beyond anything Harry had ever felt, terrifying and breathtaking at the same time.

Peeves was floating above them, crackling with magic as well. It took Harry a moment to be able to tear his eyes away from his godfather's shape to process that the Poltergeist was absorbing the extensive raw magic that was bursting out of Sirius in clearly uncontrollable waves, the Enchanted Ceiling raging in a thunderstorm as it reflected Sirius' emotions like it had done once before.

Sirius hadn't been kidding when he had said the potions messed up his control on his magic as even with Peeves rapidly absorbing the magic, tails of magic still slashed in the air around them.

Remus was not touching Sirius as he stood beside him, quietly speaking to him and Harry wondered why the man wasn't trying to help him when he caught sight of Sirius' expression and he understood.

The usual warm grey eyes were completely void of any kindness as he stared at the tangle of limbs at the far end of the Great Hall, a choke escaping Harry as he noticed Molly slowly getting to her feet again.

This was not the loving guardian he had come to know and love.

This was the man who would have stood between him and Dumbledore's plans, the one person the manipulator had known he'd be unable to bend to his will and had thus needed to get rid of.

This was Sirius as he must have been during the later years of the war, a terrifying and powerful
Order member who had made Death Eaters tremble. The man who had caused fear even in Voldemort.

The wizard who Voldemort had ordered to have killed as a number one priority, not daring to try and convert him to his side like he'd attempted but failed to do with Harry's parents.

The man who could bring the Wizarding world down to tremble at his feet if he chose to do so.

And all of that power, all of his attention was now directed at Molly Weasley, who had managed to get to her feet again, bleeding from various visible cuts.

"How...how..." her eyes widened, pressing herself into the wall behind her as she caught sight of him.

"Touch me again, come near me again and I will kill you."

The words were barely above a whisper, but they caused cold sweat to run down Harry's back as they rang loud and clear through the silent Great Hall, no one making a sound as they stared at him and Harry swallowed.

It was suffocating, the sheer power displayed drawing all oxygen out of the air and leaving the students trembling as it was a sight much more frightful than when he had confronted Umbridge just a few months before.

They were now realising that he had been in complete control of his emotions and powers back then.

This was what the man looked like if he ever lost that control and the result was terrifying.

They held their breath as Sirius stepped forward, Peeves shuddering above him as more magic was released.

"You attacked me," Molly whispered, unable to scream as she stared in fear at the approaching man, finally realising just who's she had been up against as her arm was wrapped around her midsection protectively but oddly, which told Harry both her ribs and arm were probably broken.

"I will not hesitate to squash you like a bug if you come anywhere near me or my family again."

As Sirius moved forward Harry felt his heart clench, but suddenly Remus moved with him, his left fingers locking around Sirius' right hand and effectively stopping him.

"Remus," Molly whispered relieved.

"Shut up you disgusting hag," Remus' voice rang through the Great Hall loudly, startling everyone with the venom in it.

"He..." Molly's attention shifted to Remus, clearly the less terrifying presence before her.

"Take one step closer and I swear to Merlin..." Remus' voice was trembling as he trailed off, pulling Sirius against his left side, never releasing his hold on his hand.

Breathing out slowly as Sirius made no attempt to break free from the werewolf's grip, though his eyes never shifted from Molly's trembling form, Harry shifted into a kneeling position.

Remus' eyes were burning with the same fire Harry had only seen twice before, the fire that only seemed to be brought out when Sirius was endangered or hurt.
"Come near him again and your children be damned, I will rip you apart with my bare hands."

The promise in Remus' voice was clear, making her eyes widen even more as her gaze kept switching between the two men standing a few feet away from her.

"You...I..." Molly couldn't seem to find the right words as she stared at them in shock.

"Enough! Of all the stupid...what could have possibly possessed you to grab his wrist?!" McGonagall had appeared at their other side, looking pale but livid.

"He attacked me," Molly spluttered.

"You are lucky he had enough sense not to kill you right here and now while you are trespassing on these grounds. Remus, take him away before he loses what control he’s fighting to hold onto."

Nodding Remus lightly pulled on Sirius' hand, finally making the other man tear his eyes away from Molly as his attention shifted to the werewolf, his gaze softening as he focused on him.

"Let's go, Siri," Remus whispered, forcing a small smile onto his lips as Sirius turned to him without comment and let Remus pull him towards the door.

"You can't let him leave...he's dangerous!" Molly shrieked, finding her voice again now that those intensive grey eyes weren't staring at her in coldness any more.

"To let a man like that teach...Fred, George...what..." Molly's eyes widened as the two stepped between her and the two men with their wands drawn.

"You've gone too far," George' voice was tight as he stared at his mother with an unreadable expression.

"We will never forgive you for harming him," Fred's expression however was filled with anger and disgust.

"You are picking his side?! I raised you!"

"No you didn't. Dad and Bill did. You were too busy cooing over Percy and Ginny to care about us at all. Sirius is actually the first adult aside from Dad to care about us for who we are. We will not let you near him."

"He's not..."

"He has mothered us more in this past year than you ever have. He has supported us in our dreams, nursed our wounds whenever we injured ourselves and urged us to do well in our studies. The only reason we are still in school is because he asked us to get our N.E.W.T.s and we want to make him proud," Fred moved closer to his brother, taking his hand as he swallowed before speaking.

"While you were busy crying over Percy, he helped us with our studies and spent time with us. Not because he had to, but because he wanted to."

Harry swallowed thickly, touched by the twin's words. But also saddened for he knew Ron wasn't the only one who had been overlooked by their mother.

Quietly, without drawing attention to himself he moved to the Marauders' sides, making sure to keep his hands at his side as there was still some power radiating from Sirius and he wasn't sure if his godfather would be able to recognise him right then.
"I am your mother, George..." Molly choked out, but her words only hardened their near identical expressions of disgust.

"You gave birth to us, but you have never been a mother to us. You've known us for seventeen years and yet you've never been able to tell us apart. Even now you don't know who it is you are talking to. I am George," George looked at his mother bitterly.

"You are identical..." Molly began but Fred interrupted her.

"Yet Sirius has never had trouble telling us apart, even when we try to fool him or had just met us. Our friends rarely have difficulties telling us apart, so why can't our own mother tell us apart."

"It's funny really," George continued. "You always call him immature, but he's been more of a parental figure to us than you have ever been. And we love him like one."

"So back off because we will defend him," Fred bit out, his gaze unforgiving as he stared her down.

"Remus, Harry...get Sirius out of here. We'll take care of her."

McGonagall and Remus had been staring at them speechless, but at George's order Remus sprang into action, tugging on Sirius' hand again to pull him along.

But he wasn't moving this time as his attention was to the side and following his gaze, Harry's eyes widened as he realised that most of the students present were standing with their wands drawn. But not at them, every single wand drawn was pointed at Molly Weasley and anger on every face.

"Go," Luna spoke up as she moved to stand before them, joining Fred and George's side.

Giving a small nod Sirius turned, letting Remus' hand on his back move him forward again.

A Slytherin and Gryffindor hurried forward to pull the doors open, having slammed shut during the display, before quickly moving aside with a firm nod to let them pass.

Letting the doors slam shut behind them, Remus led them through as many short-cuts and little used hallways as he could, ones that Harry barely knew of and if he hadn't been so worried about his godfather he would have been impressed.

Most of these short-cuts he wouldn't have known about without using the Marauder's Map, but Remus seemed to know them like the back of his hand as his stride never slowed to consider a direction before taking it, directing Sirius as Harry hurried after them.

Eventually Remus stopped as Sirius slowed and he turned to him.

Sirius was breathing heavily, trembling as the power he was radiating shimmered before disappearing, clearing the air around them and making it easier to breathe again.

"We're all safe," Remus whispered, reaching up to brush a hand over Sirius' cheek before pulling him against him.

Sirius tensed before he let out a shaky breath, blinking rapidly as he buried his fingers in Remus' sweater when Remus tightened his hold on him and rested his head against the crook of his neck.

Harry held his breath in anticipation as Remus softly caressed Sirius' back until he went completely slack.
Breathing out slowly Remus slid one arm underneath his friend's knees and lifted him up into his arms, shifting him so that his head was resting against his shoulder.

Harry's heart clenched as he saw how vulnerable his godfather looked right now.

"Peeves, will you be all right?"

Glancing up Harry only now noticed the Poltergeist was still with them, floating above Sirius like he'd been doing since it had all begun.

"Take care of him," Peeves looked down at the unconscious man with an expression Harry could only classify as love and concern.

"I will. Thank you for what you've done."

With a small bow Peeves disappeared and Remus carried Sirius down the hallway to their quarters, entering it without bothering to give a password.

"Can you draw a warm bath? His skin is like ice."

His voice was still tight and Harry hurried to do as asked, realising the man was still struggling to control his own emotions to not turn around and kill Molly Weasley.

While he drew the bath Remus stripped Sirius before lowering him into the tub.

"Is he hurt? Harry softly asked as the water turned reddish.

"He's got some scratches on his arm, I'll bandage them later after I'm sure that...woman's filth is gone from them," Remus replied as he examined the wrist more closely.

"That is from a few scratches?" Harry indicated the water.

"No, he probably reopened a wound somewhere," Remus cupped clean water into his free hand and let it run over Sirius' head carefully, soaking his hair and face as he tried to get his temperature up before checking his older injuries.

"Can't you use heating charms?"

"I can't."

Harry was about to ask why it was he could not when Sirius suddenly screamed, bucking underneath Remus' hold as he lashed out.

Remus cursed violently, grabbing Sirius' arms and pulling him out of the water like he weighted no more than an infant, cradling him against his chest, uncaring it got him soaked.

"Sirius!" Harry tried to help but Remus pushed him away as Sirius began to fight in earnest, though he was no match for the werewolf's supreme strength and Remus easily trapped him against his chest.

"Get out," Remus barked, using his free hand to manoeuvre Sirius' arms between them so he couldn't hurt either of them as Sirius kept fighting tooth and nail trying to get away, despite the clear uselessness of his actions.

"But..."
"Out!" the tone was harsh and left no room for argument so Harry moved backwards.

He had no intention to actually leave the bathroom but as Sirius continued to scream he lashed out with magic again and Harry was forced outside as Remus used wandless magic to push him out of harm's way before Sirius' magic could reach him.

The door slammed shut behind him and wouldn't open again even as Harry immediately turned to try and open it, only to find it was magically locked.

'Remus!' Harry choked out, not daring to use magic to try and open it again, but not willing to step aside either, he leaned against the door and listened to his godfather's screams.

He sounded terrified and in pain and Harry wanted nothing more than to help him, but Remus wasn't letting him.

If he thought logically he knew there was nothing he could do, but he didn't care about logic as Sirius was clearly hurting in there and he wasn't there to help him.

Eventually Sirius' screams turned into heart-wrenching sobs that broke Harry's heart to hear.

Sliding down to the ground he pulled up his knees, hiding his face in his arms as he tried not to cry in response to his godfather's pain.

He stayed there until Sirius' sobs slowly died out, Remus' whispers just below his hearing, only forcing himself to move to the couch as even those stopped.
He had no idea how long he sat on that couch with his head in his hands, but that was where he was when a cup of hot chocolate was pressed against his hands.

He'd have shot from the couch if Remus hadn't rested a hand on his shoulder to prevent him from doing so.

"He's asleep. I gave him a dreamless sleep potion so he will sleep peacefully for now," he answered Harry's unspoken question as he took a seat at the table across of him, placing the cup on the table beside him.

"I'm sorry I yelled at you."

"Why did you force me out?" Harry demanded, not caring about apologies. "He needed me!"

"He was in a full blown panic, unable to recognise either of us. If you had stayed he could have accidentally hurt you."

"I don't care!"

"He would. Do you think he would ever forgive himself if he had hurt you? Even if it had been accidental? I know I angered you by forcing you out, but I am not sorry for doing so."

Harry stared at the man for a long moment, wanting to stay angry for what he'd done, but he knew Sirius would have indeed never forgiven himself if he had unintentionally hurt him and that knowledge made his anger ebb away. Especially when he saw the scratches and bruises already forming on Remus' arms and knew his godfather would already feel guilty enough about those.

"Why did he panic like that?"

"Because I made a mistake. You know he was tortured in Azkaban," Remus paused for Harry to nod. "There are many ways in which they did so, most of which he won't really talk to me about. I already knew about this method because I made the same mistake back at Grimmauld Place last year when he went into shock due to the Dementors' lingering presence, his body ice cold. He reacted the same way back then and through his following nightmares I saw part of his memories of that."

"You used Occlumency on him?" Harry asked, not really angry about the violation of Sirius' privacy as he was aware that Remus would never do so on purpose.

"No, he unintentionally used Legilimency on me and I countered automatically, accidentally breaking into his mind for a moment while his defence was down."

"What did you see?" apprehensive Harry swallowed, aware he probably didn't want to know but
still needing to so he could understand why his godfather had reacted the way he did.

Remus sighed, debating with himself for a long moment before he spoke.

"They used to shackle him to the ground with chains, immobilising him, before putting a towel over his head and spelling water directly onto it, not stopping until he was close to drowning. And once he'd be about to lose consciousness they would use the torture curse to ensure he'd stay awake. And if he would lose consciousness they'd just revive him again so they could start all over again."

Horrified Harry blinked back tears as he forced himself not to cry.

"How did they get away with what they did?"

"No one who might do something about it knew. Amelia Bones learned the truth and the five guards involved have been arrested."

"Yes, McGonagall said something about that yesterday. How did they learn the truth?"

"Susan told her. She overheard the Gryffindor table discuss Azkaban the night you confronted Sirius, most of the students did actually, and distressed she asked her aunt if it was true. Amelia had no idea, but decided to investigate. That was the initial reason why she wanted to speak to Sirius alone."

"And he told her the truth?" Harry asked sceptically, knowing that if his godfather rarely spoke about it with Remus there was no way he'd speak to someone else.

"No, he wouldn't say a word. But I managed to persuade him to at least give up the names of the ones involved. Amelia had them brought in for questioning."

"While Sirius was still there?"

"No, they weren't brought in until later that afternoon."

"When you asked me to stay with Sirius while he was asleep and you left for important business?" Harry connected Remus' leaving that afternoon to the questioning now.

"Yes. I had asked Sirius' permission to go and although he wasn't happy about it he permitted me to go."

"He didn't want you to find out?"

"No and with good reason. A few drops of Veritaserum and those guards spilled everything. Sirius hadn't been the only prisoner tortured; though he was the one who bore the brunt of their actions and he was the only one they tried to...well...do that to."

Swallowing Harry bit back his anger. "They never tried to...?"

"Not as far as Veritaserum is concerned and Amelia questioned them thoroughly to cover every possible angle. Apparently they thought it an additional crime to be as gorgeous as Sirius is and let it waste away without getting something...enjoyable...out of it. It frustrated them to no end that they were unable to get their way," Remus answered grimly.

"Right. How else did they torture him?"

"That is not for me to tell," Remus took a slow steadying breath, blinking rapidly a few times but
unable to prevent a few tears from slipping out.

"Do you think Sirius will ever tell me?" Harry softly asked, knowing the man across of him wouldn't break his godfather's trust in telling him without his permission.

"No," Remus replied honestly. "And it is best if you never learn exactly what they did to torture him, to what extent. Just know that they were careful not to cause too many scars, in case the wrong people might ask questions."

"So they mostly used spells and curses that leave little to no mark," Harry didn't really need to ask to know it was true, but Remus nodded anyway.

And although he wanted to know exactly what they had done to hurt his godfather, he understood Remus' words and knew that it was unlikely that Sirius would ever tell him. And he respected that choice, even if it saddened him. There were some parts of his godfather that he would never learn about, the events in Azkaban were one of those.

Forcing himself to focus on something other than what his imagination was feeding him, he thought about what more Remus had said.

"What about the other prisoners those guards tortured? What happened with them?"

"There were three others, but they passed away years ago."

"They killed them?" his eyes widened in shock; surely they would have had to answer to how three prisoners mysteriously died.

Curiously Remus looked at him. "Are you feeling sorry for confirmed Death Eaters? Men who murdered Muggles and brutally tortured innocent children?"

Looking down Harry swallowed. Did he feel sorry for those who had clearly hurt innocent people? He couldn't say he did and they deserved what they'd gotten. But did anyone deserve to be tortured while they were already down? Unable to defend themselves against their tormentors?

"No one deserves to be tortured like that. It makes us no better than the Death Eaters themselves," Harry softly said as he looked up to Remus again.

"Well said, spoken like a true Marauder's child," Remus smiled briefly and Harry felt his heart skip a beat in pride. "But they weren't killed. They stopped eating like most of the prisoners do in the end. Not having a reason to keep holding on."

"While Sirius held on because of me," Harry said more than that he asked but Remus still nodded.

"What happened to the guards?"

"They are serving a life sentence in Azkaban with a specific spell placed upon them."

"What kind of spell?" accepting the now lukewarm cup of chocolate he nodded as Remus offered to reheat it with his wand.

"A spell your father and Sirius created during the war."

"What kind of spell?" Harry leaned forward curiously.

"A spell that lets the target feel the pain they've caused their victims without having lasting effects on their bodies."
"Why would they invent a spell like that?"

"Because your dad believed that people would think twice about committing crimes if they knew they'd be forced to feel what they've inflicted upon others."

"Sirius didn't believe that?"

"No, he was of the belief that if the threat of Dementors wasn't enough to keep people from committing crimes then nothing would."

"But he still helped Dad create it despite not having faith in the possibility?"

"Yes, because more than what he himself believed, he believed in your father more," Remus smiled.

"So those guards are forced to experience what they've done to Sirius and those other prisoners?" Harry asked confirmation.

"Yes, it won't undo the damage they've done, but at least they won't be able to hurt anyone else anymore."

"That doesn't help Sirius, though," Harry spat out bitterly.

"No, it doesn't," Remus agreed.

"But why did he panic now and not before in the Great Hall?" Harry asked as Remus sipped from his own drink. "I had expected him to show fear there, or break down. But he was so cold and terrifying."

"Never let your fear take over in the middle of a fight, it was the first rule we followed. No matter what happens or who gets hurt, you keep your head while in the midst of things. You can break down when you are in safety and alone, not a second before," Remus spoke evenly and to Harry it sounded like something he'd said or heard repeatedly.

"And that actually worked?" Harry raised an eyebrow incredulously.

"It did for us. It was a rule your dad and Sirius followed even when we were still in Hogwarts."

"Even when one of them got hurt?"

Harry found it difficult to believe; knowing how emotional his godfather was in general, so Remus' nod surprised him.

"How? How are you not overcome with emotion when someone you love is seriously hurt?" Harry couldn't help but remember his own panic when he had heard his godfather being tortured when running into Voldemort and his lackeys. Normally he'd be pretty good in keeping his head in tense situations. But he had lost it completely when the one he loved most of all had been hurt and had trouble understanding how the Marauders had been able to keep their heads when they'd witnessed their loved ones being hurt.

"The knowledge that they'll be hurt worse if you lose your head. It takes focus and hardening your heart against what you're experiencing, but you have no other choice. Not if you want to attempt to make it out alive. It is a consequence of living in wartime," Remus softly admitted.

"That's horrible."
"It is," Remus agreed.

"What can I do to help Sirius now?" Harry asked as they had lapsed into silence, quietly finishing their drinks.

"There isn't much we can do. Due to the amount of magic he's used he will most likely be overly tired for a while and he has re-broken three ribs so he will be in some pain."

"And where did the blood come from?"

"Besides the scratches that woman left, he reopened the wound in his side. I applied dittany to it again and put a new bandage on it just to be on the safe side."

"How did he reopen that wound?" frowning Harry glanced to the bedroom.

"I'm not sure. Luckily it was already mostly healed so the part that was reopened wasn't too big and he really didn't lose a lot of blood. It was just the water making it seem more than it was," Remus reassured him.

"Good, because he really can't afford to lose more any more," Harry sighed relieved before glancing at the bedroom door again.

"There's something else still bothering you isn't there?" Remus asked softly.

"I'm just wondering about something Sirius said a while ago. Sirius went through an extremely traumatic experience. When people in the Muggle world go through a traumatic event they get therapy and..."

"And you are wondering if that might help him after all that's happened," Remus finished when he trailed off.

"Well, yes. Do you think it would?"

"No."

"It helps Cho, and Neville's parents are getting therapy, don't they?"

"They do. And it might have worked if his situation was anything like theirs. Sirius didn't go through a traumatic event. Most of his life has been one gigantic horrifying pile, no therapist or Healer could even begin to understand why he's not lost his mind long ago."

"So there is no way I can help him?" Harry asked crestfallen.

"You can by just being yourself," Remus shifted, wetting his lips before sighing.

"The things Sirius has gone through, neither of us will ever be able to understand, not fully anyway. But despite all the horror he's gone through he's managed to hold onto his sanity, his kindness. And the thing that helps him most is us just being there."

"Surely there must be more we can do?" Harry pressed on but Remus shrugged.

"Maybe, but that is not what he needs from us. What he needs is just us, for us to understand and accept him as he is. For us to love him, with all his faults, his past and scars. That is all he needs from us."

"For us to simply love him as he is and to be his family," Harry whispered in understanding.
It was all he himself had ever wanted growing up so he could understand Sirius, who had come from a much darker family than him, had to want the same thing. As a boy he probably had had the same dreams of a family that would love and accept him.

And Sirius had found it in the Potter family and eventually in Remus and Harry himself just like Harry had found it in them.

"Yes. That is all he wants," Remus snorted. "Actually, I think that's all any of us has ever wanted. The two of you have always just wanted a family while I just wanted to be accepted."

"We all found what we were looking for. Sirius and I found the family we've always dreamed of and you found people who accepted you, who've never cared about your furry little problem."

Suddenly Remus laughed.

"That is how your father always referred to Moony in company."

"I know, Sirius told me," Harry chuckled.

Remus smiled. "Did you know that Sirius discovered the truth about me months before the others did?"

"What?" surprised Harry looked back up to the other man.

"He never said a word. The only reason I found out is because he said something that didn't make sense to me."

"What did he say?"

"In third year, shortly after discovering the abuse Sirius went through, we discussed the scars we all had to make him feel less embarrassed about his own. I mentioned one of mine that is a bit funnily shaped and he made the comment that it was like a triangle."

"But?"

"That scar is on the inside of my thigh. I'd never been completely naked in their presence before."

"He couldn't have known about it then," Harry realised. "So how did he?"

"Early in first year he got into trouble with a few of his relatives still in school. He hid underneath the Whomping Willow to escape and eventually they gave up trying to find him and left. But when he attempted to get away from the Willow again he noticed me and Madam Pomfrey coming in his direction and fell back, accidentally finding the tunnel. He hid in an upstairs room in the Shrieking Shack when he realised we were heading directly to the Willow and saw me transform."

"How did the Willow not beat him into a bloody pulp?" Harry asked, recalling his own painful experiences with the violent tree.

"Having been beaten his entire life he could anticipate where the next hit would come from and avoided the punches, hiding against the base where the tree couldn't reach him."

"Right, smart move," Harry cleared his throat awkwardly. He didn't like how his godfather had the experience to anticipate where a hit would come from, no matter how handy it had been in that situation. "So that is how he knew about the scar? He saw it when you transformed?"

"Actually that is when I got that scar. A chair cut deeply into my thigh while I was tearing it apart."
"How could he have known it would become a scar?"

"I usually black out for several minutes right after changing back because of the pain, when I came back to my senses the worst of my wounds were already healed, but Madam Pomfrey hadn't shown up yet. I was never able to explain why they were healed until then."

"But he never said anything about what he had seen?"

"Not a word. Not even when James told them of his suspicions shortly before Christmas of our second year and confronted me. Never treated me any different either, though it certainly explained why he never pressed me to talk about my nightmares all those times he would wake me from them. And why he'd often give me chocolate and ensured I ate well," Remus laughed breathlessly, the disbelief he still felt after all these years clearly evident.

"When exactly did he discover it?" Harry asked.

"The first full moon after starting Hogwarts, September fifth," Remus swallowed thickly and Harry gasped as he realised the significance of those words.

Sirius had discovered Remus' secret four days after they had met and had kept his secret. It had been remarkable for three twelve year olds to discover such a huge secret and keep the secret for their friend, that kind of loyalty was admirable. But Sirius had barely known him when he had discovered his secret and he had kept it, never telling a living soul about it and thus keeping Remus safe despite not having an inkling of knowledge if the other might be trustworthy.

"What did he say when you confronted him?" Harry asked softly, amazed to learn how much Sirius had kept hidden for years without anyone ever realising it.

"He apologised."

"What for?" frowning surprised Harry looked at Remus to see him smile softly.

"For having accidentally intruded on my privacy and seeing something he had no business seeing."

"Figures. And you never knew he'd been there? Wasn't Moony able to smell him?"

"No. He told me he'd been surprised when Madam Pomfrey left me and I got undressed. Afraid he'd see something embarrassing he was actually about to slip way when I began to transform and realising what was happening he cast protective charms over himself so I wouldn't be able to see or smell him."

"He knew what to do?" Harry asked shocked.

"Yes. When he was little his parents forced him to watch a werewolf transform and attack a Muggle family. He remembered the werewolf's reaction, his behaviour pattern and learned how to act in case he'd come across one again."

"They made him..." Harry shook his head, disgusted. "Why am I even surprised they forced him to watch that?"

"They didn't just make him watch," Remus hesitated. "He told James the entire story years later, I kind of overheard so I don't know if he knows that I know."

"What happened?" Harry could see him debating if he should tell him or not, but finally he decided to continue.
"After a particularly harsh beating he managed to run away from home and was found by a kind homeless man, who helped him with his wounds. But his parents tracked him down and imprisoned them both."

Harry swallowed, knowing it was unlikely they had just imprisoned their disobedient son but didn’t dare interrupt him in case he might change his mind.

"When he pleaded with his parents to let the man go, he had just tried to help; they took him to an acquaintance and locked him into a small cage. A cage located in a cellar where the man and a Muggle couple with two young children were held hostage, on a full moon. For you see, they had spotted the man's registration code and had known what he was."

Remus paused, shaking his head with angry tears in his eyes.

"It was their way to show him what disgusting monsters werewolves truly were and how pathetic Muggles were."

"They locked him into a small cage? What if the werewolf had broken into the cage?" Harry felt his heart hammer in his chest at the story.

"They had charmed it so that the werewolf couldn't reach him. Could see and smell him, but no matter how much he attacked the cage, he couldn't reach the boy inside."

"That's...how old was Sirius when that happened?" Harry choked out, aghast.

"Four," Remus replied bitterly.

"Four..." Harry repeated numbly. What a horrifying sight that must have been, seeing the man who'd been so kind to him change into a bloodthirsty monster and slaughter an innocent family, slaughter children. How absolutely terrified that child must have been when that same monster turned to him and attacked the small cage he was trapped in.

He forced the bile rising in his throat down as he blinked rapidly to stop the tears from falling down. And yet, despite that experience...

"He didn't think you were a monster," Harry couldn't help point out.

Remus' eyes softened. "No. Even after what he saw he did not believe I was evil. Nor did he ever believe that man had been evil."

"He didn't?" Harry asked surprised.

"No. Sirius told James that when the man changed back he wept hysterically for what he'd involuntarily done. He said that he knew the man hadn't been in control of himself when he had transformed. Had seen the madness of the wolf and knew the man was not to blame."

"What happened to him?" Harry asked, despite already knowing the answer.

"He was killed before Sirius' eyes by the acquaintance as his parents told him that was what would finally happen to all beasts when Voldemort came into power."

"Poor Sirius, it is amazing he turned out all right despite the way they attempted to bring him up," Harry commented softly.

"Yes, it is. He admitted to James that was when he truly realised just how wrong his parents were,
how sick his relatives were. Inadvertently that was when he rejected his relatives beliefs completely, disgusted with their supremacist ideology."

Harry snorted. It served those horrible people right that that cruel act had been the last straw for their son to turn his back on them and Harry was awed by the intelligence his godfather must have already possessed as a four year old to be able to realise the truth.

"Were you mad at him when you learned he had known about Moony?" Harry asked after they'd lapsed into silence for a while.

"More like mortified," Remus chuckled. "No one had ever seen me transform before, not even my parents. Or seen me naked for that matter. So I understood perfectly why he hadn't wanted to embarrass me by telling me. And once I'd gotten over the shock of realising just how long he'd known I was grateful."

"Because he kept your secret, even from my father?" Harry smiled as Remus nodded, reaching forward to pat his leg before yawning.

"We should go to bed."

"Yeah," Harry agreed, glancing back at Sirius' bedroom door longingly.

"Do you want to sleep with us tonight?" Remus offered as he rose from the table.

"Won't I disturb him?"

"I knocked him out with enough potion that we could probably hold a party here and he wouldn't wake up from it. Go brush your teeth, put on your pyjamas and come to us then."

Nodding Harry hurried to wash and change before silently slipping into the bedroom, his eyes immediately locking on his godfather's sleeping form.

Quietly padding to the bed on bare feet he inspected his godfather's slender frame, his eyes falling on the bandage around his right arm.

Automatically he reached out to touch them but stopped himself in time, not sure if the touch would hurt him.

Pulling his hand back he placed his glasses on the night-stand and slipping beneath the comforters, carefully placing a hand in his godfather's and shuffling close enough to be able to rest his cheek against his shoulder.

"You're quick," Remus chuckled as he entered from the bathroom, dressed in his own nightclothes.

Grinning guiltily Harry only stuck out his tongue and snuggled closer to his godfather.

"Really mature," Remus smiled, returning the gesture before getting into the bed on Sirius' other side.

"If anything's up you wake me up, all right?" Remus turned off the oil lamp and made himself comfortable.

"I will, good night," Harry promised before closing his eyes, drifting off to sleep almost before he heard Remus' quiet reply, exhausted by all he had learned today.
In loving memory of Grandpa Ad, may you rest in peace after your long but inevitably lost battle. 09/20/1939 - 11/26/2015

The distant sound of something metallic falling woke Harry and groggily he shifted into a sitting position, blindly reaching for his glasses and putting them on.

He glanced around a little confused, not entirely sure why he was in Sirius and Remus' bedroom as neither of the men were in there.

Glancing at the alarm clock he was surprised to learn it was close to noon already and he slipped out of bed to enter the bathroom.

It was as he was wiping off the remains of his toothpaste, that his eyes fell upon an empty potion bottle and suddenly he remembered what had happened the day before. Quickly finishing he padded out of the bathroom and towards the sounds in the small kitchen, pausing at the sight that greeted him.

"Hey."

His godfather was seated at the dining table; bend forward with his head resting on his crossed arms on the table while Remus was stirring in a pot on the small stove.

"Hey," Remus replied as Harry moved to the other side of the table, taking a seat across of Sirius, who turned his head a little so he could shoot him a small smile in greeting.

"How are you feeling?"

"Sore and tired," Sirius' voice was a bit scratchy and he spoke even softer than usual, not that Harry was surprised by that as his godfather had screamed quite a lot the night before, so his throat must be sore. "I'm sorry I worried you."

"It's okay. I'm just glad to see you up," Harry smiled. "Why didn't you wake me?"

"I was going to wake you once Rem was done. You looked so content asleep."

"What are you making?" Harry directed to Remus.

"Chicken soup. I was going to make pancakes, but his throat is too sore to comfortably eat those right now."

"I didn't know you knew how to make soup."

"I might not be a culinary miracle, but I do know how to cook," the man looked amused at Harry's resulting blush.
"Sorry, I should have realised, it is just that it is normally Sirius who cooks."

"I'm not up to much right now," Sirius sighed.

As he shifted slightly again Harry caught sight of his complexion, which was paler than usual and he was trembling a little.

"Are you sure you are all right?"

"Never said I was."

"But when I asked..." Harry began perplexed.

"You asked how I was feeling, not if I was all right," Sirius interrupted him teasingly before his expression settled into a soft smile. "I will be. I just need some time."

"Is there anything I can do to help?"

"You could do one thing..."

"Anything," Harry didn't hesitate to say.

"You could stop being so far out of my reach and give me a hug."

Chuckling Harry moved to his godfather's side and wrapped his arms around him as Sirius slowly sat up, humming contently as he leaned into Harry's embrace, although he did not actually raise his own arms to return it.

"Does it hurt?" Harry eventually asked as he pulled back, seating himself beside Sirius and indicated to his bandaged wrist.

"Rem already reset the bone and healed the cuts. I'm just so incredibly sore and tired."

"Reset the bone? You didn't mention it was broken," Harry snapped his head up to see Remus staring at them with a guilty expression.

"I hadn't realised. I checked his ribs but I hadn't expected the wrist to actually be broken with how briefly she had a hold on it."

"What made you realise it was in fact broken?" Harry asked as he lifted his godfather's hand up a little by his fingertips, examining the bandaged limb.

"I couldn't hold my toothbrush," Sirius grudgingly admitted.

"I take it that there are some things you do with your dominant hand automatically despite being ambidextrous," Harry mused, curling his fingers around his godfather's.

Sirius only smiled, moving slightly back as Remus placed five plates on the table.

"Are you expecting someone?" Harry asked confused.

"As soon as they work up the nerve to stop lingering in the hallway."

"Fred and George?" It wasn't a question Harry was asking but Remus still gave a nod.

"Do you think they are angry with me?" Sirius sighed.
"Why would they be angry?"

"I did hurt and threaten their mother."

"You...oh for Merlin's sake, that's it," Remus growled as he strode to the front door and pulled it open, startling the two young men a little further down the hallway.

"He thinks the two of you are unwilling to actually knock because you are mad at him. Care to rectify that?"

"He...you're the last person we'd be mad at!" a red head appeared in the door opening and it took Harry a moment to recognise George from the dishevelled state he was in. The normally slightly more reserved of the two now burst into the room, a disbelieving and horrified expression on his face as he strode up to the table and looked at Sirius.

"Yeah, if anything we were afraid you would be unwilling to see us!" Fred added, quickly following his brother inside, his expression scandalised at the mere thought of them being angry with him.

"Why? I'm the one who attacked your mother...," Sirius looked confused.

"You didn't attack anyone. Our mother attacked you and you reacted in self-defence," George interrupted.

"I threatened to kill her."

"Not entirely unexpected after what she did," Fred shrugged.

"Not...Fred, I threatened to kill your mother only because she grabbed my hand," Sirius stared at him in disbelief, like he couldn't understand why they weren't mad at him.

"No, she grabbed your wrist despite having been warned not to. We've all been warned against doing so."

"She knew exactly what she was doing. She could have reached for your shoulder or your arm, but she specifically aimed for your wrist, knowing it would hurt you and knowing you might react badly to it," George added.

"What?"

"We...know about Azkaban," Fred admitted quietly.

"Yes, I know that. McGonagall told me she had unintentionally revealed that when telling the students about what happened at the trial. But your mother wasn't present then so how would she have known?"

"Moody chewed her out last summer for nagging at your inability to keep the newspaper still," Remus revealed. "Moody had seen the scars on your wrists and deduced how you had likely received them and why. He warned the other Order members to never touch your wrists if they didn't want to die a horrible and painful death."

"Meaning your reaction was anticipated. Maybe no one had expected you to lash out quite that strongly, but we all knew you weren't using magic because your control is rubbish due to the potions you are still using," Fred shrugged as he and George took a seat at the table.
"Did I hurt anyone else," Sirius asked quietly as Remus returned to the stove.

"Most have a few bruises from the original blast and Katie broke her leg but it was nothing Madam Pomfrey couldn't fix in a second," George waved his concern away.

"I hurt the students."

"No one blames you. Well, outside Malfoy and his little cronies. Though he is mostly terrified, been given a sample of what you might look like when you're truly angry."

"Were the two of you hurt? Remus already assured me Harry was fine, you are unhurt, right?" Sirius worriedly looked at Harry who nodded with a smile, squeezing his godfather’s fingers.

"We're fine. We were more worried about you."

"Not about your mother?" Sirius asked surprised at the odd looks both gave him.

"You...don't you remember everything that happened?" George asked hesitantly.

"Ah...not much. I remember flashes here and there. I know Remus stopped me from truly harming her, but after that I have to admit it is all a bit vague."

"What do you remember?"

"The students gathering with their wands drawn and I know Peeves was there, trying to absorb my magic while I tried to regain control. And I know that Remus was anchoring me so I mostly focused on controlling my magic, letting him deal with everything else."

"Anchoring... that's why you never once released his hand. It was to tell him you were in control of the situation so he could focus on himself," George exclaimed in sudden understanding.

Remus gave a small smile as he poured soup into the plates. "Eat up; knowing you neither has eaten anything at all since it happened."

Fred shared an embarrassed glance with his brother; both looking surprised at the plates as they only now saw the table had been set for five instead of three.

"You were expecting us?" he asked as he picked up his spoon.

"Remus said you were standing outside," Sirius softly answered. "But he wouldn't let me go say sorry."

"You have nothing to be sorry for," George was quick to brush Sirius' guilt away.

"What was I supposed to remember?" Sirius eventually asked after they had eaten in a comfortable silence for a while.

"That they threatened their mother, standing between her and you and declared you were more of a mother to them than she had ever been and that they would hurt her if she dared to harm you again," Harry summed up, biting his lip to keep from laughing at the embarrassed expressions of the twins.

"You..." Speechless Sirius stared at them as they both coloured a little at Harry's blunt words.

"Well...it is true, you have always been there for us," Fred cleared his throat.
"Took care of us and helped us with whatever problems we had."

"Believed in us and supported our dreams."

"Nursed our injuries and just spent time with us."

"Appreciated us and comforted us when we were sad."

Sirius stared at them as they took turns summing things up. Harry stifled a laugh at his expression, knowing he himself had been just as surprised and shocked when he had heard their speech.

"But...she's your mother," Sirius finally said lamely.

"No, she gave birth to us. She has never truly been a mother for us or cared for us for whom we were," Fred shook his head.

"You were right you know. Mum does see us as substitutes for her brothers, always has."

Sirius sighed, not trying to deny the words he himself had said.

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. We were actually quite used to only being yelled at. That's why we originally began to pull pranks, to try and get some attention," George admitted.

"Because any attention, good or bad is better than no attention at all," Sirius finished knowingly.

"Precisely."

"We've always had each other. But when we came to stay at your house things changed. Well, we were still mostly ignored or yelled at, but you were there."

"You sought us out, actually interested in our inventions and what they were for. You spent time with us and helped us out."

"You healed my hand when you noticed I had hurt it even when Mum was still yelling at us, never once asking if we were all right. She's always yelling at us for anything we do..., Fred trailed off, suddenly looking unsure of himself and picking at his sleeve, unable to look up at Sirius.

"But you thanked us. After we had been introduced and been send to unpack in our appointed rooms, you came to us and thanked us for having looked after Harry," George continued, his eyes shining.

"I was thankful, still am. Why wouldn't I have thanked you?" Sirius asked.

"Because no adult ever had before."

"Then they are idiots," Remus said.

"When you guys arrived at my house I was looking forward to meeting the boys who had done so much for my godson. And after actually meeting you I wanted to get to know you both. But not because you were pranksters," Sirius paused at their surprise and smiled.

"Harry had mentioned some of the things you'd done for him and I wanted to get to know the boys who had given him a taste of what a true family was like. And I was not disappointed when I got to know you. You are both kind-hearted and honest. You are good boys and I am happy to know
you."

Fred and George both swallowed thickly at his warm words.

"You are not mad we kind of called you our mother in front of the entire school?" George asked.

"I would have been honoured to be your parent, and I'm kind of used to being called a mother hen by these two," Sirius chuckled before he turned more serious again.

"Why is it that you've always been looking out for him? Not that I'm not grateful, but you don't act that way towards Ron."

"Ron has always been a jerk most of the time. Always tattling on us and as bad as Percy is with his disregard of how good he has it."

"When we first met Harry and learned who he was we were surprised he was not at all like the image we had of the famed boy."

"So we wanted to get to know him as he was and were pleasantly surprised by how nice he was. He doesn't judge or yell at people unless they deserve it. We are proud to call him our little brother. Where we are mostly ashamed of Ron's behaviour," Fred finished.

"I wonder if he has always been like that?" Sirius asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I admit we met under unusual circumstances as I had just dragged him into the Shrieking Shack as Padfoot, broken his leg while doing so and he believed I was out to kill Harry. Do you know what he did?"

"Wet his pants?"

"Scream in fear?"

"He stood before him and told me that if I wanted to kill Harry, I would have to kill him, too."

He was quiet for a moment as they both looked at him in disbelieving shock.

"I suppose I am the last person who should wonder how someone can change so completely, but it always struck me as odd that he could be willing to die for his friend and not even half a year later drop that same friend so completely out of jealousy over nothing."

"It is odd," Fred admitted slowly, frowning. "Ron can be a good person, he just always lets his jealousy guide him instead of common sense."

"He does," Harry agreed with a sigh as Remus frowned. "Say...what happened after we left?"

"Mum was arrested."

"Arrested?" Remus looked surprised.

"Yes. Originally we were just going to throw her off the grounds. But when you guys left she started insulting Sirius, which did not sit well with any of us."

"What did you do?"
"Luna was actually the one to take charge. I've never seen her mad before, but even we stepped aside when she brushed past us. Any bad word Mum said about you got her another powerful hex and yelled at until she eventually got the message to stay quiet. Especially when Peeves returned and viciously began to crackle energy around her, throw her into the air upside down and held her there until the Aurors came."

"And even then Madam Bones had to swear she'd pay for attacking Sirius before he let her down. Followed them all the way out of the castle, throwing things at Mum's back until they left the castle," George continued.

"And what happens now?" Harry asked, not feeling even remotely sorry for the woman as he glanced at his godfather's pale and shaky form.

"I don't know exactly, but McGonagall told the students that she will face charges for attacking the Lord of a Noble and Most Ancient House, attacking a teacher and entering Hogwarts without permission," Fred didn't seem to feel sorry for his mother, his expression grim.

"And if I don't press charges?" Sirius asked.

"If you don't then I will," Remus cut him off.

"Remus..."

"No Sirius. I meant what I said, she will pay for what she did."

"What about her other children? These two might believe she deserves it, but what about Ginny? Or Ron? Or even the older ones?"

"Ginny is on our side, she told us Mum had it coming to her with her behaviour. And I know Bill and Charlie will agree, too. They've seen her behaviour towards you, too, and have been saying that eventually she'd go too far and would have to deal with the consequences."

"We're not saying she should go to jail, but she should be punished," determined George looked at Sirius.

"What about demanding house arrest?" Harry asked.

"What?"

"That is what your grandfather did to Walburga Black, right?" Harry looked at Sirius but it was Remus who nodded in understanding.

"You could speak to Arthur and say that you won't press charges if he confines her to the house."

"It would work. In contrary to what Mum believes, Dad is actually the Head of House. He can bind her to the house, make her unable to leave the property. And she could be forced to pay a fine for the trouble she caused you," George nodded.

"I'm not going to ask your father to pay money," Sirius looked scandalised.

"Force her to make an Unbreakable Oath then that she has to leave those you consider family alone. No writing, no Howlers, not anything," Fred said.

"Madam Bones said she'd contact you after the weekend to discuss the event with you, so think about it," George pressed on.
Sirius nodded. "Yeah."

"Right," Remus rose and began to clear up the table.

"Do you want us to help with the dishes?" George immediately asked, rising to help him.

"No, thanks. I think it is time for him to get some more sleep," Remus smiled as Sirius tried to suppress a yawn and not the first one since the discussion had begun.

"That is our cue to leave then," Fred smiled, rising from his seat, too.

"You don't have to go just because I'm being kicked to bed," Sirius chuckled.

"No offence, but you kind of look like death warmed over and our presence would only keep them from fussing over you like they want to," George hesitated for a moment before bending forward to give Sirius a quick hug. "Get well soon."

Blinking surprised for a moment before smiling warmly Sirius nodded, allowing Fred to give him a quick hug, too.

"Thank you for the lunch, and we'll see you Monday for class... Mummy, Harry, Remus," he chuckled as Sirius stuck out his tongue and they quickly left with a wave.

"Why don't you go lie down on the couch for a while as I clean things up?"

"Are you sure?" Sirius asked, Harry grabbing his arm to steady him as he rose from his chair.

"Sit."

"Woof," Sirius shot back teasingly, making Harry laugh as they moved to the couch.

"I'll grab a blanket. your skin is like ice," Harry commented, quickly retrieving a blanket and two pillows while Sirius sat down.

Sirius smiled, letting Harry fuss over him and push him down into a lying position, pushing a pillow under his head and covering him with the blanket as he curled up on the couch.

"Want me to read to you?" Caressing the fringe out of his godfather's eyes Harry smiled, knowing the man loved it when he read out loud.

"Sure, what are you reading right now?"

"The fairy tale book you gave me on our Hogsmeade visit," Harry had already retrieved the book and settled himself on the pillow he had placed on the ground next to the couch.

"Again?"

"I rather like it though they are very different from the Muggle fairy tales you've read to me."

"Which one are you reading now?"

"The Tale of The Three Brothers," Harry smiled.

"My favourite," Sirius returned the smile, shifting a little as Harry opened the book.

"There were once three brothers who were travelling along a lonely, winding road at twilight!,"
Harry kept his tone soft as he read the story and he smiled as it did not take long for his godfathers eyes to begin to close.

Finishing the story shortly after Remus sat down on the other couch he smiled as he closed the book.

"It never ceases to amaze me that he falls asleep so easily when I read to him," Harry smiled.

"You could be reading him a phone-book and he'd still like it because it's your voice speaking. You have a very pleasant reading voice that's very relaxing," Remus complimented, keeping his voice down, too.

"I'm glad. I do wonder about something though."

"Such as?"

"The story. Sirius told me it is about my ancestors and the items are called the Deathly Hallows that many people search for."

"The Peverell brother, yes. You are a direct descendant of the youngest brother, Ignatius. And the Cloak is the one of the story," Remus confirmed.

"I know, but the story says that Death couldn't see the youngest brother when he was underneath it, right? And we know no spell or curse works on it, protecting you against everything when underneath it."

"Yes, not even the Killing Curse could penetrate the Cloak, which saved Sirius and James' lives more than once. What are you getting at?" Remus asked curiously.

"If it can do all that and is more powerful than any spell or curse and it makes you completely invisible no matter what, then why are we still visible on the Marauder's Map when wearing it?"

"Because disguises don't work on the map."

"Those are normal spells, Polyjuice and the likes where more than one way of countering it is known. There is no spell that can break through the Cloak, so why can the map?"

Remus blinked surprised. "I...it shouldn't be able to."

"So, why can it?"

"I don't know. Sirius and James came up with most of the more advanced spells as we created it. Peter and I took care of the design and adding pieces while they added the charms and Sirius drew the actual map. You should ask Sirius, maybe he knows."

"When I asked about the Room of Requirement he said it was Unplottable so it couldn't be added. But it seems that does not apply to the Cloak then if we're still visible under it."

"I know the Cloak was rather unusual as it had been passed down from generation to generation without ever losing its power. But I simply assumed the Peverell brothers were extremely powerful," Remus admitted, taking a sip from his tea.

"If that is true then I guess the Marauders were even more powerful," Harry grinned.

"Two of them anyway," Remus smiled fondly towards Sirius.
"Don't count yourself out. You are more than capable, too."

"As are you. Are you getting nervous for the exams yet?" Remus suddenly asked, completely changing the subject.

Glancing down at the book in his hand Harry shook his head. "No, not at all really. And not just because it's still a while before it's time. You both prepared me well, so I am confident in what I've learned and I know I will do well. And Sirius already promised he'd test me on my theory at random times just in case. Has been doing so already actually."

"Yes, always did that for me, too. Absolutely refused to even touch a book when the exams were already ongoing but before he'd help out enormously. The spontaneous tests helped me a lot, though your dad was just plainly evil in his attempts to help."

"How so?"

"He'd jump on your bed in the middle of the night and ask questions while you were barely awake," Remus chuckled quietly at Harry's horrified look.

"Why wouldn't Sirius touch a book when the exams were on?"

"Thought I'd only make myself nervous by constantly reviewing between them. He let me read my text books in between but refused to test me, usually claiming he already knew it all but I knew the truth," he smiled fondly again.

"They were never once nervous for exams, were they?" Harry asked.

"No, for the same reason you aren't now. They knew they were well prepared."

"But you were nervous and I know you would have been well prepared, too," Harry objected.

"Only when I'd start to review in between the exams. If I didn't do that I wasn't nervous at all," Remus assured him. "Have you finished your homework?"

"Almost. I only need to finish my Transfiguration essay."

"Why don't you finish that and we'll do something fun after that?"

"Barricade? Sirius got his hands on the game last week and I think I got the hang of it now," Harry suggested excited.

"Sure, you have to refresh my memory though. I haven't played that game since I was a teenager," Remus chuckled.

"I'll finish my essay then, and if Sirius wakes up we can just start over."

"Sounds like a plan to me," Remus nodded and Harry quickly retrieved his school bag with his homework and settled back on his pillow, smiling at his godfather's relaxed sleeping form and tucking him in a bit more warmly before starting on his homework as Remus picked up some homework to mark.
¹ original text from The Tales of Beedle the Bard, page 87 The Tale Of The Three Brothers.
"Harry?"

Looking up from the book he was skimming through he smiled as he noticed Neville looked at him bemused.

"Hmm?"

"You aren't paying attention."

It was the Monday after what was now referred to by the students as the Shock Wave incident and Harry was sitting in the Potions classroom.

He was supposed to be making a potion with Neville, but instead his mind had drifted away to the events of the last few days.

Neville had returned the day before, his good mood vaporising upon learning what had happened and he had immediately called Harry on his mirror, asking if Sirius was all right, before raging over Molly Weasley's actions, to their dorm mates' amusement.

Arthur Weasley had requested a meeting with Sirius, which entirely unusually, had taken place at the Ministry that same Sunday, as Sirius had refused to be the reason the students missed even more classes.

They had agreed that instead of pressing charges, Molly would be confined to her house, unable to leave for whatever reason without Arthur's permission. Her communication restricted and Arthur would train the old house owl not to deliver post for her any more.

Her restricted communication included that she was unable to contact those Sirius considered family and the twins were honoured to learn that apparently they fell into that category after their father contacted them to inform them of a Howler their mother had send to them for their actions.

Fred and George thought it was hilarious that it had been redirected back at their mother due to the restrictions and had exploded into her face.

And to make matters even worse for her, Arthur, as a further punishment, had requested that Kreacher would live full time with Molly as he had been staying at Hogwarts since Grimmauld Place had been destroyed. Sirius agreed that the elf would do the groceries for her once a week for a small fee.

Something that amused Harry, the twins and the Marauders immensely as they knew the elf would curse and grumble at Molly all day long, and since Sirius was still his master she would be unable to order him around except to get groceries once a week.

It got the elf off Sirius' back and even though Ron was horrified to think of going back the next summer to the company of the vile creature again, Ginny thought it was a brilliant trick.

Unknown to the younger Weasleys and Arthur, Sirius planned to deposit the small fee paid for the loan of Kreacher directly back into their own Vault. Explaining his actions to the twins by saying
that their father shouldn't be punished for his wife's actions.

"Harry, care to tell us where your mind is? Because it certainly is not in this classroom."

Startled Harry looked up again, into the dark brown eyes of Andromeda Tonks, ignoring the chuckles from his classmates.

"Sorry And-Professor. I wasn't paying attention."

"So I noticed. What were you thinking about?"

"What happened last week," he admitted quietly.

The dark eyes softened, making the stern face change drastically.

"Do try to stay with the lesson. I would hate to be mauled by Sirius because his son is missing a few limbs due to not paying attention to his potion. And then for my remains to be torn to pieces by Remus for upsetting him."

"Sorry And-Professor," Harry snorted, fighting to keep a smile from his face at her words.

"For the sake of keeping my limbs intact, do keep your attention to what you are doing," she winked at him, her long black robes sweeping against his table as her heels carried her further through the classroom.

"I tried to warn you," Neville shot him an apologetic smile.

"I know, thanks."

"You know, she is completely different from what I had expected," Dean leaned in from the table beside them.

"In a good way," Seamus leaned forward to look past his Potions partner and grin at them before they both quickly leaned over their book again as Professor Tonks turned, shooting them a questioning look.

Harry smiled as he leaned over his book again, too, reading the next instructions.

Andromeda Tonks had barged through the front doors yesterday afternoon, news of Molly's actions having reached her through her daughter. And nothing McGonagall said could mollify her until she had actually seen Sirius for herself, the man returning with Remus from the Ministry shortly after she had arrived.

It had been hilarious to see Remus, who had stood before Voldemort without a hint of fear, flinch and back away as the woman berated him for not informing her of yet another attack on her little cousin before she had begun to fuss over Sirius.

It had also spurred her into announcing she would begin teaching the very next day as she refused to stand by while her boy was repeatedly hurt within these supposedly safe walls, ignoring Sirius' spluttering that he was fine.

Needless to say, the students had been looking forward to the next day, curious to how the woman would be while teaching.

And they were not let down so far. Harry had only met her once before, when he had joined Neville to meet her. His first impression had been of a strict looking, tall, strong and proud woman,
and the patrician beauty that seemed to be common for the Black family present.

But she was friendly and kind, something the others came to realise as they had nervously entered the classroom, only to be put at ease by her calm presence and easy teaching. It was not as unorthodox as Sirius' lessons usually were, but it put them at ease as she had set a simple potion for them to brew while she walked around to get to know them a little.

"You know, it is a good thing we are brewing a potion that cannot actually explode," the amusement in Neville's voice made him realise he had once again become lost in thoughts.

Realising Neville had taken over completely and had finished the last step already Harry sighed.

"Sorry."

"A lot has happened with Sirius in the last two weeks, so I'm not surprised your mind is on other things," Neville smiled.

"Yeah," Harry sighed before he smiled."He's not alone though, Remus and he are tackling Defence together now."

"It's a good thing Professor Ted began to teach early, too. I don't know how well Professor Lupin would've handled being separated from Sirius right now," Neville commented softly.

"Not well," Harry answered honestly.

It was true. Ted Tonks had arrived just before dinner with suitcases, having anticipated his wife's actions. He had immediately assured Remus that he'd begin teaching History of Magic first thing in the morning, something Harry knew the man would be enormously thankful for as he'd been unwilling to leave Sirius alone to teach while he was still so unhinged.

Not to mention that it eased Harry's own worries about his godfather, knowing the two friends were together, especially the first few days.

Their first lesson that morning had been with Professor Ted as he'd decided he'd be called to avoid confusion, and Harry had found that Tonks had inherited most of her personality from her father, who was easy going and had the same sense of humour as his daughter. His soft voice not at all causing drowsiness among the students, captivating their attention as easily as Remus had done.

"All right class, it is almost time so bottle your potions and bring it forward before cleaning your supplies away," Professor Tonks' voice called out and Harry gave Neville a filled phial before cleaning everything away, ignoring the protest of his potions partner.

"You did all of the hard work so the least I can do is the clean-up," Harry explained, sending Neville to the front desk.

When he returned Harry was just finished and as the bell rang they quickly bid Professor Tonks a nice day and joined the others.

Making their way to the Great Hall for lunch Dean spoke up.

"So what did you guys think about Professor Tonks' lesson?"

"She certainly knows what she is doing and is a good teacher, but she's not Professor Sirius," Lavender responded.
"She is better than Snape has ever been, but you are right. I liked Professor Sirius more, too," Parvati agreed.

"I have to admit I was slightly apprehensive when she arrived yesterday, despite the Professor's preparation."

"Because she is a Black from birth?" Ron asked.

"No, because she looked so strict and well...pure-blood," Parvati admitted.

"Professor Sirius is a pure-blood too, you know," Dean snorted.

"Yeah, but he hardly looks like one. He doesn't have the aristocratic air that she has. Like..." Parvati trailed off as she searched for the right word.

"Like we are far beneath her. She is nice though, despite the arrogant look," Lavender finished for her.

"Are you sure you both don't simply prefer Professor Sirius because he's dashing, young and fun?" Seamus teased.

"Professor Tonks is not exactly bad looking herself," Parvati laughed.

"She's very good looking," Seamus readily agreed. "But that is almost a standard for Black descendants. Professor Sirius has this extra air about him that brings him beyond good looking."

"He's extremely good looking, but it is his incredibly warm aura that draws people to him and makes him more beautiful than any of his relatives could ever hope to be."

"I don't think any guy appreciates being called beautiful, Nev," Harry chuckled, making Neville colour.

"Attractive then?" Lavender offered with a dreamy glint in her eyes.

"You do realise it is my godfather you are drooling about, right?" Harry noted, not the least bit disturbed by their conversation.

"Oh come on, do you find Professor Tonks more attractive, then?" Parvati asked.

"And that Professor Tonks is my cousin," Harry added, laughing at her startled expression.

"How did we get from comparing teachers to comparing their attractiveness?" Dean chuckled.

"His teaching methods are easier than hers," Hermione suddenly spoke up, making Neville trip over his own two feet in his sudden twist to stare at her in absolute shock.

Only Harry's quick reflexes saved him from falling over, though he stared at her in shock, too.

"What?" Hermione asked confused as they all stopped walking to stare at her.

"You hate Professor Sirius! The only reason you were allowed to join today is because Professor Tonks wanted to give you one chance. It is hard to believe you actually said something nice about him," Dean exclaimed.

"I don't hate him. I just believed he wasn't a very good teacher."
"And you do think so now?" Ron asked sceptically.

"I...I've just changed my mind. I realised I might have misjudged him," she hesitated to speak up.

"You mean you've realised that Dumbledore was not the hero you thought him to be?" Dean raised an eyebrow.

Hermione opened her mouth to say something before she closed it again with a sigh and turned to Harry.

"I owe you an apology. I have always looked up to P- Dumbledore and believed everything he said. He said that Sirius was a horrible choice for a guardian with how rash he behaves and how he never thinks before he acts. And I always believed him because I saw how moody he acted last summer."

She took a deep breath.

"And I admit that I kept viewing him as such when he started teaching. I knew that the image Pro...the image Dumbledore had sketched was wrong, but I refused to acknowledge it, because who would know better than him?"

She sighed.

"I believed that Sirius was holding onto the you he knew from when you were a baby. And that before long he would show his true colours and hurt you by showing he saw you as nothing more than a reflection of your father. Because the alternative, that kind of unconditional love from someone not your parent is terrifying. No one is that selfless."

"Sirius is," Harry shot at her.

"Yes, I can see that now. I should have trusted you. But instead I listened to Mrs. Weasley and Prof...Dumbledore. There were wrong about him."

"I'd say," Ron muttered, surprising them all as Hermione only looked down at her feet.

"When I saw how close you and Sirius were becoming I was afraid that you wouldn't need your friends any more. That you wouldn't want us at your side any more, wouldn't need me any more. But it wasn't Sirius who was pulling you away; it was me who was pushing you away. I kept driving you off with my behaviour."

Harry stared at her as she blinked a few times, trying to prevent tears from falling down.

"I disrespected him and treated him as I would never treat another living soul because I was jealous."

"Of what?" Harry asked confused.

"The bond between you, of how close the two of you were and how much you loved each other. You don't trust easily, Harry, and yet..."

She swallowed.

"And yet from the moment you realised he was innocent he had that trust. And the worst part is that it was unconditionally immediately while we had to earn it slowly. I worked so hard to earn your trust, but he... he just had it immediately. And I tried so hard not to be jealous but I couldn't
help myself, so I lashed out at him and treated him horribly. And the worst part is that he... he let me," she choked on a humourless laugh, a few tears slipping down.

"I treated him like dirt and he let me get away with it most of the time because he knew why I was doing it."

"Sirius knew you were jealous?" Ron asked perplexed, shifting a little nervously.

"How could he not know? He kept his distance during the day in the summer, trying to give me space. He is the most empathic man I have ever known," she softly admitted.

"Could have fooled me," Dean muttered and Hermione hung her head, not bothering to try and defend herself.

"So, if I don't misunderstand, you do know Sirius is a brilliant teacher? You do know he is talented and kind, but you refused to accept it because you were jealous of him?" Neville more summed up than asked.

"And he cut you slack because he realised why you were acting the way you were?" Dean raised an eyebrow.

Hermione could only nod, looking down at her feet.

"Sirius is my family; you were one of my best friends. What was there possibly to be jealous about?"

"I have never seen you as happy as you are now. Why is it that you smile the moment he is only mentioned? Why does your entire face light up when you catch sight of him? Why is he able to make you happy, make you laugh even when you don't feel like it, something we've not been able to do in all the time we've known you?"

"It is a trick every parent knows. They all have the ability to make their children smile, even when the child doesn't feel like doing so," Lavender offered but Neville shook his head.

"It is because they love each other. When we are near the people we love the most, it automatically makes us happy when we see them."

"Though they can also make you feel horrible about yourself when you disappoint them," Seamus smiled.

Hermione nodded.

"You're not going to argue that the Professor isn't his dad?" Lavender looked surprised.

"How can I deny the truth?" Hermione asked.

"Speaking of, I've wondered why you don't call him that. Technically he is...."

"No," Harry interrupted Dean. "Well, he is but I would never break his heart by calling him that."

"Why would it break his heart?" Parvati wondered.

"Because he loved your dad so incredibly much and it would tear him apart to even think he'd be taking his place?" Neville's voice was full of understanding and Harry smiled.

"Yeah. I compromised on it though. I call him Siri and he calls me his pup."
"Just like old times," Ron grinned as the other Gryffindors chuckled.

"You could always just call him Snuffles," Hermione suggested, smiling faintly when Harry laughed.

"Do you know where he got that name from?"

"No. I always wondered but it never felt proper to ask. It seemed like a weird name to call oneself, even when in hiding."

"It was the name I had given my black plush dog when I was a toddler."

"Not Padfoot?" Ron asked surprised.

"I already owned a knitted Padfoot. Mum gave me the plush one because she was worried the stuffing might come out at night from the knitted one."

"Your mum gave you a plush dog? Why not a bear?" Parvati asked.

"Probably because Sirius' Animagus form is most likely a dog," Neville laughed as Harry blushed.

"How did you know?"

"Between the dog collar he wears and the fact that he calls you pup it was a simple guess," Neville shrugged.

"Why does he wear a collar anyway? It looks good on him, but he's never really struck me as the type to be vain," Parvati looked curious.

"It is a reminder for him of the family he's found and the product of an adventure he and Remus had in their fifth year," Harry answered cryptically.

"Oh, I thought it was because of Azkaban," Lavender admitted quietly.

"How so?" Dean wondered.

"Prisoners have their prisoner number tattooed onto their neck. I just thought he used the collar to hide it," she admitted.

"Oh no, he doesn't have one because he was never tried. A number is only given when a suspect is convicted. But because he never was he was also never officially registered as a prisoner," Harry explained.

"I'm glad," Lavender breathed out relieved before she grinned. "So Professor Lupin gave it to him?"

Harry laughed, able to see the wheels in her head turning.

"Yes, Remus attached the collar around his neck."

As Lavender made a very girly squealing sound Hermione turned to him.

"Can you forgive me?"

Staring at her for a long moment he could see she was truly sorry for her behaviour, and he wasn't one to hold grudges. But all that he could see was how she had treated his godfather, especially the last three months.
"I'm not the one you should apologise to."

"I know," Hermione trailed off expectantly.

"If Sirius forgives you, then I will think about it. You've been treating him horrible," swallowing he forced himself to continue, ignoring the tears in her eyes and his listening classmates.

"You listened to Dumbledore and Molly Weasley despite being fully aware they were acting unreasonable. That she was treating Sirius inexcusable. I told you she was doing so and yet, despite the fact that we've been friends for almost five years now, you kept on listening to them instead of me. Why? What changed your mind now?"

"A combination of things," Hermione hesitated. "The first time I had to go to Professor McGonagall's office she set me an assignment to research Sirius. I...reading through paper clippings and other files I realised that the way Mrs. Weasley and Pro...Dumbledore portrayed him was wrong and it didn't make any sense and I realised you had been right." She shifted uncomfortably.

"I read articles in old Prophets in which the Order was mentioned helping catch Death Eaters and Dumbledore enforced a trial, overruling the Ministry several times. He did have the power to demand a trial for Sirius, but for some reason didn't. I researched what a magical guardian actually is entitled to and Dumbledore trampled over all of his rights, over your rights. I had never imagined he'd deliberately condemn Sirius to hell, but he did."

She fidgeted. "But it is more than that. During my research I came across several mentioning's of him in the Prophet. He was a hero during the war, saving many innocent lives during Death Eater attacks. Mrs. Weasley always said he was a worthless lowlife, but it's not at all true. He repeatedly risked his life on Order missions, taking out many Death Eaters and fighting for our future."

"I found small articles of investigations after assassination attempts, people actually tried to kill him when he was a child, just because he was the Black heir. I can't even imagine what kind of life he must have had growing up with people targeting him."

Harry forced himself not to show any emotion to her words, though he was surprised. He had never heard anything about assassination attempts before and although they had clearly not succeeded he still wondered who would have wanted to kill his godfather when he was just a child.

"I read the article about the Hogsmeade visit," she whispered.

"What about it?" Ron asked the question Harry didn't want to ask.

"Death Eaters attacked the village on a Hogsmeade visit early in their third year. Sirius and your dad saved the lives of a hundred and seventy two students, most Muggle-born and Half-bloods. They raised a shield, strong enough to protect the students and held it. They held onto the shield until after the Order and Aurors had arrived despite being put under the Cruciatius Curse repeatedly by V-Voldemort himself."

"Early in their third year...that would mean they had been thirteen!" Parvati exclaimed horrified.

"There was a reason why Voldemort put a price on both of their heads before they even finished school," Harry revealed grimly. He had already known his father and Sirius had been involved in a Death Eater attack in their third year, though Sirius hadn't mentioned the students they had kept safe. Though it sounded like something the two would have done, despite their young age.
"But didn't people around them help?" Lavender asked.

"Are most wizards ever helpful when there is danger?" Dean snorted. "Most students were probably too busy wetting their pants to be of any use."

"Most indeed ran, but some stayed to fight. Five students were killed that day, it's why the Hogsmeade visits were cancelled during the war unless the Aurors could be present to patrol," Harry confirmed, finally understanding why his family hadn't run, too.

They all swallowed, everyone realising just how bad it could have been if the two boys hadn't done what they did.

Hermione took a deep breath. "Everything I ever believed about him is wrong and I hurt you with how I treated him."

"Sirius is the first person to have ever truly cared about me. He loves me for me, not because of who my parents are or what I might have done in life, he just loves me. He accepts me and everything he has ever done has been done for me. He lost everything when my parents died but survived twelve years in that hellhole for me," Harry choked back a sob, willing himself not to cry.

"They tortured him for years but he held on, he kept fighting because he knew that I might be in danger someday. Because he knew Voldemort was still out there. He escaped from Azkaban because Pettigrew was close to me and he knew no one would see the danger coming."

He paused to swallow thickly but Hermione didn't try to interrupt.

"There is no one in this world who has done more for me, who loves me more than Sirius does. So yeah, it hurts when one of my best friends treats him like he's a worthless lowlife for absolutely no reason. And not only that, but you have been constantly undermining his authority despite knowing what a rough time he was likely to get when starting," he bit out.

"It doesn't matter that most of the students absolutely adore him, you, as my best friend should have had his back. But you hadn't. You have been doing all you could to undermine him and make things more difficult for him."

He took a deep breath, not at all feeling sorry for her as silent tears slipped down from her eyes.

"So yes, you hurt me, but more importantly you hurt him and for that I cannot forgive you. I might think about it once you've spoken to Sirius and he has decided to forgive you, but not before."

"You've changed," Dean spoke up surprised.

"What?" Harry blinked at him confused.

"He's right mate, you have changed," Ron agreed, a resigned look coming over his face as he seemed to realise something. "Any time we fought before, you always just accepted the apology and moved on."

"I'd say it is a change for the better. You finally have some self-respect," Dean grinned. "And stand up for yourself. You don't let them walk all over you any more."

"Sirius and Professor Lupin are a good influence," Neville smiled.

"You don't think I'm arrogant for not simply accepting the apology?" Harry asked feeling surprisingly pleased at their words.
"What is arrogant about wanting the best for someone you love? She hurt your guardian, so why shouldn't she get his forgiveness before yours?" Lavender added.

"The Professor is a good man and certainly didn't deserve the treatment you gave him, regardless of what he might have been in the war," Dean frowned at Hermione.

"I know, it just made me realise he's not at all what I thought him to be."

"What did you believe him to be?" Lavender asked.

"A prankster and an idiot," Hermione sighed.

"He is a prankster and an idiot, but he is also brilliant, kind and funny," Dean said.

"I know. I just didn't want to see it. After what was revealed about Dumbledore I knew I had to apologise soon, but then Mrs. Weasley showed up Friday and...It was terrifying, but it finally truly brought home just how wrong I have been about her, too."

"So you don't believe he was to blame?" Harry asked carefully.

"No, it surprised me how calm he remained while she yelled at him. His reaction was extreme, but I could see it was entirely automatic. She deserved what Luna did to her," Hermione whispered.

"I had never seen Luna that angry before," Lavender looked awed as they reached the Great Hall and they walked to their table.

They had all gotten used to the petite blond's presence as she often hung out with Harry and Neville and secretly they had all become fond of her, along with all her quirks.

"Harry?"

"Speak of the devil and she shall appear," Dean grinned as they sat down.”Hey Luna."

"Hello Dean," Luna smiled at him, seating herself between Harry and Neville before holding out a framed photo to Harry; "Here."

"What's that?"

"It is for Sirius. I wrote to Daddy Friday to ask him if he would send it to me. I felt that it is something that Sirius would like to have."

Curiously Harry turned it around before gasping. "Are that..."

"Your parents, you and Sirius on maternity visit. Daddy took it."

He turned his attention back to the picture, even as the others gathered closer to have a look, too.

It was easy to recognise his godfather, despite the photo having to be around fifteen years old. His hair was slightly longer than it was now, reaching halfway down his neck and just touching the base of the collar, and he was younger. But his clothing style and the brilliant smile he directed at the tiny baby cradled in his right arm were the same.

On his left Harry’s mother sat sidewardly on the couch, smiling warmly at them as Harry himself was leaning on his godfather’s leg to look at the baby, too, both hands wrapped around Sirius’ left hand as his godfather supported his balance.
His father stood behind the couch, his arms resting loosely around Sirius' frame, one of his fingers held captive by Luna's tiny hand as he was clearly cooing at her, making Sirius laugh.

On his godfather's other side sat a woman, no doubt Luna's mother, smiling and leaning against his shoulder contentedly. Her dirty blond hair was braided and her silvery grey eyes looked just as warm as her daughter's did now, though slightly less dreamy.

"You really look a lot like your mum," Harry complimented as he let his eyes roam over the photo, taking in every detail of the people.

"Thank you."

"They look so happy," Neville whispered and Harry held it up slightly, though he didn't release his hold on it, nor did the others try to take it.

"Are you sure you want to give this to him?"

"I have a copy of my own. Mum always kept it framed above the fireplace, it was one of her favourite pictures," Luna explained. "I know it is still a few weeks until Sirius' birthday, but I thought he could use it now so he can see the frame as an early birthday present."

"You made this?" Dean asked surprised as they all took in the simple red frame.

Harry let his thumb brush over the smooth edge, making him realise that the pictures of the purple forget-me-nots flowers were actually painted and not real.

"It seemed fitting," Luna shrugged.

"He'll love it," Harry smiled softly. "I wasn't aware we had met before."

"You were only six months old yourself when we met so I would be surprised if you had remembered. And it was only that one time, too, with the war and all."

"I suppose so," Harry couldn't keep his eyes off the photo, despite having seen hundreds of photos by now, both of his parents and Sirius.

"You should wrap it if you mean to give it to him for his birthday," Lavender commented softly. "You were an adorable baby by the way."

"Thank you and I planned to. I just wanted to show it to Harry first. I wanted to thank Sirius for the lovely present he gave me and this seemed like a nice way to do so," Luna smiled as she pulled dark blue wrapping paper out of her bag and quickly and expertly wrapped the present before handing it back again.

"Professor Sirius gave you a gift?" Parvati asked curiously while Harry put the wrapped gift into his own bag for safekeeping.

"Yes, for my birthday in February," she pulled out a thin golden necklace from underneath her robe, a small hare pendant dangling at the end of it.

"It's pretty," Lavender commented. "I didn't know you knew the Professor so well."

"He and my mum were close friends. I grew up on stories about him so he is like an uncle to me," Luna smiled fondly at the necklace before tucking it away again.

"He feels the same about you, don't call him that though," Harry chuckled.
"No, I did not think he would like that. He'd say it's too darn formal," Luna smiled before she turned to Neville.

"Did you have fun with your parents?"

"How...never mind. Yes, I did," Neville shook his head fondly before smiling.

"How come she knows what you've been doing but you wouldn't tell us?" Parvati complained.

"Maybe he doesn't want to talk about it yet," Harry shrugged.

"No, I just wanted to talk to Sirius before I'd tell anyone else because I didn't want to make him uncomfortable by revealing too much. But he deserves to be credited for what he's done."

"What did he do?" Ron asked.

"He gave me back my parents," Neville simply said, a brilliant smile breaking through as his eyes shone.

"He what?" more than one voice exclaimed.

Harry chuckled, squeezing Neville's shoulder and leaning on the table as his friend began to explain what Sirius had done for his parents, to the astonishment of the others, their lunch untouched.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Andromeda Tonks nee Black was born between 1951 and 1955; I choose early 1952 so that her Hogwarts years would be from 1963 to 1970. Simply because it is noted that Sirius never met her married family, indicating to me that he never met Ted Tonks. If their Hogwarts years had overlapped a year, he would have met him, thought I admit it could be he just never met them after she married. But because in my storyline he never met Ted, I choose to let her graduate the year before he began at Hogwarts. I could have had Ted graduate a year before Andromeda, but choose not to because it would have meant Sirius had an ally in his first year, which didn't fit with my storyline.
"Hi there," they all looked up from their conversation to see Sirius stand behind them, an amused expression on his face, which quickly turned to worry as he caught sight of their bright eyes.

"What's wrong?"

"Sirius," George breathed out, his voice shaky with emotion and his eyes bright with unshed tears. "George? What's...," he leaned in to see for himself what was wrong when he was suddenly pulled into a hug by him.

"You are by far the most insane man I have ever met," George laughed through his tears. "Brilliant and gentle, but absolutely insane," Fred agreed, his own eyes shining, too, as he threw his arms around the part of Sirius he could reach.

"Okay...what did I do this time?" Smiling relieved that nothing was wrong, Sirius returned their hug shortly before straightening again.

"I told them what you did for my parents," Neville beamed, like most, having turned in his seat while George and Fred hugged him.

"How are they?" Sirius asked, understanding dawning in his eyes, shifting a little uncomfortable as everyone stared at him with those same bright and awe-filled eyes.

"They look forward to your visit tomorrow. I think you should prepare yourself to be smothered in hugs by Mum though," Neville laughed a little nervously.

"Ah, I'll remember that, thanks. Their speech therapy is going well then?"

"Better than expected actually," Neville nodded. "They have two sessions a day to keep them stimulated and they are using short sentences by now."

"That's quick," Sirius smiled before he frowned. "What are you nervous about?"

Neville smiled, rising from his seat and taking a deep breath.

"To thank you properly," he stepped forward to wrap his arms around Sirius' neck, pulling him into a hug, too. "Thank you."

Surprised Sirius froze for a moment before he relaxed and returned the hug. "You don't need to thank me."

Stepping back Neville's eyes were shining again, though there was a brilliant smile on his face.

"I hadn't had a chance to see you in private before, I've been wanting to do that since the hospital," he explained, not bothering to apologise for having hugged him in public as they all knew the man didn't care about rules and appearances.

And sure enough as Sirius stepped back he stepped closer to Harry, ruffling his hair a little without
a thought.

"What brought you to our humble table in the first place?" Harry laughed, swatting his hand away.

"Oh, I got a notification that several of the Gryffindors hadn't showed up for class. And remembering the bunch of students squeezed together during lunch I came to see if you might have forgotten the time."

Luna looked surprised at her watch. "Lunch has been over for twenty minutes, it isn't really worth going to class any more now."

"Yes, so you are all serving detention with me and Professor Lupin, your teachers are already informed. And since the Great Hall is deserted I figured you could all serve it now," Sirius said sternly.

"What kind of detention do you have in mind, Professor?" Katie asked softly as they all looked guilty.

She and the other non-fifth years had arrived at their table just as Neville had finally begun to explain where he'd been the previous week and interested they had joined the conversation, forgetting all about the time or noticing the other students leave. Not that anyone had alerted them, she thought bitterly.

"I'm not sure, what do you think, Rem?" Sirius asked suddenly, addressing the man who had quietly approached them.

"How do you always do that?" Angelina asked awed as Remus hadn't made a sound and Sirius hadn't turned around.

"I know him," Sirius shrugged.

"Well, I can tell they didn't skip class on purpose by seeing how guilty they all look. And it is technically your fault they were so distracted by their conversation," Remus began, his lips pressed together in what Harry was sure was an attempt not to laugh as Sirius' expression was completely serious.

"True. I guess I will just only have to take some points this time then, since it wouldn't be fair to have them serve detention if it is my fault they didn't make it to class. Twenty points from Gryffindor for not watching the time and five points from Ravenclaw."

"We aren't being punished further?" Parvati asked carefully as they all stared at him surprised.

"It wouldn't be fair if I did," Sirius shrugged. "And besides, not all of you are actually skipping class right now. But I do want you to stay in here until it is time to go to your next class, and you better do get there in time or I will be forced to give you detention after all."

"Yes sir," they chorused relieved.

"Good little lions of mine, so obedient," Sirius teased as he wrote four notes and handed them to Angelina, Luna, Colin and Katie.

"Give those to the professors you have next so they can make a note you've already served detention."

"Thanks," Angelina breathed out relieved.
"Don't make a habit out of it or I will be forced to act."

He nodded to them, taking several steps away from their table before he suddenly swirled around.

"Oh, I almost forgot. Luna, fifteen points to Ravenclaw for the absolutely astonishing spell work you performed Friday. Very good offensive work I've been told that was. And Neville, twenty five points to Gryffindor for brewing a perfect sleeping potion all on your own," Sirius winked at Harry, who blushed guiltily, knowing Andromeda would have informed his godfather he hadn't paid attention.

"I'll see most of you in class in thirty minutes."

With a small wave he walked away, Remus following before he seemed to remember something and quickly turned back to the stunned students to press something in Harry's hand.

"Thought you'd like to have these. They were brought into production this morning and I received the first two," Remus smiled before hurrying after Sirius, who was waiting for him at the doors.

"Did Professor Sirius just..." Dean started.

"Yes, he did, the sly dog," Fred chuckled as Harry looked at what Remus had given him.

"No way," Harry breathed out, his eyes widening as he took in what he was seeing.

"Are those Chocolate Frog cards?" Ginny leaned forward curiously before gasping as she saw the two pictures.

"Who's on them?" Dean asked, moving from his seat to have a look, too.

"Remus and Sirius," Fred exclaimed, laughing. "They got their own Chocolate Frog Cards!"

"What do they say about their accomplishments?" Katie asked as Harry passed the cards around so they could all see the pictures of the two.

"Remus Lupin, famous for the defeat of the most dangerous wizard of all time, Lord Voldemort, in 1995 and the defeat of numerous Death Eaters. He was awarded the Order of Merlin, First Class," Fred read out loud as he turned the card around.

"What does Sirius' say?" Neville asked Luna who held the other one.

"Sirius Potter-Black, famous for aiding in the defeat of the most dangerous dark wizard of all time, Lord Voldemort, in 1995. He received the Order of Merlin, First Class, for the defeat of numerous Death Eaters during that fight. He was also awarded the Order of Merlin, First Class, for the defeat of forty seven Death Eaters in the First Wizarding War and for saving countless innocent lives."

"Most famous for being the only person to have ever escaped from Azkaban unaided in 1993;after twelve years of imprisonment without a trial or conviction; to prove his innocence of the crimes he'd been framed for," she finished as Harry's heart skipped a beat, happy that his godfather was finally being formally recognised for his accomplishments, even if he would never receive recognition for the defeat of Voldemort.

"He got two Orders of Merlin?" Ron asked awed.

"He's earned them," Lavender shrugged before she grinned, leaning over Neville's shoulder to look at the pictures. "They look quite dashing in their photos, don't they?"
Harry smiled, Remus' picture had clearly been taken between two full moons as he wasn't pale, nor were the lines on his face as visible. It made him wonder if it had been done on purpose or it had been a pure coincidence. Since he was wearing his teaching robes with a small smile on his face, Harry suspected Sirius had a hand in that and might have ensured it was taken when Remus felt best.

Brushing his thumb over Sirius' photo he couldn't help but grin as his godfather was dressed in his normal style, seemingly looking at something slightly to the side with a small smile.

The photo made him realise it had been taken a little while ago, as he didn't look tired like he'd done the last few weeks and his hair had been freshly cut, ending just above the collar.

"I wonder if they knew about these being made," Ginny mused.

"They had to or they wouldn't have been able to make them," Neville grinned.

"Not if they didn't want to be sued," Harry agreed, closing his hand around the two cards.

"What do you mean?" Hermione asked curiously.

"If they had started printing them without their permission they would have been in their right to sue them for violating their privacy. It's what Sirius did for me," Harry explained.

"Did for you?" Seamus asked.

"Yes, after my parents died there was a ton of merchandise made with my name and face on it. None of which they received permission for, so Sirius sued every company that ever fabricated something with my name in it that he didn't agree with."

"Ginny used to have a Harry Potter doll when she was little," Ron remembered, yelping as his sister hit him hard on the arm, blushing.

"That are quite a few lawsuits," Neville said awed, ignoring the little exchange.

"It were. Everything has been recalled and destroyed and they had to give up all the profit they've ever made with my name and pay a large fine to me for violating my rights," Harry nodded.

"It's a shame Rita Skeeter never met him while she was writing all that rubbish about you," Dean said.

"She didn't have to. He's ensured she will never be able to publish another book or article ever again."

"He put her on a journalist blacklist?" Neville asked.

"No, he sued her for all the slander she wrote about me during the Triwizard Tournament. He demanded that she paid a sum of five thousand galleons for every story she wrote about me without my guardian present to consent to the story," Harry revealed.

"But Professor Sirius was in jail, how could she have gotten his consent?" Angelina wondered.

"That's the question the Wizengamot asked, too, but Sirius told them it was not his problem the Ministry failed to do their job properly and as a reporter and journalist she should have done her homework when dealing with a minor. The fact that she didn't research exactly who my guardian was and wrote stories about me without a liable and truthful source to verify what she was writing..."
just shows how corrupt she is and how deeply the Prophet has sunken from the level of a real newspaper," Harry chuckled, remembering the trial session Remus had shown him. Sirius had levelled the Prophet with the ground.

"If she has to pay five thousand galleons for every article she ever wrote about you...that were a lot of articles," Ron breathed out as Neville whistled approvingly.

"Yes, though she won't begin paying the fine until after she is released from Azkaban," Harry nodded.

"Azkaban?" several voices rose.

"Yes, Sirius asked how she even got onto Hogwarts grounds without anyone seeing it after having been banned. This led to her being questioned with Veritaserum and she revealed she's an illegal Animagus, so she's serving three years in Azkaban."

"How did he realise that?" Hermione asked surprised as she had never told anyone besides Harry and Ron and didn't think Harry had thought to tell him.

"Because he is brilliant?" Dean snorted. "So she'll have to pay a huge fine. But didn't he sue the Prophet too, then? They've held a whole slander campaign against you all year without her help."

"Oh he did," Harry commented offhanded. "He was very thorough and sued everyone after researching just how many people abused my name in some way."

"Remind me to never get on your godfather's bad side," Dean whistled.

"Aside from the fact that he could squash you without breaking a sweat, he's also capable of ruining your life," Katie noted.

"But that doesn't explain why Skeeter will never be able to write another article again if she's not blacklisted. She could just go to another paper," Ron frowned.

"And risk pissing off the richest man of the Wizarding World who has an enormous influence? No newspaper or magazine is going to work with her when she's got Lord Black's ire looming over her," Neville snorted.

"He's the richest man of the Wizarding world due to all those lawsuits?" Ron's eyes were wide, a hint of jealousy in his eyes.

"The Black family has always been beyond loaded and Sirius himself earned his own money with photography and painting even when still at Hogwarts," Harry shrugged, ignoring the look. "Besides, he sued them as my guardian so I'm the one receiving the money, not he."

"Sirius worked while at Hogwarts?" Ginny asked surprised.

"Yes, snuck out once a week to work at the Hog's Head Inn to save up on money for when he'd graduate."

"But The Hog's Head is shady and he a minor," Hermione frowned.

"Yes, but it's led by Aberforth Dumbledore who did not have a good bond with his brother, unlike Rosmerta from the Three Broomsticks. So it was less likely Dumbledore would find out he was working there," Harry answered. "Ab kept an eye on him and gave him a place to sell his work. The painting he made of his sister for him is still displayed there."
"Ab?" Ron raised an eyebrow.

"It's what Sirius and Remus call him."

"And he never told Dumbledore that Professor Sirius was working there?" Angelina spoke up.

"Not a word. Gave him a cap to wear and Muggle eye contacts to alter his appearance and kept the customers from bothering him."

"Why...A young Professor Sirius working in a bar with shady customers...never mind," Lavender obviously remembered their first meeting for the DA and the photo Luna had showed them.

"Was he any good at photography?" Katie asked.

"He's great," Colin surprisingly answered and they turned to him.

"How do you know?"

"Because I've seen his work. It is in the library," Colin shrugged.

"I'm surprised you aren't following him around with your camera, he is rather famous," Fred shot at him good-naturedly.

Colin however turned red and looked down. "He followed me around for hours with a camera of his own after classes started again."

"Why?" Katie laughed.

"To make me realise just how uncomfortable it makes people to be followed around like that and I realised how uncomfortable I've always made Harry. He exchanged the photos he'd made of me for the ones I've made of Harry."

"But they were your photos!" Ginny exclaimed.

"Made without consent and while I was stalking him. He let me keep the ones in which Harry didn't look forced or uncomfortable," suddenly Colin smiled brilliantly.

"We exchange business now actually. He paid for copies of several of my photos and gives me tips on how to become better. And we meet up whenever I develop a new roll because he'd like to see my progress."

"He still took your photos though," Ron mumbled.

"He gave me three empty film rolls to make up for it and he was right, it is unhealthy to make photos of people when they don't want it. It makes me not better than those tabloid photographers I hate," Colin sighed before smiling. "And I made him laugh with the photos."

"That's the reason I don't mind so incredibly much anymore when you do take a photo now and then, at appropriate times," Harry smiled, remembering his godfather's laughter as he'd explained the situations behind each photo.

"I'm not following," Ron admitted.

"The Professor missed twelve years of Harry's life. Stories are great and all but to be able to see him grow up on photos, no matter how remotely, is more than he ever had," Katie mused.
"This is still my favourite of the ones you've made Colin," Harry suddenly said, pulling his organiser out of his bag and opening it, showing them the picture he had strapped inside.

Colin had taken it during the severe snow fall when they had gone out early on a Saturday to build snowmen and hold snowball fights.

Sirius was hugging Harry from behind, they were laughing alongside Luna, Neville, the twins and McGonagall as Remus was putting the head onto their snowman as he was the only one tall enough to actually reach that high without cheating with magic.

"He loved it, too, and I admit it is one of my better pictures," Colin admitted.

"Weren't we there, too?" Dean asked.

"You guys are playing in the distance," Neville noted, pointing at the vague figures in the distance which were running in and out of the frame.

"It is a good photo," Luna complimented, making Colin beam.

"We should go to class though, before we'll be late," Katie said as Harry returned his organiser back to his bag.

"We should," he agreed and they all rose to make their way to their respective classrooms to enjoy an interesting lesson.

After their Defence lesson Harry lingered, telling the others to go to dinner and Sirius sat down beside him.

"Do you want me to leave, too?" Remus asked, gathering their stuff.

"No, I just wanted to ask him the question I asked you Saturday but forgot about again."

Nodding his understanding Remus continued cleaning up.

"What question?"

"About Dad's cloak. It repels any spell or curse that's thrown at it and makes you completely invisible, right?"

"Yes."

"Then why are we still visible on the Marauder's Map while wearing it?"

"You're not."

"What?" Harry hadn't expected that answer and clearly neither had Remus as he stopped what he was doing.

"It's not visible on the map. If anyone looks at the map while you are wearing it, they'd be unable to see you."

"But in fourth year I got stuck on the stairs and Crouch Junior saw me while impersonating Moody. And I saw myself on the map, too."

"He saw you through Moody's magical eye, one of the very few things that can see the cloak. You see yourself because you have Potter blood."
"Potter blood?"

"Yes, only one of your bloodline can see the cloak on the map."

"You might have been blood adopted by James before we finished the map, but I wasn't. I don't have Potter blood running through my veins and I've always been able to see you under the cloak," Remus pointed out.

"James added a charm that gave you the ability to see anyone under the cloak on the map. I thought you knew?" Sirius looked at him surprised.

"I didn't. I hadn't even realised that effect of the cloak until Harry pointed it out," Remus admitted.

"So, besides you and Remus no one can see me when I am wearing the cloak?" Harry asked for confirmation.

"Why? Are you planning nightly trips behind our backs?" Sirius teased. "No one would be able to find you on it as long as you are wearing it."

"Just curious. What kind of charm is it that Dad added to allow Remus to see the cloak?"

"A blood charm. It is kind of like the blood ward that I've put on our house to prevent anyone not added to the wards to enter or find it without actually putting it under the Fidelius. We developed a way to make the ward into a charm that works the same way. Your dad added it so that Remus and the rat would be able to see him even when he's underneath it."

"While you could already see it because Dad preformed the ritual with you, making you of the same line," Harry realised.

"Exactly, so what else is bothering you?"

"It's something Hermione said, she apologised to me today for how she's been treating you by the way." Harry didn't bother wondering how his godfather knew there was more.

"She went through you for that?" Remus asked sceptically.

"Yeah, I told her she had to go to Sirius, but that's not the point. She mentioned reading articles about assassination attempts when you were little?" he trailed off as Sirius tensed.

"Let's return to our chambers, we'll eat something there. I'd rather not have his conversation where we might be overheard."

"Do you want me to leave you two alone?" Remus asked softly, placing a hand on Sirius' shoulder in support.

"No, I'd like you to stay," Sirius sighed, reaching up to squeeze his hand. "You already know everything anyway."

"Let's go then," using his grip on his hand to pull Sirius up and Harry suddenly felt unsure of himself, seeing their reaction to the question. What was the story behind that to make his godfather tense like that?

Hesitating he rose, too, but Sirius took his hand and gave him a small smile. "Let's go."

Walking to their chambers in a silence Harry didn't dare to break, he was relieved that his godfather held onto his hand, the small contact comforting as Sirius didn't speak.
"I'll make us something to drink," Remus disappeared to the small kitchen upon arrival and Sirius led Harry to the couch.

"There were never any assassination attempts when I was little; it was how my parents excused the bruises and injuries I was usually covered in the few times they took me outside."

"So they lied to cover up they were hurting you?" Harry asked disgusted.

"It was all part of their plan. I never really knew the full truth until the day I ran away."

"What plan?" Harry bit his lip as his godfather hesitated again.

"The plan to kill him once his brother was old enough," Remus answered for him, placing mugs onto the table and seating himself next to Sirius.

Harry blinked, not entirely sure he had heard correctly and a million questions raced through him at Remus' words, but only one thing slipped out of his mouth in the end.

"What?"

"I really should have seen it sooner," Sirius sighed.

"What normal sane person would ever suspect something like that?" Remus grumbled, squeezing his hand as Sirius took a deep breath.

"By the time Regulus was born they had already realised I wasn't like that. No idea how since I was barely a year old, but that is when they started to punish me harsher whenever I didn't behave to their liking," clearly seeing the question on his face he added, "Before they usually just had one of the house elves, usually Kreacher, discipline me."

"Discipline you how?" Harry wanted to become angry, but he already suspected Kreacher had been involved in how they had treated their son and knew it was why his godfather had always hated the elf.

"Putting me in a corner in a full body bind, denying me food, and using his magic to discipline me, things like that."

Harry suppressed the urge to snort at Sirius' offhanded comment. That same kind of treatment directed at him had the man out for the Dursley's blood.

But at the same time he couldn't help but understand as he hadn't complained about his own treatment, but always felt rage course through him whenever he noticed more signs of how Sirius' parents had treated him.

"How did they discipline you after Regulus was born?"

"They began to punish me themselves with spells, curses and the likes. I actually thought it was normal to be treated like that," a sad smile appeared on his lips. "Until your dad and Remus showed me otherwise."

"Did no one ever notice?"

"When I was four, Uncle Alphard noticed bruises on my arms and on my neck and confronted them," Sirius snorted.

"He believed that one of the house elves was handling me too roughly. That is when they began to
leak out stories of assassination attempts and they began to lock me up without me giving them cause. I tried to run away shortly after that but they found me again pretty quickly."

"That's when you met the homeless man who turned out to be a werewolf?" Harry softly asked, linking his running away at that age with what Remus had told him before.

Sirius glanced at Remus before nodding with a sigh.

"They had an acquaintance that had a large cellar and enjoyed that sort of thing. They made me watch before he killed the man before my eyes and my parents told me that is what would happen to anyone who would discover the truth and they'd make me watch.""

"So you hid it," Harry knew his godfather; he'd have done everything he could to keep the abuse hidden, even from the people who might have been able to help.

"Yes, the thought of anyone...of that..." Sirius shivered, swallowing thickly and Remus placed his hand on his back in silent support.

Harry didn't dare to touch his godfather, no matter how much he wanted to support the man, not while he was drawing into himself so clearly, his whole body tense as he spoke almost on autopilot, unable to stop now that he had begun. And selfish as it may be, Harry wanted to know the full story, needed to and he was afraid that his touch might pull Sirius out of the story and he'd draw back into himself completely.

"Didn't anyone ever notice at all?"

"No, I became very good at hiding any evidence or pain. And it also helped that the few times I was actually allowed outside I was not to leave their sight. No one thought anything weird of it because they'd see overprotective parents trying to protect their heir from more assassination attempts."

"Why the act? Why go through all the trouble of hiding it if they planned to kill you? Why not just..." Harry trailed off, unable to actually say the words.

"Why not just kill me when I was still young and let Regulus take over?" Sirius finished for him. "For Regulus' protection. Upon my death he'd be next in line, but he would be vulnerable because the protections the heir automatically receives at birth would not be passed down to him and he would be an easy target as it was indeed not that unusual for a heir to be targeted by power-hungry rivals."

"Protections such as what had protected you until your fifteenth birthday from..."

"And any kind of magic that is focused on trying to control the heir," Sirius confirmed.

"So their plan was to keep you alive until Regulus was old enough to protect himself?"

"Yes."

"But why would they torture you? I mean, I know your parents were sick and twisted but how would they benefit from beating you?"

"Partly because it kept me a little in hand, they wouldn't openly admit they couldn't keep me in line so they punished me severely any time I did anything they didn't like. But it was also to cover up the murder to come."
Harry's confused gaze brought forth another sigh, too many in Harry's mind as it told him his godfather had long since resigned to what his parents had done.

"As the Lord Black, my grandfather would never just accept the story that the heir had been killed. Nor would he just accept any new heir that was shoved before him after the primary heir passed away. As the Head of House he would demand an explanation as to how the heir could have been killed and why they hadn't taken more precautions as it makes a House look weak."

Sirius shifted.

"Their story would prevent the House influences from wavering and if anyone would ever see the scars on my body it would paint a picture of a strong house that did not break under distress, instead being more powerful than anyone trying to break them."

"They tortured you because they found it made the House look stronger?" Harry forced out.

"And because they were insane and twisted people who enjoyed inflicting pain," Remus muttered, something Sirius didn't contradict.

"Once I started Hogwarts they believed I would become more of a target due to my defiance. I would become a target to any dark family out there who might want to try and gain control of the Black fortune and their status. And they believed the light families would shun me because I was the Black heir. Actually, they hoped I would be killed under Dumbledore's care so they could dispute his status."

"But you weren't attacked while at Hogwarts," Harry more asked than stated, not sure if that would be true. So he was not entirely surprised when Remus tightened his grip on Sirius' hand.

"Never any too serious attacks or too often."

Harry looked at Remus, but besides the tightening on his grip he gave no other indication that Sirius' words weren't true.

A small smile spread over Sirius' lips. "Are you really trying to determine the depth of truth of my words by looking at Remus?"

Blushing Harry shrugged. "You are much harder to read sometimes than he is and your idea of not too serious is not the same as ours when it comes to your own safety."

"There never were any life threatening attempts. There were several occasions in which I got injured, but never seriously enough that I absolutely had to go to the hospital wing. And your dad always retaliated before the wounds were even healed so most thought twice before they'd attempt something." Sirius told him honestly and Harry nodded, aware that his father wouldn't always have been able to prevent his godfather from getting hurt, but had tried his best.

Satisfied by the answer he returned to the conversation at hand.

"So your grandfather never realised the truth? Didn't he wonder why you were constantly covered in bruises and cuts despite the so called precautions to prevent those attempts from happening?"

"He was a very busy man and didn't actually invest a lot of time in me until I was eight, when my training as heir officially began. I often only saw him once a year and since it was never an unannounced visit my parents could back off a little the days before his visit so I wouldn't have any fresh wounds or be visibly sore. On some occasions where they hurt me in the spur of the moment, they'd fabricate stories where I had been disobedient and gone outside anyway, or a house elf that
had been clumsy."

"Not to forget that you'd been training yourself to push through the pain and ignore it, something you became very good at as it took us two years to even begin to suspect half the truth and we shared a dorm with you," Remus softly added.

Having figured as much Harry nodded, returning his attention to his godfather's pale form.

"And Regulus? He must have known."

"He did. But he kept his mouth shut, I don't know if he simply didn't care or had been told to keep quiet as he usually left to his room whenever I was dragged to the study."

And did nothing to try and help his brother or make the abuse stop, Harry bitterly added in his mind, feeling resentment for the younger Black. Especially when thinking of his own father, who had desperately tried to help but had been unable to do so without making it worse for him.

Forcing his thoughts away from the worthlessness of Sirius’ family he concentrated on the conversation again.

"But their plan failed because you ran away before they could attempt to kill you, right?"

"They realised I was growing too powerful to be taken out easily since I'd survived two encounters with Death Eaters already, despite only being fifteen years old and I angered them enough that Christmas eve that they tried to kill me. I don't think I would have gotten away alive if he hadn't tried ..."

Sirius fell silent and Harry had to take several deep breaths to try and keep himself from crying at the defeated tone in his godfather's voice.

The knowledge that his parents had been planning his death since he was only a toddler had to hurt even if he had grown up hating them.

He knew how much it hurt to know you weren't loved or desired, but he had always had the hope that his parents had loved him, even if the Dursleys hadn't.

His godfather didn't even have that. His parents had only kept him around as a plaything, a convenient decoy for the child they did love.

Even if he had grown to hate his parents, he still would have wanted their love unconsciously and Harry realised he had never, not even once received any kind of love from the people who should have loved him and protected him.

It must have been as hard for him to meet his Dad's and Remus' families as it had been for Harry to meet Ron's, yearning for that kind of love directed at them, too.

Swallowing thickly again, he automatically reached forward to slip his hand into his godfather's, relieved when the man didn't pull away, instead entwining their fingers together. He didn't know what to say to his godfather as he knew he couldn't possibly make it better.

Remus had been right when he had said Sirius' life was one big pile of traumatic events after another and Harry was glad his grandparents had taken Sirius in, that his family had given his wonderful godfather a taste of what a true family was like, just like Sirius had given him a family.

"What made you realise what they had planned?"
"Outside the fact that for some reason they hadn't killed me they slipped when I pushed them over the edge the night I ran away."

"What happened that they slipped?"

Sirius glanced at Remus, who shifted and clenched his hand even tighter.

"I'm to blame for that."

What? Harry wanted to ask, but Sirius shook his head, squeezing Remus' hand.

"You're not to blame; they'd have put their plan into motion sooner or later. I don't think I'd have made it all the way to James' house if I hadn't had that reminder."

"What happened?" Harry looked at Remus, but the man wouldn't meet his eyes, looking down at his and Sirius' hand with guilt written all over him.

"I had slipped away a day or two after the Christmas Holidays began to spend the full moon with Remus, which is when I got the collar¹."

"They lost it because of that?"

"Partly. Though they didn't even notice it at first, I had stayed away for six days after that day, sleeping on the streets until Christmas eve, knowing that they'd delay their punishment because my grandfather would be coming on Christmas day²."

"But they didn't?"

"I didn't know he had gotten a cold and had cancelled the plans."

"So there was nothing that kept them from unleashing their full anger at you," Harry breathed out shakily, aware of the state Sirius had been in when he'd gotten to Potter Manor.

"I fought back, harder than I had ever done before because they were threatening James and Remus. And they tried to use Legilimency to force me to reveal who'd given me the collar. Between their curses and my father's attacks I countered by breaking into my father's mind in an attempt to stop the assault. He hadn't expected me to ever break through so he hadn't locked anything and I stumbled upon their plan. The break through angered them enough that they crossed the line they had set for themselves to ensure I wouldn't be killed. You know what happened after that, I ran to your father's house and they took me in."

"Who in turn finally had what they needed to go to your grandfather and take you away from there," Harry whispered, holding his godfather's hand tightly.

"And made me feel loved as they gave me a family," the watery smile that spread over his face made Harry rush forward to wrap his arms around his godfather, pulling him as close as he could as he tried to push all of the love and affection he felt for him into it to let him know he loved him.

He knew he had succeeded as he felt thin arms wrap tightly around him in return, pulling him close.

It was an embrace that Harry never wanted to break so that he could constantly let his godfather know he loved him.

A thumb softly caressing his back made him chuckle and rest his cheek on his godfather's shoulder.
"I'm trying to comfort you here."

"Could have fooled me," Sirius replied softly, pressing a kiss into his hair.

They sat like that for a long moment before Harry finally pulled back. "I'm squashing you."

"You are getting kind of heavy," Sirius teased, lightly brushing the tear stains from Harry's cheeks with his thumb.

"That's at least one of you who is gaining weight properly," Remus commented.

Harry smiled as Sirius stuck out his tongue at Remus, his worries eased as the two bantered for a few moments.

His eyes caught sight of the collar around Sirius' neck, taking in the simple old black band and appreciating it even more than he had before, knowing it had been what had managed to both save his godfather's life and given him the strength to hold on.

Laughing at their antics, he caught the warm smile Remus gave him and couldn't help but return it, even as he leaned back against his godfather's side again and rested his head against his shoulder, knowing the man had been right when he had said that all Sirius ever needed from them was to be there and accept him.

So he cuddled into his side comfortably, smiling as an arm wrapped around him immediately, content to do just that.

Chapter End Notes

¹ You can read the full story in Of Collars and Belonging.

² You can read the story of Sirius running away in Coming Home.
Taking a deep breath Harry adjusted his robes while trying to listen to Angelina as she barked out another pep talk at the last minute.

"Are you nervous?" Fred glanced at him.

"Why would I be? It isn't like it's my first match."

"No, but it is the first match with Sirius officially on the stand," George grinned. "And that's making all of us a little nervous so we can imagine you are, too."

"I'm more nervous he'll overdo things while cheering for us," Harry laughed.

"Like he would let anything stop him from watching you play today. Madam Pomfrey tried to talk him out of it but he threatened to lock her into a broom closet if she even dared to try and stop him," Katie laughed.

"He did?" Harry looked at her surprised.

"Oh yes, actually went as far as to open the closet before she wisely shut up."

"If the Professor is that determined to see us play for the first time then we better perform our best out there," Angelina ordered.

"It's not actually the first match he's seen us, you know," Harry commented.

"It is the first one where he's actually on the stands. He's been to every single one of our trainings and it is our first match with him as our Head of House so we should make him proud," Angelina clasped a hand on his shoulder firmly.

"Let's give Luna a reason to let that lion of hers roar and scare the hell out of everyone," Katie grinned.

"Is she wearing that hat again?" Alicia peered out towards the stands. "Oh..."

"What is it?" George stepped forward; peering out, too, before he began to laugh.

"Oh Harry, you have got to see this."

"What did she do now?" Harry chuckled, moving forward and seeking out Luna in the stands.

It wasn't hard as she was indeed wearing her famous lion-topped hat. But she wasn't why George was beaming now.

Next to her were Sirius, Remus and Neville, all dressed in Gryffindor colours, no surprise there. But Sirius was standing between Andromeda and Ted and he was cheerfully wrapping them both in Gryffindor scarves.

Ted was wearing a Hufflepuff scarf and hat, but around his large belly Sirius had tied a Gryffindor scarf and he'd clearly given him red gloves to wear, the same ones he was trying to wrestle Andromeda in.

"The Head of Slytherin is supporting Gryffindor," Alicia giggled.
Won't he get into trouble with her for that?" Ron wondered, coming forward to peer at the stands, too.

"Not if her laughter is anything to go by," Fred chuckled, and he was right. Sirius was having trouble wrestling her into the gloves, not because she was trying to stop him, but because she was laughing too hard at the hat Luna wore.

"Sirius is just as much of an oddball as Luna is," Fred laughed fondly as the man succeeded in his task and sat down between Luna and Remus again, nodding as Remus said something to him.

"Should they be picking sides? I can understand if Sirius does, he is our Head of House after all, but the others? They are professors," Ron wondered as he grabbed his broom.

"So is Hagrid," Alicia pointed out.

"Yeah, but Hagrid is Hagrid."

"And they are my family," Harry smiled, waving when he saw Luna and Sirius wave at him enthusiastically upon spotting him in the shadows of the changing room.

"Is he drunk?" Ron raised an eyebrow at Sirius' behaviour.

"He doesn't drink," Harry frowned at the implication.

"He's just excited to see Harry play," Fred laughed, waving too.

"He acts like he's drunk and he did drink last summer," Ron muttered softly as the others returned into the dressing room to finish getting ready.

"Clearly not because he wanted to," Fred snorted, making Ron look at him confused.

"Honestly, do you never pay attention? Remus was always the one who forced a drink in his hand and I do mean force because he clearly didn't like the taste."

"Then why would he take it if he doesn't like it?"

"Judging from the layers of clothing he's lost since getting out of that house and the drink he usually prefers I'd say to stay warm," George smiled when Harry turned to him surprised.

"How did you know?"

"We came close to Dementors several times while they were posted here. It took ages to get rid of the coldness that seemed to claw at our bones. So it wasn't hard to connect the dots and come to the conclusion that he drank Firewhisky because it fought off the lingering coldness that was bound to have settled inside of him," Fred explained, keeping his voice down so the others wouldn't overhear.

"Why doesn't he drink any more now then? He is still cold," Ron asked.

"He's cold now because he's still underweight and lost a lot of blood recently," Harry sighed, looking up as Angelina walked back towards them.

"Let's give Luna's hat something to do, everyone!" she called out and under a cheer they made their way to the pitch.

Luna's lion roared repeatedly as the Gryffindors played their best match ever, driven by the cheers
coming from the stands, and even Ron seemed to play better than he had ever done in the trainings before.

Though Harry wasn't entirely sure if the confidence boost came from the fact that the Gryffindors were surprisingly singing the "Weasley is Our King" song along with the Slytherins, or from the pep talk Sirius had given him in private just before the match.

Either way it was their best match in a long time and he grinned broadly as he landed with the Snitch in hand, laughing with his team-mates as they cheered.

"Nice match, Harry," Luna appeared beside him, smiling.

"Thanks, did you enjoy it?" Harry returned the smile, breaking free from the group as he glanced to where Sirius and Remus had been seated.

"Normally I don't really care much about Quidditch, but it was very enjoyable today and Sirius and the Professors were delightful company. Professor Tonks told me she loved my hat," Luna beamed.

"I'm glad we gave it plenty of opportunities to roar," Harry laughed, relieved to hear Andromeda hadn't been making fun of the petite blond who he had become very fond of and Sirius had more or less adopted as his own.

"Yes me too, I do believe Sirius is rather proud of you," she commented offhandedly, looking at the cheering Gryffindors.

"You think so?"

"I think his smile speaks for itself," Luna motioned towards the Marauder making his way through the crowd and they moved towards him to meet him halfway.

"Hey you, nice match," Sirius greeted them, pulling Harry into an one-armed hug for a short moment before releasing him again.

"Did you enjoy it?"

"Very much, the commentary was quite lovely, too," Sirius grinned at Luna.

"I bet," chuckling Harry glanced at the stands where the Slytherins were disappearing again.

"Did you set it up?"

"Set what up?" Sirius asked innocently.

"Never mind." Smiling Harry nodded to Ron, who was making his way towards them. "Thank you."

"I haven't the foggiest what you are talking about," Sirius winked at him as Ron reached them.

"Harry did you hear it?! They were singing for me! For me!" Ron was beyond himself with glee.

"Yeah I heard."

"And did you see the move he pulled against Summerby?" Ron looked at Sirius.

"I did. And if you ever scare me like that again I will personally wrap you into bubble wrap and
not let you out again. I thought I was going to have a heart attack when you didn't pull out of that dive," Sirius directed to Harry.

"It's called a Wronski Feint," Ron grinned, completely oblivious to his tone.

"You don't say," Sirius dead-panned.

"I won't. I was just trying to show off but I could see I scared you with it. I'd forgotten you're not crazy about Quidditch," Harry apologised, smiling as Sirius flicked his nose.

"You don't like Quidditch? How can you not like Quidditch?" Ron's eyes widened.

"I like it well enough, just not when the people I love are plummeting to their deaths in insane moves," Sirius ruffled Harry's hair.

"You're insane, how can you not like Quidditch," Ron still looked shocked.

"Might have to do with the fact that he often had to patch James up again after he was injured in the matches," Remus' voice greeted them. "Nice match."

"Thanks. I already promised I won't perform the Wronski Feint again, so no worries for his heart," Harry smiled.

"Good, I'd hate to have to try and catch it when it jumps out in fright," Remus teased as he ruffled Harry's hair.

"Don't joke like that," Sirius swatted at his arm before pulling something out of his pocket. "Here, you'll need it for the party you're holding tonight. I'd hate if detentions were given to wandering students after such a cheerful day."

"What is it?" accepting the small palm-sized bag he looked it over.

"A banquet fit for a winning team. I got Butterbeer and snacks in a large cooler and shrunk it all. Remus and I aren't on patrol tonight," Sirius explained.

"Thanks. Nice gloves by the way," Harry couldn't help but grin at the sight of the gloves Remus wore.

"Courtesy of your godfather. He thought snitches would be fitting."

"Have to show our support to our boy, don't we?" Sirius grinned.

"So I've heard," Remus mock-glared at Harry. "Tell me, have you Gryffindors begun to plan our wedding yet?"

"Why? Have you finally proposed?" Harry shot back without missing a beat.

"You proposed?" Ron exclaimed, much louder than they were speaking and several people turned to him.

"You finally did, Professor?" Lavender beamed.

"No...I didn't," Remus stuttered.

"You shouldn't wait too long, Remus," Fred grinned.
"Yeah, who knows when someone will come along to snatch him away," George added.

"What am I? A helpless damsel?" Sirius laughed.

"I wouldn't say damsel," George mused.

"But definitely helpless. Especially when pretty green eyes are batted your way," Fred decided.

"Which pretty green eyes? Harry's or Remus'?"

"You aren't even denying it!" Lavender cheered.

"Why deny the truth?" Sirius wondered making them all laugh as they knew he was missing the point Lavender was hoping for.

"So, whose eyes are prettier? Professor Lupin's or Harry's?" Neville unexpectedly asked interested.

"Remus'," Sirius answered without hesitation. "Sorry pup."

"I thought you would at least have to think about it a moment," pretending to be disappointed, Harry pouted.

"Your mum once asked me the exact same question," Sirius shrugged.

"Why is it that you can remember a question asked fifteen years ago perfectly, but you don't have the faintest idea where you left your red socks?" Remus complained fondly.

"My mind works in strange ways and no worries, your red socks are very comfortable."

"I know, I bought them," Remus shot back sarcastically, making Sirius grin.

"Life with those two must be so interesting," Katie laughed. "I envy you, Harry."

"It's never boring. And I borrowed his red socks because mine had holes in them," Harry chuckled as Sirius turned to him surprised.

"See? I didn't misplace them at all. But you should all hit the showers and get changed, you lot stink."

"Don't sugar-coat it for us," Ron murmured even as the others laughed.

"Want him to lie and tell you the way you smell is lovely? What if you run into the love of your life in the hallway and the moment you come close he or she bails because you smell like a sweaty shoe?" Remus asked.

"Aww, it is not that bad, Rem, if they truly love them then their beloved won't mind," Sirius grinned.

"And how would you know?" Remus asked sceptically.

"I keep you around despite the fact that you smell like wet wolf occasionally."

There was a deathly silence for a beat before Remus snorted loudly and burst out into laughter.

"You're one to talk!"

Everyone chuckled at Sirius' mischievous grin. "If you wish not to smell one we'd better get a
move on, it looks like it's going to rain soon."

Readily agreeing Harry and his team-mates hurried to the showers while the others made their way into the castle, no one wanting to get caught in the upcoming rain.

Once he was cleaned up and exited the changing room in his normal clothes again, Harry was surprised to find Neville and Lavender waiting for him.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong, we just wanted to walk with you?" Lavender's smile was a bit forced so Harry frowned at her.

"Neville?"

"Ron and Hermione are arguing again."

"That isn't exactly new," Harry mused.

"He only left the changing room a few minutes before you, yet they already got into an argument," Neville exclaimed.

"You do remember it is Ron and Hermione, right?" Harry shot him a sceptical look.

"I know," Neville sighed.

"So what's causing the two of you to hide with me then?"

"They are arguing about Prefect duties again. He actually blamed her for their badges being taken when I confiscated a fourth year's Yo-yo because he was using it to toss it against a first year's head repeatedly," Lavender began.

"And you figured it would be wiser to get away while you still could before either of them would start telling you what you are doing wrong?" Harry asked knowingly.

"I don't know how you manage to take their near constant yelling," Neville sighed.

"You kind of get used to it after a while and I haven't really been around a lot lately to have to deal with it."

"I don't know what Sirius was thinking when he recommended us to McGonagall. We'll never be able to stand up to either of them," Neville sighed.

"Sirius recommended the both of you because he believes in you. He knows you are the right choice for the position, Luna told me about the standing ovation you both received when McGonagall announced you as the new Prefects, so it is clear that everyone agrees with his choice."

Lavender and Neville shared an uncomfortable glance and Harry smiled.

"What has Sirius been drilling into you since the start of the year?"

"You are capable of more than you think and I should have a little more faith in myself," Neville sighed. "But it's hard to remain confident when Hermione Granger might just start shrieking at you. I know she hasn't yet, but it can only be a matter of time before she blows up about her position being taken from her."
"You could always just put a Silencing Charm on her when it happens, that's what Sirius has done a few times last summer," Harry teased but Neville's eyes widened.

"She'd kill me; she is much quicker with her wand than I am."

"That's not true. Since you got your new wand your reaction time has tripled."

"New wand?" Fred's voice greeted them.

"Sorry, we didn't mean to eavesdrop, but we were looking for Harry," George apologised.

"It's all right; Sirius got me a new wand last month because he discovered I'd been using my Dad's since I started at Hogwarts."

Fred whistled. "I bet he wasn't very happy to hear that."

"You'd win that bet. He paid a visit to my Gran the same evening and took me to Ollivanders the next weekend to get me a new wand," Neville smiled. "From what she told me last week he really gave her a piece of his mind on what could have possibly possessed her to tell me to use a wand that hadn't chosen me."

"What did she say?"

"That she wanted me to honour my father by using it. She apologised actually and told me she hadn't been thinking about how it would affect my ability to use magic."

"Madam Longbottom was apologising? Professor Sirius must have truly given her a piece of his mind then," Lavender whistled.

"He did. But why were you looking for me?" Harry asked.

"Want us to leave?" Lavender asked.

"Nah, it's not a secret. Remember the birthday gift we wanted to get Sirius?"

"Yes?"

"Don't. We just overheard Sirius and Professor McGonagall. He was playing with Crookshanks while they were talking in the hallway and she asked him if he wouldn't like to have a cat of his own."

"What did he say?" Harry asked apprehensively.

"After teasing her if she was offering; he said that he wouldn't want one because it wouldn't be fair to the animal," George said.

"He said that he hates it how all these students have cats and barely give them any attention at all because they are too busy and he'd hate to do the same thing. His priorities simply do not involve a pet that deserves as much attention as a cat does," Fred continued.

"And getting one just because he enjoys playing with them is a horrible excuse to get one as he'd rather spend his time with you," George finished.

"So a cat wouldn't exactly make him happy," Harry mused; relieved they were discovering this before they'd gotten him a cat.
"So what do we do now?" George sighed.

"You could give him a new collar," Lavender suggested and they turned to her.

"What?"

"The one he is wearing right now is worn out beyond proper saving," Neville agreed.

"I think it got damaged when he ran into Grawp." Harry had noticed the black band looked beat the Monday before when he had learned the full extent of Sirius’ past. But he hadn't dared to mention it to his godfather, knowing that if it broke he'd be devastated.

"I'll talk to Remus about it; maybe we could get him a new one."

"And maybe we can replace the tag as well, that has seen better days, too," George nodded.

"We could make him a Marauder Map tag with the same information written onto it that's on there now." Thinking out loud as ideas crossed his mind, Harry smiled.

"I think he'd like that. You could make a medallion out of the tag and add small pictures inside it," Neville suggested.

"That's a nice idea, let's discuss it with Remus, thanks," smiling Harry nodded to Neville.

"I should say the same to you. Come, let's go find our inner Gryffindor and face Ron and Hermione."

Taking a deep breath Lavender nodded, waving at them as she followed Neville.

"We'll go with you, it wouldn't do to raise Sirius' suspicion by not attending our own victory party," Harry called out and together they made their way to Gryffindor tower, where they knew a party would be waiting for them.
Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

Merry Christmas everyone!

The students looked at each other questioningly as Sirius stopped mid-sentence for the fifth time in mere minutes, frowning as he half turned towards the door.

"Professor?" Dean finally spoke up.

"Yes Dean?" distractedly Sirius tried to turn his attention back to the class.

"Is something wrong?"

"I'm not sure," walking to the door he opened it a tiny bit, only to immediately move back as several large balloons forced their way into the classroom.

Suspiciously he drew his wand as he moved back, the students getting down from their tables, too, to scramble away from the intruding balloons.

"Sirius?" Harry moved closer to his godfather as his godfather stopped, his suspicion fading into a faint smile.

"You might want to get down," Sirius warned moments before the balloon right in front of him exploded in a rainbow of colours and sound, splashing everything in bright colours that seemed to dance to unheard music while actual fireworks rose into the sky to explode there, littering the ceiling with sparkles.

Most of the students yelped in shock as they were splattered in the liquid before realising glitters were floating down to come to rest on their paint-soaked bodies.

As the glitters touched the other balloons those too exploded in a similar fashion and everyone ducked even lower as firework travelled wayward through the classroom and out of the open door, causing more screams and yells as it travelled down the hallways.

Harry blinked as the glitter settled down absolutely everywhere and risked a glance to his classmates, snorting as he saw most of them were covered from head to toe in outlandish colours and glitters.

"Right, so only Neville, Lavender and Harry raised a shield to protect themselves?" Sirius' amused voice called his attention and Harry turned back to him, realising that the shield he had raised automatically had also protected his godfather from the explosions as the man had taken a step back towards him at the exact right moment.

Not that Harry though it had been luck that had made him step backwards, the faint smile on his godfather's face had been enough evidence that he had at the very least suspected what would happen.

"I wasn't aware we were under attack," Ron grumbled, trying to wipe the liquid off his robes.
"I wouldn't do that if I were you," Sirius chuckled.

"Why not?"

"You honestly think your brothers wouldn't ensure the liquid wouldn't come off that easily?" he calmly asked as he stepped over a large splatter of liquid to walk to the door.

"This is Fred and George's work?" Parvati spluttered.

"Unless you know another pair of pranksters with a flair for ingenious designs?" Sirius grinned. "Oh, ten points each to Neville, Harry and Lavender for successfully raising a shield in time to protect them from an attack."

"Are you nuts? This wasn't an attack, this was a bloody prank!" Ron shrieked, thoroughly annoyed as he realised Sirius had been right and the liquid he'd been wiping off exploded again, covering him in even more of the substance.

"At least we aren't covered in it," Sirius shot back, grinning as he stepped out into the hallway.

"Did they only target us or were more students targeted?" Dean asked, moving to follow him.

"From the sounds of it I think they got to more classes. I better go see if...oh...they actually got you?" Sirius laughed as Remus appeared around the corner, clearly in a hurry.

"I didn't see the balloons in time," Remus answered as he slowed down.

Harry had to bite his lip to stop himself from laughing as the man was covered from head to toe in shiny liquid, leaving a rainbow trail behind him as he walked towards them.

"Well, you look rather tasty, you better be careful no one tries to take a bite out of you," Sirius teased, shooting him a worried look.

Realising the older man looked tense and pale, Harry frowned, wondering what had happened as it was unlikely he was upset about the prank.

"I have a guard dog to prevent that from happening."

Stepping closer Sirius ran a finger through the liquid on Remus' chest before bringing it to his mouth "If that dog doesn't take the first bite. Hmm, hazelnut, your favourite."

"Yes, if you like, I believe there is milk flavour on my sleeve. I know I always say I love chocolate, but this is not exactly what I had in mind," Remus' eyes narrowed as Sirius gathered some more from his sleeve, causing some of the liquid to explode as his finger slipped a little.

"Sorry...Moony, no!"

Harry laughed as Remus suddenly wrapped strong arms around his godfather's waist and pulled him into a hug, effectively causing more of the liquid to explode as their clothes brushed together, covering Sirius in bright colours, too.

"Did that make you feel better?" Sirius grumbled as Remus laughed, most of the tension disappearing as he slipped a hand in his friend's upon releasing him again.

"Much better."

"It's not paint?" Parvati brought her soaked hand to her mouth, taking a small lick. "Huh, I never
would have suspected that. It is quite good."

"You'd be wise to go wash up before lunch. Harry, could you lead them so they won't run into Filch?"

"Of course."

Recognising the request for a moment alone so he could find out what was wrong with Remus; Harry pulled out the Marauder's Map and led his classmates back to Gryffindor tower.

He kept one eye on the dots that were his godfather and uncle moving towards Marauder Headquarters as the others laughed as they saw just how many students had been hit by the exploding balloons.

Pointing out Filch coming their way however was enough to have them hurry to Gryffindor tower.

"You guys got sprayed too, I see," Ginny's voice greeted them as they entered, she was surprisingly clean from any liquid.

"You raised a shield in time too?" Neville grinned as he sat down beside her.

"No, I already cleaned up."

"Are you all right?" taking a seat on her other side Harry noticed just how pale she was.

"Is Remus with Sirius?"

"Yeah, he arrived just after they exploded so I assume they didn't go off everywhere at the same time."

"It went off for us fifteen minutes ago. How...how was he?" Ginny looked at Harry.

"Tense and a bit shaken. Though he seemed to feel better once he pulled Sirius into a hug. What happened?"

"It was awful. We were practising counter-curses and no one noticed the balloons until they were already upon us. You know how Remus is with sudden loud noises, so he was startled and slipped on the liquid. He stumbled against a cupboard and apparently a Boggart had settled there recently," tears appeared in her eyes but she quickly brushed them away.

"He isn't normally shaken that much by the full moon any more," Harry frowned.

"It...It wasn't a full moon. I don't think Remus himself even knew it had changed, he was...he just froze, I've never seen him freeze before and look so absolutely terrified."

"What came out of the cupboard, Ginny?" wrapping an arm around her shoulder Neville tried to comfort her, but Harry suddenly took a sharp breath as he realised what it had changed into.

"It was Sirius, wasn't it?"

"It was terrifying. One moment there was an explosion of colours and the next Sirius was lying there on the ground, covered in blood," biting her lip to keep from crying, she shivered.

"For a long moment I thought it was real before I remembered he was teaching you guys and I realised it had to be something else. And seeing as Remus was closest to it I figured it had to be a Boggart."
"You got rid of it?" Lavender asked as Harry wrapped an arm around her, too, and she leaned against them.

"No, Colin did. He stepped forward and the moment Sirius disappeared Remus managed to compose himself enough to lock it back into the cupboard. Luckily most had still been hiding from the ongoing explosions so only Colin and I saw it. He dismissed us to go clean up when we assured him we were fine before hurrying off."

"To see for himself that Professor Sirius was all right," Lavender finished at the girl's nod.

"Are you and Colin truly all right? It must have been a horrible sight," keeping his voice down as students began to return from their dorms in fresh clothes and cleaned up, Harry pulled back a little to be able to look at her.

"We were both pretty shaken, but we're all right," she let out a wry chuckle as tears began to slip down. "It was actually scarier to see Sirius like that then to see the enormous snake that appeared when Colin stepped before the Boggart."

"You're pretty close to the Professor. Besides Ron, I think you all are, so I think it is only logical that you are shaken up at the sight. Just remember that it wasn't really him," Lavender leaned forward to squeeze Ginny's knee.

They sat in silence for several minutes as the other students began to leave, no one bothering them. Their classmates shot them curious glances but at the slight shake of Neville's head they left them alone.

Annoyed that Ron didn't even pause at the sight of his little sister crying Harry pulled Ginny a little closer. He didn't even try to find out why she was crying as he left the Common Room and Harry had to forcefully reign in his anger at his supposedly best friend's behaviour. It wasn't the time to let his anger distract him and he focused on comforting Ginny.

"Why did his Boggart change? Wouldn't losing Professor Sirius always be more frightful to him than the full moon would ever be?" Lavender eventually asked as the Common Room had emptied out again and Ginny's tears had dried out.

"Not when his worst fear had already come true. He already lost Sirius fifteen years ago in a way that was much more horrible than even his worst fear had imagined. He lost everything that day and had nothing left any more," Harry sighed.

"Nothing except the lonely full moons where there would be no one to stop him from tearing himself apart, moons where he'd be confronted more than ever by just what he'd lost and how alone he was," Ginny whispered, angrily brushing away the fresh tears welling up in her eyes.

"Getting my parents back...the thing I fear most would be losing them again," Neville began. "So for the Professor to get his best friend back against all odds, to learn that he hadn't lost him, he'd be terrified to lose him again."

"There is nothing in this world that Remus cares more about than Sirius," Harry confirmed.

"Fred and George will be devastated when learning their prank caused Professor Lupin distress," Neville muttered.

"Especially since the reason they pulled it in the first place was to cheer them up a bit," sighing Harry squeezed Ginny's shoulder before releasing her as she sat up with a murmured thanks.
"I noticed they were both more subdued at breakfast, not playing a game," Lavender trailed off, making Harry smile, appreciating that she was trying to give him the choice by not actually voicing the question.

"It's my Dad's birthday."

"Oh...I'm sorry, I didn't know. I guess that's why you are quieter than normal, too."

"Are you going to visit his grave today?" Ginny asked, wiping her eyes with the tissue Neville provided for her, giving him a small smile.

"We already went to visit before breakfast since Sirius usually still gets tired after a full day of teaching, so they'll probably just spend the rest of the day in their quarters since they don't have classes this afternoon."

"And Fred and George pulled the prank to try and cheer them up a little before they'd hole themselves up?" nodding to Neville Harry shifted.

"They certainly succeeded for Professor Sirius," Lavender smiled.

"It was my Dad's favourite prank, the one they pulled on his seventeenth birthday. Although they didn't use chocolate but liquid candy."

"A fitting tribute," smiling softly, Neville squeezed his shoulder.

"It is."

"We have two hours left before we have to go to Potions. How about we go to lunch before trying to find the twins and warn them of what happened?" Neville suggested.

"That's a good idea."

Pausing so that Ginny could go wash her face, they left for the Great Hall.

"Are my brothers there yet? Else we could intercept them so the others won't overhear."

Pulling out the Marauder's Map again, they quickly located the two only a few corridors away from them so they hurried to them.

Surprisingly the two were heading towards them and not to the Great Hall as everyone else.

"Harry! We are so, so sorry!" the two immediately exclaimed upon seeing them in the distance.

Harry was surprised to see they were both pale and extremely guilty looking.

"You already know what happened?"

"Colin sought us out to warn us of what had happened. We never meant any harm," George explained.

"We know, it was just an accident and I know Remus knows that, too," Harry sighed. "You couldn't have known there was a Boggart hiding in there and that Remus would stumble across it."

"Maybe, but we are still sorry. Are you all right, Gin?" Fred asked, brushing a hand over his sister's cheek as he took in her red eyes.
"I'm all right. They already gave me a shoulder to cry on," blushing slightly she smiled at them.

"Was Colin all right, too?" Neville asked.

"Professor Tonks overheard us and already took him under her wing; she'll ensure he's truly all right." Suddenly Fred pulled a face. "It is so weird to call someone other than Tonks by that name."

"It is. I wonder what Professor Slughorn will be like because I rather like her," Ginny admitted.

"It wasn't announced yet?" Harry asked surprised.

"What?"

"Professor Slughorn won't be coming after all. Andro...I mean, Professor Tonks already determined that she wouldn't need his help. Thanks to the changed lesson schedules Sirius managed to completely bring the fifth and seventh years up to date. And he's gotten the other years caught up far enough that she can handle the last few weeks of term on her own with a little bit of help from Sirius."

"Actually knowing the basics of potion making and understanding the logic behind it all helps a lot when actually brewing. Sirius went back to the very beginning with every class so that they'd have the basics down. We had a basic understanding already because of the joke shop, but even we didn't know half of what he's explained. Brewing got so much easier since then," Fred grinned.

"I'm actually a bit relieved, Professor Slughorn didn't really sound all that great," Neville chuckled.

"You wouldn't actually have to deal with him in class," Ginny grumbled good-naturedly.

"Neither do you," Lavender laughed.

Fred and George both moved forward as one, wrapping an arm around their sister's shoulders.

"Are you sure you are all right?" George asked softly.

"I'm sure," smiling she slipped her arms around her brothers, too, as they leaned in.

"Good. Thank you for looking after our Gin-Gin," Fred smiled at the three fifth years.

"No problem, she's our little sister, right Nev?" Harry smiled as Neville immediately agreed, even as Ginny's face slightly fell.

"He actually had the nerve to ask me to go and we did have a lot of fun, so leave him alone."

She mock glared at Fred, knowing he was only teasing and indeed he began to laugh, patting Neville's shoulder.

"All right, no need to get defensive. Nothing wrong with going with a sibling, Harry went with his too, after all."

"Didn't he go with Luna?" Ginny asked confused.
"I did. Luna is family to me and I know Sirius feels the same," Harry shrugged.

"He cares about her deeply," George grinned before turning to Neville again. "All joking aside though, thank you, both of you."

"Thank you for trying to cheer Sirius and Remus up," smiling Harry clasped hands with him.

"Anything for our honourable Mum and Remus."

"We should go to the Great Hall before we will miss lunch altogether and we have to go back to class," Ginny suggested.

Harry hesitated, torn between following Potions that afternoon while all he wanted was to go to his family.

"How about we make up an excuse to Professor Tonks so that you can go check up on Sirius and Professor Lupin?" Neville suggested and Harry turned to him.

"Are you sure? It would mean lying to a Professor."

"I don't think we'd even have to lie. She spoke to Colin after all so she'll probably understand," Lavender shrugged.

"Thanks."

"No problem, now go off and make sure they are all right," Neville ordered and with a nod Harry hurried off, glancing down at the map to check they were still in their quarters.

Realising they were outside he changed directions and taking a short-cut he made his way outside, too, realising they were moving slowly.

From a distance he could already see the two walking near the edge of the Forbidden Forest, a large shadow at Sirius' shoulder, which he recognised as Buckbeak as he drew nearer.

"Hey Pup," Sirius greeted him as they had paused for him to catch up.

"Hey, are you all right?" Harry directed at Remus, who was holding Sirius' hand again as they walked.

"Better. So you heard what happened?" he sighed, looking at the ground while Harry bowed to Buckbeak so he could get closer.

"Ginny told me, Neville and Lavender while the others were changing. The twins are really sorry for what happened," he added as he walked with them once Sirius had given him a hug. a slow pace that gave him the feeling they were more walking for the sake of doing something more than anything else.

"It wasn't their fault, just a horrible timing."

"I told them the same thing, but they still feel guilty their prank caused this."

"It was a nice distraction," Sirius commented softly.

"It was," Remus agreed. "And the chocolate was a nice touch."

"It's new that it re-exploded though, very nice," Sirius smiled, reaching up to brush a hand over
Buckbeak's flank as the Hippogriff nipped at his jacket.

"What's he doing here?"

"He can sense I am not in top shape so he feels that I need protection while outside," Sirius ran a hand over Buckbeak's beak affectionately as he trotted after them before slipping it into Harry's.

They walked in silence for a long moment, calmly making their way towards the Black Lake.

"It's a good thing the Lake's frozen or we might have the giant Squid after us, too," Remus joked.

"Another animal naturally drawn to Siri?" grinning Harry turned to his godfather who stuck out his tongue.

"He's deep under water when it's winter, right?"

"Yes, he goes deep into the lake when it starts freezing and usually stays there until the thaw sets in properly. It's why the students can ice-skate in winter as he doesn't break the forming ice up," Sirius explained.

"But no one's been ice-skating for weeks."

"Because with the exception of that small burst of snow two weeks ago it's been steadily thawing," Remus answered, glancing up as Hagrid was teaching in the distance.

"Is he still avoiding you?"

"Not exactly, it is a bit complicated," Remus sighed.

"Oh?"

"He's been questioned after Dumbledore's trial about his involvement in your kidnapping and Sirius' imprisonment."

"What did he say?" Glancing back at the gentle half-giant Harry couldn't imagine he'd deliberately condemn Sirius, not with how well they'd gotten along earlier that year.

"That Dumbledore had given him a slip of paper with the address written onto it. He didn't know the difference between handwritings so he just assumed Sirius had given it."

"So he had no idea you weren't the Secret Keeper?"

"No, he just followed orders," confirming it Sirius looked out over the lake.

"Then why is he avoiding you both now?"

"He's not avoiding me, it's Sirius he's avoiding this time," a little amused Remus scratched at the back of his neck.

"Why? You know he wasn't aware and he knows that too, right?"

"He does, but that doesn't stop him from feeling guilty because he never questioned Dumbledore's orders to retrieve you despite knowing I was your godfather."

"So he feels guilty because he basically kidnapped me?"
"Pretty much, yes. He blames himself for not seeing the truth or wondering how Dumbledore knew something had happened," Sirius sighed. "You know what he's like. Dumbledore entrusted him with something so he does what's asked of him without asking questions."

Unable to think of something to say to that truth Harry only shrugged.

"Have you talked to him?"

"I have and I've told him it wasn't his fault that manipulative bastard deceived us all, but he still keeps his distance," frowning Sirius stopped walking.

"What is it?" turning so he could follow his gaze Remus and Harry both looked out over the water, too.

"There's something in the water."

Stepping forward to test the ice while both he and Remus drew their wands, Buckbeak suddenly screeched, rising onto his hind legs to force Sirius back onto solid ground with closed talons so not to hurt him.

"What is it?" Sirius asked as he grabbed the open beak to keep himself from slipping in the melting snow at the sudden movement.

It never ceased to amaze Harry that the Hippogriff could be so gentle and fierce at the same time as Buckbeak was careful not to close his beak entirely while Sirius' hand was on the lower half, but closing it enough as he came down again to keep the man from stumbling.

Shaking himself loose from Sirius' hand he turned to push his beak against Sirius' leg, trying to worm his head between his knees while bending low.

"All right, if that makes you feel better," turning to climb onto the Hippogriff's back without difficulties, Sirius glanced at the lake again. "Let's see if it is what it looks like, shall we?"

"I hope not," Remus murmured as Sirius nodded grimly.

Taking to the sky in the Hippogriff's normal fashion, meaning the beast raised half a meter with every wing flap before abruptly coming down again as he began to hover over what Sirius had seen, Harry was surprised his godfather could make out anything at all.

But the man was clearly used to flying like this and it didn't take long before he returned, Buckbeak landing smoothly besides Remus.

"It is. Remus?"

"On it, Expecto Patronum," the silver wolf took off towards the castle immediately as Sirius sent his towards Hagrid's cabin at the same time.

"What is it?"

"There's a body in the lake."

"An Inferius?" Remus inquired as he gripped his wand tighter.

"A what?"

"I don't think so, but I can't be sure. An Inferius is a dead body that's been reanimated by Dark
Wizards to do their bidding. On occasion Voldemort enjoyed turning magical people he killed into Inferi to use them against the Order in the first war. It was terrifying to see former comrades be turned against you like that, to realise what had happened to loved ones who'd disappeared without a trace. Inferi have no free will so Voldemort used them to spread fear and terror among those opposing him," Sirius explained as he slipped from Buckbeak's back again.

"So he basically made controlled zombies out of the people he killed?" Harry swallowed thickly as Sirius turned to Remus questioningly, clearly for once unfamiliar with a Muggle term.

"Yes. They are one and the same. The zombies Muggles always tell stories about do in fact origin from Inferi. Although in their stories the zombies are a force of nature while Inferi are in reality created by Dark Wizards," Remus explained.

"Right. Do they eat humans too, like they do in the movies?"

"I don't really know. I've never really paid attention as they attacked to see if they ate what they tried to rip off," knowing his godfather hadn't meant it as harshly as he had said the blunt words, Harry nodded.

"Shouldn't we get it out of the water?"

"Once Professor M and Madam Pomfrey are here and the students have returned to the castle," following Remus' gaze Harry noticed Hagrid leading the class he'd been teaching back towards the school.

"How come it wasn't visible before?" Harry asked.

"When it's freezing the water usually freezes deeply, causing a thick layer of ice. It's most likely been under too deep for any of the ice-skaters to see it. But because it's been slowly thawing all month it's coming up now," Remus explained.

"How do you know it wasn't put in recently and the water frozen again?"

"No one's been skating because of the thaw setting in, so it is easy to determine there was no magical interference for at least five weeks. Every magical signature leaves long lasting traces," Sirius explained.

"Who do you think it is?"

"Not a student. There were no students missing from their dorms last night, every student was accounted for," Remus said.

"Could someone be using Polyjuice?"

"No, you'd need fresh hairs or the potion doesn't work properly, and this body has to have been in for at least five weeks," Sirius brushed a hand over Buckbeak's flank as they waited.

"Do I want to know how you know that?"

"Order mission gone completely wrong. I was supposed to go undercover as a Death Eater they'd caught. They just forgot to mention the man was already dead when they took hairs from him. I changed back after fifteen minutes, in the middle of a gathering of a dozen Death Eaters."

"That's actually the event that resulted in the pictures you drew on his ankle," Remus noted and Harry grimaced.
"Right, Buckbeak will return you to the castle and I want you to stay there until it is safe," Sirius suddenly turned to him as two shapes began to hurry from the castle.

"Because if it is an Inferius then you don't want me anywhere near it. I'll run though, I prefer if Buckbeak stayed with you in case it is one because you are not in top shape yet," Harry didn't bother to argue, knowing his godfather wouldn't accept any arguing when it came to his safety and he knew he'd only be in the way if it did turn out to be dangerous.

"Be careful," quickly giving them both a hug he ran all the way back to the castle, stopping as he reached the Courtyard so he could still see what was going on.

Sirius was on Buckbeak's back again, hovering over the spot the body was in, several meters into the lake.

Watching as his godfather carefully cut open the ice as the others were clearly waiting with their wands drawn his heart hammered in his throat as a figure began to rise from the newly cut ice and was moved onto the solid ground.

When there didn't follow any commotion Harry knew it was indeed just a body and he hurried back, stopping a little behind them in shock as his eyes fell upon the frozen body of his second most hated professor ever.

"The lake froze long before," McGonagall was saying but Madam Pomfrey shook her head.

"We had a period of thawing between Christmas and the end of January when the new cold front arrived. There would be weak spots in the ice in that period and he must have fallen through."

"The students were ice-skating again two days after he vanished, Hagrid checked the ice himself so if Snape fell through, the ice must have pushed his body deeper," Sirius mused.

"The water temperature is cold on the hottest of days, so it would have frozen him almost immediately upon falling through even if it hadn't been freezing," Remus nodded. "Students saw him leave the castle through the main gates; there was no indication to search near the lake so no one would have looked for him there."

"And with the frost coming in as harshly as it did, the weak spots would have thickened again almost immediately, leaving his body deep under the ice," Madam Pomfrey agreed.

"But why didn't the Slytherins see him then? Their Common Room is underneath the lake," Harry spoke up; belatedly realising he probably wasn't supposed to be here as both Madam Pomfrey and Professor McGonagall turned to him sharply, though they didn't comment on his presence.

"Their Common Room is more to the south, so luckily they wouldn't have seen it," Remus replied as Madam Pomfrey waved her wand over the dead body.

"I'd say the cause of death is his heart stopping suddenly, which would support the falling through ice story."

"I guess he is a lucky git then," Sirius muttered, straightening.

"Lucky?" Madam Pomfrey blinked, disbelief written all over her face.

"Yes, all the marked Death Eaters have died in slow and agonising ways. If his heart stopped due to the shock of the cold, then he got off lucky by such a quick death."
"If you think of it that way I guess it is true. When will the Aurors arrive?" Madam Pomfrey agreed thoughtfully.

"I sent Amelia Bones a Patronus, so they'll be here shortly," Sirius replied.

"Shouldn't we move him?" Harry asked, shivering slightly as Sirius pulled him close to him. He stared at the body for a long moment, surprised he didn't feel anything at his death and leaned against his godfather.

"Better not. We can't say with a hundred percent certainty that he did fall through the ice so let's not disturb the evidence even more."

"If he was affected by the Mark being drained he might have thought the water could cool the pain," Madam Pomfrey mused.

"Then he was even more of a stupid idiot than I always thought," Sirius snorted.

"How so?"

"Because the only thing that would have helped would be to remove the Mark altogether."

"It's possible to do so?" McGonagall asked as she straightened, too.

"Oh yes, it's not easy but it's possible. You have to truly feel remorse for every act you've done to be Marked and perform a ritual to cleanse yourself. According to what I've read in the Black Library it is really painful, but it doesn't kill the Marked person," Sirius explained as he wrapped his outer robe around Harry when he shivered again.

"I'd prefer it if you were to go back inside," Remus remarked.

"Not a chance. I might never have liked the git but we're the ones who found him so it's only decent to remain here until the Aurors come to pick his body up," Sirius shrugged, conjuring a large sheet to cover the body under while McGonagall conjured chairs for them to wait in.

As he sat down beside his godfather, Harry thought about how surreal it was to sit outside in the cold, waiting for Aurors to arrive to pick up the body of one of the most hated teachers he had ever known.

Of the five people seated, three had mutual hate for the slimy git and he was positive the two women never had been overly fond of him either. Yet none of them had even hesitated to sit down and wait with his remains, something Harry knew wouldn't even have crossed the man's thoughts if the roles had been reversed, instead sneering in their faces at the mere idea of performing that decency.

Leaning against his godfather under the robe as they waited in silence he couldn't help but snicker at the sudden image that crossed his mind of how absolutely horrified the git's spirit would be that it were the Marauders who had found his body and it were them who were holding silent vigil over his remains now.

Sharing the thoughts with the small group upon their questioning gazes they all broke into chuckles knowing it likely to be true.

The thought broke their subdued expressions completely as they all imagined the man's sneering at their presences.
A hand brushing through his hair brought Harry into awareness and he shifted, automatically leaning into the touch despite its coldness.

"Hey, it's time for your potion."

"Do I have to?" He was aware that he was whining, but he couldn't find it in him to truly care.

"You do, unless you want to remain sick?"

"Where's Siri?" Blindly accepting the potion given to him he swallowed it with a grimace.

"Are you still delirious, pup?"

The thinly veiled worry behind the light chuckle was enough to make Harry open his eyes so that he could see the blurry shape of his godfather sitting on the bed beside him.

"Sirius?" Sirius helped him as he tried to struggle into a sitting position, propping a pillow behind him so that he could sit up a little on his own.

"Easy kiddo, here's your glasses."

"Thanks."

"Hmm, now open your mouth so that I can feed you."

As his glasses were carefully placed on his nose Harry became aware of the cup of soup Sirius picked up from the night-stand.

"You don't need to..."

"Shush and let me feed you," Sirius raised a spoonful of soup to his lips and obediently Harry opened his mouth to let his godfather hand-feed him.

"Atta boy."

Snorting at the soft pat on top of his head, Harry leaned back to let his godfather feed him spoonfuls of soup, grumbling once the bowl was empty.

"I hate that git, it's all his fault."

And he truly meant that. The morning after they had found Snape's remains he had woken up with a sore throat and tired.

He hadn't thought much about it as he had stayed up late the night before, discussing his death with
McGonagall hadn't wasted time, after the Aurors had arrived and indeed confirmed Madam Pomfrey's belief that his heart had simply stopped, she had cancelled classes for the rest of the day and had called the staff together to inform them before she shared the news with the students.

No one had been very shocked to learn he had been found dead, the news of what had happened to other Death Eaters had already made them suspect what had happened to their ex-Potions Professor, so no one was surprised at the confirmation.

And truthfully, no one was sad to learn of his death, though they had spent the rest of the day discussing recent events among each other.

By the time Harry had gone to bed it had already been very late so he blamed his tiredness on that and had ignored it until he'd begun coughing later that morning in History of Magic, badly enough that Ted had alerted Sirius immediately.

His godfather had taken one look at him before he whiskered him off, fed him several potions and forced him into bed.

He didn't remember much of what had happened after he'd been tucked in, but Sirius had been there every time he was aware of, taking care of him.

"What time is it?"

"A little before eleven in the morning," Sirius spoke softly, pulling the comforter a bit more securely around him.

"What day is it?" trying to suppress a yawn Harry settled back into the pillows.

"Monday. You've been out of it for quite some time but your fever finally broke during the night and you've been sleeping peacefully since then."

"No wonder I feel so clammy," Harry chuckled.

"I gave you a sponge bath every time I changed your soaked pyjamas but there is only so much a washing cloth can do. If you feel well enough later I'll help you take a bath," Sirius promised, brushing the fringe out of Harry's tired eyes.

"I'd like that," smiling he tried to suppress a yawn again.

"You should get some more sleep."

"I know, but I don't want you to go yet," admitting that he wanted his godfather near wasn't something he was ashamed about as he knew the man wouldn't think less of him and he wasn't let down as Sirius smiled.

"I'm not going anywhere, pup. In fact, I might even crawl in beside you as it is rather cold out here."

"Room enough," grinning at the clear invitation to cuddle with his godfather Harry shifted to the side.

"I can see you are eager to steal what little body heat I have, but I first want you to drink some water."
Accepting the straw when it was held before his mouth he swallowed several mouthfuls gratefully, the cold liquid soothing his slightly raw throat.

Once he'd had enough Sirius returned the glass to the night-stand before he walked around the bed to slip underneath the comforter on the other side.

Immediately Harry edged over to his godfather and curled up against him, letting Sirius pull him close and remove his glasses for him.

Sighing contently he rested his cheek on Sirius' shoulder and as a thumb began to brush lightly over his eyebrow, it, combined with the even heartbeat underneath him, lulled him back to sleep.

When he woke up again it was to Remus tucking the comforter around him more securely and he peered at him with one eye.

"Hey, how are you feeling?" the whispered words alerted Harry to the semi-warm body he was curled up against and knowing his godfather had fallen asleep, too, he answered in the same whisper.

"Better, what time is it?"

"Almost eight. I was going to wake you but you both looked so comfortable I decided against it," letting Remus measure his temperature he smiled.

"Fever truly gone then?"

"Has been since last night, but it doesn't hurt to be sure. Looks like you are on the mend, which is good as you smell horrible and really need a shower. You both do."

"He hasn't left my side at all?"

"Twice for a shower."

"But what about classes? Surely he left to go teach?" Harry asked as he slipped out of Sirius' arms and sat up, accepting the glasses Remus handed to him.

"No. He told McGonagall that you are and always will be his first priority."

"What did she say to that?" feeling his heart swell like it always did whenever his godfather put him before anything else, even if at the same time he also felt guilty he'd caused trouble for the man once more.

"She told him he had made it clear from the beginning that he was a parent before he was a teacher and that she thought it was the way it should be."

Remus smiled.

"He'd have stayed the entire time if you hadn't thrown up over him. Then he left to take a quick shower and let me sit with you."

"I threw up on him?" horrified Harry groaned, stirring the sleeping form beside him but as they held their breath Sirius only shifted onto his side.

"Twice," Remus finally answered after a few moments had passed in silence to ensure the man didn't wake up.
"Twice what?" distractedly Harry turned back to him.

"You threw up over him twice. Though I admit the second time was my fault."

"How so?"

"He was sitting on the chair, leaning over you so that he could hold you up as you threw up. I sneezed and stumbled against his chair..."

"And I missed the bucket because his chair was shifted," Harry finished with a wince. "Poor Sirius."

"I don't think he really cared. And it were my socks you threw up over," Remus teased, making Harry laugh, knowing it was probably true as his godfather had a tendency to unconsciously pick the other man's clothes to wear.

"What's so funny?"

Turning to Sirius as the man sat up, the light from the doorway allowed Harry to get a good glimpse of his godfather in the otherwise dark room.

"Have you slept at all?"

"I just woke up."

"I mean before, while I was sick."

"Here and there. Don't look at me like that; it's my job to take care of you, especially when you are sick."

"But..."

"No buts. And I did sleep a little whenever Remus sat with you. And I rested a lot whenever your fever spiked because the coldness of my body helped you cool down."

Ruffling a hand through Harry's hair, Sirius smiled as he automatically leaned into his godfather's touch.

"How are you feeling now?"

"Pretty good. I'm eager for that bath."

"If you are up for it then we could visit the teacher's bathroom after we've had dinner?" Remus suggested.

"We can go there?" Harry asked surprised. He wouldn't have even known about the bathroom if it hadn't been on the Marauder's Map.

"Why not?" Remus shrugged as Sirius stretched before moving to sit on the edge.

"I'm just a student."

"That may be, but you are with two teachers."

"Who are my guardians so no one will complain," Harry nodded before pushing the covers off him and shuffling over to sit on the edge beside his godfather. "So what's for dinner?"
"I think it's wise to stick to soup for now, unless you'd like to try some porridge?"

"Soup is fine. What will you two eat?"

"The same. Dobby made a huge pot yesterday that has enough left for the three of us," Sirius smiled, putting an arm around Harry's shoulders as he leaned against him.

"Dobby went through that trouble for me?"

"Oh yes, you should have seen him. I got kicked out of the kitchen when I tried to get something to eat for Sirius. I wasn't even going to try and help with the soup but he kicked me out anyway."

Laughing at Remus' pout Harry straightened again as Sirius rose to his feet.

"The kitchen is his domain when one of us is sick, that's the agreement he told me Sirius and he settled on when he was hired."

"You mean he demanded to be responsible for that task," Sirius snorted as he helped Harry up, handing him a bathrobe to wear.

"Oh, a few of your classmates said to get well soon again, they miss you. And for reasons they said you'd understand Fred and George attempted to send you a toilet seat yesterday."

Snickering at the resigned look on the man's face at the twin's antics and the smile Sirius was attempting to hide, Harry slipped into his robe.

"Did you send them away?"

"No, Sirius enchanted it and had Dobby relocate it to the Gryffindors seventh year's boy's dorm."

"What did you do with it?"

"I didn't enchant it," Sirius protested and upon seeing their disbelieving gazes added. "Really, I didn't."

"Then why was I called to Gryffindor tower this morning because a toilet seat suddenly developed arms to pull anyone entering the bathroom into a hug?"

"I just asked Dobby to relocate it, it is not my fault if there was an enchantment upon it," Sirius shrugged innocently and Harry burst out in laughter.

"You're such a sly dog. But it's not very hygienic is it? To pull a prank with a toilet seat?"

"It wasn't actually on the toilet; I had Dobby hanging it on the wall beside the door. And it was a completely new seat, the sealing still around it. The boys aren't ones to pull unhygienic pranks like that," Sirius shrugged as he and Harry sat down at the small table.

"How did they react?"

"They seemed to be enjoying themselves and asked me to tell you they owe you a bow for your brilliance."

"They must have known we would check the seat before letting it anywhere near Harry," Sirius chuckled as Remus served the soup.

"They admitted that they counted on you to test it, it should have activated upon your magical
signature," Remus explained.

"Why didn't it activate then?" Harry asked between two bites.

"Because he tested it, not me. And because they pre-set it upon my specific signature, it didn't activate when Remus tested it. When I asked Dobby to relocate it I only changed the pre-set target into a more general one," Sirius explained, tucking into the meal as well and they fell quiet as they ate in comfortable silence before Sirius and Remus did the dishes, making Harry remain seated to not upset his stomach so soon after dinner.

"Can I have that bath now?" Harry asked hopeful once the last cutlery was put away.

The two Marauders shared a glance, and as Harry had become used to, an entire conversation took place in that one glance and Sirius sighed.

"Are you sure you are up for it? You could have a quick bath here, too, and we could go to the teacher's bathroom another time."

Hesitating Harry bit his lip. Did he truly feel well enough to go out already? He looked forward to seeing the teacher's bathroom, but if he was completely honest with himself then he had to admit the simple meal had already tired him out.

"It might be wiser to take a quick one here for now, I am pretty tired," he eventually admitted.

"You can visit the teacher's bathroom another time," Remus promised and Harry nodded, letting Sirius help him to the bathroom. Harry couldn't help but smile at the sight of a ready bath.

His godfather knew him better than anyone, so he would have known Harry hadn't truly been feeling well enough to go anywhere. And yet he had let him make that choice for himself despite that knowledge.

It was one of the things that had taken him a long time to get used to, that both men let him make his own decisions. If he made a mistake they believed he'd learn from it and Sirius only intervened if he felt Harry was going to make a choice that would hurt him in the long run.

"Thank you," wrapping his arms around his godfather he leaned against him, resting his forehead on Sirius' collarbone.

A kiss pressed against his temple was his only answer, and Harry smiled as he let Sirius help him undress so he could step into the warm water.

"Do you need help washing your hair?"

"Would you mind?"

"I'll come back in fifteen minutes then, but do make some sound so that I know you haven't fallen asleep."

"Want me to squeeze a duck?" grinning Harry held up one of the rubber ducks that Sirius had given Remus last Christmas.

He was often very sore after transformations and long warm baths helped a lot. But it quickly became boring when he couldn't read so the younger Marauder had gotten him a variety of Muggle bath creatures and enchanted them to swim around in the water.
And although Harry had roared in laughter upon learning of their existence, he secretly had a lot of fun playing with them whenever he took a bath and he and Sirius occasionally held races with the ducks in the bath.

"Just let it quack, no need to squeeze the poor thing," Sirius teased, ruffling his hair and activating the ducks before leaving the bathroom and Harry leaned back contentedly, chuckling as a couple of rubber fish tried to swim through his toes.

All too soon Sirius returned and helped him wash his hair before helping him back to bed.

As he settled, Remus came in with a cup of warm milk, placing it on the night-stand.

"Why don't you take a shower while I keep Harry company?"

"That bad, huh?" Sirius chuckled, ruffling Harry's hair before leaving the room.

Remus took a seat on the chair beside the bed without a word and Harry waited quietly as the man seemed to be listening to something for several moments.

"Okay the shower is running, can I ask your opinion?"

"On what?" Harry kept his voice down too, aware that Remus had waited until the shower was running so that Sirius wouldn't hear them.

"A way to get rid of Sirius' scars."

"What? How?" sitting up straighter he leaned in curiously. He knew his godfather always hid them, both ashamed of them and hating them.

"I came across a half finished research in one of your dad's many notebooks a few weeks ago. It was about Phoenix tears and their uses. From his notes I discovered he was trying to discover if they were capable of healing scars."

"You think he was looking for a way to remove Siri's scars?" Harry breathed out, touched by the realisation of how much the three Marauders had tried to do to help each other.

"Yes. At first I was sceptical but then I remembered what you told Sirius in your fourth year, about Fawkes healing your arm after you'd been bitten by the Basilisk and I realised it might just be possible."

"What were Fawkes' thoughts on it?" he knew it wouldn't have been difficult for the man to ask the Phoenix as Fawkes occasionally visited, sometimes staying at Sirius' side for hours before returning to who knew where he'd left to after Dumbledore was arrested.

"He gave me a phial full of tears when I explained why I was asking."

"I assume you tested it on yourself so you know if it works and won't get his hopes up for nothing?"

"I did, but I would like to get a second test subject before I even discuss the option with him."

"Right," pulling the comforter aside Harry pulled his pyjama pant up to reveal a scar just below his knee that had been left by his fight at the Graveyard, aware it would need to be a scar Sirius wouldn't immediately notice missing.

Smiling Remus quickly pulled a small cloth from his pocket and pressed it against the scar for a
moment, rubbing lightly before pulling it away.

Taking a deep breath Harry took a closer look as the scar had completely vanished.

"That's amazing. I never would have thought to use Phoenix tears like that."

"Neither did I or Sirius. If I hadn't come across your dad's research we might never have thought of it."

"It's a good thing you did then. But what did you want my opinion about?" As Remus tucked the cloth back into his pocket, Harry shuffled back underneath the comforter again.

"Do you think he will want to remove them? They are a part of him and I don't want him to become even more uncertain of himself than he already is by making him believe I take offence at their sight."

Biting his lip Harry thought for a moment.

Would he want the scars removed in the first place?

He knew he himself would jump at the chance to remove the scar on his forehead for good, if only to stop people from staring at him all the time.

But would Sirius feel the same way even if he was ashamed of them. Even if the scars were erased, the pain and memories of his past wouldn't be and they'd been part of him for so long.

If he didn't it would indeed make his godfather even more self-conscious than he already was, always hiding his bare skin underneath long sleeves and buttoned up shirts no matter how hot it was.

But if he did want them removed it might actually stop him from always trying to cover himself up and it might even give him some peace of mind to not always be confronted by evidence of the pain he went through whenever he saw his own body.

"If it were me I'd jump at the chance. But I'm not Sirius. What would you want?"

"I'd want them removed. It wouldn't have made a difference for me fourteen years ago as I'd just get new ones every upcoming full moon. But now, with Wolfsbane I'd take the chance with both hands," Remus admitted completely honestly.

"Then you should talk with Sirius. You could just bring up Dad's research and ask what he'd do if he'd be given the opportunity," Harry suggested.

"I'll do that, thank you. Oh, now that he's occupied... " Remus trailed off as he left his seat to retrieve something from the closet. "I tried to follow your wishes to the smallest details so I hope it's like you imagined."

Opening the box Remus handed him, Harry smiled as he took the collar out of the box to inspect the tag more properly.

Taking in the simple silver star they'd settled on before carefully opening it, his smile widened as he looked at the two photos they'd chosen.

Upon telling Remus of their idea the man had immediately showed them the perfect photo; one that had been taken shortly after Harry's birth and showed his grandparents and parents as they
surrounded the two Marauders seated on a large chair, he himself in his godfather's arms.

For the other picture Remus had approached Colin in secrecy, asking him to make a photo of the four of them with Luna and Neville without Sirius finding out. The boy had been ecstatic and had immediately taken and developed several photos for them. They'd chosen one where they were all standing before Hogwarts and Remus had written down their wishes for the tag so that he could order it for them, keeping the engravings the same.

Brushing a thumb over the simple black band Remus had picked Harry smiled. "It's absolutely perfect."

"I thought you'd approve. I've added the usual charms to it and some additional protective charms."

Nodding Harry returned the collar back to the box, handing it back to Remus so he could put it away again as they heard the shower stop.

"It seems like such a small gift though," he whispered.

"Trust me; he'll love this more than anything we could think of. Besides, we're taking him out to the zoo and dinner Saturday," Remus smiled as he took his seat again, tapping Harry's now cold milk with his wand to heat it up again.

"Better finish this off before he worries why you haven't finished your drink."

Chuckling at that truth Harry quickly finished the milk before shuffling down into a lying position, laughing as Remus tucked him in.

"Honestly, you are just as much of a mother hen as Sirius is."

"I'll take that as a compliment," Remus stuck out his tongue as he ruffled his hair.

"You two seem pretty cosy," Sirius entered the room with a potion in his hand and a towel over his shoulders to catch the drops falling from his still damp locks.

"Looks like it's potion time," Remus grinned as Harry groaned, standing up so that Sirius could take a seat, and pulled the towel back over Sirius' hair as he handed Harry the potion.

"You do realise I'm quite capable of doing that myself, right?" Sirius laughed as he leaned back to let Remus dry his hair properly.

"Hush, just read our boy his bedtime story to make up for the horrible potion you just gave him," his eyes were twinkling at the two tongues being stuck out to him simultaneously before he placed the towel over the heater.

Harry grinned, his heart skipping at Remus' words as he turned onto his side and squealed out in a little boy's voice; "Story time, Siri!"

Both men shot him an amused glance before Sirius' eyes glinted mischievously and he rose to pick the stuffed dog from the shelf and wiggle it beside Harry underneath the blanket.

Laughing Harry let his godfather tuck the dog beside him and childishly wrapped his arms around it, pulling it close.

"Am I not a little bit too old to be sleeping with a teddy?"

"Why? We sleep with a teddy, too, and we are much older than you are," Remus chuckled, pulling
Sirius into a hug before he could sit back down, and laughing Sirius patted him on the head.

"That's right; I have a very tall teddy bear in bed with me."

"You're both insane," Harry chuckled as the two sat down again and the younger of the two picked up the book Harry had been reading from.

"Seriously?"

"What? Remus said it was a good trilogy," Harry defended his reading material.

"It is, but it's a terror to read out loud from. I can't pronounce half of the names and places in here," Sirius complained.

"How about we all get into the bed and I read then?" Remus suggested, Harry immediately sitting up to return the stuffed dog on the shelf and move over.

"I think he agrees with your plan, Moony," laughing Sirius slipped into the bed beside Harry, shuffling over so that Remus could get in, too.

"All right, get settled you two so that I won't have to rearrange you once you have fallen asleep."

Waiting just long enough for his godfather to slide down and get comfortable, Harry curled up against him again. A wave from Remus' wand dimmed the lights enough so that there was only a night-light on at his side and with a chuckle at the two expectant faces he began to read.

"Next day Frodo woke early, feeling refreshed and well. He walked...¹" as he read a smile spread over his lips as from the corner of his eyes he saw Harry's eyes already beginning to drop, tucked warmly and relaxed against his godfather's side.

Catching his friend's eye they shared a warm smile before Sirius pressed a kiss into Harry's hair and Remus continued reading.

Chapter End Notes

¹. Direct words from - The Fellowship of the Ring Book 2 chapter 2 The Council of Elrond.

I was looking for a book for them to read from after the Beedle the Bard one and my friend is absolutely crazy about LotR. One of our discussions involved the boys reading those books and it seemed like the perfect choice for this chapter.

Remus would know the book, as a half blood and being born just six years after the books first came out. And the bookworm we know he is would want to share it with his friends, which explains why Sirius knows it, too.
"Are you going to tell us what you are so bloody nervous for?"

Ron was frowning at Harry as he fidgeted in his seat for the seventh time that minute, glancing at the door repeatedly instead of at his cauldron. Turning in his seat, Harry frowned.

"What?"

"Why are you so bloody nervous?"

"Do mind your language, Mister Weasley, though I have to admit I too am curious to what has you on pins and needles this morning, Harry," Andromeda asked as she appeared at Harry's side.

"Sirius was testing out a potion last night and I'm waiting for confirmation if he succeeded," Harry sighed. "But they left for the Forbidden Forest in the evening and didn't return to their quarters before I had to leave for class..."

"Meaning you are uneasy, seeing as what happened last month," she finished in understanding.

"What kind of potion was he testing?" Hermione asked curiously from beside Ron.

"That is not for me to reveal."

"Why not? We're your friends, aren't we?" the disgruntled expression on Ron's face was enough to tell Harry he was still unhappy Harry had chosen to remain seated with Neville when Andromeda took over and he opened his mouth to answer when Lavender snorted.

"He'd be absolutely insane to share that information before the Professor filed a patent if whatever he's testing works. That's asking for theft."

"Why would he want to ask patent on something?" Ron frowned.

"Maybe because he doesn't want someone else to go steal his invention and get the credit?" Blaise shot an incredulous glance at him.

"Or make the money his invention would probably make," Parvati added. A knock interrupted anything Ron might have to say to that.

"Come in," Andromeda called and Harry's heart jumped as the door opened to reveal Remus.

"You're hurt!" shooting from his seat, he rushed forward as the man entered, revealing bandages poking out from under his rolled up left sleeve. His heart was in his throat as he remembered the last time they'd gone into the forest during the full moon.

"Sirius is limping right now and we both have a few bruises, but other than that we are fine," the immediate reassurance that his godfather wasn't badly hurt made Harry breath out relieved.

"Where is he?"

"Hospital wing. He got bitten by an Acromantula."
"What?!" both Andromeda and Harry exclaimed before Harry frowned.

"But they reside deep in the forest, neither of you would be foolish enough to go near them."

"He's fine and we didn't step into their nest," Remus held up his hands as Andromeda's eyes shot fire, looking ready to yell at him.

"They aren't in their nest any more. Sirius thinks they've been lured out of their territory by Grawp's presence, feeling threatened by another predator. From the progression of webs it looks like they've been slowly gaining territory."

"Acro...there are gigantic spiders in the Forbidden Forest?" Lavender swallowed thickly as Ron paled at the mentioning of them.

"They are coming this way then? An entire colony of them?" Andromeda paled before glancing at the students. "Should we step outside for a moment?"

"They'll learn of what happened soon enough and the Acromantula didn't get a chance to come close enough to be any danger to the students. Sirius immediately contacted Kingsley and together with a large batch of Aurors they removed them from the forest before dawn to ensure no early rising students might be endangered by accident."

"But he was bitten," swallowing Harry looked up at Remus.

"Yes, but he's fine. He immediately changed back and counter-attacked. Once they retreated he summoned an antidote for us both."

"You were bitten, too?" pulling up Remus' sleeve further Harry inspected the bandages on his arm, sniffing to try and detect the distinguished smell that poison usually left. Rolling his eyes amused, Remus peeled back the bandage a little so that Harry could ease his worries and see there was barely a wound left.

"We're both fine. He'd have come himself but Poppy wanted to do a thorough check-up while he was there, so he asked me to reassure you."

"Wait...you said Sirius changed back to fight them off. If this happened before dawn then wouldn't he have been in danger from you, too?" Neville suddenly interrupted and Remus turned to the students who had all gathered near the front desks.

"No, but a good question. Due to the Wolfsbane I am able to keep my mind when transforming. When Harry officially came to live with us, Sirius insisted on testing out how I'd respond to human scents from close distance, just in case."

"And?" Andromeda asked.

"Neither of our scents has ever tempted you while transformed. But you say Sirius helped Kingsley and the Aurors get rid of the Acromantulas before dawn..." Harry trailed off and Remus nodded.

"While Moony was present, yes."

"But the Wolfsbane has never been strong enough to not tempt Moony when smelling other human scents. It is why all the precautions have been put into place and Padfoot has had to steer you clear from Hagrid's house on occasion. Why would it work now all of a sudden?"
"Ah, that's where it gets interesting. We kind of forgot about that in the heat of the moment and then the Aurors arrived, naturally startled and terrified upon seeing me besides Sirius. But even though Sirius immediately raised a shield to protect me when they tried to stun me, I was never even tempted."

"How's that possible?!" awed Harry stared at him, knowing the wolf always fought for control and won on those occasions despite the Wolfsbane.

"The only possibility I can think of is that you were too focused on protecting Sirius and that helped you keep your mind," Andromeda offered, leaning against the desk.

"Didn't work when the giant attacked last month. Had to knock myself into a wall to keep from attacking Hagrid when he came out of his cabin moments after I transformed back on the way to the castle."

"What was different now, then?" Neville asked but suddenly realising something Harry's eyes widened and his heart jumped at the possibility.

"The potion...do you think..." he had completely forgotten about the potion when he had caught sight of those bandages.

"Yes, I do."

Taking a deep breath Harry let his eyes scan over Remus' frame, ignoring the tiredness and instead focusing on trying to see traces of weariness he'd become accustomed to seeing the days after the full moon. Remus stared at him with an unreadable expression and Harry bit his lip.

"Does that mean that whatever potion he was developing worked?" Andromeda asked, unconsciously voicing Harry's thoughts and asking the question he couldn't bring himself to ask.

Remus shot her a glance before he turned fully to Harry and suddenly the unreadable expression gave way for a brilliant laugh and sparkling eyes. "Have I ever told you how bloody much I love that stubborn godfather of yours? It worked perfectly and he was filling in a patent on it for Kingsley to take with him as we speak."

Whooping in delight, Harry engulfed Remus in a hug, the man pulling him close and returning it tightly for a long moment.

"What is he filing a patent on?" Hermione immediately asked.

"He is filing a patent on what might just be the most amazing invention since the Wolfsbane potion," Remus answered as he and Harry separated again.

"Which is?" Ron asked impatiently, wincing as Dean elbowed him for his tone.

"What did Sirius invent?" Neville asked, ignoring Ron's muttered curse.

"He and Harry's father spent years trying to find a solution to the excruciating pain a werewolf goes through during the transformation. Yesterday he had me take a potion that allowed me to transform seamlessly without any pain, and because he managed to figure out a way to have it work efficiently with the Wolfsbane potion it still allows me to keep my mind."

There was a long moment of shocked silence before the class exploded in cheers.

"That is amazing! And he is filing a patent on it now?" Daphne asked.
"Yes, as we speak," Remus confirmed.

"He'll get loads of Galleons for inventing something like that," Ron breathed out in awe.

"Every Sickle earned by the invention of what will be called Wolfspoly will go to the Marauder Foundation, brought into existence to support and aid werewolves and other magical creatures," Remus said, his gaze on Harry as emerald eyes widened.

"He's..."

"Yes, he already arranged everything in advance after he learned it worked last month."

"Will every werewolf be able to take the potion?" Blaise asked.

"They will need to take a binding oath that they will never purposely seek out or attack another human being and as long as they keep to their oath they will receive it free of charge," Harry explained. "And there will be a protective spell woven into the oath that if a werewolf is about to break it he'll be locked into a sigil that will immediately notify the foundation."

"He's thought it through quite thoroughly," Dean praised.

"Yeah, he and my Dad didn't want the potion to be abused so they took every precaution they could think of."

"Well, congratulations to the both of you," Neville beamed wholeheartedly and Remus smiled.

"Does this mean that new potion also keeps the natural blood-thirst of the werewolf under control where Wolfsbane fails?" Daphne asked thoughtfully.

"That's what Professor Sirius is going to have the Foundation investigate as they start developing the potion. If it is indeed an effect the potion has on every werewolf they can use it to identify the werewolves who mean to harm innocents."

"Because the sigil would only be activated if a werewolf meant to harm a human. And they'd know it was intentionally if the potion indeed has the effect to dispatch the natural blood-thirst of a werewolf," Neville realised.

"Exactly. Andromeda, may I take Harry to go see Sirius?"

"Of course. Make sure to tell my cousin that if he doesn't stay out of trouble I will strap him to a bed and sit on his legs to ensure he will stay there."

"I vote that we keep him there for at least a month," Remus chuckled.

"Seconded," Harry agreed before he followed Remus back to the Hospital wing.

"Sirius!" spotting his godfather sitting on the bed he hurried forward.

"Hey pup," Sirius smiled as he accepted the hug Harry gave him.

"How are you feeling?"

"All right, did Remus say the potion worked perfectly?" beaming he ruffled Harry's hair.

"He did, but I meant with being bitten and all."
"Oh, I'm fine. Took an antidote as soon as I could. I just sprained it when I tripped over Moony trying to give him the antidote, too," Sirius explained away the ice pack resting on his ankle.

"You tripped over Moony?" Harry shot an incredulous glance at Remus, who cleared his throat embarrassed.

"It seems that Moony doesn't like shots."

"So you trip the man trying to help you?" snorting Harry took a seat on the bed edge.

"Yes. I didn't mean for him to sprain it though," Remus said as he sat down in the chair.

Sirius laughed. "You should have seen him, pup; he was twisting and turning in my grip. He even growled at me."

"After which you slapped me on the nose like I was a disobedient child!" Remus actually pouted, making Harry laugh.

"Well, you did growl at me," Sirius leaned forward to pat the older Marauder's hand with a smile. "But technically I think it was the gigantic monster that hurt my ankle, Moony just hit it the wrong way after it was already damaged."

Turning his hand and folding his fingers around Sirius', he returned the smile. "Andromeda says to stay out of trouble or she'll strap you to the bed."

"Tell her I love her, too."

Chuckling at his godfather's words Harry felt a hand curl around his waist and glancing down he poked at it, relishing in the resulting laughter before shuffling over so he was curled up beside Sirius like the man clearly wanted.

"So what exactly happened?" he asked once he was settled.

"We were running around when we smelled them. But before we could get away they suddenly came down from all sides and surrounded us."

Shivering Harry nodded, remembering the attack he'd experienced in his second year.

"Remus said you changed back? Wouldn't it have been easier to outrun them as Padfoot?"

"If it were just one or two of those things then yes, but I think it was most of the nest. Two canines can't fight off that many when they are attacking. Changing back I could use magic to back them off."

"They realised we weren't easy pickings after twenty or so got burned to crisps and another bunch killed," shifting Remus readjusted the ice bag on Sirius' ankle.

"How did you get bitten then if you fought them off successfully?" Harry glanced at the swollen and bluish ankle as it became partly visible for a moment.

"One slammed into my back from above and set its fangs into my leg. Remus got bitten as he tore it from my back."

"His arm isn't swollen like your ankle is."

"That would be the sprain. The venom was quickly removed and the antidote applied before it
"That explains why his arm is bandaged. But your ankle's been damaged so often lately that it's harder to heal?" Harry tried to deduce the different approach in treatment.

"Oh it's easy to heal, Poppy is just using this as an excuse to keep me rested for a bit," Sirius smiled.

Humming in understanding Harry picking up his godfather's free hand; "So much for a quiet birthday."

"I had a brilliant birthday, pup, nice and quiet. And this happened just after two in the morning so it was technically not my birthday any more."

Tangling their fingers together Harry leaned against his shoulder. "So you did have fun on your birthday?"

"I did, absolutely loved my presents, too."

Smiling Harry looked up to his godfather, brushing a thumb over the new collar, remembering exactly how speechless he'd been upon opening the box and how emotional when Remus attached it.

The old collar had been put into one of the scrapbooks Remus had been working on for months now.

Hermione had unconsciously given a big contribution to it, during her research for McGonagall's essay she had made copies of everything she found and had included it.

McGonagall, aware of Remus' little project, had donated those articles to him along with a large bunch of her own collection.

It had surprised them to learn that the woman had several large scrapbooks of her own, filled with articles of her old students, following their achievements after graduating. She had been happy to make copies for Remus of every article and photo that involved one of the Marauders and their families.

Sirius and Harry had enjoyed looking through it when Remus gave one to Sirius for his birthday and though not all articles were cheerful they belonged in the story Remus had been trying to form and Harry had been unable to stop laughing as the two told him stories behind certain photos and saw the horrible first attempts at the Marauder's Map and the many photos McGonagall had secretly taken after any pranks they had pulled.

Sirius had thoroughly thanked Luna for the framed photo Harry had finally given him, too, it having been given a place on the fireplace shelf.

Resting his head on his godfather's shoulder again he let his fingers trace a thin scar on the hand Remus was still holding.

"When are you going to remove them?"

"When we return to our quarters," Sirius answered softly, immediately knowing what he was talking about.

"Are you nervous?"
"A little," the admittance made Harry smile.

Remus had spoken to Sirius about the possibility to remove the scars Wednesday morning, when Harry had returned to classes again.

It somehow still managed to surprise Harry when Remus had informed him Sirius was only interested in the option if the two of them would also think about it.

Not that either of them had to think about it so they'd agreed immediately and the few scars Harry had, had already been removed, though Sirius had discussed it with him to remove the one on his forehead in steps so it wouldn't call as much attention to him.

It was something that Harry agreed upon, knowing that if the famous scar was suddenly removed all of a sudden he'd get lots of unwanted attention.

So he'd let Sirius only dab lightly at the scar, making it lighter and they would repeat the process every few weeks until they could let it disappear without raising too many questions.

Remus and Sirius had decided to wait until this morning as they didn't have classes until the afternoon and they'd need the time.

Harry hadn't asked to be present as he knew their scars were a sore point and although he had no doubt they'd let him stay if he asked, he knew they needed to do this with just the two of them.

"What are you thinking about?" Sirius' soft voice made him realise he'd been quiet for a while.

"That I love you both very much."

"And we love you. Are you looking forward to class this afternoon?" Remus gave him a knowing look, making Harry grin apologetic as he knew the man had known exactly what he'd been thinking about.

"I always look forward to any class you guys give."

"We're not going to teach you guys anything new you know, not just before the holidays," Sirius said. "So I doubt it will be anything interesting."

"Any class the two of you give is interesting," Harry disagreed before sitting up with a sigh as Sirius and Remus both yawned at the same time the bell rang to indicate the first period was over. "I should return to class so that you can catch some sleep."

"Why don't you walk back to our quarters with us? That way you'll know we've gotten there in one piece. It's no use to return in the middle of an ongoing class," Remus suggested as he leaned forward to pick up the ice bag and inspect the ankle.

Nodding approvingly at what he saw, he quickly healed it before handing Sirius his sock and boot and quietly they slipped out of the hospital wing to return to their quarters without Madam Pomfrey noticing them.

Harry listened as Sirius informed him of what Kingsley had said before he hurried to his next class, where his curious classmates were already waiting for him.

"So what happens with those Acromantula now that they've been removed from the forest?" Lavender asked as they gathered in their seats for History of Magic.
"Sirius says the ones not killed will be transported back to Borneo where they originally came from. Hagrid will probably not be happy but they are too dangerous now they've left their original nesting ground."

"I can't imagine the idea of those things having lived in the forest. Who knows how long they've been there!" Parvati shivered in disgust.

"Since the fifties. Very few students ever saw them because they resided deep into the forest. Sirius and Remus knew of their existence because they explored the entire Forbidden Forest during full moons in their own school days with my Dad."

"And we came across them three years ago, too," Ron bragged proudly.

Biting his lip to keep from snorting at the sudden bravery Harry turned to Neville as the shy boy spoke up worriedly: "But he's truly all right?"

"Yeah. You can see for yourself when we have Defence this afternoon."

"Shouldn't they be asleep if they ran around all night?" Dean frowned. "I mean, they must be exhausted."

"Especially if they had to fight off those things, too," Seamus added.

"Sirius has never missed class after a full moon. Although I admit he does drink coffee at lunch if he has to teach all day."

"Probably needs it to get through the afternoon awake," Neville chuckled before they all quieted down as Professor Ted arrived.

Through the rest of the classes Harry only paid the minimum of attention to class and surely would have received a lot of detentions if Neville and Lavender hadn't covered for him, his mind not with the classes.

"You'd think you'd have become more at ease now that you know they are fine, but instead you are only getting twitchier," Lavender chuckled softly as they made their way towards the Defence classroom after lunch.

"I don't know what would have happened if the two of you hadn't kept covering for me, thank you."

"You'd do the same for us. Besides, we are prefects now, it is our duty to look after our fellow Gryffindors," Neville grinned, also keeping his voice down so the others wouldn't overhear as they opened the classroom door.

"And you both still wonder if Sirius made the right call?" amused Harry sat down beside them.

"I wonder what we'll be doing today," Dean mused.

"Nothing new. They wanted to keep it light just before the holidays so we might just review today," Harry shrugged as they sat down.

"Good afternoon class," Remus and Sirius greeted them, calling their attention to the door and returning the greeting as the two made their way inside.

"So, how are you all this last class before the Easter holidays?" Sirius asked as he pulled himself up
Harry looked at him closely but he couldn't see much of a change in his godfather, beside the obvious tiredness and he wondered if they'd removed the scars yet. Both men were dressed as usual so he couldn't see anything either.

"Eager for some time off, Professor," Seamus grinned. "Maybe we could take it easy today?"

"Easy how?" Remus asked as he took a seat beside Sirius.

"Easy like...no homework?" Lavender batted her eyes sweetly.

"And what do we get in return should we not give you homework to do for next week?" Remus asked, playing along.

"We could..." she trailed off as she glanced at her classmates.

"See it as a reward for our perfectly good behaviour?" Dean smiled hopefully.

"That is a good one. Have they behaved in class?" Remus turned to Sirius.

"I have to say that they are very good little lions, very enthusiastic," Sirius mused, winking at Harry. "So I suppose we could let them off easy just this once, right?"

"But everyone gives them homework," Remus argued.

"True, but we aren't everyone, are we?"

"If you put it like that then I suppose we could skip on the homework just this once," Remus chuckled as they all cheered."So, what should we do today?"

"Hmmmm, how about we just chat a little before we let them off early so they can go pack and get ready in time for the train tomorrow morning?" Sirius stretched a little lazily.

"And we can go back to sleep?" Remus asked hopeful, making them laugh.

"That would be nice. So, Gryffindors, what are your plans for the Easter holidays?"

They snickered as they each told their plans for the week before making some small talk.

"Is everyone going home, sir?" Lavender asked.

"Unsurprisingly yes. It seems like every parent wishes to see their children," Remus answered as Sirius was called out of the classroom by a crying first year Gryffindor.

"What was wrong?" Harry asked as he returned after a while, looking deep in thoughts.

"Sirius?"

"What would happen if you send a werewolf to the moon?" the unexpected question made Remus and the students stare at him.¹

"I..." blinking, Remus seemed lost for words.

"He'd stay transformed all the time?" it was more a question than a suggestion Neville made.

"Would he?" Sirius cocked his head to the side in question and Neville coloured.
"Wouldn't he die without oxygen?" Lavender mused.

Dean shrugged; "The Professor has magic doesn't he? He could just make an air bubble around his head."

"The Professor does, but not all werewolves have magic," Lavender shot back with a grin.

"But either way he'd stay transformed, wouldn't he?" Neville tried to clarify.

Looking at each other for a long moment in thought, they all turned to Remus.

"I...where did this suddenly come from?"

Sirius looked up. "When I brought Anna to Poppy I overheard two Ravenclaws discussing if you can still follow the moon cycle while actually being on the moon and I suddenly wondered what would happen if you put a werewolf on the moon."

At Remus' blank stare he elaborated. "Because the moon is technically always full up there, we just can't see it from the earth. So would being up there still have the same effects as being on earth does? Does the werewolf know the moon is full if it cannot see it? Or would the effect not even count for a werewolf while they are up there?"

"I...don't know," Remus admitted.

"Me neither," sighing Sirius leaned against the desk again.

"But I'm not going up there to test it out," Remus raised an eyebrow.

"I'd knock some sense into you if you had even suggested the idea, Moony," Sirius chuckled distractedly as he leaned over to rummage in his bag.

"At any rate he'd probably never howl at the moon any more since he's already there," Harry chuckled, amused by the turn of conversation.

"Maybe he'd howl at the earth then?" Neville suggested, trying and failing miserably not to grin as Remus narrowed his eyes at him in a mock glare.

"He'd only howl at the earth because he'd be missing Padfoot," Harry grinned as Sirius looked up to him.

"I have no intention to send Moony up there, pup, I just meant werewolves in general."

"Professor Lupin is a werewolf, too," Lavender pointed out.

"Yes, but he's not just any werewolf, he is my werewolf and not going anywhere," Sirius answered immediately.

"And do I have a say in this?" amused Remus looked at his friend as Sirius began rummaging through his bag again.

"Not really. Besides, if you go anywhere I'll just follow and you don't want that on your conscience," Sirius mused.

"Why would I feel guilty about dragging you to the moon?"

"Because Harry is still a minor. I'd have to drag him out of school to be able to follow you. Which
would mean that he'd miss education and although we are both more than qualified to teach him all
he needs to know he wouldn't have the company of his peers and you'd feel guilty over that."

"Because there is not a chance you'd stay here if I would leave," it wasn't a question and Remus'
smile grew as Sirius nodded distractedly.

Lavender just managed to suppress a squeak at the words and the others grinned.

"Say, what are you looking for?"

"My pencil, I thought I had left it on the table..."

"You mean the one that you always stick behind your ear and then promptly forget?" Remus
calmly leaned in to pull said item from its spot, holding it out to him as Sirius straightened
surprised, making the class laugh.

Accepting the pencil Sirius shot him a calculated look before picking up his notebook to write
something down.

"So, is there a way to answer your question?" Parvati asked.

"Not unless we actually send someone up there. And I don't know about you lot but I'm not eager
to send a werewolf to the moon," Remus said.

Lavender opened her mouth but the bell interrupted her and surprised they all looked up.

"Time went by much faster than I expected," Dean laughed. "Turns out we spent the entire hour in
class after all."

"Let us cancel the second hour then so that you lot can all get the things you want to take home
packed before dinner," Sirius suggested. "And I do suggest you use the time because I will not have
my Gryffindors running around like headless chickens tomorrow morning to pack their stuff.
Neville, Lavender, I'm expecting the two of you to spread the word to the other Prefects and ensure
it truly happens."

"Yes sir!" they saluted him.

"Carry on and we'll see you all tomorrow morning at breakfast," Remus nodded.

"Not at dinner?" Ron asked confused.

"They'll probably be sleeping then," Seamus answered him as both adults grinned.

Under laughter they bid them goodbye before leaving, Harry hesitating.

"Go with your classmates, pup, and come to us around eight. I do believe we promised you a visit
to the teacher's bathroom earlier this week," Sirius smiled, ruffling a hand through his hair.

"We'll have time for that?" eagerly but surprised Harry grinned.

"Of course, it's not like you need to hurry packing your essentials as you don't need to catch the
train," Remus laughed. "Besides, we need a bit more time to finish what we discussed this
morning."

Understanding what they meant Harry nodded.
"So you've made a start then?" he asked as Sirius pulled him close.

"We're about halfway there, the deeper ones take more appliances of the solution," the strange words were murmured into his ear, confusing Harry. But he didn't ask further as Sirius let him go again and a light playful slap on his behind had him hurrying after his classmates.

"What do they need more time for?" Ron asked as Harry joined them outside.

"Something personal, were you eavesdropping?" realising why Sirius had spoken cryptically. The man must have known Ron was listening in.

"It's not my fault he talked loudly," Ron shrugged, not at all feeling guilty. Frowning at the redhead Harry shook his head in disgust at the display.

"If we hurry we can finish our potions assignment before dinner starts," Neville pulled on his sleeve.

"We've already finished the rest so it should be possible and else I have until eight," nodding Harry and Neville made their way to Gryffindor Tower.

Chapter End Notes

¹. I overheard a kid at my work asking his older siblings that question and it got me thinking of what would happen. Would he transform and stay transformed? Or would the curse not come into effect up there?

I couldn't not include the question in this story; it was just too good to leave out even if I did not have an answer.

So special thanks to the little boy who gave me the idea and the delighted debate that followed with him, me and his big brother about the question, which resulted into the conversation the Gryffindors had in this chapter.

Also special praise for the boy's argument of just why he thought his big sister was stupid for liking vampires when it is so obvious werewolves are so much cooler. For such a small boy he made a very solid pro werewolf case and as a fellow werewolf fan, I certainly agreed.

My apologies to any vampire fans, but I've always liked Oz a lot more than Spike, though Angel will forever remain a favourite of mine.
Turning his bottle of coke around in his hands, Harry glanced at the man seated across of him while biting his already abused lower lip to keep from laughing.

When they had arrived at the zoo that morning Harry had been eager to look around, hoping to be able to see some animals despite the fact that the weather was rather wet.

He shouldn't have worried though, as the moment Sirius walked past the first area, Penguin Pool, most of the penguins had immediately gathered near the wall where he was standing, trying to get close to him.

Harry had laughed himself silly as caretakers had come by to see what was going on, the penguins immediately diving into the water and down the slides to follow his godfather as Remus cheerfully ordered him to come to the other side.

Luckily for Sirius not all animals had been attracted to him so they could walk around in relative peace to see all the animals.

It hadn't been until Harry's request to see monkeys that Remus had suggested they'd go to a Dutch Primate zoo, which was famous for certain monkeys walking around freely among the visitors.

That alone should have been enough to alert all three of them of what a bad idea it was to go there, but unthinkingly both Harry and Sirius had agreed.

Upon arrival the staff had warned them to put all their valuables in special bags, a precaution they had taken, before entering the area where squirrel monkeys lived.

Remus had just been quick enough to pull Harry away as a whole troop of them jumped his godfather, throwing him off his feet.

Bursting out in laughter as the man was quite literally covered in small yellowish orange monkeys with black spots and long tails he could only stand by and watch as Remus moved in to try and relieve him of some of them.

A caretaker ran towards them and called something out but although Remus pulled his hands back, he shook his head.

"I don't speak Dutch, sorry."

"Oh, you aren't allowed to pick the monkeys up. If they come to you then it's all right, but you can't pick them up."

"I didn't," Sirius grumbled, shaking his arms to try and dislodge most of the monkeys there as Remus stepped back.

The caretaker hurried forward and sprayed something from a bottle at the monkeys, immediately causing them to jump away for a few moments before gathering near Sirius' feet again as he sat up.

"They normally react really well to the water," the caretaker apologised.
"I don't mind as long as they don't come at me in large numbers," Sirius got his legs back under him and kneeled properly, letting them investigate his hands and clothes as some climbed onto his shoulders again.

Chuckling Harry knelt down too, opening his hands to allow Remus to pour some of the monkey treats they had bought at the entrance into them.

It was efficient enough to lure a few of them away from his godfather and steal the treats before they climbed onto his arms and shoulders in search of more.

They spend the larger part of an hour playing around with the monkeys before they decided to leave again.

Harry couldn't stop grinning whenever he caught sight of the slightly dishevelled Remus. His clothes were ruffled, though he'd managed to get himself cleaned up enough that he didn't look like he'd been molested any more. A young squirrel monkey had crawled into his dress shirt when they'd gotten up to leave, giving Harry a lot of trouble to try and get it out again without actually picking it up.

Sirius had been in stitches during Harry's futile attempts until he'd taken pity and stepping closer he'd slipped his hands underneath Remus' shirt to effectively lure the monkey to him and let it crawl onto his shoulder instead.

The caretaker had taken an interesting shade of red at Sirius' action, something Remus' only comment of complaining about warming his hands next time, had done nothing to lessen. Not that Harry could blame the stuttering girl; it had been quite the sight to those not used to their normal behaviour.

It never ceased to amaze Harry how the two most brilliant men he had ever met could at the same time be so utterly naive to what kind of reaction their general interaction with each other caused in others.

Smiling he glanced at his godfather, who was playing with a baby at the table next to theirs as they waited for their orders to arrive.

Leaving the primate zoo they had returned to England to eat dinner at a small Italian restaurant in London where Remus had occasionally eaten with his parents when he'd been young.

It wasn't very fancy as Harry had originally wanted for his godfather's birthday, but he knew Sirius would appreciate this more. The simplicity and cosiness of the restaurant was exactly his taste, and as he looked around again Harry couldn't deny he liked it a lot, too.

Sudden childish laughter returned his attention to the scene across of him and he smiled as his godfather and Remus were both cooing over the baby now.

"Why are you both so good with babies?"

"We had lots of practice with you, you were the most adorable baby ever," Sirius smiled, watching as Remus tickled the baby's stomach, resulting in more laughter.

"He needed a new diaper though," Remus commented once the parents had gathered their supplies and made the baby wave at them as they left.

"I bet that is not something adorable," grimacing Harry waved along with the two.
"Your dad was always horrified by what such a tiny baby could produce," Remus admitted.

"You guys weren't?"

"I never changed your diaper until Sirius taught me his secret."

"Because of the smell?" chuckling Harry thanked the waitress who brought their plates, understanding his nose was much too sensitive for what babies produced in their diaper.

"Thank you, yes. For some reason it had never occurred to either your parents or him to simply use an Obliteration charm to both remove the odour and the contents before changing it. Or even a Bubblehead charm," suddenly Sirius laughed.

"You should have seen your dad; he'd stand in the door opening and try to change your diaper from across the room, gagging even from there."

"Poor Dad. What did Mum say about that?"

"She'd tell him he was an idiot but he got back at her because in the beginning she kept forgetting you were a boy and she should be careful when she was changing you," Remus chuckled.

"I peed on her?" realising what would have likely happened Harry laughed.

"You peed on most of us when trying to change you, until Sirius told us to hold it down the moment the diaper got lose and you'd pee in the diaper. Once you were done we could quickly change you. It was hilarious, none of us had ever taken care of a baby before and yet he was the only one who always knew exactly what to do."

"That's not entirely true; I read several books when Lily revealed she was pregnant. I was just more prepared than James or you."

"You read baby books?" the image of his godfather researching all there was to know about babies was easy to see for Harry as he knew that would be exactly what he'd do.

"Always went with your parents to antenatal class, too," Sirius nodded.

"Didn't that cause some odd looks? I mean, aren't it usually only couples in those classes?"

"At first they looked at me oddly, but they got used to my presence and it was really helpful when your mum actually went into labour and I was the only one there," Sirius shrugged.

"None of that ever explained why you never threw food at him, though," Remus grumbled.

"I did throw food at you then?" Harry grinned.

"There was this one time when Remus was attempting to feed you, but you were a little unwell and really didn't want any food. But he'd refuse to give up, determined to get some food into you. You got so annoyed with his persistence that you dumped the entire contents of the nearby blender over his head."

"I am so sorry," unable to stop himself from laughing Harry at least tried to look apologetic.

"Don't be, all kids throw with their food, I was just unlucky that you happened to have extra means to throw food at me. It was just very frustrating that you behaved perfectly when he took over two minutes later," Remus mused with a nod towards Sirius between bites of lasagne.
"It was rather unfair," Sirius agreed before smiling. "Though I really don't know what you are complaining about as you got off rather easy. James was often covered in so much goo that he had to go take a shower afterwards."

"I must have been a horrible little monster," sighing Harry blew on his own lasagne before carefully testing it, having learned the hard way that just because Remus was cheerfully tucking into the exact same dish, it was not necessarily cool enough to eat for others without burning themselves.

"Every baby is a little monster at times," Remus shrugged, trying to hide a smile behind his filled fork at Harry's precaution, it widening as Harry stuck out his tongue at him.

They ate in comfortable silence and once they were done both men got a cup of tea while Harry got to pick something from the dessert card.

Luckily for him Sirius was smart enough to ask the waitress exactly what he'd ordered and he was spared a dish that she pointed it out at another table and it looked rather like liquid egg.

Instead he got a full bowl of delicious ice cream and he happily tucked into it, occasionally assisted by Remus as he had asked for an extra spoon and together they quickly finished it while Sirius declined.

"Excuse me...may I ask a rather odd question? Are you Harry? Harry Potter?" a woman with dark brown hair had come over from another table and was looking at Harry curiously and nervously.

Apprehensive Harry shot his godfather a glance as the man shifted, but as he looked at the woman more closely he suddenly recognised her.

"Mrs. Granger?"

The woman's face broke into a smile, relaxing slightly as she was clearly relieved to have gotten it right. "Sorry, I didn't mean to bother you, I just saw you and it kept nagging me until I could no longer stand it and had to find out."

"It's no bother; we've just finished eating anyway. Oh, this is Hermione's mother..."

"Monica. Monica Granger. And that is my husband Wendell," she nodded to a man who also looked nervous but gave a small wave as Sirius raised a hand to wave at him.

"It is nice to meet you, I'm Sirius and this is Remus. We are Harry's guardians and teach at your daughter's school," Sirius and Remus both rose to shake her hand.

"The pleasure is mine, I've heard...much about the two of you."

"I'm afraid I cannot say the same," Sirius apologised. "Why don't you and your husband join us for a bit, if I am not mistaken we'd both learn a bit more about one another that way, Doctor Granger."

"Please call me Monica, I get called Doctor Granger more than enough at work as it is, and I would like that very much, that is if you don't mind, Harry?"

"Not at all Mrs...I mean, Monica. I have to admit I barely know anything about you, either, as Hermione rarely mentions her parents."

Remus quickly retrieved two more chairs and Monica called over her husband to join them. A new round of drinks was quickly ordered and Harry took the time to take the two in more properly.
Both had dark brown hair but Hermione had inherited her father's brown eyes as her mother's eyes were green. As they'd been standing Harry had seen they were both very tall, Monica only inches smaller than Sirius while Wendell was the same height, though built much sturdier than Sirius.

They shared some small talk, both quickly relaxed as they laughed at things Sirius and Remus told them.

Harry shared a few of their daughter's more innocent adventures at school, something he noticed both latched onto eagerly and he wondered how much Hermione actually told her parents about Hogwarts.

"Your daughter didn't join you tonight?" Remus eventually asked and Monica shook her head.

"No, she wanted to spend the Easter holidays at the Weasleys to prepare for the upcoming exams. I was a little surprised when I thought to have recognised you. Normally you all spend the holidays together, don't you?"

"Yeah, but I wanted to spend Easter with my family," Harry explained, not at all surprised to learn Hermione had gone to the Weasleys.

He had never been able to understand why the girl seemed to spend most of every holiday with them, despite not having seen her parents for most of the year. He would have wanted to spend every single day off with his parents if he'd had the option, an opportunity he now grasped with both hands.

"I have to admit I am a bit unsure of exactly what you are to one another. Hermione mentioned you lived with your uncle and aunt but she also briefly mentioned you were his godfather?" Wendell sounded unsure and Harry realised he'd been trying to bring it up but hadn't dared.

"I am," Sirius confirmed.

"And you were their teacher in third year, weren't you?" Monica directed at Remus.

"Yes."

"He's also Harry's uncle and second guardian, the three of us live together," Sirius explained at their confused expression.

"Right, but if you are his guardians then why didn't he live with you before? If you don't mind me asking that is," Wendell asked confused, glancing at them both a bit surprised.

"Due to circumstances I was left in no position to take custody of my godson until recently and Remus wasn't let near him," Sirius explained.

"Yes...Hermione mentioned something about those circumstances..." Wendell trailed off, the nervousness returning.

"I'm not sure exactly how much she's told you but I was arrested for a crime I didn't commit and deliberately imprisoned so I wouldn't be able to take custody of Harry. I realised this after escaping and took charge to change that."

The words were spoken softly but the directness of them still left both Grangers blinking surprised.

"That's...not what Hermione told us. She just said Harry had a godfather who had been in prison and had escaped a while ago," Monica finally managed to bring out.
"What exactly has your daughter told you about us, Doctor Granger?" Remus calmly asked as he took a sip from his tea, clearly having expected as much.

"Wendell please. She's told us things that I am not entirely certain any more are true," he shifted and shared a glance with his wife. "You see, we've been at the restaurant for quite some time now and saw you come in..."

"And have been keeping an eye on us when you thought you recognised Harry," Remus finished for him when he trailed off.

"Yes...sorry," Monica bit her lower lip.

"Don't be. While I normally don't appreciate being watched I know you were only trying to look out for Harry. So what did Hermione tell you about us?" Sirius asked with a small smile.

"She wrote to us that you were unfit teachers, even more horrible than the one she had earlier this year and that you were ...erm..." Wendell shot a glance at his wife.

"A worthless lowlife?" Harry decided to help them out.

"Well...yes. And we really weren't sure what to think of it, because she also mentioned you were promoted to her Head of House which didn't fit with that, although I admit we are not sure why Professor McGonagall stepped down," Monica said.

"Professor McGonagall is Headmistress now. Albus Dumbledore had been on probation since the beginning of the year until he was convicted of several crimes a few weeks ago and imprisoned. Her promotion meant there was a new Head of Gryffindor needed and Sirius was recommended for the job," Remus explained.

"Isn't Dumbledore sort of a hero in your world?" Monica's eyes were wide.

"He used to be, until it came to the light that he's a manipulative old sod," nodding Sirius finished his tea. "Would you like another cup?"

"I think I need something stronger than tea," Wendell admitted as he took a deep breath.

Nodding Remus ordered two beers and refills for Sirius and Harry when Monica declined.

"You don't drink?" Wendell asked surprised.

"No, I dislike the taste of alcohol and I don't appreciate to have my senses dulled, not after growing up in wartime. And he only drinks occasionally," Sirius explained before he chuckled at their surprise. "Hermione told you I was an alcoholic, didn't she?"

"Yes."

"Last summer I did drink whiskey. But it was for medical reasons, not because I enjoyed it."

"Right, you know, you are both quite different from the image I had in my mind. Younger too," Monica smiled.

"We'll take that as a compliment?" Remus asked, laughing when she coloured slightly but nodded.

"What is Hermione like at school?" Wendell suddenly asked, his eyes narrowing as Sirius and Remus shared a glance.
"The few letters our daughter sent portrayed the both of you rather unkindly and she doesn't have her mother's tact to remain pleasant in the face of someone she dislikes, so please do not sugar-coat it for us as I know she must have misbehaved."

"For what it is worth, she has recently apologised to Harry for her behaviour, realising she was out of line," Sirius said.

"To Harry?"

"Yes. I admit we haven't really given her a chance to seek us out yet as we've been extremely busy," the honesty in Remus' voice put both parents a little at ease before Wendell raised an eyebrow suspiciously.

"At any rate, I am going to have stern words with my daughter about what she's told us and I can assure you, regardless of any apology she'll give you I will punish her," Wendell promised.

"I don't think there is a worse punishment for her than having been kicked out of class permanently," Harry mused.

"What?! She was kicked out of class? Just exactly what kind of behaviour has our daughter portrayed?"

"Well..." sighing Remus told them.

Harry couldn't blame them for their complete shock at his words as Hermione's recent behaviour had taken them all by surprise.

"But why weren't we warned that our daughter was banished from three classes? Shouldn't we have been contacted?" Monica asked.

"You were going to be contacted shortly after the Easter holidays. A lot has happened at Hogwarts lately and we've been understaffed for a while. I kicked her out of our classes a few weeks ago but we've held off on warning her guardians."

"Why?" Wendell asked Remus.

"Because two new teachers were going to take those classes over at the beginning of April and they might accept her back again, she is currently on probation for both classes."

"So alerting us was put off until the probation period was over," Monica realised. "So she has been removed from your class permanently?"

"For this year at any rate. We've discussed it and if she indeed apologises and behaves normally for the rest of the term we might let her in again for the N.E.W.T class next year. On a probation period though," Sirius said.

"That is more than I could ask for," Wendell sighed. "I will have a very strict word with her and I won't wait until the summer vacation for it to happen. I will pull her home this week for it, do you happen to have any idea how I can reach her?"

"Arthur Weasley has a phone, I'll send you their number as I have it at home," Harry promised.

"Wait...you don't have any way to contact your daughter while she's in the Wizarding World?" Sirius asked incredulous, surprised when the two looked around nervously and Monica frowned.
"Should you be saying that so loudly?"

"Hmm? Oh, I cast a spell that keeps people from eavesdropping on us the moment you joined us," Sirius revealed.

"But you didn't take out your stick...your wand," Wendell's eyes grew.

"I know wandless magic; I wouldn't be having this conversation in the middle of a restaurant if I hadn't cast a privacy spell. But you didn't answer my question."

"No, we have no way to contact our daughter until she sends us an owl," Monica sighed.

"There are several pet shops around here that are linked to our world, they have owls that Muggles can use to send messages to their magical offspring," Remus said as Sirius pulled out a piece of paper to write down several addresses.

"Harry's mother was Muggleborn, too. His grandparents used these same addresses to be able to contact their daughter before she got an owl of her own," he handed over the list.

"Thank you so much. It has always worried me that we had literally no way to contact her even if she kept insisting she was perfectly fine. If something happened in the family we had no way to let her know," tears appeared in Monica's eyes as she held the list tightly.

"Hogwarts is supposed to give these addresses out to the parents of Muggle-born or Muggle-raised students but I know you aren't the only ones who never got that. I've added our phone number at the bottom so that if anything urgent comes up you can reach us."

"It is likely that our House-elf Dobby will answer the phone as we travel a lot, but he can find us anywhere," Remus added.

"Thank you," Wendell breathed out relieved.

"You are welcome, but I am afraid we are going to have to bid you goodbye as we still have other plans for the evening."

"We do?" Sirius asked surprised.

"Of course, did you honestly think we'd only take you to the zoo and out to dinner on your birthday celebration?" Harry grinned, rising like everyone else.

"Congratulations, why didn't you say we were interrupting a birthday party?" Wendell asked.

"Thank you but I didn't mind. It was nice to meet you both," Sirius shook their hands.

"The pleasure was all ours. I am glad we got to meet the real you," Monica smiled warmly before nodding to Harry.

"I hope you will have a lovely holiday and thank you for your honesty."

"No problem, have a nice evening," Harry smiled as he accepted the coat Sirius handed him before following the two men outside so that Remus would be able to Apparate them home where he had set up a ceiling show for them to watch from the cosiness of their own living room.

Harry looked forward to going to sleep in his own bed and wake up on his first Easter with them, knowing Sirius and Remus had bought a couple of dozen chocolate eggs to hide in the house and garden and would likely do so after he'd gone to bed.
He felt like a small child when Sirius had purchased supplies to be able to paint boiled eggs; a tradition Harry had never been able to take part in as the Dursleys had never let him.

The knowledge that Remus and Sirius would willingly sit at a table with him to do something as childish as painting eggs had him giddy with excitement and he couldn't wait.

"Did you have fun today, pup?" Sirius' voice interrupted his thoughts as they gathered again in the living room after taking showers and Remus spread out a thick blanket on the wooden floor for them to sit on.

"Yes, did you?" he leaned into his godfather's side, an arm wrapping around him as they settled onto it for the fireworks.

"I did, did you? Despite the monkey assaulting you?" Sirius teased as he let himself fall back to lie on his back, pulling both Remus and Harry down with him.

"The monkey wasn't the only one assaulting me, Pads," Remus laughed as he got comfortable and Sirius grinned as he rested his head on Remus' shoulder.

"You really wonder why everyone thinks you are a couple?" laughing Harry snuggled into his godfather's side.

"Let them think what they want, I really can't be bothered to care about other people's opinions," Sirius yawned.

Remus hummed in agreement, reaching out to grab a bag of potato crisps he had brought and tossed it to Harry.

"What are you giving me that for?" Harry laughed.

"Because we're going to fall asleep soon and you'll get hungry halfway into the show but won't want to move," Remus grinned at him.

Snorting Harry opened the bag and poured himself a bowl while Sirius grabbed a couple of pillows so that he could semi sit up and not choke on the crisps. They settled back in and as Harry watched the firework show he couldn't help but smile as he glanced aside to notice the two men having drifted off to sleep beside him.

Carefully moving away from his godfather he made sure the room temperature was warm enough before quietly activating one of the many movies Remus had added to the system.

Settling back again to watch the movie Harry couldn't stop himself from staring at his godfather's ankle, just barely visible as the man had curled onto his side as Harry had moved.

The drawings Harry had made as a toddler were just visible there and he smiled as he remembered noticing them the night before, surprised they hadn't been removed.

There were still a few scars on his godfather's now smooth form that he had refused to get rid of and Harry really should have known better than be surprised by their sight.

The triple moon scar Moony had made in sixth year that was Sirius' favourite was also still there, as was the crest Harry's grandfather had accidentally caused with his ring.

Remus had been near tears when he realised the phoenix tears had been able to vanish the scar that had turned him and with the scars in his face gone he looked younger.
At breakfast that morning Harry had expected a lot of questions since the three scars in Remus' face had been rather visible, but surprisingly only a few leaned in to question him about it, something he had only answered with a shrug and a vague answer that had satisfied their curiosity.

Harry's eyes travelled to his godfather's visible wrist, no longer hidden underneath tight sleeves now that the scars were gone, though Harry knew it would always remain a trigger point of the man.

Smiling as Remus shifted, wrapping an arm around Sirius in his sleep he shook his head before concentrating on the playing movie, enjoying the nearness to his two most favourite people in the world.

Chapter End Notes

I chose the names Monica and Wendell for Hermione's parents because that were the names she mentioned after telling Harry she had modified their memories. I have never seen a reason for why she would change their given names along with their surname.

And the whole 'they were in hiding so it had to be completely new identities' is nonsense to me. Wendell and Monica were very common names in their assumed generations so why change them?
A quiet curse was what woke Harry up the next morning and stretching he sat up, not entirely sure why he'd been sleeping on a blanket on the floor.

"Awww, you woke him, Moony," the amused voice made Harry grin as he remembered the previous day's events.

"What time is it?"

"A little after noon."

"Noon?! You let me sleep half the day away," Harry scrambled to his feet.

"It’s vacation, you are allowed to sleep longer then," Sirius shrugged. "But if it makes you feel better; he hasn't been awake very long yet, either."

"I wish you had woken me earlier though, now you had to prepare most of lunch alone," Remus smiled as Harry walked to the table to give them both a hug.

"Happy Easter. Are we going to paint that many?" he asked as his eyes fell on the boiled eggs both men were drying off.

"Happy Easter. It's only fifteen eggs," Remus chuckled.

"I suggest you wait with showering as a very eager bunny hid tons of eggs for you to find."

"What kind of hiding places did you use that I should expect to get dirty while seeking for them?" Harry asked amused.

"Rem hid half of them and knowing him, I'd be sure to check the pond and rain pipes."

"How do you hide eggs in a pond?"

The blank look both men gave him was enough to make Harry pout. "That is totally unfair!"

"It's called practice," Remus smiled. "But I didn't hide any in the pond in this weather. Go get cleaned up and don't bother trying to cheat; I've concealed them for now so you won't find any."

"Of course you did. How many eggs do I have to find?"

"Five outside that you should hunt down before doing anything else as it looks like the storm will hit soon, the other twenty are hidden inside so those can wait until you've brushed your teeth."

"Right," accepting the coat Sirius handed him, he slipped into it and smiled as Sirius picked up a basket.

"Are you going to help me seek?"

"I'll give you hints when needed," with that Sirius changed into Padfoot, looking at him expectantly.

"What are the parameters?"
"Just until the rose bushes. Don't worry, I didn't hide any in the pond or the rain pipes," the reassuring smile Remus gave him turned mischievous. "I'll keep that until a nicer Easter."

"Joy," rolling his eyes Harry brushed a hand over Padfoot's head, accepting his wand as the dog held it up to him. "Am I going to need that?"

Taking the bark and wiggling tail as an affirmative Harry tucked his wand into his sleeve and pulled up his hood.

"Want to start on the right?"

It took a long time for Harry to locate the first egg, and he wasn't entirely sure he'd have ever found it if he hadn't almost tripped over Padfoot when the dog had planted himself directly before his feet while his gaze was on the wall.

As it was, the egg was floating half a meter above his head, just out of reach and rolling his eyes Harry raised his wand.

To his utter shame he needed five attempts before he found the proper spell to repel the protections around it and he could levitate it down and as the egg landed in his hand he turned to Padfoot.

"Are all five eggs going to be like that?"

Padfoot only cocked his head and Harry sighed. "I guess that's a yes?"

Now that he knew the eggs could be hidden by magic he used both tracking spells and his eyes to try and locate the others, while also keeping an eye on Padfoot.

The Animagus would sit down when Harry was going to leave the general area where an egg was hidden, telling him he needed to search better.

Even with Padfoot's help it still took him over an hour to find the five eggs and by the time he'd found the fifth; a red one, hidden at the centre of a red rose bud, the light rain had turned fiercer and the wind had picked up. He was covered in mud and green smudges from the wet grass.

"Next year Sirius is in charge of hiding the eggs," he grumbled as they entered the house again and he pulled his shoes and coat off.

"There weren't that bad, were they?" Remus laughed as Padfoot shook himself off before changing back.

"He'll come back from that once he's tried to find the ones I hid," Sirius chuckled, ruffling Harry's hair. "Go shower and brush your teeth so we can have breakfast before you go hunt the other ones down."

"Did you use magic to hide eggs, too?" Looking at his godfather suspiciously Harry sighed as the man only winked and hurried off to go brush his teeth and shower, returning to find Remus making toast.

"Still can't work the toaster?" he grinned as his nose caught the scent of burned toast.

"The problem isn't the workings; his mind is just working on a million things at once so he doesn't hear the small click that means the machine is done," Remus smiled.

"And since we still haven't gotten a new one, it means the toast burns as it doesn't shoot upwards,"
Harry nodded in understanding. "Where did he go anyway?"

"Feeding the burned toast to the ducks in the pond," Remus answered as he poured three glasses of orange juice. "I'll ask Dobby to pick up a new one Tuesday."

"Pick up a new one what?"

Harry laughed as his godfather ruffled his hair, taking a seat too.

"A new toaster."

Nodding Sirius took a sip from his orange juice. "We could give Arthur the old one so he can tinker with it."

"He'd like that," Harry agreed.

They ate breakfast while chatting, taking their time to simply enjoy it, Remus and Harry doing the dishes while Sirius made tea.

Done at the same time they made their way to the living room.

"The parameter is the entire living room."

"Twenty chocolate eggs, right?"

"And five bunnies," Sirius added as he and Remus made themselves comfortable on the couch, Harry placing his basket next to Sirius as the man stretched out.

"You hold watch over that."

"Aye, aye captain," Sirius saluted him with a grin, pulling the basket against his side.

Rolling his eyes at them, Harry set off to find the hidden eggs.

It didn't take long for him to realise that Sirius had indeed used magic to hide the eggs, though his use of magic was much more subtle than Remus' had been, making it close to impossible to find them by using tracking spells.

Sirius had given most of them small features to protect themselves. Some taking on chameleons-like qualities, flying off or otherwise shielding themselves.

One bunny even became animated on touch and tried to run off.

But the most memorable one for Harry was when he spotted a small blue egg and had reached out to grab it; only to be completely taken by surprise when the small thing suddenly sprouted legs and jumped onto his arm to get away.

It had resulted in an impromptu chase that had left both Sirius and Remus in stitches while Harry tried to chase the little egg out from under furniture.

"That's sneaky," Harry eventually managed to bring out as he stared at the tiny legs still running, even as he held the finally captured egg upside down fifteen minutes later.

"That face," Sirius seemed unable to bring out anything more between what sounded suspiciously like giggles.
"Happy to see you're having such fun," the pure glee in his godfather's eyes made Harry chuckle and with a shake of his head he dumped the little egg into the basket with the others he'd already found before being pulled into a hug by his godfather.

"Good job, pup."

"That were all of them?" surprised Harry glanced into the basket.

"About time, you've been at it for over two hours," Remus commented; undoing the enchantments left on the eggs and unwrapping one.

"Really?"

"Yeah, but you looked like you were having fun," Sirius accepted the offered unwrapped egg, popping it into his mouth.

"I did," Harry leaned back against his godfather with a grin. "Are we going to paint the normal eggs now?"

"I'll make us some hot chocolate if the two of you get the markers," Sirius bargained.

"Deal," jumping up Harry pulled Sirius to his feet too, excited.

"I think I left them in the storage closet," Remus called out and with a nod Harry made his way there to indeed retrieve three packages of markers.

Entering the kitchen with them he took his usual seat; thinking of what he wanted to paint, only looking up when Sirius placed a cup of hot chocolate before him.

"Do you want to paint them all by marker? Or do you want to dye some, too?"

"Marker's fine. What are we going to do after painting them?"

"If there's still time left, we could start a game of Monopoly before dinner," Remus suggested.

"Leaves the question of what to make for dinner," humming Sirius took his seat; picking up one of the eggs.

"Didn't you get a can of chicken soup because you figured we'd eat loads of snacks today?" Harry questioned; picking up a black marker and tapping the bowl of crisps in the middle.

"I did?"

"You did," Remus chuckled and Harry shook his head fondly as Sirius blinked surprised.

They fell into a comfortable silence as they painted; each forming their own ideas.

Peeking at what the other two were doing occasionally, Harry had to suppress a grin as Remus was mostly making eggs with dots and stripes while Sirius' eggs were covered in tiny artworks of various scenes.

"Ohh I like that one," Sirius suddenly commented; taking Harry's just finished egg from him and turning it in his hands.

"I thought you might," Harry grinned.
"You forgot to add a tiny pup between Moony and Padfoot though," Sirius commented as he returned the egg.

"You do know I am not technically a puppy, right?"

"Of course you are. What do you think, Rem? A small black ball of fur?"

"With green eyes," Remus laughed.

"Of course," Sirius hummed in agreement. "See? You're our little black ball of fur."

"I think I prefer being called pup," Harry laughed, leaning in as Sirius ruffled his hair.

It was the last thing that was being said for a while, until they all finished their eggs and Harry looked at them with Sirius while Remus retrieved the Monopoly game.

"Where's this?" Harry asked; carefully turning an egg with a painting of a street in his hands. He had recognised their own house, Hogwarts, the Shrieking Shack and Potter Manor easily on the other eggs, but although the street looked strangely familiar, he couldn't place it.

"It's the street I first saw you in after twelve years," Sirius smiled, pointing to a tiny figure that sat on a low wall.

"Magnolia Crescent," Harry breathed out; suddenly recognising the scene with a small smile. "That's incredibly detailed."

"I have a good memory but I love your eggs. Is that Hedwig?"

"Yeah."

"Your drawings have improved drastically," Sirius teased, pulling him into a hug for a long moment before he picked up Remus' egg.

"I never understand how you've got the patience to draw line after line without giving up after a few minutes."

"I learned the meaning of patience while growing up with you and James," Remus chuckled, placing the box on the table.

"Like you weren't just as bad," snorting Sirius retrieved sodas for them and they settled back in, setting everything up for a night of gaming.
Chapter 34

The last evening of the Easter holidays, the returning students realised a notice had been hung onto the common room message board.

It told them that all fifth-years would be required to attend a meeting with their Head of House the coming week to discuss their upcoming career.

None of the fifth year Gryffindors were startled by the news as Sirius had already alerted them before the holidays and had ensured that a whole pile of leaflets had been placed on a table in the corner so that they could take them home and discuss it with their parents if they wanted to.

He had scheduled all of their meetings back to back on the next day after lunch and Harry suspected Sirius had planned it that way on purpose so that the three boys would miss Divination, something none of the three was very sorry about, but so that the two girls could follow their favourite class without missing any of it.

Harry himself however would be going last and miss the beginning of Defence, something he appreciated as it meant Sirius would walk back with him to class.

That Monday Harry sat down beside Neville during lunch as he was looking at a leaflet about Healing.

"You're thinking of becoming a Healer?"

"No, there's nothing about the subject I'd like to read about," the blond sighed.

"What would you want to do?" shifting into a more comfortable position Harry looked at him, surprised when his eyes lit up shyly.

"I would like to teach."

"What subject?"

"Herbology. I talked to Professor Sprout and she mentioned I'd need Transfiguration," he looked sad so Harry patted his shoulder.

"I think you should talk to Sirius before you despair, he's not McGonagall."

"What does...Sirius will teach the N.E.W.T students next year?" Neville's entire being seemed to brighten at the sudden hope in his eyes.

"Yeah, starting next year he'll take over the N.E.W.T students for Transfiguration so Professor McGonagall has more time for Headmistress duties," Harry confirmed, laughing when Neville whooped in delight and patting his back as the relieved blond hugged him.

Not following Divination the two walked with their male classmates towards Sirius' office to await their turns together while Ron entered the office first and took a seat.

"Hey Ron, so have you thought about what you would like to do after Hogwarts?"

"Harry and I are going to be Aurors," Ron proudly said and Sirius raised an eyebrow.

"Right, you do know that the Auror training is very difficult, right? And that it involves at least
three years of more studying after you finish at Hogwarts?"

"Yeah, I'll be fine."

Sirius picked up his folder and glanced at it.

"You need top grades to qualify for the training as they ask a minimum of five N.E.W.T.s and nothing under Exceeds Expectations," he nodded confidently while Sirius spoke.

"Once you sign up for the program you will be required to undergo a series of character and aptitude tests at the Auror office, they only accept the very best."

"What kind of tests?" Ron asked, suddenly a little nervous.

"They'll test your ability to perform under pressure in the hardest circumstances among other things," Sirius explained. "They will test your skill and mind to the limits to see if you will be capable."

Seeing Ron shift, losing a bit of his confident air, Sirius sighed.

"Why do you want to join the Aurors, Ron?"

"It's a cool job," Ron immediately answered.

"You want to become an Auror because it is cool?" Apparently Ron understood the sceptical look Sirius shot him for he shrugged.

"Well yeah, it looks like a good job, you know. Gets me recognised and known..."

"Do you know what Aurors do?"

"Yeah, they catch Dark Wizards," Ron nodded.

"An Auror is a highly-trained specialist who investigates crimes related to the Dark Arts and indeed catches Dark Wizards. But that is just part of who they are. Aurors, the good ones, are a steady presence in the community who fight for justice."

He sighed.

"It is not an easy profession and not the glamorous job many think it is. It is dangerous and often you will have to fight. And not just to be able to arrest the suspect, but also for your life as the ones you are hunting will not often aim to disarm. They will come at you with the intention to kill and you will need to be head-fast and cannot let your personal feelings cloud your judgement."

Sirius held his gaze as he continued.

"And if I am very honest then I do have to admit that even if you did manage to reach the grades needed to get into the program, then I am still not sure you would qualify."

Anger crossed Ron's features for a brief moment before it made place to understanding and Ron sighed.

"Because I'm not in control of my emotions at the best of times, right?"

"You keep your head in stressful and dangerous situations, but you cannot keep your cool when it comes to your own emotions. If you cannot keep your cool when arguing with your friends, then
how will you keep your emotions under control when in actual combat?"

"Right," disappointed Ron looked at his hands and Sirius gave him a calculated look before he glanced down at the file before him.

"Tell you what. You still have two more years of school to complete, two years in which you can work on learning to control your temper if I sign you up for the classes you'll need."

Hopefully, Ron eagerly nodded.

"You will need to work hard because the grades you have now are nowhere near enough to even bother signing up for the program. You have a few more weeks left to boost up your grades, I suggest you begin to use the brains I know you have in earnest."

He caught Ron's gaze and held it. "I mean it Ron, I expect you to stop slacking off. You have a logical mind and it is time that you begin to use it to put effort into your work. Can you honestly say you've been doing that?"

"No," Ron admitted slightly ashamed before he brightened up. "But I can easily change my ways!"

"Changes like that don't come at once and you will find it's not as easy as you believe. There will be plenty of times where you'll fly off the handle and become mad, even though you now believe you'll easily be able to keep your temper and change just like that."

Sirius sighed. "Between truly taking your school work seriously and working on reining in your temper, you'll be having a difficult time if you go in with the mindset that it will be easy."

"You don't think I can do it?" Ron looked annoyed.

"I think it will be a long way with no doubt plenty of missteps if you are not careful and constantly keep yourself in check with what you say. You have the temper of your mother and unless you work really hard at yourself, you will not be able to change, not for real anyway."

"I can!" Ron disagreed.

Looking at him for a long moment Sirius nodded. "We'll see. To qualify for the Auror program you will need Defence, Herbology, Potions, Charms and Transfiguration. Your grades seem to shift overall between Acceptable and Exceeds Expectations for every subject so you need to work hard if you wish to pursue this dream."

Nodding Ron took a deep breath.

"Do you have any questions left?" Sirius asked as he wrote a few things in the folder before closing it.

"No...I will need to work harder if I truly want this," Ron acknowledged.

"You do, and right now you need to concentrate on pulling up your Transfiguration grade. I won't accept students below Exceeds Expectations as the workload is too tough otherwise. Right now you are barely brushing that. So take the last few weeks to work hard on that subject. You are safe enough for the rest if you study normally."

"Right. Thank you," Ron said in earnest while pushing his chair back.

Nodding Sirius shifted through the files on his desk, "Oh, and Ron...it might be wise to speak with
Harry before you try to plan his future for him. Would you call Seamus on your way out?"

Surprised Ron nodded and left, moments before Seamus entered.

"Hi Professor," Seamus grinned as he took a seat.

"Hey Seamus, have you thought about what you would like to do?" Sirius smiled as he picked up his file.

"I want to work at the Department of Mysteries," he immediately answered.

"To research the very essence of magic as an Unspeakable?" it wasn't asked as a question and surprised Seamus nodded.

"How did you know?"

"You are always curious, asking questions about how magic works and you have an uncanny ability to pyrotechnics that you try to replicate to understand what you've done and replicate it in a controlled matter. You would make a brilliant Unspeakable."

"Thanks," he beamed before frowning. "I can't find out what kind of subjects I'd need though."

"Transfiguration, Charms, Defence and Potions. It might be wise to add Herbology just in case as an Unspeakable comes across unknown territory. And if I were you I'd start up studying on Ancient Runes as it is often used."

"Can I still do that this late in my education?" Seamus asked worriedly.

"I can arrange some old lesson books for the third to fifth years on the subject. If you promise to study them in the summer vacation, then I'd be willing to try and talk Professor Babbling into giving you some private lessons next year to catch you up," Sirius said.

"I would like that. I promise I'll study hard."

"I know you will and as Harry started late, too, you might be able to get some pointers from him. Now, your grades are stable on an average of Exceeds Expectations so if you keep this up you will have no problem getting into the N.E.W.T classes. Do you want to keep Care of Magical Creatures or Divin...?"

"No!" Seamus interrupted him with wide eyes, making Sirius look up to him with a smirk. "Please tell me I can drop those two."

"You can drop both subjects next year," laughing as the sandy-haired boy slid down in his chair in pure relief, Sirius jotted a few notes down.

"Do you have any other questions left?"

"Yeah...my Potions grade..." biting his lip as he trailed off, Seamus looked at the table.

"Is Acceptable," at the disbelief written all over the boy's face Sirius turned the file around so that he could see for himself. "You've pulled it up steadily from Dreadful in the last two months."

"Only because you took over from that git and actually taught me the basics," Seamus swallowed thickly.

"Normally Acceptable wouldn't be enough to continue the subject, but Professor Tonks will allow
any fifth year with a passing grade into her N.E.W.T class the upcoming year if she's seen you're working hard. You've worked extremely hard," Sirius complimented him with a smile.

"Thank you," he beamed.

"Do you have any other questions? Would you let Dean in on your way out then?"

"Of course Professor," Seamus hurriedly left, already calling Dean's name as he opened the door so it didn't take long before the dark-haired boy sat across of Sirius' desk to tell him he wanted to become an Auror.

"Why an Auror?" Sirius asked curiously.

"I want to help and protect people. Make the streets a little safer so families can sleep at night without worrying about what's out there," Dean looked determined. "I want to be able to provide answers so..."

"So that families won't be torn apart without knowing what happened to their loved ones," Sirius finished softly as Dean trailed off and he nodded sharply.

"Yes."

"That is a good reason to want to become an Auror," Sirius' gaze softened before he told him a little about what the program entitled and which subjects he needed.

"I'll tell you the same thing I told Seamus, normally your Acceptable for Potions wouldn't be enough to get you into the N.E.W.T class, but Professor Tonks allows this year's fifth-years batch in if she's seen you worked hard."

"What about the students who are sixth years now and would have wanted to take Potions?" Dean asked curiously.

"I've stuffed those together in a separate class when I took over, to get them up to date so they could join the N.E.W.T class next year," Sirius revealed.

"And the seventh years?"

"The ones wanting to try and get their N.E.W.T's despite not having sat in the subject joined them for the last few weeks. Any questions left about your own future?" Sirius chuckled as Dean blushed.

"No, I'm good. Who should I let in next?"

"Erm... I don't think Hermione is here yet so Neville if I'm right, thanks."

"Any time Professor," Dean grinned before quickly leaving and Sirius pulled out Neville's file as the boy entered.

"I think Hermione's still in Ancient Runes," he apologised as he sat down.

"That's all right. How are your parents?"

"Doing well. They are speaking more now and Mum was already allowed to walk through the hallways with me for a while," Neville grinned.

"That's good news," Sirius smiled. "So Neville, have you thought about what you'd like to do after
"Hogwarts?"

"Yeah, I'd like to become a teacher," Neville revealed nervously. "But I'd also like to spend some quality time with Mum and Dad."

"Herbology?" Sirius teased.

"Yeah."

"Well, Professor Sprout has revealed she'd like to begin taking it a little easier in a few years time," Sirius began.

"She has?"

"Yes, she mentioned to me that she'd like to take on an assistant in three years time so she can turn to part time working for a few years before retiring completely and having the assistant take over," Sirius rolled his eyes as Neville looked crestfallen.

"Neville, she's waiting for you to graduate so that you can begin training under her and eventually take over," he decided to be straight to the point, knowing how little confidence the fifteen year old had in himself.

"She...really?" Neville's eyes widened as he stared at him.

"Really, if you are interested that is?"

"No...I mean...yes, I am, I am interested," Neville stumbled over his words as he brightened and Sirius chuckled.

"Well, then I suggest you speak to her soon to confirm your interest. For your subjects you'd need Defence, Transfiguration, Charms and naturally Herbology. It might be wise to add Potions, you are good at the subject and it might be interesting to learn antidotes just in case."

"Right," Neville nodded, biting his lip. "Transfiguration...how's my grade for that?"

"You're between Acceptable and Exceeds Expectations, so you are very welcome in my N.E.W.T class next year," Sirius read his question correctly. "Professor McGonagall confided to me how incredibly proud she is of your progress."

"She is?" a small shy smile fell over his lips at hearing the praise.

"Yeah and so am I. You have worked so incredibly hard since I've met you and progressed a lot and I'm not the only one who's seeing it. Talk to Professor Sprout. The arrangement she was thinking of would allow you to stay at home for a year before working part-time, so you can still help your parents if you'd like," Sirius closed his file.

"I'd like that," Neville confirmed, a smile spreading over his lips.

"I thought so, could you let Parvati in? She just arrived."

"It's scary how good your hearing is, Professor," Neville chuckled before shaking his hand.

"Only to those aiming to misbehave," Sirius grinned and Neville snorted as he stepped aside to let Parvati in, who informed him she wanted to learn all there was about Divination.

"Divination?"
"Yes, I want to learn Cartomancy, Astrology, Crystal-gazing, Dream Interpretation and Palmistry," she immediately said.

"Right. Well...you'd obviously need Divination for that and Astronomy," Sirius looked through his papers. "And I have nothing here about any careers involving Divination."

"That's all right, I want to work for Witch Weekly and write horoscopes while also reading people's fortune in person," the brown-eyed girl revealed.

"All right, if that's what you want then you'd need Potions and you'd should also think about taking Charms."

"I'd like to keep on Transfiguration and Defence too, Sir, just in case," she said.

"It never harms your education to keep your options open," Sirius agreed. "Your grades are good enough to get in so no problem there. Do you have any questions you'd like me to try and answer?"

"No, I'll just let Lavender in, shall I?"

"All right," Sirius looked up from his writing again when Lavender almost skipped in and took a seat.

"You're...chipper," he commented amused.

"Yes, Professor Trelawney told me I'd soon meet a handsome dark-haired man and he'll give me great news," she beamed, looking at Sirius expectantly.

"And you believe I am that man?" he asked hesitantly.

"You're the only handsome man I was meeting soon, so what great news do you have for me?"

"I...no idea?" finally settling on that he shot her an apologetic look as her face fell slightly. "Why don't we just start our meeting and we'll see if I might give you good news?"

"Great news," Lavender corrected him and Sirius nodded.

"Right, great news. So...have you thought about what you want to do once you finish here?"

"Yes I have and I've decided I would like to become a reporter."

"At Witch Weekly?" Sirius asked for confirmation, picking through the stack of papers again.

"Yes."

"Okay, you are good at writing and asking questions, you're also very good at gossip and fashion so it would fit. You probably want to keep on Divination?" at the girls happy nod Sirius looked down in his papers again before giving up.

"I'm going to have to think logically here. I'd advice Charms and Defence, just in case you piss off someone you're gossiping about and Potions for the hate mail they might send you. Maybe Transfiguration would be wise, too, and definitely History of Magic. I would hate for you to write articles that are inaccurate."

"Don't worry Professor, I will make sure to verify everything I write before I spread lies," Lavender assured him.
"I think everyone you're going to follow would be grateful for that," Sirius smiled again. "I'd suggest those classes as your grades are all above average."

"Do you think it will be difficult to get a job there, Professor?" she asked as she rose from her seat.

"Why don't you write a couple of articles and practice holding interviews so that when the time comes I can put in a good word for you?" Sirius suggested and Lavender smiled in thanks.

"That would be great! Oh...that would be great news, she was right!" suddenly beaming Lavender quickly bid him a good day before running off to tell Parvati.

Sirius stared after her speechless before taking a slow calming breath as the open door allowed him to realise Hermione had arrived and he pulled out her file while she entered and sat down.

"Good afternoon, Miss Granger, have you thought about what you would like to do after Hogwarts?" deciding to be direct he looked up at her.

"I want to do something for the House-elves and other magical creatures," she said softly.

"It will be a long progress and it will take time to change things, but if you are up for it then the best place would be the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures," Sirius answered as he picked up the information he'd found for her, having expected her choice.

"I've realised that," Hermione nodded.

"Right, they suggest Transfiguration, Runes and Charms but I'd suggest taking Potions and Arithmancy, too, as it is a very large area you'll be dealing with."

"And Defence?"

"That depends on your behaviour," Sirius looked up to her to find Hermione staring at her hands.

"I... I wish to apologise for my behaviour, sir, I have been disrespectful and I am ashamed of how I've treated you," she swallowed as she forced herself to look up and into his eyes.

"Just me?"

"I've been disrespectful to Professor Lupin, too, and I will apologise to him, too," she admitted.

"So you aren't going to be disrespectful any more?"

"No, I will behave in class," Hermione promised.

"Why? My teaching methods haven't changed and you have disagreed with them from the start. So why should I believe your behaviour would change?" Sirius looked at her sceptically.

"I realise I have been treating you unfairly, listening to people I shouldn't have and following their judgement. It is no excuse for how I behaved though and my father has had a long conversation with me about it."

"Yes, I had the pleasure of meeting your parents last week, they are very nice and I honestly couldn't understand why their daughter seemed to be so rude while they were so well-mannered."

"You have disrespected me as a teacher, doing everything in your power to make my work more difficult. And yes, that upsets me. Especially because you've done the same thing to Professor Lupin, who you know is a brilliant teacher, you said so yourself last summer. What possessed you
to treat him the way you did?"

Hermione looked down and bit her lip. "I have no excuse other than listening to Mrs. Weasley's rants. She said he was corrupted by your influence and I believed her. I hurt your feelings and upset you."

"I don't really care if you upset me. That is not why I am having this conversation with you. The only reason I am speaking to you about this right now is because of Harry. If he wasn't here then I wouldn't have cared as I cannot be bothered to deal with students who throw a hissy fit when things don't go their way," he knew the words were harsh as she shrank before his eyes, but he knew they needed to be said.

"Harry cares about you and is hurt by what's been going on between us. And I will do anything to take that pain away, and that is why I am trying to work this out with you, because your behaviour to him is unacceptable to me."

"I understand," Hermione looked down again."I'm working on making it up to him again, I am really trying."

"So far I haven't seen much of that yet. It might be wiser to hang around with Ron a little less and begin socialising with the other students in your year a bit more."

"The others don't really like me."

"Can you really blame them? You are bossy and a rude know-it-all who rubs her believed superiority into their faces and then becomes mad when someone happens to do something better than you," sighing Sirius rubbed a hand over his face. "You are a smart girl, Hermione, but your personality makes it very difficult for people to like you."

"I've never had friends before Harry and Ron," Hermione admitted.

"Ron is not your friend, Hermione, he only tolerates you because you help him with his homework and Harry's chosen to befriend you. Harry, however, is one you are about to lose if you don't change your attitude."

"I don't know how to change," tears began to run down her cheeks and she angrily tried to wipe them away.

"I think you do. What happened to the brave thirteen year old who stood by her best friend when he faced a believed mass murderer? Harry's told me all about the two of you in his letters and although I got the impression you were bossy, I never had the impression you meant to hurt him. Something that got strengthened when you were one of the only ones to stand by him last year when his name came out of the Goblet."

He sighed, moving around the desk to hand her a tissue and lean against it.

"But that changed when I saw you again last summer. So I know you haven't always been like this, outside the know-it-all part, that you've always been," Sirius mused and Hermione gave a wet laugh, understanding it wasn't meant offending.

"What I mean to say is, have you truly let Molly Weasley and Albus Dumbledore mess with your head so much that you forgot your own instincts and beliefs?"

"I've never listened to others before, but they were people I looked up to, so when they said all those things about you that I deep down knew weren't true I believed them anyway, because they
are so much wiser than me. And when I began to see you the way they did I became afraid you'd take Harry away and I'd be left alone."

Crying silently she startled as Sirius leaned down to rest a hand on her shoulder. "Then how about you stop listening to what others are saying and start listening to what your instinct and your heart are telling you?"

Nodding Hermione brushed the tears away with the tissue.

"And what is your heart telling you about me taking Harry from you?" Sirius asked softly.

"That it is ridiculous and you're only making him happy," Hermione sighed as new tears appeared.

"I've always known that you were good for him. You returned to the country only because something was threatening him and you tried to help him at every turn, despite it being safer for you if you'd run. And I saw you in the library several times late at night last summer, looking up cases in which under-age magic was pardoned due to circumstances."

"All you have ever done has been for Harry and in an attempt to help and protect him. I knew you weren't an alcoholic, my uncle was an alcoholic, so I know the signs and you didn't have any of them. I knew why you were really drinking and yet, despite the fact that that house was slowly killing you, you stayed there because it was the safest place for Harry to be," she sniffed. "I'm sorry for everything."

"I accept your apology and if you show me that you are truly trying to change, then I will accept you back to Defence next year."

Surprised she looked at him before nodding fiercely.

"I will, I will change...I won't let you down again."

"Then take these last few weeks to prove to me that Remus is wrong in calling me a sentimental sod in wanting to give you this last chance, Hermione."

Sirius returned to his seat after handing her another tissue to blow her nose and wrote into her file.

"So I will sign you up for Transfiguration, Ancient Runes, Charms, Potions, Arithmancy and Defence. Do you have any questions left?"

"Are there any more subjects I need to take to make it into the Ministry as a Muggle-born?" she asked timidly as she dried her eyes for the last time.

"No, Kingsley and Madam Bones are working really hard right now to bring down the supremacy that's been going on in the Ministry so your grades should be enough to get you the job you want."

"Thank you. I know I've never said it, but I know you had to do with all the changes for the better, so thank you," Hermione softly said, bowing slightly and surprised Sirius nodded to her.

"I'll send Harry in."

"If you'd be so kind."

As she left he rested his head in his hands for a long moment.

"Hermione giving you trouble?" Harry's voice made him smile and he looked up to him leaning against the now closed door, moving towards him now that he'd noticed him.
"No, she apologised and we spoke. I told her that I want to see some change so we'll see how it goes."

"Hmmm," nodding at his words Harry smiled as Sirius leaned in, wrapping his arms around his waist and resting his forehead against his stomach and taking a deep breath.

"Are you tired?" he asked as he brushed a hand over his godfather's back and shuffled closer so the man wouldn't accidentally overbalance.

"How did you know?"

"Your eyes are darker than usual; they only darken when you're in pain or really tired. I'm just assuming you aren't in pain," chuckling at Sirius' denying sound he stepped back when his godfather made to rise, only to laugh when he was pulled into a proper hug.

"I needed a hug," finally pulling away after a long moment Sirius smiled contentedly.

"Happy to be of service," returning the smile Harry took his proper place at the chair as Sirius sat down again.

"So, have you thought about what you want to do once you are finished here?"

"Haven't we discussed that already?" Harry laughed as Sirius stuck out his tongue.

"This is your official career advice conversation. I need to make things official now. And I've been asking that question for over an hour now," Sirius added as he raised an eyebrow.

"My plans haven't changed, I would like to become a teacher," confirming it once more Harry got comfortable in the chair.

"What subject?"

"That is where it gets a bit trickier," Harry admitted and Sirius laughed.

"Maybe, it depends if you accept the proposal offered to you."

"Shoot."

"Is that a Muggle expression to say I should continue? Because I have no desire to shoot anything, least of all you," the confused look Sirius shot him was enough to make Harry laugh.

"Yeah it is, sorry."

"Huh...shoot...all right, did you want to teach full time or would you accept part-time teaching?"

Frowning at him Harry wondered what he was up to but shrugged, "I'd accept part-time. What do you have in mind?"

"Well, I spoke to my colleagues and Ted and Andromeda aren't going to stay forever. But Remus and I would both like to keep to the subject we love most so we worked out something that might make all three of us happy."

"What have you got?" Harry asked as he leaned forward curiously.

"Well, we were thinking that if Remus and I teach the first two years of Defence, you could take over third to fifth years. And because Rolanda is planning her retirement I thought that maybe you
would like to take over flying lessons for the first years and oversee Quidditch matches, too."

"That...would be really cool," Harry blinked. "I never thought she would retire. I just always sort of assumed she'd teach until her death because she's so old already."

"Ninety-five is not really old in Wizarding terms, pup. Abe is a hundred and twelve and still very fit, too."

"I noticed," Harry chuckled dryly, remembering the speed at which the man had managed to move to pull Sirius into a smothering hug upon seeing him enter the bar on their Hogsmeade visit.

"Anyway, would you be interested?"

"You and Remus would be taking the N.E.W.T classes of Defence then?" Harry asked as he thought for a moment.

"Yes, same for Transfiguration," Sirius confirmed as he shifted in his seat.

"Professor McGonagall is going to keep teaching the first five years herself?" accepting the cup of tea Sirius conjured for him Harry leaned back in his chair.

"Yes, but we're looking for an assistant for her who will eventually take over Transfiguration by the time she'll retire."

"You won't take over her classes fully by that time?" Harry asked surprised.

"No, I'll be supposed to take over her duties by then," the face Sirius pulled made Harry chuckle, knowing the man still didn't feel he was the best choice for Deputy even if everyone else thought he was.

"And Andromeda? When she retires we'll be one Potions Master short again."

"She'll be getting an assistant, too. Professor M and the board have decided that every subject should have a standard of two teachers so that the students won't miss classes when a teacher gets sick."

Humming in understanding Harry narrowed his eyes. "Are you sure that you both are all right with that arrangement?"

"We are, pup. Rem and I will work together as we had originally wanted and maybe we'll even switch sometimes and you'll work with one of us if you'd like," Sirius smiled.

"That would be nice. If you are both sure then I accept the proposal."

"Good. Well, you'd need Defence then, and what other classes would you like to take?"

"Transfiguration, Potions and Charms. If you are willing to keep tutoring me in private then I'd like to continue Arithmancy and Ancient Runes this way and only sit in for their N.E.W.T. exams."

"I enjoy our lessons together, so I don't mind," he looked down at Harry's file.

"That is if I get my O.W.L. for the two subjects."

"I don't think that will be a problem, pup. You have one Exceeds Expectations for Potions," Sirius' voice was thick with emotion and Harry looked at him, a little scared.
"Are the rest of my grades that bad?"

"Not at all, the rest of your classes you rank Outstanding," the pride in his godfather's voice was unmistakable now and Harry felt himself swell in happiness as that same pride was openly displayed on the man's face as he looked up to him.

"I had secretly hoped I'd reach Exceeds Expectations," Harry admitted a bit shyly as Sirius came to him to pull him into a hug.

"You really worked hard and it's showing in your grades. I'm really proud of you, Harry," his words were soft but to Harry it was the loudest thing he had ever heard, his heart almost skipping out of his chest with delight.

He knew Sirius was proud of him no matter what happened, but to actually give him reason to be proud was a fantastic feeling.

"If you hadn't pushed me to do better my grades would have been much lower. I never would have suspected an Outstanding for anything except maybe Defence," Harry murmured into his guardian's shoulder, smiling as the man kept holding him tightly.

"I only asked you to do your best, you did it yourself, pup."

Eventually separating again, Sirius placed a kiss on his forehead and smiled as he gazed at him. "You've grown."

"Hmmm, I doubt I will ever become taller than you though," letting him ruffle a hand through his hair Harry chuckled.

"You won't end up much smaller if you keep growing like this," Sirius smiled as he returned to the desk to quickly jot down Harry's future classes before picking the files up.

"Care to join me while I bring these to Professor M before joining Remus?"

"Always," taking Sirius' free hand as it was held out to him Harry walked with him to McGonagall's office to drop the files off, the spring in his step never faltering, even doubling when Sirius showed Remus his grades and the man promptly pulled him into a hug, too, with the same proud expression on his face as his godfather still carried.
Chapter 35

Harry shot upright in bed, startled by screaming.

He was halfway into the small living room with his wand drawn and glasses in hand before he had properly registered the sound as coming from Sirius and it dawned to him what was going on as there were no other sounds of distress.

And sure enough he walked into the other bedroom to find Remus holding his godfather tightly, softly rubbing his back, the screams having given way to incoherent murmuring.

"Is it all right to come closer?"

Remus gave him a sad smile, having looked up as he entered and nodding; at the silent answer Harry made his way to the bathroom to grab a washing cloth and wet it.

The soft murmuring reached his ears again and as he could make out some of the words Sirius was repeating in a mantra, he knew he was still lost in the nightmarish memory that had first made him scream.

It was horrible to see the look in his godfather's eyes on these occasions so he was thankful his face was hidden against Remus' shoulder right now as he ensured the cloth was cold but as squeezed out as it could be so there would be no chance of water dripping.

Not ready to see the dead look in the normally soft and warm grey eyes, he looked away as Remus pulled his godfather back a little so that he could run the cloth over the feverish and tear-covered face, even as Sirius was still mumbling.

Turning back at the sound of sheets rustling he watched as the man cocooned Sirius in the comforter before pulling the unresponsive and shivering body close again, knowing the cloth hadn't worked to snap him out of it.

The soft warmth and steady heartbeat did its purpose as Sirius blinked after a few minutes, light returning into the dull eyes as he quieted down, and Harry breathed out relieved as they slowly focused on Remus' face.

"Moony?" his voice was so small and insecure that it broke Harry's heart to hear it.

"I'm here, Pads," Remus confirmed, never stopping his slight shuffling to engulf the younger Marauder in his scent, something Harry knew provided a layer of subconscious security for the disorientated man and helped ground his mind.

"Harry?"

"He's here, too," taking the hint Harry moved to sit on the edge beside Remus, making sure he was near his line of vision, not daring to touch him yet.

"Hey."

Slowly tired grey orbs shifted his way and Harry's heart fell as there was no recognition in them, even if he'd half expected it.

"Who?..."
"It's me, Siri," he softly answered, automatically reaching out a hand to touch his godfather's arm but not surprised when the man jerked away from his touch.

"Harry's not..."

"He grew up. It is nineteen ninety six, love," Remus closed his eyes as the expected next question was asked without fail.

"Where's James?"

Harry had known it would come the moment his godfather hadn't recognised him, but that didn't mean it was less painful to get confirmation of exactly how disorientated the man still was right now, how deeply he was still in the after-effects of the nightmare.

"He's not here," Remus offered quietly, pulling the comforter around him tighter and leaning his head back against the headboard as he knew what would come next.

As always when this happened, Harry hoped the searching eyes would somehow settle on him, allowing him to delay the realisation from settling in, letting him fall back asleep on his own again. But his godfather never mistook him for his father, not once, no matter how far gone he was and today was no exception.

It was heartbreaking to watch the warm grey eyes cloud in pain as the man withdrew into himself, hiding, as the memories returned to him, unable to do anything to protect him from the knowledge setting in.

As a shiver racked through the thin body and tears slipped down, Remus summoned a potion and uncorking it he tightened his hold on Sirius as he began to struggle, clearly recognising the smell even in his disorientated state and not wanting to be put back to sleep.

Tears filled his eyes as he watched Remus coerce Sirius into swallowing it, ignoring the whispers to stop him and half-hearted struggles to get away from him as he fed him the potion.

It made Harry want to pull his godfather away from Remus, to let him know he'd not force him into a fake sleep, not force him into oblivion; only to wake up with a sense of loss later.

But he knew it was the only thing that would allow him some much needed rest, as did Sirius, so he simply bit his lip to keep silent as the tension slowly drained from his godfather's body, quiet sobs taking their place as the potion quickly began to take effect and his struggles became more sluggish.

Remus loosened the comforter to pull Sirius onto his lap and into an embrace as the hands stopped their weak attempts to push him away and he began to caress his back as the fingers curled into his nightshirt.

Sirius shuddered as he relaxed into his embrace, the distress softening as drowsy eyes cleared and became more coherent again, even as the potion was pulling him under.

"He hasn't had nightmares in quite some time," Harry cleared his throat as eventually Remus carefully slid the now sleeping Sirius down into a more comfortable position, his eyes narrowing when the man remained silent. "Remus?"

"You normally cast silencing charms out of habit when you go to bed so you aren't woken by them."
"How often does he still have nightmares?" Harry asked.

"I wake up seven, maybe eight times a month from them."

"Wake up?" hearing the hesitation in the man's voice Harry stared him down. "How often do you think he still has nightmares?"

Remus sighed, carefully brushing Sirius' fringe out of his eyes. "Harry..."

"How often?"

"I think he still has nightmares most nights as he's usually curled up against me when I wake up. I don't always wake up if he's not screaming and no, your presence won't change that."

"So he had nightmares even when he slept at my side?" crestfallen Harry slumped where he sat. He had honestly thought his presence had helped with the many nightmares as his godfather usually slept soundly.

"I'm sorry. But it does help when he wakes up from one and there's someone at his side. It usually settles him and lets him know it's all right so he can get back to sleep easier," Remus tried to comfort him.

"I don't like that he still has nightmares at all," Harry grumbled.

"I don't think that will truly change any time soon, kiddo. Too much has happened for that."

"Do you know what the nightmare was about?"

"I'm not sure."

"But it involved my Dad?"

"Many of his nightmares do," Remus sighed, looking down at the sleeping form in his arms with a small smile.

"You know, it baffled many how close they were. I remember one time when we were fighting Death Eaters, I can't remember exactly where it was, but it was at the edge of a large cliff. The fight was brutal but we had gained the upper hand when the ground James was standing on collapsed under the assault of spells, sending him plummeting to the sea below."

Harry looked up to him.

"What happened?"

"Sirius jumped after him. There were these stalagmite-like rocks poking out of the sea below, but Sirius dived after him without hesitation," a warm smile crossed Remus' lips at the memory.

"I don't think it even occurred to him that he could have tried to Summon him back, he just dove after him without a second thought. Saved his life, too, as James had been knocked unconscious by falling debris and would have drowned."

"You guys Summoned them both back?"

"No, we were still fighting the Death Eaters, some of whom managed to break through our defence and get to the edge to send curses at them. When we finally managed to take them down they were both gone. To this day I still don't really know how Sirius managed to miss the rocks, save James
and avoid the curses thrown at them while also avoiding serious injury."

He leaned back against the headboard again. "Lily was beside herself by the time Sirius' Patronus showed up, informing us they were fine but he was too exhausted to Apparate and if we could please come get them. Turned out he had found an hidden cave and he had dragged James into it to escape."

He laughed breathlessly. "We had looked everywhere, refusing to give up. But it had never occurred to us to think of hidden caves. Having that knowledge, it was fairly easy to pinpoint their exact location and Apparate to them to get them out."

"And they were both indeed fine?" Harry couldn't stop his own smile from spreading.

"Sirius had broken his collarbone, James had a concussion and both were covered in bruises and scrapes, but yeah, they were fine."

"I'm glad."

"So were we," Remus covered a yawn.

"Will he be all right when he wakes up?" shifting on the bed, Harry sighed.

"I'm hoping he won't remember this, but if he does then he will probably be disorientated and uneasy when he wakes up. Do you want to sleep here for the rest of the night?"

Harry looked down at Sirius, "No...I... he didn't recognise me. If he is disorientated when he wakes up I don't want to agitate him without a reason."

"He didn't mean to hurt you."

"I know. I just don't want to cause any additional distress," Harry explained, giving his sleeping godfather a smile as he brushed the man's fringe aside as it had shifted back into his eyes with Remus' movements.

"If you are sure?"

"I am, I'll just return to bed too and see you both in the morning. Do you think he will be up for teaching?"

"I think it depends on his mood, if he is as distracted and on edge as last time then I am not going to let him leave our chambers."

"But I don't like leaving him alone either. Last time this happened he was a mess," sighing Harry brushed his thumb over his godfather's hand before rising to his feet.

"If he is as much of a mess as last time then I'm not leaving him alone. McGonagall knows this so she or Andromeda will take over Defence should it be needed," Remus assured him as he manoeuvred himself expertly into a lying position without jolting Sirius too much, shifting him so that his head was resting against his shoulder again.

"All right. Let's just hope he's feeling better tomorrow," with a last glance at his godfather Harry wished Remus good night before returning to his bedroom.

Pulling his glasses off, he let himself fall onto his back with a sigh.

He had meant what he said about not wanting to cause additional distress. But that did not mean it
didn't make him feel useless.

The first time his godfather hadn't been able to recognise him after a heavy nightmare he had been upset, not quite understanding that the nightmare had resulted in a flashback from before he had been born.

Sirius had screamed, fighting Remus to try and get away from Harry, not able to place him at all and eventually Harry had withdrawn to stop him from hurting himself or Remus in his attempts to get away.

Other times his godfather had asked for him like now, but couldn't quite grasp the sight of a teenager while his mind was providing him with knowledge of a toddler, not quite remembering the hell after those few happy years.

While it was touching when his godfather asked for him, wanting to know he was safe, even if he had no recollection of the teenager he was now, it was also more difficult. For it were usually the times that ended like today, with Remus drugging Sirius as the memories came crashing down upon learning Harry's dad wasn't there.

Though Remus had never before shared a memory from the war with him.

It wasn't often either of them spoke about that time and the things they'd seen nor had Harry ever truly asked, not wanting to tear open that particularly can of bad memories.

Sometimes he wondered if he should press more when his godfather did share some things, but he always ended up changing the subject as those warm grey eyes clouded.

Sirius was the strongest and kindest person he knew, to see him sad or in distress always made Harry feel horrible.

Sighing again he turned onto his side; and knowing he needed some sleep he began the process of clearing his mind as Sirius had taught him.

The rustling of fabric was what woke him several hours later and groggily he reached for his glasses while sitting up, immediately spotting his godfather sitting in the windowsill with a book as he slipped them on.

"Hey."

Harry was relieved to see tired but completely coherent grey eyes lit up in a paler than usual face as Sirius looked up.

"Hey, did you sleep well?"

"Yeah, what time is it?" Sirius glanced at his pocket watch as he closed his book.

"Almost eleven, Remus vouched for your absence," clearly seeing his alarm Sirius was quick to reassure him. "Neville promised him he'd take notes so you won't get behind on your homework."

"Right, how are you?"

"I'm sorry."

"I knew you weren't completely there. Remus told you what happened?" he sat up completely as Sirius slid down from the windowsill and sat down on the foot of the bed.
"No, I saw the empty bottle of Dreamless Sleep and the washing cloth on the night-stand."

Frowning Harry shifted so that he sat sidewardly in the bed, facing his godfather. "How does that tell you what happened?"

"You weren't there when I woke up," Sirius sighed, looking down at his hands. "I'm sorry that I made you feel like you should keep your distance."

Reaching forward Harry took his hand. "Stop saying sorry for something you have no control over."

Giving him a small apologetic smile Sirius entwined their hands together, using it to pull him forward for a hug.

"You still haven't told me how you're feeling though," Harry smiled as he eventually pulled back again, happy he'd put him at ease enough again to initiate a hug.

"A bit uneasy," Sirius told him honestly.

"Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Just being near helps. It's why I'm stalking you right now," suddenly he chuckled. "That sounded creepy, didn't it?"

"Just a bit. But that's okay, I know what you mean. It would have been creepy if you'd been staring at me when I woke up."

"How do you know I wasn't secretly doing that?" laughing at the teasing, Harry moved from the bed and stretched.

"Where's Remus?"

"Teaching," smiling Sirius looked up to him. "It was rather funny to see him stand there speechless when I suggested staying here with you today."

"He probably expected to have to bribe you into staying inside," Harry chuckled.

"Like I wouldn't take every excuse to spend the day with you," snorting Sirius rose to his feet, too.

"How about I go make some breakfast while you get washed up?"

"Sounds like a plan," Harry rubbed a hand over his face, grimacing as he felt the light stubble there that had begun to appear over the last few weeks.

"Have you decided what you want to do, yet?"

"About?"

"Your beard growth. Do you want to grow some real stubble or do you want to start shaving?" Sirius reached out to brush his thumb over the stubbles.

"You'll have to teach me how to shave then, I don't fancy having a beard," Harry admitted.

"You'd have to ask Remus, I haven't had a proper manual shave since your Grandfather first taught me."
"Then how…." Harry trailed off as he glanced at his godfather's clean-shaven face and tried to remember a time he'd seen his godfather shave but couldn't come up with any.

"First time I cut myself I decided I couldn't be bothered to repeat that every morning so I developed a cream that would remove the stubble for me. Just has to be applied like soap over the stubble and then washed off with warm water," Sirius smiled.

"That's…think you can teach me how to make it?" Harry asked eagerly, not looking forward to the idea of having to shave every morning either.

"I'll teach you sometime, but maybe you'd like a tube right now? You're lucky though," Sirius spoke as he walked to the cupboard to pick something up. "When I first developed this I had to arrange it for every different skin type and it took days to brew it for your father, Remus and your grandfather."

"It doesn't take that long any more?" Harry accepted the small white tube.

"No, between researching how to destroy Horcruxes while laying low at Rem's, I started brewing it again because I kept cutting myself while shaving manually. While I was at it, I improved it and fixed the errors in the original recipe so it's usable for every skin type now."

"You should sell it, bet it would be a marvellous success," Harry didn't need to ask why his godfather kept cutting himself as although the man was a brilliant duellist, the slight tremor in his hands hadn't lessened in the time he'd known him. It would have made it easy to cut himself while shaving with a razor.

"It's going into production next year through the Marauder Foundation, a secondary branch that focuses on other things that'll raise money to keep the Foundation going without using our own money in the long run."

"Smart," Harry agreed as he looked down at the small tube again. "Do you have a name for it?"

"Your dad always called it my Magic Beard Vanish, but why don't you think of a name and get back to me about it?" Sirius suggested. "You can use it under the shower, just apply a thin layer over the area your stubble is and then wash it off."

"No waiting time for it to work properly?"

"Made sure of that as your dad wasn't the most patient guy in the world," Sirius teased. "Just wash it off while showering and don't worry about it accidentally removing your hair anywhere else, it's designed to only work on beard hair."

"That's good to know, fixed that problem because of Dad's tendency to run his hand through his hair, too?" Harry asked curiously.

"Was never an issue, I took that into account when developing it," Sirius laughed. "It would have been funny to see, though."

"It would have been," Harry grinned, twirling the salve between his fingers. "Thanks. Will you be all right while I go take a shower? Or are you going to be a creep and follow me into the bathroom, too?" sidestepping the swat Sirius directed at him he laughed.

"Behave or I'll replace the water with pink paint," Sirius threatened.

"You wouldn't!" horrified Harry stopped in the door opening, glancing at the shower suspiciously
before turning just in time to see Sirius leave the bedroom. "Siri?"

Sinister laughter was his only answer.

"Sirius!"

Turning back to the shower he narrowed his eyes; not sure if his godfather would pull a prank on him.

He occasionally pulled pranks on the students if they asked for it; the memorable moment of the Gryffindors Quidditch team emerging from the showers, covered in sparkles, immediately coming to mind. It had been his godfather's revenge on the team for cornering him in a group hug after a very muddy practice.

And a few weeks ago, Trelawney had crossed Neville and predicted to him that he would lose someone dear to him soon; leaving the boy in distress as he immediately thought of his parents.

The woman nearly had a heart attack when the dark shadow of Padfoot appeared in her sight mere hours later. Sirius had randomly showed up to her repeatedly over the course of several days, just long enough that she spotted him from the corner of her eyes before vanishing again.

Eventually he had left the shadows to walk up to her once she was twitching madly and had changed back before her eyes.

Harry hadn't been present when that had happened; but according to several students she hadn't made a single doom-laden prophecy since.

When asking his godfather about it, the man had simply said he'd spoken to her and refused to say more.

He had become known as a prankster, but he had never played a prank on Harry, so after debating with himself for a long moment he stepped into the shower.

He knew that he wouldn't notice anything strange about the water anyway, even if the man had decided to play a prank on him. So, deciding not to worry for now he took his shower and successfully applied the stubble remover before dressing and making his way to the living room where Sirius was making breakfast while chatting with Remus, who was seated at the table.

"What colour are my hair and skin?" Harry asked in greeting.

"Normal, what did you do to be threatened with a shower prank?" Remus asked.

"He called me a creep," Sirius complained, turning around with a spatula in his hands.

"Only after you yourself said you were stalking me and that it was creepy," Harry shot back as he took his usual seat.

"Being creepy and acting creepy are two entirely different things," Sirius pouted as Remus laughed.

"Sounds like you've had an eventful morning."

"I've only been awake for half an hour," Harry revealed as Sirius turned back to the stove, only to turn around moments later with a large plate filled with pancakes.

"You know, you are the only British person I know who feeds his family pancakes for breakfast,"
Harry said.

"Technically it is lunch time, pup, so it is perfectly socially acceptable."

"And even if it's not, who cares? I like pancakes and he makes them brilliantly," Remus happily grabbed a pancake from the pile and dumped it onto Sirius' plate.

"Sure beats the Great Hall's lunch, doesn't it?" Chuckling Harry held up his plate as Remus picked up a pancake for him, too.

"No doubt about that, ohhhh..." a happy grin slid over Remus' lips as Sirius turned from the stove to slide a thick pancake onto his plate before he could pick one up for himself.

"Looks like you've been a good boy," Harry commented as he looked at the pancake filled with jam now resting on Remus' plate.

"I'd make one for you, too, but you don't like your jam warm," Sirius returned the pan to the stove before he sat down, too.

"I like ice cream," Harry batted his eyes at his godfather hopefully.

"For breakfast?"

"Technically its lunch time," using his own words against him Harry grinned as Sirius rolled his eyes but nodded his consent.

The ice cream was quickly retrieved and Harry cheerfully dumped some onto his pancake, laughing when both men slid their plates closer to receive some, too.

"Only because we're having a stay at home day though," Sirius warned him, smiling as he reached out to brush a hand over Harry's now smooth skin. "Worked well?"

"Perfectly, thanks."

"You gave him the Magic Beard Vanish?" Remus grinned. "Good stuff, huh?"

"I'd still like you to help me teach him the motions of shaving manually though, just in case of emergency," Sirius asked.

"Always handy to know," Remus agreed, lifting his fork to his mouth. "So what are you two going to do this afternoon?"

"We'll have to stay inside since we're playing hooky so I guess we'll just play games, do his homework and test him a little for the upcoming exams," Sirius mused as he looked at Harry.

"Sounds like a plan to me," nodding in agreement Harry didn't mind having to do some homework on his unexpected day off. Knowing his godfather the way he did he'd both help him and be able to tell him all kinds of small trivia about the History of Magic homework.

He chatted animated with both men while they ate before helping Sirius with the dishes as Remus returned to classes, only having come over for lunch.

After they'd held an impromptu fight with the bubbles they finished cleaning up, glancing over at his godfather's increasingly relaxing posture, Harry felt content as he watched him set up a game of chess once he'd finished what little homework he had left.
And although he didn't like the reason why they had it, he still loved every minute of their unexpected day together, laughing and joking with his godfather as they played several games.

And near dinner time he joined Sirius in the kitchen to help prepare dinner for when Remus returned before they'd continue playing games with the three of them.
Chapter 36

"Can I talk to you for a moment?"

Harry warily looked up from the game he was playing with Neville, Seamus, Dean and Lavender as Ron sought him out in their dorm where they'd retreated for a quiet evening.

He hadn't spoken to the other alone any more since before the holidays, when Ron had once more become mad he wasn't going to come for Easter.

"Depends on what it is about, if it's about the summer holidays then don't bother," Harry moved his pawn four steps forward when the dice fell to that number.

"No, Sirius said that I should talk to you."

"Sirius did? What did he say you should talk to me about?" Harry frowned curiously as Sirius hadn't said anything to him.

"Not sure, he said something about talking to you before I planned our future," Ron shifted his weight.

"Ah," suddenly realising he hadn't actually shared with the other that his career choices had changed, Harry sighed. "He probably meant the change in my career choice as I'm not going to pursue a career as an Auror any more."

"Why did you change your mind all of a sudden?" Ron raised an eyebrow.

"Not suddenly, it's been on my mind since last year. Becoming an Auror seemed like the only logical career choice at the time, with Voldemort after me and all."

"Don't say his name!" Ron hissed, even as Lavender and Seamus grimaced but didn't tense and Harry shot them a smile as Sirius and Remus had been working on getting the students over their fear of a mere name.

"It isn't cursed any more, Sirius made sure of that," Neville shrugged, having been one of the only ones not to tense as he'd become used to Sirius and Harry saying the name.

"I suppose Sirius was the one who had you change your mind?" Ron ignored Neville.

"In a way. He fought in the war without ever being an Auror, letting me realise I didn't necessarily need to follow that path to learn how to defend myself against attacks."

"It's a great job!" Ron snapped.

"It is, but not what I want," Harry shrugged.

"Yeah? Then what do you want to do now all of a sudden?" but even as he said it, a look of realisation crossed his features. "Teach?"

"As a matter of fact, yes, that is my plan," Harry fought to remain calm even as Ron turned red in anger, reminding him eerily of Molly Weasley.

"Should've known. You do whatever Sirius wants you to do!"
"Sirius has nothing to do with my choice. I love teaching, have since you and Hermione talked me into running the DA."

"We were going to become Aurors together. It's why we take the same classes!" Ron stubbornly argued.

"I took the same classes as you because I hadn't the foggiest what I should choose and would at least have a friend for company if the choice would turn out to be wrong," Harry bit at him. "Something you know very well. And I changed some of my classes after returning from the Christmas holidays."

"Sirius set you up to this! He just doesn't want you to hang out with me because I'm poor!" Ron's voice rose, but Harry didn't care.

"No, he doesn't," he admitted calmly. "But he's accepted that you were my friend and treated you kindly because of that."

"Sirius doesn't..." Ron actually looked taken back by the admittance. "He hates me?"

"No. He thinks you could be a good person if you'd let go of certain aspects of your personality. He's seen what you can be back in the shack and told your brothers as much when they complained about your attitude," Harry could see Ron colour again as he clearly hadn't expected that. "But he doesn't like how you act towards others and certainly doesn't appreciate the possessive attitude you display towards me."

After taking a deep breath, Harry looked into Ron's eyes. "And neither do I. I have my own life, my own friends and am not your property and do not appreciate being treated as such. I am tired of walking on my toes in the hopes of not gaining your anger or trigger your jealousy over my unwanted fame or money. I decide who I want to hang out with, who I wish to talk to and what I want to do, not you. You are not my keeper and you certainly do not decide for me how and where I spend my time, holidays or otherwise."

Ron gaped at him like a fish for a long moment, before he began to splutter. "I'm your best friend! And you've always spent the holidays with me!"

"And I don't wish to do so now," Harry cut him off. "I told you before that I appreciate that I've always been accepted into your house and family, but I want to spend time with my own family as much as I can right now. And although I am very fond of your siblings and father, I have no intention of ever stepping foot in a house with your mother ever again."

"I could always come to your house," Ron offered immediately, but Harry shook his head.

"Not a chance. Sirius won't allow you access. He might accept that you hang around with me at school, but he won't accept your presence at our home. Not with how you've been treating me lately."

"I haven't treated you differently!"

"That might just be the whole problem," Dean snorted. "You've always acted like a possessive twat, blocking all of us from coming close. Only difference now is that he's stopped allowing you to do so and grew a backbone."

"Stay out of this!" Ron snapped.

"Why? Because he's telling the truth?" Hermione inquired softly from her seat near Dean, book on
"You're one to talk! You've treated Harry horribly!" Ron yelled.

"Yes, and I'm trying to make amends for my disgusting behaviour," Hermione flushed but didn't rise to his insult. "I've had a long talk with both Sirius and Remus by now and apologised for what I've said and how I behaved and am working on changing. It's more than you can say."

"I don't need to apologise, I'm his best friend!"

"No, you are not," Harry cut him off. "Not with how you've been behaving. Best friends don't act the way you do or how you've acted in the past. I've made the choice to change my future career and you're going to have to accept that as you don't get to tell me what to do with my life."

"I suppose Sirius does that for you," Ron sneered.

"It would be within his right as he's my guardian, but he never said anything about his wishes for my future until I'd told him my dream had changed."

"What did he say?" Lavender asked.

"That he respected my wishes, but that he was relieved I had found a less dangerous dream."

"Why? Any parent would be proud if their child became an Auror," Ron grumbled.

"Proud and terrified," Dean corrected him. "Mum was horrified when I explained to her what an Auror was. It is a very dangerous profession."

"My parents can vouch for that," Neville agreed lightly and although it wasn't a funny matter at all, Harry couldn't help but smile at his words.

"My Mum has always wanted the best for us," Ron snapped. "And being an Auror is the best there is."

"Maybe, but my family just want me to be happy," Harry shrugged.

"Yeah well, not everyone is rich," the jealousy in Ron's voice was impossible to miss and Harry sighed.

"Even if we hadn't been rich, they'd still want me to be happy above everything. Remus grew up in a very poor household, but with parents that only wanted him to be happy and although Sirius did grow up in a rich household, he had to fight for what he wanted and worked hard. They don't believe a fantastic job is the most important thing in the world as long as you're happy," Harry shrugged before he picked up the dice again and held it out to Lavender. "I believe it was your turn?"

"We're talking!" Ron growled in anger at the clear dismissal.

"No, you are yelling at me for something that is none of your business while I'm trying to play a game with my friends," Harry waved him off as Lavender took her turn.

"Well, I think you will be a marvellous teacher," Hermione interrupted anything Ron might have said, the others agreeing immediately.

"She's right, you really have a flair for explaining things so everyone understands," Seamus agreed as Dean rolled the dice.
"I hope so; the plan is that I'll take over part of Sirius and Remus' classes after graduation."

"So we'll become colleagues!" Neville grinned as he accepted the dice from Dean after his turn was over.

"You're going to teach, too?" Lavender asked as she accepted the bowl of treats from Seamus.

"Herbology. I've worked out a plan with Professor Sprout to become her apprentice after graduation," Neville nodded as he picked up a handful of crisps from the bowl. "But enough about that. Are you guys excited about the mock duel tomorrow?"

"It's going to be brilliant to see Professor Lupin and Professor Sirius duel," Dean grinned excited.

"I wonder who'll win. I know Professor Sirius is really powerful, but Professor Lupin took down You-Know-Who," Lavender mused.

Neville cheered as his last move let him win the game and the others groaned. "I guess we'll see tomorrow. Do you guys want to play another game or turn in for bed?"

"I think it's best to turn in, it's already ten pm and we'll want to be able to pay proper attention tomorrow," Lavender suggested as Hermione closed her book and Ron stormed off.

"Sounds like a plan, it's going to be an amazing duel tomorrow," Dean grinned as he and Seamus cleaned up the game of Don't Worry and they all readied themselves for bed, excited for the following day.

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The fifth year Gryffindors stared in shock as Sirius suddenly straightened the following afternoon, shooting up red sparks as he did.

"But...you were winning!" Ron spluttered, all his anger of the previous evening seemingly forgotten.

"There are more important things than winning a duel, Ron," Sirius replied as he walked over to Remus, who was bend over, leaning on his knees as he took several deep breaths.

Summoning a desk Sirius helped Remus onto it before kneeling down to carefully remove the shoe.

"I hadn't realised I had aimed for your ankle."

"You didn't. I deflected your freezing charm but then stepped aside in the same moment to barely avoid the full body bind you send in its shadow."

"Thus stepping directly onto the frozen ice and twisting it in your counter-attack," Sirius nodded.

"That looks painful," Lavender wasn't the only one to wince as they could all see the clear break in the limb.

"You didn't stop though, the Petrificus Totalus charm and your answering Jelly-Fingers Curse were at least five minutes ago," Harry accused.

"I hadn't realised it was broken," shifting to give Sirius better access to examine the rest of his ankle, Remus winced as he touched a sensitive spot.

"How did you know then, Professor?" Parvati asked as the boys pulled up two desks for them all to
"His eyes tightened twice in the same movement, so I knew I had hurt him," Sirius explained as he inspected the foot itself.

"You were halfway across the room, how could you have possibly seen that?" Ron asked.

"I told you that it is important to keep an eye on your opponents' movements as they tell you a lot about what they are planning next and aiming at. For me, it is easiest to keep looking into their eyes."

"It is also intimidating when someone is seemingly staring you down so it throws the opponent off from their game" Remus added.

"Will we ever stand a chance against either of you?" Dean sighed as Sirius pulled out his wand to heal the bone.

"Sure, just keep practising," Remus smiled.

"Don't get your hopes up though, I can't last more than five minutes against either of them and I've been training for months now," Harry sighed.

"You're still young, pup, and are improving rapidly."

"Why didn't you just heal it immediately?" Lavender asked interested as Sirius slipped his wand into his sleeve again.

"Just wanted to make sure there were no other problems. It is harder to see underlying problems in his bone structure with the use of magic."

"Because you are a werewolf?" Lavender turned to Remus.

"Yes. While it is usually harder to break my bones it also makes it more difficult to detect deeper injuries, even with magic."

"So what Professor Sirius did makes it easier to detect if something is wrong?" Dean asked.

"It only works when you know the layout of someone's body very well," Sirius contradicted him as he rubbed his fingers into Remus' shin. "I could let you or Harry do the same thing I'm doing now, but you wouldn't detect a single difference."

"Then why can you?" Ron raised an eyebrow.

"He's been taking care of me since we were teenagers, healing my wounds and caring for them. I'm willing to bet he knows my body's layout better than even Madam Pomfrey does. Ow," he twitched, wincing as Sirius worked his way up his calf.

"Yeah, I think you tore a muscle," pulling out his wand again he ran it over the calf and Remus' expression relaxed again.

"That's better. Are you done?"

"Yeah."

Dean cocked his head as Sirius leaned forward to grab Remus' sock and shoe.
"Is that….a dog?" he asked a little uncertain.

"That's a werewolf," Sirius answered, realising what he'd revealed by leaning forward.

"You have a tattoo of a werewolf on your ankle?" a sly smile spread over Lavender's lips.

"Don't get any ideas, it's not a tattoo and it's not the only animal there," Sirius laughed as he tightened Remus' shoe again.

"I'm glad it's not a tattoo. No offence Professor, but your tattooist would have been an awful artist, it's barely recognisable," Dean said.

"Oi, it is a fine werewolf," Harry defended the drawing.

"It's a horrible werewolf," Remus snorted. "But that doesn't matter since he loves it."

"If it's not a tattoo, then what is it?" Parvati asked as they all leaned in to have a look, too.

"It's the result of a toddler's creativity with a sharp pencil while I was drugged up on potions after a battle. There are a dog and a deer on the sides," Sirius rose to his feet, pulling up his trouser leg as he turned around.

"Very artistic Harry," Neville chuckled as the other two were revealed.

"What can I say? I'm an artist," Harry grinned.

"Didn't you feel it when he drew on you? Or did the potions numb his actions completely?" Seamus asked interested.

"I had no idea he was drawing on me with sharper tools than usual," Sirius let his trouser leg drop again as he pulled himself up to sit beside Remus.

"Moony, Padfoot and Prongs," Neville suddenly smiled. "You drew the Marauders onto his ankle."

"That's rather cute," Lavender laughed as Harry blushed.

"How did we go from a lesson about duelling to this?" Sirius looked to Remus curiously.

"No idea, but let's get back on track. Are there any questions left about duelling?" Remus grinned.

"How do you know what kind of spells are allowed in a duel and which ones aren't?" Parvati asked Sirius.

"In an official duel you usually set the rules beforehand. In a duel during a battle any kind of spells are used as your opponent often comes at you with the intention to kill or seriously maul."

"How do you know if they are coming at you with the intention to kill?"

"Blood starting to flow and them not stopping is usually a good indication of their intention," they all laughed at Remus' words and Seamus grinned.

"The truth is, you can't always tell. Many witches and wizards can cast non-verbal, so being able to identify a spell by the colour alone will give you an advantage. But it is not always enough so you need to be prepared for anything," Sirius finally answered.

"There is no way to be able to recognise every spell, especially those that are self-invented or old,"
continuing when Sirius paused Remus looked at the students. "The best you can teach yourself is to be quick on your feet and raise a shield the moment something comes at you."

"Would a Shield Charm protect against violent curses?" Lavender wondered.

"Against most curses it does. Even if it isn't able to stop the curse, it can still lessen the effects by letting it hit the shield first and gives you time to sidestep it," Sirius explained, looking up when the bell rang.

"All right, that is it for this year. If there is anything you're still unsure about for the upcoming exams then don't hesitate to ask. Study wisely and don't overdo things, make sure you take some time to relax, too, or you're heading straight to a nervous breakdown."

"Focus your last minute studying on the subjects you aren't strong in, eat well and make sure you get a good night's sleep before every exam," Remus added as Sirius turned to Harry as he made no move to rise.

"Go with the others, we have a short meeting with McGonagall first but we'll come pick you up when we're done."

Nodding Harry followed his classmates as they wished them a good afternoon and left the classroom.

"Are you guys ready?" Neville asked as they made their way towards the Great Hall for dinner.

"Can you ever truly be ready for exams?" fidgeting nervously Dean looked at Seamus who shrugged and turned to Neville. "Neville. Are you nervous?"

Neville thought for a moment, "No, not really. I'm as prepared as I can be and confident actually."

"I think you are the only one then," Ron grumbled.

"No, I'm pretty confident, too," contradicting him Lavender smiled at Neville.

"Do you have a last tutoring session with Professor Sirius tonight?"

"No, he believes I'm ready. I think they will spend the weekend preparing the exams for the other years."

"Yeah, It is pretty interesting to see how they develop an exam," Harry grinned.

"They make their own exams?"

"Of course, what did you think they did?"

"I thought there was a standard exam for every year," Ron admitted.

"No, every teacher makes his or her own exam, I thought you'd have realised that after Lockhart's exam. Though I do admit that most teachers keep it pretty much the same every year. Sirius, Remus and Andromeda have just decided to make their exams from scratch to give students a proper chance based upon what they've actually learned."

"Because it would be unfair to give them an exam with things they haven't been taught," nodding in understanding Lavender sighed.

"I wonder if our examiners will be that thoughtful for us, too."
"I've heard the History of Magic exam was adapted because T- Professor Ted hasn't been able to get us up to speed properly," Harry admitted.

"Not even with Professor Lupin teaching before him and both of the Professors helping out now?" Dean asked.

"No, Ted thinks we're about at the level of what we should have known last year. It is more than he'd expected really, Sirius and Remus worked really hard to stamp information into our heads."

"It left them exhausted though. They were juggling three classes around while tending to other duties at the same time."

"And yet they've done more for us in these last six months than any other teacher has ever done. I just hope we'll be able to do them justice," Lavender smiled to Neville.

"It's funny, this is the first year that I really want to do well, just to make them proud," Dean commented thoughtfully.

"That's because we're all wrapped around their little finger. We're wiped," Seamus laughed. "And bloody happy about it."

"It makes a huge difference if you like your teacher," Harry agreed.

"It's rather hard not to like them; they're so different from the other professors."

"They make things interesting, the other teachers are more approachable now, too," Dean agreed with Lavender as they took a seat.

"Hey, Sirius and Remus the topic of discussion again?" Ginny asked as Harry and Neville sat down beside her and Luna.

"As usual, yeah. They are saying life at Hogwarts became much more interesting since they arrived," Neville grinned.

"Not just more interesting, better too," Katie mused.

"Yeah, it never ceases to amaze me," smiling Ginny looked out over the Great Hall.

"What doesn't?" Ron asked.

"That Sirius managed to do in less than six months what Dumbledore failed to do in over fifty years."

Neville hummed in agreement but Ron just looked confused.

"House unity Ronald, honestly," Hermione sighed from across them as she gestured at the other students. "Just look around, all four houses are mingling together."

Harry followed her gaze to indeed see several students seated at other tables and he smiled proudly, knowing Sirius was mostly to blame for that.

"I've become so used to the sight that I kind of stopped noticing it," Alicia admitted.

"Sirius is the best thing that has ever happened to Hogwarts," Luna simply stated and the others couldn't agree with her more.
"Hey Harry, have you seen this yet?" Hannah came their way, handing over a Chocolate Frog Card to him.

"Yeah, I…"

"It's Dumbledore's card, just throw it away," Ron interrupted as he pulled it out of Harry's hand, ignoring his protest as he did.

"The text has changed," Hannah waved him off annoyed, indicating for Ginny to read it as she took it from her brother with a glare.

"Albus Dumbledore. Was considered by many to be the greatest wizard of modern times; before it was revealed in court that his manipulations resulted in the deaths of many innocents, most known of all the Potter family."

She paused to swallow thickly.

"He is serving a life sentence as an accomplice in their murders and for knowingly condemning an innocent Black Heir to a lifelong imprisonment in Azkaban to get the Potter Heir under his control. Once famous for his defeat of the Dark Wizard Grindelwald in 1945, now he is mostly famous for his severe manipulations."

There was a moment of silence before Katie snorted in disgust.

"They should have taken his card away completely."

"It's going to be taken out of production next year. They just want to spread this new more accurate edition around for people's collections before it's removed completely," Harry told them as Ginny handed him the card back.

"How do you know that?" curiously Hannah looked at him as she accepted the card he held out to her.

"Sirius holds stock in every major candy fabricator and the companies keep him updates on things."

"Is there anything he doesn't hold stock in?" grumbling Ron piled food onto his plate. "He also holds shares in your company, doesn't he?"

"He is our business partner so of course he holds stock," Fred shrugged as he watched in disgust as Ron began to shovel food into his mouth.

"Does he help develop products?" Luna asked curiously.

"He's given us some pointers and ideas, but he's mostly a silent partner for now. Only thing he did openly was sell us our future store location."

"He sold you a building?" Hermione inquired.

"Yeah, the Black family owns several buildings in Diagon and Knockturn Alley. He showed us several interesting locations for our planned shop a while back."

"Why am I not surprised that family owned property there?" looking at her brothers Ginny turned suspicious. "You aren't planning to open your shop in Knockturn Alley, are you?"

"No, we found the perfect location in Diagon Alley. We were going to rent it from him, but he's
decided to sell the property to us."

"Where'd you get the money to buy a property in Diagon Alley? The rent is massive so I don't even want to know how much it would be to actually buy one, even if the Professor would give you a generous discount," Seamus whistled.

"We've worked something out," George answered cryptically.

"You didn't go into debt did you? Because Dad will kill you if you work yourself into a debt before you're even out of school," Ron frowned, ignorant to the disgusted looks thrown his way as he spoke with his mouth full. Seamus and Hermione shuffled a little further away from him.

"We aren't stupid. We worked something out with Sirius and that is all you need to know," Fred cut him off before he could say more.

Grinning Harry took a sip from his pumpkin juice to avoid having to look at Ron. The twins were technically telling the truth.

They had arrived at Marauder Headquarters the afternoon of their birthday, packed with business plans and proposals to convince him to rent the property they had set their sights on out to them.

Sirius had asked all the proper questions and had even made some suggestions to give them an even more professional appearance as he listened to their proposal.

Once they had finished their story, Sirius had pushed a folder towards them with his own proposal; Harry would never forget the complete confusion on their faces as they had opened it to reveal a stack of papers, endowing ownership of their desired property onto their names.

Picking up the papers to try and understand them, Fred had revealed the paper Sirius had slipped underneath it, the simply handwritten note that wished them a happy birthday and to enjoy their present leaving them speechless.

Their objections that it was too much fell to deaf ears and Sirius cheerfully informed them the act was already done, so they could whine all they wanted, or they could take the upcoming holidays to begin getting their property cleaned and ready for their well thought out business plans.

It was a brilliant scheme as it gave the twins an excuse not to have to face their mother so soon and as Sirius had included the flat above the shop it immediately gave them a living place where they could stay during the holidays.

But while they had told their father the truth, Sirius had requested they'd keep it a secret for everyone else for now to prevent askance looks and to allow them a chance to build a name for themselves without immediately being associated with him.

"What is the address and have you got a name yet?" it was Neville who asked the question but they all looked at the two interested.

"Number ninety-three and we'll call it Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes," George grinned.

"That's rather a mouth full isn't it?" Frowning Ron took another bite.

"It is. Sirius has begun to refer to it as Triple W because of it. We were going for Weasley and Weasley, but Triple W works too."

Chuckling at Fred's words they nodded before Lavender spoke up.
"When will your shop open?"

"The beginning of August if everything goes according to plan. We've managed to do a lot during the Easter holidays, but there's still some stuff we need to take care of before we are ready to open."

"But don't worry, we'll advertise before the opening and we'll have three special celebrities appearing when we do."

Snorting at the wink Fred sent him Harry shook his head. "You do realise that is a Muggle habit, right? Try to attract a crowd to a new opening by inviting celebrities that will sure bring lots of curious people."

Dual grins were his only answer and rolling his eyes Harry looked up as Remus arrived in the Great Hall, returning the smile as the man spotted him and smiled before making his way towards him.

"If you're inviting Professor Sirius then you're sure to get many female customers."

Harry wasn't sure who had said it, but the words did draw his attention back to the conversation.

"What?"

"Girls don't just chase after someone just because they are handsome, you know," Ginny objected.

"It sure seemed that way with Lockhart, Hermione was crazy about him," Ron commented.

"I wasn't crazy about Lockhart," protested Hermione, glaring at him.

"You were drooling over him!"

"I think you are mixing her shy crush up with the drooling mess you became whenever Fleur passed by last year," Harry commented offhandedly as Remus reached them.

"Sometimes you are just like him."

Blinking surprised Harry wasn't the only one to look up to Remus as the man stared at him with a fond smile.

"Harry's dad was witty, too?" Ginny asked.

Snorting Remus shook his head. "James is not the one Harry reminds me of."

"He's not?" curiously Hermione glanced at Harry as his face broke into a large grin.

"No, he reminds me of Sirius. The same wittiness, enthusiasm and behaviour. You may look a lot like your parents at first glance but from the first time I actually got to speak to you it's always been Sirius you've reminded me of," the last part was directed at a still grinning Harry.

"I expect that is a good thing?" staring at Harry now, Seamus couldn't help but ask the question.

"A very good thing," Remus decided with a smile as he ruffled Harry's hair, messing it up like Sirius always did and Harry chuckled.

"Where's Sirius?"

"He went ahead to start dinner so we can eat by the time we arrive and you can help us with the
first to fourth year's exams as training for later," rising to his feet he nodded at the explanation; and wishing the others a good evening he left with Remus, as he often spent the weekends at Marauder Headquarters.
The moment the ending sign was given Harry looked up to catch Neville grinning at him from a few rows before him, and smiling he made his way towards him.

"Did well?"

"Yeah, I didn't second guess myself for a single question, you?"

"It was surprisingly easy. Do you want to wait for the others outside?"

"Might be a good idea," collecting his bag they quickly made their way outside. "If the practical is as easy as the theory was then I might even ace it."

Admitting his own confidence seemed to make Neville shy again as he ducked his head low.

"I think we'll both do really well," grinning Harry nodded to the others as they joined them in sitting just outside of the Great Hall, knowing lunch would start soon.

"Do you think Professor Sirius and Professor Lupin will be there this afternoon?" Lavender asked once it was confirmed they had all done well.

"If not both then certainly Professor Sirius will be there," the confidence in Dean's voice made most look at him curiously. "Technically it is his class."

Chuckling Harry nodded, knowing Sirius would indeed be there. He settled on the ground and leaned back against the wall as they waited for the Great Hall to be returned to its usual four House tables instead of the rows of single desks it had now.

"Are you still nervous?"

"I haven't needed a calming draught yet," Seamus joked.

"It's going remarkably well. Much better than I had ever expected. If this keeps up then I'm almost certain I'm in for several O.W.L.s," Parvati revealed.

"I think we all might be," yawning Dean glanced at the closed doors. "I do hope they'll hurry up, I'm starving."

"It shouldn't be long now, the other students are starting to arrive, too," Blaise assured him and no sooner were the words out of his mouth or the doors opened to reveal a restored Great Hall.

"You should have taken Divination," Harry teased him, laughing when the dark-skinned boy shot him a shudder as they rose to their feet and made their way inside.

After a relaxing lunch the fifth years gathered in the small chamber beside the Great Hall as with every practical exam so far. Malfoy glared at the several Slytherins chatting with the Gryffindors, but his eyes immediately widened and he stepped back as Sirius joined them with a long list of names in his hand.

Grinning Harry watched as Sirius took a small group with him into the Great Hall and he settled against the wall, knowing it was done alphabetically, so it would take a while. Some of the others were muttering quietly to themselves as they nervously awaited their turn, not knowing what to expect as those already tested did not return.
Daphne and Hermione were called in at the same time, the latter trembling with nerves while Daphne looked mostly confident and he wished them luck before catching Neville's eye again.

The blond grinned at him nervously, not practising like the others and Harry was happy for it. Sirius had asked them both not to and they had honoured his request, although Harry only understood the reasoning now.

The others were increasingly getting more nervous as they practised silently, messing up their spell work as nerves took over. But Harry and Neville were both still calm and collected, and as Neville was eventually called in by Sirius he grinned as he passed Harry.

"Reminds me to tell him he's a genius."

Chuckling quietly Harry nodded, taking a deep breath when his turn finally came.

Shooting his godfather a smile as he winked at him, he made his way to Professor Tofty, an examiner he'd had before and who Harry liked.

Performing the tasks with ease he enjoyed the exam thoroughly, relishing in the knowledge that Sirius was watching him, a soft smile on his lips as he leaned against the wall.

Grinning broadly as he was dismissed, he returned the cheerful wave Sirius gave him, ignoring the examiner's raised eyebrows and the glare Malfoy shot his way, still not finished with his exam.

He smiled as Professor Tofty's chuckle reached his ears, having learned through Remus that the man had been an examiner in their time, too. The man had been very impressed by both his fathers and Sirius' skill and to this day their scores were still unbroken.

A score that he knew he wouldn't have broken, though he was fairly certain he'd just gotten an Outstanding.

He found the other Gryffindors gathered just outside of the Great Hall and he learned they had done fairly well despite their nerves as they waited for Dean and Ron before making their way to Gryffindor Tower to freshen up for dinner.

To congratulate themselves on their success they decided to take the Friday off from revision since they had no exams, only Hermione, Harry and Neville making their way to the Ancient Runes exams before they could call it a weekend, too.

Splitting up from the two after the exam Harry made his way to his godfather, locating him near the lake.

It didn't take long to spot him as his godfather was sitting cross legged underneath his usual tree, leaning back against Buckbeak while Crookshanks was resting in his lap, surrounded by stacks of papers.

"Sticking charm?" he asked in greeting as he sat down, being careful not to dislodge any of the piles while tapping his glasses to change them into sunglasses so the sun wouldn't bother him. A trick Sirius had taught him and he gratefully made use of.

"Yeah, it was too hot to remain inside," it took a moment to understand the distracted reply as Sirius kept writing but accepting the explanation Harry picked up one of the sheets from the pile in front of him to look at the list of spells written on it.

"Is this for the other year's exams?"
Distractedly Sirius smiled at him before scratching something else onto the paper he was holding.

"No, lesson plan for next year."

"It's still weird, I've never had a defence teacher two years in a row," Harry chuckled as he returned the paper to its place.

"Only because the previous Headmaster was a stupid imbecile who wasn't worthy of being called a wizard."

"Yeah," thinking back at how easily Sirius had removed the curse on the position it was laughable. He would have been ready to accept his godfather was just that powerful if not for Professor Flitwick' anger upon learning of the nature of the curse.

Watching in silence as the man piled the stacks up before Vanishing them, he frowned.

"Why isn't Remus helping you?"

"He is arranging some things at Gringotts for our holiday. I'm doing this as a surprise for him so I'm glad I got to finish it before he's back."

"Where are we going?"

"No idea, we still have to plan that. Where do you want to go?"

"I assume we'll be staying home until after the full moon?"

"Yes, it'll be the first of two full moons in one month and I don't know how well he'll handle that even with the help of the Wolfspoly," Sirius explained. "So I'll feel better if we are somewhere safe and comfortable."

"Of course. After he's regained his strength it would be nice to go sightseeing for a bit and just relax near a beach or so?"

"There's an estate in Italy. It has a decent amount of land and a private beach attached to it that's charmed against Muggles. We could spend some time there, unless you'd rather blend in with the tourists?"

"The private beach sounds nice. Not only would Dobby and Buckbeak be able to run around freely without us having to worry about anyone seeing them; we could also simply relax without having to be on guard all the time," Harry mused. "And from there we could go make plans for sightseeing and other activities. Have you ever been there?"

"A few times, the Villa is my favourite residence after our home. That is actually where your dad proposed to your mum."

"That wasn't by a villa, was it?" trying to pull forth the memory Sirius had showed him months ago. They had been staying in a large cottage, the simplicity of it at the time having surprised Harry as he knew his family was very rich and he couldn't imagine his wealthy grandparents willingly staying in such a small building.

But that had been before he had gotten to know the two of them through Sirius' memories and had learned that his grandparents were actually very adaptable and enjoyed the simple things in life.

"It's called the Villa. I told you we went on vacation to Italy after fifth year, right?"
"Yeah, where Dad taught you how to swim."

"Yes. The two of us went looking around, sightseeing one day, found that cottage, and just fell in love with it. When we went back to show Mum and Dad what we'd found, your dad jokingly introduced it as our own personal Villa," Sirius smiled warmly as he was clearly recalling the memory.

"We took lodging there for a few days and two years later, when we graduated Mum and Dad revealed they had bought it for us as a graduation gift, naming it the Villa."

"And Dad took Mum there?"

"Yes. We took Remus and your mum there shortly after graduation, before we got completely involved in the war."

"Not the rat?" shifting in his spot Harry looked at his godfather.

"No, he claimed his mother had gotten sick. You know, your mum was always convinced that is where you were conceived."

"That is one piece of information I'm pretty sure I never wanted to know about my parents," grimacing he glared as Sirius laughed.

"I could tell you all kinds of embarrassing things about them, pup," shuddering at his godfather's teasing he shook his head.

"I'm good, thanks. Did Remus like it there, too?"

"He loved the privacy and scenery. We'll have to discuss it, but I'm pretty sure he'll love the idea. And if you speak of the devil he shall appear," Sirius grinned as he spotted the man coming towards them before his eyes narrowed.

Half turning as his godfather rose to his feet he frowned as Remus greeted Sirius.

"Hey sweetheart."

The strange greeting was weird, but it was the sight of the man sweeping his godfather into a hug before kissing him squarely on the lips that made his eyes widen in surprise.

Harry could only stare at them in amusement as Sirius wrapped his arms around Remus' neck, not sure what was going on, before he noticed two women had followed Remus, now looking rather taken back by the display before them.

Clearing his throat to get their attention the two broke apart; and thanks to them having slightly turned in the initial contact, Harry had a perfect view of the mischievous grin that had slid over both pairs of lips.

The devilish grin on Remus' lips turned to one of surprise as he turned to face the women. "Hmmm? Oh sorry, I hadn't realised you were following me. I did say I would bring him to you, didn't I?"

The words were said innocently enough, but Harry knew they were a blatant lie as he knew Remus was always aware of who was around them.

Suddenly he realised what was going on as an arm slipped around Sirius' waist and linked into a
belt loop possessively. He was relieved that he was wearing sunglasses so his initial reaction hadn't given them away.

"Siri, Harry, these are Miss Renegan and Miss..."

"Mrs. Baines," the older of the two women corrected, coming to her senses even if they both kept their distance due to Buckbeak's presence, Crookshanks having run off when Sirius rose to his feet.

"Hello. You were looking for me?" Sirius calmly leaned into Remus' hold, something Harry knew neither of the women missed from the nervous shifting of their weights.

"Yes...I...

"Hey Professor!"

They all turned to see Blaise and Neville running up to them.

"What is it?" Sirius asked as both boys bowed to Buckbeak without being prompted.

The proud Hippogriff never reacted to Harry's presence any more, having accepted him as part of Sirius' pack like Remus already had been last summer. But others still had to bow before they could approach close and all the students knew that.

"Professor Tonks asked if you could join her for our Potions class this afternoon," Blaise spoke up once Buckbeak returned the gesture and they straightened.

"Would you be so kind as to tell her we'll see her during lunch and join her then?" Remus nodded.

"Of course, who're you?" Blaise rudely stared at the two women.

"This are Miss Renegan and Mrs. Baines, they followed me from the Ministry because they both wished to speak to Professor Sirius," Remus explained.

"Hope it's not a marriage proposal again. I'd hate to see another woman ripped to shreds, sir," Blaise commented.

"It isn't Sirius' fault that Remus is so possessive and that woman couldn't understand the meaning of no." It satisfied Harry to see Miss Renegan shift nervously at his words.

"I was more thinking of the red-head that got carried out of here some time ago. She sure was a sight to behold," the almost professional regretful expression on the dark-skinned boys face looked sincere as he turned. "Remember her, Nev?"

"I don't think anyone can ever forget her," Neville sighed heavily. "Last thing I heard is that she hasn't left her house since it happened."

"Boy's, there is no need to terrify these two ladies. I'm sure they are here for something completely different," Sirius looked at them sternly even as Harry had to suppress a snicker as he knew they meant Molly Weasley.

"Whatever you say Professor, I haven't forgotten the mess the House-Elves had to clean up after you were done with that banshee," Blaise shrugged dismissively.

Harry forced himself to keep his expression schooled as both woman's expressions paled at the topic the two fifth years were calmly discussing, clearly imagining horrible and bloody scenarios while in truth the House-Elves only had to clean up the spilled food and overturned furniture.
"It is not his fault that woman couldn't keep her hands to herself," Harry protested on his godfather's behalf.

"That's true, she brought it onto herself. She honesty should have known better," Neville agreed. "Though I don't think anyone has forgotten Burke's fate yet either."

"Isn't that girl still seeing a counsellor since she tried to make a pass on Harry?" Blaise asked, faking confusion.

"No that's Cho Chang, I heard she's now slowly recovering since facing Sirius," Neville pulled a face. "Burke was the seventh year who foolishly tried to slip Sirius a love potion and had to answer to Professor Lupin. He's the one in Azkaban."

Harry snorted as he recognised the name.

Rowan Burke had been a seventh year Ravenclaw who had believed he could get his hands on the Black fortune if he'd dose Sirius with love potions. When Sirius had been unwell after the giant incident and unable to identify the potion, the guy had taken action and slipped one into his tea during a lesson.

Unfortunately for him Remus had arrived in class unexpectedly and had immediately recognised the scent. It had only been a matter of moments before the werewolf had found the culprit.

It was both lucky and unlucky for Burke that Sirius was both immune and protected against most kinds of potions or he'd have been slaughtered by Remus instead of facing lifelong imprisonment in Azkaban.

It was also lucky for him that Sirius hadn't been able to use magic at the time or he'd have torn a piece from him, not that Remus hadn't hexed him into a weeping and bloody mess before he'd thrown the guy into McGonagall's office but Harry believed he'd gotten what he deserved.

"Anyone knows they should keep their hands off what is clearly mine," Remus growled even as Blaise's expression turned to realisation and Miss Renegan's hold on her handbag tightened.

"I know, dear," patting Remus' arm affectionately Sirius turned back to the women. "But enough of that, how can I help you?"

"I..." Renegan's eyes flashed from Remus' slightly manic smile to the hand Sirius left resting on the man's lower arm and her hands tightened on her purse, which undoubtedly to Harry held a marriage proposal.

"We've come here to inform you that Witch Weekly has elected you as the most desired bachelor of the year," Baines blurted out in an attempt to help her companion out before she blanched as both men stared at her blankly.

"Are you for real? Have you looked at him? In what universe would he still be single?" snorting Blaise stared at her in disdain.

"Everyone knows the Professors live together and have for quite some time," Neville added.

"It might be wiser if you two leave," Sirius looked at Remus as the man smiled, one that looked utterly terrifying. "Before you make even bigger fools of yourselves."

"Y-yes...I...I'm sorry for taking up your time," pulling Renegan with her Baines left in a hurry and Sirius, Neville and Harry cheerfully waved after them until they were out of sight.
"Well, that was rather funny," Sirius' comment broke the dam as they all burst into laughter.

"Great timing boys," wiping his eyes Remus grinned as he released Sirius.

"We noticed them following you and realised what was going on when you swept him into a kiss so we thought we'd come help you out," Blaise smiled at a grinning Neville.

"It's been a while," Sirius hummed.

"What? That you've been swept off your feet and kissed senseless?" Harry teased him, making Sirius snort.

"That too, but also that someone showed up with a marriage proposal in person. Usually they just send propositions to my junk mail that are automatically turned down by Dobby."

"Renegan came to me while I was making my way out of the Ministry and Baines called out to me when I made my way to the Floo," sighing Remus watched as Sirius patted Buckbeak before collecting his bag and shrinking it so he could pocket it.

"I gathered they cornered you."

"When did you realise what was going on?" Harry asked as the Hippogriff took off towards the Forbidden Forest and they began to make their way towards the castle.

"At sweetheart, he'd always use that to greet me after Hogwarts in warning of what was following him. The kiss was a new touch though; I assume it meant she was a leech?"

"I didn't think an endearing name was going to cut it with her so I had to take a more drastic action," frowning Remus turned to Harry. "For a moment I thought you were never going to interrupt us though."

"I had no idea what was going on!" Harry defended himself.

"I'm surprised you didn't stare at us in shock, giving everything away," chuckling Sirius ruffled his hair.

"Living with you guys has taught me to be ready for anything. And since you immediately responded without hesitation I knew you knew what you were doing."

"You certainly made a lot of girls happy today," grinning at the groans from both men Neville winked at Harry.

"How did you realise we were there to help though?" Blaise asked.

"You said Professor Tonks requested our presence in your Potions class. You're in the middle of your exams," Sirius explained to Blaise' delight. "Anyway, ten points to all three of you for a prank brilliantly executed."

"It was a pleasure," nodding to them Blaise separated from them to make his way back to his friends, Neville however looked at them.

"Why don't the two of you simply get a civil union? It would get people off your back, wouldn't it?"

"It would certainly keep Tonks off your back," teasing his friend Sirius sidestepped the slap Remus aimed at him.
"She backed up a little since the court incident," Harry laughed.

"Professor Tonks is after you?" confused Neville stared at Remus.

"No, her daughter. She's been flirting with me since last summer."

"And you aren't interested?"

"Not at all. I'm more than happy with the situation as it is now; I have no interest in a relationship."

"Technically you are already kind of in one," Harry disagreed.

"A sexual relationship then, smart-ass," Remus shot back at him.

"And she doesn't accept that?" ignoring the tongue Harry stuck out and Sirius' chuckle, Neville kept his attention on Remus.

"She seems to think I am in denial and insecure about myself, though granted we've not seen her since the court session any more so she might have changed her mind."

"After your action in court it would be strange if she still had hope," Harry mused.

"Maybe we should just sign one of those forms," Remus sighed. "It would keep people off our backs and let them know neither of us is available."

"It would mean you'd have to adopt Harry too, though," Neville admitted.

"I've already done that. We signed a second set of adoption papers in private shortly after Sirius adopted Harry. He wasn't going to take the chance that Dumbledore would take him from me again if something were to happen to him."

"Smart move, congratulations," smiling at them Neville turned as Dean and Lavender called his name. "I should go; I promised them we'd play Exploding Snap."

"Of course, thank you for your help and have a nice weekend," Sirius smiled as Neville waved them goodbye before running off.

They made their way towards their chambers, and Remus made tea for them while Sirius arranged for a small bite to eat as they gathered in the kitchen.

"If you two do sign a registered partnership wouldn't you be expected to wear rings?" Harry mused as he sat down, not having wanted to ask in the hallways where people could overhear.

"That's not really a problem," Remus turned to Sirius. "What do you think?"

"Why, are you proposing to me?" as Remus slapped him on the arm he laughed and Harry grinned at their playful behaviour.

"All joking aside; for all intents and purposes we are technically in a relationship, Harry has a point there," he hesitated, turning serious as he looked down at his cup.

"So much has happened since everything went to hell and everything changed. Neither of us is the same person as we were when we graduated. I'm still settling back into a normal life properly, but for the first time in a very long time I can honestly say that I am happy and that is because I have the two of you."
"I've said before that I'm not interested in pursuing a sexual relationship and I meant it. I don't think I'll ever be able to, not after all that's happened and what it did to me, to us. I am happy with where we are now, just the three of us. You guys are my home, my family and I love you both more than anything and would not mind spending the rest of my life like this. If to keep what we have undisturbed I have to sign some papers and call you my partner, I'm more than willing to do so. So, if you are absolutely sure, then I'd say yes."

Sirius looked up to Remus, his content expression and the honest admission making Harry swallow as he knew his godfather was truly happy for the first time in a long time.

"A lot has happened and we are indeed not the same people we used to be all that time ago," Remus reached forward to take his hand, squeezing it before entwining their fingers.

"Twenty-five years ago I started Hogwarts, terrified of what was to come and sure I would never fit in until a pale dark-haired boy spoke to me at the Gryffindor table and pulled me into a conversation with the friend he had made at the train. You were the one who befriended me and gave me a place to belong. A lot has changed since that day, and I've made many mistakes, but that hasn't changed."

He reached out with his free hand to Harry's, which he readily gave, before moving it onto the table and placing their entwined hands over his. "This is where I found my place, at your and Harry's sides and that is where I want to stay."

He placed his free hand over theirs and Harry felt tears rise at the emotion in the man's words.

"In the past I've allowed people to let me doubt you, let them come between us despite the fact that I should have known better. No more. I won't let anyone take my family away from me again, no matter what. And if getting people to back off from what's mine means putting a ring on our fingers, then so be it. I'm not letting anyone separate us ever again," Remus smiled. "You know you are my world and I love you, even if it's not in the way our little smart-ass happily remarked and I get this not so little monster I love dearly with the package."

Harry grinned as Remus ruffled his hair with a fond smile before his gaze returned to Sirius. "If I am to bind myself to anyone in this life, I cannot think of a better person to do so to than you."

"So you are proposing?" Sirius chuckled, clearing his throat with twinkling eyes.

"If you'll have me," smiling at his teasing, Remus squeezed his hand.

"I suppose it can't be help. Seems we've been doomed to be stuck with each other from the start, huh?"

"Seems like it," Remus grinned.

"Then I accept your proposal," suddenly Sirius choked out a laugh. "I bet James is laughing his butt off up there right now."

"No doubt about it. He's said we'd end up together from the start," Remus laughed before he turned to Harry.

"Would you be all right with that?"

"You guys have always acted like a married couple anyway and I know you guys love each other: this would just make it official and get people to see where you guys belong and leave you alone," Harry smiled. "I assume you'd need witnesses to be able to sign that kind of papers?"
"Two witnesses of age and a registrar. The Minister is capable, so we could have Kingsley act as one?" Sirius looked at Remus.

"Or we could ask Professor M, I know she has the same qualifications and I know you would be more comfortable with her than with Kingsley. Besides, asking Kingsley would call attention to it and I think we'd both prefer to keep it as small as possible and that would be not possible due to our social standings right now."

"I can't deny that I'd prefer Professor M over Kingsley. If she'd agree to do that then all we'd need would be two witnesses. It's a shame you're out as they need to be adults."

"I'll just be the third unofficial witness," Harry shrugged before he grinned. "You could have Buckbeak carry the rings though."

"It's not going to be an actual wedding ceremony, you know," chuckling Sirius ruffled his hair. "What about Fred and George?"

"As witnesses?" Remus asked for confirmation. "They are adults and they are basically family so they would be a fine choice. Anyone else you'd want to be there?"

Sirius hesitated and Harry chuckled, knowing what his godfather was thinking about and from Remus' smile he did as well.

"You are going to invite Luna and Neville, aren't you? I mean, they are as much part of our family as Fred and George are and it would be nice to have our family present when you sign those papers."

"I guess that's settled, do you have anyone you'd like to be there beside those two?" Sirius turned to Remus.

"Those four and Harry sound perfect to me as they are indeed family to both of us."

"Then all we need is to get the papers and ask them," Sirius smiled.

"And arrange for rings. If you could go out and get those tomorrow and ask McGonagall and the others while I go pick up the papers we could sign them tomorrow afternoon?" Remus suggested.

"I think I could have a pair of rings charmed and ready by tomorrow afternoon," Sirius nodded. "Sounds like a plan."

"You don't waste time once you've set your mind to something, do you?" chuckling Harry looked up surprised as Sirius rose to his feet. "Where are you going?"

"Starting dinner, it's already rather late and I completely forgot to ask about your exam."

Remus waved him off as he made to rise, getting to his feet himself. "You worked hard today so let us make dinner while you tell us about your day."

Chuckling Harry settled back in his seat as he told them about the exam, actually enjoying it when they discussed the exam with him while he watched them prepare dinner, knowing that tomorrow they would officially become a family for the world.
The moment the starting sign was given that Monday afternoon, Harry began cutting his ingredients. The theory exam had gone well that morning, but practical Potions was the one exam he had been rather nervous for and he was determined to do well.

From the corner of his eyes he saw his godfather slip through the crack of the Great Hall door he'd quietly opened and he smiled as he saw him move to stand beside Andromeda.

Amused eyes caught his and Harry felt himself relax as Sirius smiled, taking a deep breath to calm himself as the man had taught him before continuing his work much more sure of himself.

Deciding to treat this like a normal private lesson he had no trouble brewing the potion and he noticed he wasn't the only one being reassured by the man's presence as the tension in the room dropped the moment he had arrived.

It was with satisfaction that he eventually stepped away from his cauldron and looking up he immediately found warm grey eyes smiling at him from across the room.

Grinning at him to let him know it had gone well he returned his attention to his potion, filling a bottle with a sample before cleaning up.

He had to squash down his disappointment as his godfather was gone when he was done but Andromeda waved at him when he was permitted to go, so he made his way over to her.

"Hey."

"You've done well," Andromeda smiled in greeting.

"I hope so, Sirius returned to class?"

"No, a Gringotts representative asked to speak to him."

"Here at Hogwarts?" they calmly walked through the hallways.

"Yes. Sirius refused to be absent from this exam as he knew you had been dreading this one. The Goblin apparently said he'd wait in his office."

"The exam took two hours!" disbelieving Harry stared at her.

"Yes, Sirius told him that but he said he'd wait. Once you were done he left, asking me to wait for you so I could apologise on his behalf."

"I hadn't expected him to show up at all, let alone stay for the entire exam, though I am happy he was there. I wonder what was so important that a Gringotts representative actually came to Hogwarts to speak to him," Harry mused as they walked out into the Courtyard.

"It is not unusual for Ancient families to receive a house visit from Gringotts. It is part of their service. I suspect the meeting is about combining vaults now that Sirius and Remus are legally registered as life partners."

"The whole idea of keeping it a quiet thing kind of backfired didn't it? Did Sirius tell you personally?"
"No, I read it in the special edition of the Prophet that came out Sunday morning; he wanted to tell me this morning."

Harry winced. Someone at the Ministry had seen Remus collect the civil partnership papers, and realising what they were for, had alerted the Prophet.

It hadn't taken them long to find confirmation for the story as signed papers were automatically copied into the public archive.

It was a good thing the general public had already believed them to be an item or Harry was sure it would have been more than just a front page article in the Prophet and congratulations from most of the students at dinner.

"Are you mad that you weren't invited?"

Confused Andromeda turned to him before she laughed. "No, I completely understand their wish to keep it as small as possible since I know the reasons behind it. And no, I am also not hurt that Sirius did not ask me to be his witness, George is like a little brother to him and they are much closer than we ever were."

Accepting her explanation he leaned against one of the walls overseeing the Black Lake, watching the Giant Squid sunbathe for a moment before something occurred to him.

"Why would they combine their bank vaults?"

"Because marriage is binding in the Wizarding World. Divorces are very rare as you need to have a very good reason for requesting one. So when a couple marries, their vaults are automatically combined. In their case it is just a question in which name they will combine the vaults.

"Because Sirius has the older bloodline and therefore he is the dominant party?"

It had been a surprise for him to learn the Marauder's Map now referred to Remus as Potter-Black, despite the fact that he'd been convinced Sirius would take on Remus' name as he hated his surname. But both men had just shrugged, not really caring as they thought it was fitting all three of them would have the same last name.

"Sort of yes. Not only is his bloodline much older and therefore the Black Vault much better protected, Sirius will also always remain Lord Black. No matter how much he hates the name."

"Why wouldn't he just be able to take on Remus' name and let the entire Black family fade?"

"Because the House of Black is the oldest House left in the history of our kind. Their power is tremendous and the other pure-bloods have all married into the Black family, giving them supreme power over them."

"Sirius told me that all the pure-bloods are interrelated as are half of the half-bloods. But I don't see what that has to do with him having to keep on the Black name."

"Because the Houses will never accept Remus as their ultimate Head of House. He's not a pure-blood and many of the darker families don't even consider him a half-blood since he's a werewolf. If Sirius were to denounce the Black family he might actually unleash war."

"Why?" confused Harry stared as Andromeda sighed.

"You grew up with Muggles so I'll try to explain it to you as Ted explained it to our daughter once.
The purebloods would be Dukes and Lords, considered the elite in society. Much higher ranked than the half-bloods, the normal people."

"Like how most pure-bloods see Muggles and Muggleborn as nothing more than slaves?"

"Exactly. In the thirties there were twenty-eight families left that were considered pure-blood. Of those twenty-eight, only twelve truly pure-blood families are left today. Of those, six are considered dark."

"That's half of them," Harry noted alarmed.

"And all of them have married into the Black family. So In Muggle terms, the House of Black is royalty and Sirius is seen as the King. Most of the current Lords might not like him, but politically and magically he is by far the most powerful player in the field. His influence reaches far and wide, so the other houses answer to him."

"A King?" incredulous Harry stared at her. He'd known the House of Black had been very powerful, but he'd never expected that powerful.

"Yes. When You-Know-Who first came into play, the Black family was drawn to his promise of power and supremacy, to his promise of lesser beings being put in their place. They knew he was the last descendant of the Gaunt family, one of the few families older than them. With them supporting him, many of the other families followed and the Dark Lord rose to power."

She leaned against the wall. "When you defeated him the Houses fell into chaos as the House of Black was left crippled. Lucius Malfoy saw his opportunity and bribed enough of the lower families so that he could rise into power and influence."

Smiling she turned to him. "He succeeded in getting in with the right people, but then Sirius came back into play."

"What does Sirius have to do with Malfoy's attempt to rule?"

"Everyone learned he had never followed You-Know-Who, attracting the light families to him. But at the same time he denounced Dumbledore's leadership, attracting the dark families, too."

Seeing his confusion she tried to explain it better.

"To many of the remaining Houses Sirius is a beacon. He is not following anyone but forging a new path. It is a path that many heirs of the current families are very interested in."

"A path he laid out clearly for all to see when he and Remus took out Voldemort and all the Death Eaters were killed in the resulting shock-wave, many of whom were Pure-bloods. But at the same time he took down Dumbledore, and the shock wave resulting from that affected the families even further."

"Why? Because Dumbledore was considered a hero?"

"No, because Sirius revealed he will not bow down to anyone, no matter who they are and has begun to change many things. Most of which the dark families do not like, but they are smart enough not to provoke him into taking action, knowing he does not walk the same path as his ancestors and will not be swayed from what he believes in."

"So the families follow him because as Lord Black he is a recognised and powerful player. And if he were to renounce the House of Black, it would cause other Houses to try and rise to power. So
basically Sirius is the one to keep them from being divided again?"

"Exactly."

"Will the dark families give Sirius trouble now that he's basically married to Remus?"

"It's strange, the families don't care about skin colour or sexual orientation, but they are completely bigoted to Muggles and magical creatures. They won't be happy that Sirius bound himself to a werewolf, but it is a clear message to them that they won't be able to miss."

"That this Lord Black is for equality for all?"

"Yes, he adopted a half-blood, is friendly with Muggleborns and has now married a werewolf. I think they've realised that Sirius is going to change the workings of the Magical world and they have no other choice than to let him."

"But won't they try to assassinate him?" Harry asked worriedly.

"Some might have tried if Sirius wasn't so strong magically. You forgot that everyone knows he stormed into Hogwarts and single-handedly subdued over two hundred wizards for over an hour, while simultaneously keeping Ministry officials locked outside. That is not an easy feat. Even if the Prophet only reported half of it, the children of those families will have told their families all about it."

"So they are too frightened to try anything?"

"Not exactly. They saw a man who took action when no one else did. Their children were under Umbridge's control, too, and who knows how many students she hurt. He has grudgingly earned their respect for going against all odds to change things. But it are the children who keep anyone from attempting anything."

"The children?" confused Harry looked at her.

"Have you not noticed that almost every student is very fond of him? They see first-hand the changes he's made to the Wizarding World and they appreciate it."

She looked back out over the courtyard. "If you had told me last year that Gryffindors and Slytherins would be friends I'd have laughed in your face. But here the heirs of the Houses of Greengrass and Nott are calmly chatting with a Muggleborn and not only are they all laughing, no one even cares."

"It's pretty common now," Harry followed her gaze to see Daphne, Theodore and Justin chatting with each other as they revised together near the Lake.

"You have no idea how unbelievable it truly is for people of my generation. But those children, who have grown up prejudiced, are changing. And with them, so is the world as they begin to see Muggleborns and others are more than lesser beings. They will not accept their parents to act against Sirius, seeing how much good he is doing."

Suddenly Andromeda laughed. "I wish I could have seen Lucius' face when he'd have realised his plans would never work."

"What plans?" surprised by the sudden subject change Harry turned back to look at her.

"He was banking on the knowledge that Draco would become the new Lord Black on his
seventeenth birthday. It would mean supreme power to his family and it was what he had worked for so hard.

"But even if he'd been alive until Malfoy's seventeenth birthday, Sirius would still be alive so that wouldn't work, would it?"

"Narcissa revealed under Veritaserum that Lucius had planned an assassination attack on Sirius when the time would be right. He had most of the Ministry officials in his pocket and plenty of Aurors so it wouldn't have been difficult. Wouldn't have been the first time someone tried to assassinate Sirius while he was imprisoned after all."

"And once Sirius was dead the new Lord Black would be revealed on his seventeenth birthday."

"And it would be revealed that Sirius named you his heir long before his imprisonment. It would have been hilarious to see his face when he realised Sirius had long since taken him out of play."

Chuckling at her glee Harry pulled himself up onto the wall, surprised when she reached out to touch his arm.

"I never did say thank you, you know?"

"For what?"

"Saving him and keeping his whereabouts a secret. But most of all for believing him when no one would have."

"It took me a while before I did," Harry confessed.

It still bothered him how close it had been, how much he had wanted to kill the assumed murderer of his parents. If Remus hadn't had the timing he had Harry might have done something he would have regretted for the rest of his life. And Sirius' overwhelming guilt and incapability to communicate straightforward hadn't really helped him explain anything to quell Harry's anger.

"If anything, you should thank Remus. I don't know what would have happened if he hadn't showed up when he did."

"It is not something I like to think about," she smiled as she stepped back again. "I've gotten my cousin back and for that I cannot thank you enough."

Nodding Harry smiled, knowing it would be no use to argue. Together they looked out at the Giant Squid as some of the students fed him until footsteps approached their area.

"Meeting done?" Andromeda asked in greeting as Sirius stepped outside.

"Yeah, Gornuk wanted to inform me that they've finally worked through the backlog and that Gringotts wants to know what my wishes were."

"Wishes for what?" Harry asked as Sirius leaned against the wall beside him.

"The Vaults of the deceased Death Eaters who have no relatives left. As basically all of them married into the Black family their worldly possessions are now mine."

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Sell everything and donate the whole bunch to different good causes," Sirius answered her with a shrug.
"What will happen to those who do have relatives left? Surely they will be punished for their crimes?" Andromeda asked.

"They will be forced to pay a large compensation to the families that are known to have been tormented by their family member. If the relatives had nothing to do with Voldemort nothing more will happen."

"And if they do?" Harry asked as he pulled Sirius closer towards him so he could take his hand.

"Then the Ministry will take charge and every action taken by that family will be put under close scrutiny before a suitable punishment will be given."

Nodding Harry smiled as his fingers caught on the simple silver band on his godfather's ring finger and as he looked down at it he suddenly remembered the original reason Andromeda had thought the Goblin had been there.

"Did you arrange things for your Vaults to be combined?"

"That was done automatically the moment Remus accepted my surname. But enough about business, did Andy tell you you've done well on Potions?"

"Yeah, you really think so?"

"I didn't see you do anything wrong. And you didn't get distracted when Millicent Bulstrode melted her cauldron," his voice praised and Harry grinned.

"Did Neville do well too?"

"He made a small mistake by first adding the Moondew before he added the Betony, but he compensated by adding less Belladonna and more Nettle. It was a smart move that the examiners will appreciate," Sirius smiled.

"Because they don't just score you for your actions, but also how you fix your own mistakes, right?"

"Yes. They like seeing your efficiency and if you can rectify your own mistake by keeping your head together," Andromeda confirmed.

"Hannah rather failed at that last week," Harry mused.

"I'd say the examiners failed horrible then, too, it was ridiculous," snorting Sirius squeezed his hand and Harry grinned as he remembered the disaster that had been prevented.

During the practical exam of Transfiguration Hannah had completely lost her head and had managed to multiply her ferret into a flock of flamingos. It had been funny to see the examiners halt the examination so they could chase after the birds.

It had been difficult to keep his expression neutral as Sirius took charge after staring at the examiners in disbelief for several seconds. A simple Freezing charm had halted every bird in the room and under the stares of everyone in the room he had Vanished the animals, all the while muttering about incompetent idiots.

Having taken the moment of shocked silence to transfigure the desk beside Hannah into a new ferret, he had patted her arm and told her to just continue even if the examiners forgot they were wizards.
It had done the trick of calming her down and the rest of the exam had passed quietly as she'd been much more composed.

He looked up when Sirius stretched. "I don't know about you two, but I'd like to get something to eat. It's been a long day."

"Sounds like a plan. Maybe you can help me revise for Care after dinner?"

"I need to take care of some things first so how about I'll pick you up from Gryffindor Tower around seven?"

"Okay."

Together they made their way towards the Great Hall, splitting up as Harry made his way to the Gryffindor table and Sirius and Andromeda moving on to the Staff Table.

He took a seat beside Luna and Dean, listening as the two were laughing about a creature Luna was going to track down with her father during the holidays.

Once they had eaten he and Neville made their way to the library to return a book Neville had borrowed before making their way towards Gryffindor Tower.

Harry was informing Neville of what Sirius had told him about his exam when he spotted Malfoy approaching from the other side.

The Slytherin had left him alone since Sirius had arrived, terrified of the man's temper so Harry didn't expect any trouble now and kept up his conversation with Neville.

"Well, look who it is, Potter without his precious mutt at his side," Malfoy sneered at them. "Oh wait, he's replaced him with a brainless puppet."

"Don't you ever come up with anything new?" Neville snorted, not backing down as Malfoy glared at him.

"I've always been told Dumbledore was the worst thing to ever happen to this place, but I guess Black beats that," Malfoy sneered, ignoring Neville.

"He is the worst thing to have ever happened to your precious Death Eater club, yeah," Harry readily agreed.

"He and that filthy half-breed of his will get what they deserve Potter, you wait and see."

Harry raised an eyebrow. "Even if you weren't such a coward and full of bull then that still wouldn't worry me."

"Think you are so great now, you just wait," he threatened. "You won't be able to hide behind that blood traitor forever, Potter."

"That blood traitor happens to be the Deputy so you might want to show some respect to him," Harry shot back.

"Not a chance Potter, you must be happy though," a malevolent grin slid over the pale face. "Finally having a mummy again who can wipe your drool away or wait that would be the other way for you wouldn't it be, Longbottom."

"My mother can eat just fine on her own, perhaps you are mixing her up with your mother? Not
that I can see how you could since while my mother is beautiful, yours looks like she fell into dung," unimpressed by Malfoy's taunt Neville calmly answered him.

"Don't you dare insult my mother, Longbottom,"

"You should expect it if you do the same," Harry turned to Neville. "Come on Neville, we're wasting our breath on that baboon."

Malfoy's face twisted in anger at Harry's dismissal and even as the Slytherin was still casting a spell Harry already raised a shield.

But the spell shot straight through his shield like it wasn't even there, and Harry could only widen his eyes as an unfamiliar white light shot straight at him, unable to get away in time.

But suddenly Sirius was there and blood splattered everywhere, covering Harry's robes as he was shoved to the side before the spell could hit him.
Chapter 39

The force behind the shove was hard enough that Harry painlessly hit the wall, but he ignored the pain flaring in his back, looking up just in time to see Malfoy slam into the opposite wall.

Unsure of what had just happened Harry sought his godfather, gasping as he found him.

Sirius' right arm looked like it had been mangled by knives, blood pouring out of several deep gashes, but he was ignoring it in favour for running his wand over the much deeper wounds in his thigh, where the brunt of the attack must have hit him.

"Sirius!" scrambling to his feet, panic threatened to overwhelm him at the sight of the blood splattering on the ground, Sirius' blood.

Suddenly realising he had to stop the bleeding he hurried to his godfather's side while struggling out of his outer robe so that he could hold it against the bleeding gashes.

As he got close enough Sirius' eyes shifted to him, though he didn't stop muttering under his breath and tracking his wand over the wounds in his thigh.

Reading the question in those warm grey eyes he loved so much he nodded while pressing his robe to the gaping wound in his godfather's shoulder, "I'm fine."

Accepting the answer with a nod of his own Sirius shifted his wand to his side, which Harry only now realised was soaked with blood that couldn't have come from the wound in his thigh.

"I'm going to need your help. Track your wands over the wounds in my shoulder and arm while repeating Vulnera Sanentur as you track each wound."

Not wasting time his godfather clearly didn't have, Harry hurried to follow his instructions, dropping the robe to the ground as he realised it was doing nothing to stem the bleeding.

Following his godfather's example as the man cast the same spell again he watched as the blood flow began to ease up wherever his wand travelled.

He only became aware of Neville working at his side when the boy was there to help catch Sirius as he stumbled and almost slipped on his own blood, steadying him without ever stopping his muttering as he worked on Sirius' arm.

The effects of their efforts were not as quick as those of Sirius, but between them they managed to slow the bleeding to a stop before Sirius staggered to lean against the wall, sliding down so that he was sitting against it before he began to repeat the same spell and track his wand over the wounds on his thigh again.

Wordlessly following his example they worked together to give the other wounds the same treatment, amazed when the blood and torn flesh disappeared to only leave gaping wounds.

Harry wasn't sure what more was supposed to happen when Sirius started over again, but automatically they both began to repeat it a third time, even as Sirius' arm slid down to come to a rest across his stomach.

Harry kept his eyes firmly on what he was doing, not daring to look up to his godfather in case he'd give in to the panic he was still forcing down, though they both gasped as the skin began to knit
back together under their wands before their eyes.

"This might prevent scarring," a hand appeared beside Harry and startled he saw Luna kneel down beside him, either not caring or noticing the blood that immediately began to seep into her robes.

She was holding a folded piece of cloth and carefully dabbed the wounds in Sirius' side and thigh with it, the visible marks beginning to fade away so Harry accepted the bottle of Dittany she was holding out with her free hand, accepting the piece Neville ripped from his own robe before soaking it in the substance and applying it to the rest of the wounds.

He became aware of someone leaning over Luna to reach Sirius, but as he identified the person as one of the twins he ignored his presence, refocusing on his task even as the twin rooted around in his pocket and pulled something out.

"He needs Blood Replenishing Potions," Neville muttered.

"Just gave him one."

Harry finally looked up, letting Luna and Neville finish as he saw George was making Sirius lean against him, eyes closed.

"Is he..."

"I'm still here," Sirius commented softly, offering him a tired smile as he shifted to lean against the wall instead of against George so heavily.

"Mostly out of it though," George commented. "The two of you saved his life."

"He saved mine. I was the target but Sirius pushed me aside," reaching out to caress Sirius' cheek he noticed his hand was covered with blood.

"He saved both of our lives," Neville corrected as he let the torn piece of robe fall to the soaked ground. "He protected you with his body while blocking the rest of the spell from reaching me."

Accepting that answer Harry tried to wipe his hand off on his robe only to realise he was completely soaked in Sirius' blood.

Blood that should never have been leaving the man's body, especially not that rapidly and suddenly the realisation of exactly what had happened came crashing down on him.

Malfoy had tried to kill him but Sirius had pushed him aside, almost dying instead.

Choking back a sob he couldn't stop the tears from falling as he realised he could have lost him.

Through his tears he felt Sirius' cold hand slip over his and blindly he reached for his godfather, burying his face in the man's left shoulder and locking his fingers in his torn sweater.

"I'll be fine, pup," Sirius whispered in his ear, pressing a kiss at his temple as arms came up to embrace him. "Did you get hurt?"

Not willing to move out of his embrace yet Harry only shook his head, shifting to sit at his right side after a few more moments. Like he could protect it from further injury if he shielded it with his own body.

"Are you all right, too?"
"Liar, come here," Sirius ordered as Neville nodded and Harry couldn't help but smile faintly.

Hesitating for a moment Neville leaned forward to embrace him so that Sirius didn't have to move to pull him into an one-armed hug.

"Thank you."

"I should say the same to you," Sirius smiled as Neville pulled back and leaned against the wall beside him, not moving away as he was clearly shaken by what had happened, too.

Resting his head back against the wall Sirius closed his eyes. "You sent Fred to warn Remus?"

"Yeah, and after Neville's Patronus warned us of what happened, he has also set up a shield to keep everyone else away from here and I've given Ginny the Map so that she could find Andromeda and raid her Potions stock for more Blood Replenishing Potions. She'll alert Madam Pomfrey."

Shifting so that he was sitting on the ground at Sirius' left leg George stretched, effectively blocking anyone from reaching him easily.

"Good job," taking a deep breath Sirius grimaced. "Hey Luna?"

"On it, wouldn't want Professor Lupin to walk into this if he doesn't have to, besides, I think we'd all feel better if it was gone."

Shifting slightly so that he could see what Luna meant Harry watched thankfully as she raised her wand to Vanish the blood surrounding them.

"What on earth happened here?!" McGonagall's alarmed voice reached them before she could clear the Hallway.

"An attempted murder on two heirs," Sirius answered without opening his eyes.

"An...is...stupid question, why are you all on the ground?"

"Because that's his," Luna commented calmly, indicating to the blood splattered around, Vanishing it just before Remus came around the corner with Fred.

Remus didn't pause at the lingering smell and Harry realised his ring must have already warned him it was bad.

Shifting aside so that Remus had full access to Sirius, the man knelt down beside him and scanned his body, even as Sirius opened his eyes and smiled. "Hey."

"Sectumsempra?" the anger in Remus' voice was unmistakable as he inspected every spot where Harry knew wounds had been.

For a moment he wondered how Remus knew exactly where Sirius had been hurt, but then as Remus removed his over-robe and slipped it around the younger Marauder he realised the clothes were still torn.

"Yeah. Harry and Neville helped me perform the counter-curse."

"From the angle of your injuries I take it you weren't the target?"

"Harry and Neville were."
"Who?"
"Malfoy."

Remus growled as he turned his attention to Harry and Neville. "Are you both all right?"
"Yeah."

"What did you do to Malfoy?"

"I transfigured him. Should be over there by the wall," they all turned to where Sirius indicated and Harry snorted as he realised what it was.

"Did you truly transfigure him into a pile of dung?" McGonagall asked as she took a step into that direction before seemingly thinking better of it and remaining where she was, her eyes narrowing. "Is that..."

"It was the first thing on my mind when I saw him," Sirius leaned against Remus. "I rebound what I could back to him and then transfigured him."

Harry followed McGonagall's gaze to the watery puddle of dung and it was only then that he realised that the watery substance was actually blood and the thing he'd first taken as cloth was actually most of a mangled arm.

"Can it be grown back?" Neville asked, pale as a sheet.

"No, something that's been cut off by Dark Magic can never be re-grown," Remus answered.

"He got off lucky," George frowned.

"More importantly than that thing, can you walk?" Remus asked.

"Experience taught me I need a bit more blood in my body before I attempt that on my own," sighing Sirius leaned forward so that Remus could lift him to his feet more easily, holding him as he tried his balance.

"Yeah?" at Sirius' nod Remus slipped an arm around his waist so that he could balance him.

"I will be alerting the Aurors and meet you in the hospital wing for your statements. I assume that the du-...Malfoy will remain in his current form until they are here?"

"His current form is slowing the blood loss down to a slow dribble. Let them change him back and heal his wounds while they arrest him. He's in no danger when left like this for a while and Andy knows the counter-curse as well," Sirius immediately answered.

"Andromeda will murder him if she's let anywhere near him," McGonagall said.

"Tonks knows it as well, made sure of that after Voldemort returned."

"I'll make sure that she's alerted. Any other injuries I should warn them of?"

"He probably has some bruises from hitting the wall and I'm fairly positive he broke a couple of bones in the process," Sirius confessed. "I tried to be careful when pushing Harry aside, didn't have that same urge with him."

"Nothing that cannot be treated in a holding cell. I'll have the Aurors pick him up here and then
they can change him back at the Ministry,” McGonagall decided, hurrying away.

Sirius hummed as he focused on staying on his feet, no matter how wobbly.

"Are you dizzy?” Remus asked, not moving an inch as they could all clearly see the younger Marauder was still very unbalanced.

"Yeah,” Sirius admitted sluggishly, leaning his forehead against Remus’ shoulder and closing his eyes.

"Are you going to be a pain in the butt and fight me, or are you going to let me help you?”

"Isn't that supposed to be my line?” a faint smile appeared on Sirius’ lips, but he made no attempt to move and Remus shifted his hold so that he could better keep him upright.

"Fred, could you grab another Blood Replenishing Potion?”

"I gave him one less than ten minutes ago,” George warned.

"He's going to pass out, isn't he?” Harry asked worriedly as he watched his godfather's sluggish movements.

"He might, I'd like to get one into him ahead of time just to be sure he'd just be passing out and his heart isn't stopping due to the lack of blood, thanks,” accepting the potion he helped Sirius drink it, aware his arms didn't seem to have the strength to come up on their own that high.

"My heart's not going to stop,” Sirius mumbled once he'd swallowed.

"We'll make sure of that, Siri,” Remus pressed a kiss to his temple before he slightly bent to carefully lift him up into his arms, blinking at the lack of protest he peered down at his face.

"He's still conscious,” Neville informed him and Remus nodded.

"I know, but..."

"Shhhh, I'm less dizzy now that I'm vertical,” all the teens chuckled at Sirius' quiet interruption and Remus smiled, moving towards the hospital wing.

"How'd you know he was still conscious?” Neville asked curiously.

"Because my ring would have informed me if he wasn't,” Remus revealed.

"How does it inform you?”

"The ring becomes very cold if one of us loses consciousness but heats up when we're in serious trouble. It's how I knew to get here as quick as possible.”

"You were indeed already halfway here when I found you,” Fred nodded. "But how did you know where to go?”

"It automatically alerts us to the other's exact location,” Sirius provided, partially lifting his hand so that he could draw a Rune and a small map appeared over his palm, showing them dots with their names and where they were.

"That's a miniature Marauder's Map!” George exclaimed.
"Yeah, I've added the most regular areas we are likely to visit."

"But if we're at a location we've not been before it will just give us a direction based on our
surroundings," Remus added.

"That's really handy, although, if the threat is dealt with quickly, how will the other know it's
safe?" Neville asked.

"We can also send messages through the ring that I can activate with a certain Rune. It'll appear the
same way as the map."

"Amazing. And I know there's a charm on it so that outside the two of you, only Harry can remove
the rings and there is a shield woven into it that prevents your hand from being chopped off,"
George nodded.

"That's quite a bit of advanced magic for a wedding ring, but I have to admit it is a very good
precaution with your track records," Neville smiled as Sirius deactivated the small map on his
palm, closing his eyes again.

"Yeah, it also protects me from any type of potions, warning me if a drink is more than just the
liquid it should be. Most of the time my nose will warn me, but in case it doesn't, the ring will do it
for me," Remus stopped long enough for Fred and Neville to push open the hospital wing doors
before he strode in.

"There you are, the last bed is ready," Madam Pomfrey greeted them and Ginny peeked out from
behind her, worry written all over her face.

"The wounds have all been taken care of and he's had two Blood Replenishing Potions so far but
he's still dizzy," Remus summed up as he lowered Sirius on the bed, Harry and Luna stuffed several
pillows behind him so that he could sit up instead of lying down.

"What kind of curses hit him?" Madam Pomfrey waved her wand over his body, sliding Remus'
robe aside to examine the torn clothes and reddish skin.

"Sectumsempra," Sirius winced as she probed his shoulder.

"It went through my shield like it wasn't even there," Harry rubbed his arms as he remembered the
spell not even being slowed down.

"It's impossible to shield against that particular curse. Your best chance is to deflect it with another
spell so remind me to teach you all how in case you come across it again, knowing your rotten
luck..." Sirius' words trailed off in a gasp as Madam Pomfrey touched his side.

"Why have I never heard of Sectumsempra before?" Neville tried to distract him from what the
nurse was doing.

"Because it is a spell the Blacks invented in the late Middle Ages. I can only assume Snape taught
it to him for some reason."

"Why would the git have known a spell your relatives invented?"

"Because he liked to pretend he invented the curse. Like he ever had the imagination to actually be
original," Sirius snorted. "Regulus admitted he taught it to him. Although he didn't know the actual
workings of it properly and taught the git a butchered version."
"That was a mangled curse? What did the original do then?" horrified George stared at him.

"The original automatically aims for the major arteries, making you bleed out in moments. There is also another more controlled version that allows control on how deep a cut is made into the target's skin."

"How did Regulus know that spell?" Harry asked sharply, suddenly seeing a canvas of scars in his mind.

"He came across it a few times," Sirius answered vaguely and Harry took a deep breath to remain calm as his suspicions were basically confirmed.

"It's a good thing I learned the counter-curse or I wouldn't have been able to save James and Remus' lives when the git used the spell on them."

"He attacked Dad and Remus with it?" it was Harry's turn to look horrified.

"In our sixth year. He used it a lot to target people from behind so they couldn't properly identify him. He liked to watch them suffer and choke on their own blood, but healed them before they'd bleed out," Remus growled at the memory.

"And no teacher ever learned the truth?" upset Neville looked disgusted while Harry clenched his fists.

"While Dumbledore was in charge? Not a chance he'd let anyone incriminate his perfect little future Death Eater pet," Harry growled.

"Dumbledore usually choose Snape's side when it was our word against his," Remus admitted. "But Snape was also very sneaky and most students couldn't testify as they had no idea who attacked them."

"But you knew," it was more a statement than a question but Sirius still responded to Fred's words.

"Not until the moment he and Regulus used it on my family and left them out in the snow to die. Never used it against a student again once I was done with them."

"Let me guess, in the end it was you who was punished, not Snape and Regulus," bitterly Harry shook his head in disbelief as Sirius didn't answer, but Remus nodded grimly.

"He was often unfairly punished for actions from Snape or other Slytherins. Though it's been years since I've seen this horrid spell," Madam Pomfrey shook her head in disbelief.

"Yeah, imagine my shock when a sixteen year old was casting it today," Sirius grumbled.

"A sixteen...who?!" Madam Pomfrey exclaimed.

"Draco Malfoy."

"Will I be seeing him in here?"

"I doubt it as the Aurors will take him into holding, but if for some reason they do bring him here then I want you to take the obligated precautions while dealing with an attempted assassin."

"Assassin...you mean..." Ginny's eyes widened even as Madam Pomfrey nodded.

"He knew exactly what that spell did as he aimed for their major arteries. It was an assassination
attempt on the heirs of the Houses of Black, Potter and Longbottom and I will treat it as such, so take the proper course of action when he comes in."

"That would mean lifelong in Azkaban," Neville whistled even as Ginny gasped.

"I'm aware."

"He's brought it on himself."

Surprised Ginny turned to Neville.

"How can you say something that harsh? I know he's a git but lifelong in Azkaban..."

"He's old enough to knowingly attempt to commit double murder so he's old enough to deal with the consequences for that crime," Luna agreed with Neville.

"That counter-curse that you used, what was it?" George ignored his sister's shock, smiling wryly as Madam Pomfrey handed Sirius several potions to drink.

"Vulnera Sanentur. It can't re-grow torn off limbs, but it is capable of stopping the bleeding and knitting the wounds back together," Remus answered as Sirius pulled a disgusted face that amused them all.

"I need to examine that shoulder and arm more properly and I'm going to have to check your thigh and side too," Luna, Neville and Ginny turned around as Remus helped Sirius slip his shirt off, not bothering to pull forth a privacy screen, but Fred and George both paused as they caught a glimpse of his blood caked torso.

"How..." George asked confused, making Sirius look up at him questioningly, but Harry, realising their confusion shook his head and both twins turned their backs on them.

Sirius turned the same look to Harry but Remus gave a small shake of his head this time and Sirius leaned forward without complaint as Madam Pomfrey examined him more properly, healing some lingering damage before handing him a hospital gown to dress in.

Remus quickly Vanished the blood on his trousers and repaired the rips in the fabric before helping him dress again.

"You guys can turn around again," Madam Pomfrey alerted the others and they turned back as Sirius leaned back against the pillows.

"I'm sorry," he sighed as he looked at them and they all looked down, surprised to see just how bloodied almost everyone was.

"I think I'll just toss these robes in the trash can," George shuddered.

"Let me Vanish the blood so that you don't have to cross the hallways in hospital gowns," everyone nodded relieved as Remus Vanished the blood from their clothes and the wet and stiff fabric became soft again.

"I'm still going to toss these in the trash later," Fred murmured, making Sirius smile.

"I'll get all of you new robes to make up for the loss of these."

"Does he need to stay overnight?" Harry asked Madam Pomfrey as they pulled the next bed closer so they could all sit comfortable as no one was intent on leaving any time soon.
"I want him to stay here until the Aurors have spoken to you all, but if all goes well then you can take him back to his chambers for the night."

"It might take a while for the Aurors to arrive though," Remus mused. "Especially in the evening. And you boys are still in the middle of your exams."

"If you think we are leaving while he's still in here then you are wrong," Neville told him and Remus smiled.

"I wouldn't even suggest it. But it might be wise to spend some time revising while we wait for the Aurors."

"We'll join you," Fred and George said in unison before George continued. "Our exams begin Monday so it'll be revising for us too. What subject?"

"Care," Neville answered.

"I have the books in my bag as I'd counted on coming to Marauder Headquarters tonight," Harry pulled his bag out of his pocket and un-shrunk it, pulling out his book and notes.

"I have some old exams that Sirius included, we could look them over," he suggested.

"Why would you look at old exams?" Ginny asked confused.

"So that you can get a feel of how questions are portrayed and you won't lose time trying to understand the wording," Sirius explained.

"Some exams are written by older wizards and their choice of wording is very old-fashioned and confuses the younger generations," Remus added.

"Then why don't they rewrite the exam in more modern wording?" Ginny asked.

"The board has agreed that the exams need to be modernized, but it takes time to properly rewrite all the O.W.L. and N.E.W.T exams so they won't manage that before next year."

"So everyone's been given the advice to look at some old exams to get used to the way questions are asked," Harry concluded his godfather's words, smiling as the man ruffled his hair and Remus rose to his feet as Sirius loosely wrapped an arm around Harry's waist, pulling him close.

"I'll get us some hot chocolate."

"Even if the exams change next year, it will still be good practice for us to look at them, too," Luna mused, shifting so that she was sitting cross-legged between George and Harry on Sirius' left while the others sat on the opposite bed, automatically leaving Sirius' right side for Remus to sit at.

It didn't take long for him to return with drinks and a couple of sandwiches for them to snack on, pressing one with red meat into Sirius' free hand to help his blood to begin replenishing itself further.

As they settled in for the wait even Madam Pomfrey joined them and the three took turns to randomly quiz the teenagers while they revised the old exams together, waiting for McGonagall to arrive with the Aurors.
Harry sat down at the Gryffindor table besides Luna and Daphne at dinnertime, suppressing a yawn and smiling as the dirty-blond placed a filled plate with all his favourites before him.

"Sirius?"

"He asked if I'd be so kind to ensure you would eat well," she nodded.

"Thanks."

"Any time," they shared a smile before she placed a second plate before a laughing Neville, who thanked her before tucking in.

"Isn't he going a little overboard with his guardian duties?" Ron commented.

"Why? Because he's trying to ensure his charges eat well?" Katie snorted.

"Can't they do that for themselves?"

"I have no doubt they can, but I think it is rather endearing he's looking after them when he knows they'll be distracted from taking care of themselves," shrugging Katie turned to Harry. "The trial began at three didn't it?"

"Yeah. If Remus' calculations were correct then I expect them back just after dinner."

"I wonder if he'll indeed get a life sentence or if they'll take into account that he's only sixteen," Hermione wondered.

"In his case his age won't help him," Angelina said. "He's old enough to know the consequences of his actions."

"In the Muggle world juveniles are placed in a special prison for under-aged criminals. But the Wizarding world only has Azkaban, doesn't it?" Hermione asked.

"Yeah, and the crime committed determines where you're locked up, not your age. Attempted murder would be a level three prisoner."

"Would be?" Dean asked Katie.

"Malfoy tried to kill two heirs of old Pure-Blood families, that will make his sentence harder. It's like when a criminal would attack the royal family in the Muggle world."

"The sentence would be harder because they targeted royals," Dean nodded in understanding. "But won't Professor Sirius' injuries be taken into account as well? Because although the man is perfectly fine now, I heard he did get hurt pretty badly."

"Yeah, but he wasn't the target and Malfoy didn't even know he was nearby or he would never have dared to try and attack them the way he did. So although they will likely take it with them in their consideration of his punishment, he wouldn't be tried for it," Katie explained. "Just for the attack on two other students, two heirs of basically royal descent."

"But the Wizarding world doesn't have royals," Ron frowned.
"Not officially. But the influence of the old Pure-Blood families is bigger than that of others," Hermione explained.

"I'm from an old Pure-Blood family, too," grumbling Ron added some more meat onto his plate.

"Yeah, but your family doesn't have much influence, though I don't really know why not," Angelina admitted.

"It's because the Weasleys rarely mingled themselves with the other houses at gatherings and balls. They also didn't care about the Wizengamot and lost their seat in a bet early in the eighteenth century, that made them lose all respect from the other houses as it unbalanced the standings," Harry explained.

"How do you know that?" Ginny looked at him surprised.

"It's part of my training as heir. I am required to know the standings of the other houses, their origins and the workings of the Wizarding world in general."

"That sounds really boring," snorted Ron.

"It's actually rather fascinating. Sirius makes the lessons interesting and challenging. He sometimes even shows me relevant memories of the lessons my Grandfather gave my Dad."

"Sirius was present during your dad's Heir lessons?" Neville wasn't the only one looking shocked.

"Yeah, why do you all seem so surprised by that?"

"Because heirs learn all the family secrets during those trainings too, no one, not even the matriarch is present during those lessons," Daphne whispered. "If Professor Sirius was present for those..."

"He was officially considered an heir," Neville finished for her, looking baffled.

"Dad blood adopted him when they were fifteen," he didn't understand why they were so surprised.

"There's a difference between being adopted into a family and accepted as an heir. Anyone can be adopted into a family by a member, doesn't mean it's accepted," Luna offered.

"It was done with my grandparent's blessing."

"Your...they gave their blessing or did they help with the ritual?" Neville asked sharply.

"What do you mean?" confused Harry looked at him.

"Did they offer blood during the ritual?"

"No, my Grandfather just insisted on drinking from the goblet before Dad and Sirius did and my grandmother after them...what?" blinking at the collective gasp from Neville and Daphne he stared at them.

"They made him an official heir," Daphne whispered and Neville could only nod in shock.

"What are you two talking about?"

But it was Hermione whose eyes suddenly widened. "He was officially in line?"
"Yeah. Your grandfather drank from the goblet before them, he probably bit his lip and added his blood to theirs to make him officially an heir to the Potter line," Neville mused.

"Wasn't that done automatically when he was blood-adopted?" Harry asked confused.

"No. A heir is the first-born son of the Lord, any other children are just sons, they are not next in line unless the Lord accepts them as official heirs," Daphne explained.

"So if anything happened to my Dad..."

"Professor Sirius would become the next Lord Potter. Well, until you were born, then he became third in line," Daphne nodded.

Neville's eyes widened as he realised something.

"That must be the main reason why Dumbledore wanted him out of the way so badly. He knew he'd lose all power and standing he had if Sirius became Regent Lord Potter, which he would have because you were under-age when your father died, automatically passing Lordship to him until you'd become seventeen."

"Because the Professor wouldn't idly stand by and watch the Wizarding world become the way it did. He'd have fought the corruption tooth and nail and with the power of the Houses of Black and Potter behind him he'd have had both the power and influence needed to change everything," Katie added.

"But how would Dumbledore know Sirius had become an official heir if no one else did?" Harry asked, wondering if Sirius knew about this.

They all looked at each other lost for a moment.

"Because the Chief Warlock is automatically alerted if there are changes in Lordships, so they can confirm the changes in the next session. It is how he must have known your dad was killed," Luna softly provided the answer.

"And since school was in session he must have been able to tell in moments that you were still registered as a future student and thus alive, setting his plan in motion," Neville swallowed thickly.

"Does the Professor himself know he's the current Regent Lord Potter?" Lavender suddenly asked and they all looked at her."I mean, if the Lordship passed on to him until Harry becomes of age, he'd be the Regent right now...right?"

They all turned to Harry who could only shrug even though he was fairly sure Sirius had absolutely no idea. His godfather had never given any indication he was more than a mere proxy. And he had probably never even thought there was a reason behind his grandfather's insistence of being the first to drink in that ritual other than wanting to bless their action as the man hated rituals and only knew what he needed to know.

"Well, either way your heritage is in good hands until you reach adulthood. I can't think of a better person to guard all your families' secrets and fortune," Neville smiled.

"Secrets?"

"As Regent the family secrets would be passed to him, the knowledge automatically put into his mind," Daphne explained and Harry gasped as he suddenly understood.
That's what Dumbledore was after when he tried to break into Sirius' mind during the early interrogation sessions. Dumbledore had been after the Potter family secrets, he had no idea why, but he was suddenly absolutely sure that was what the man had been after.

"Dumbledore tried to access the Professor's mind while he was imprisoned?" Dean asked alarmed, making Harry realise he'd said it out loud.

"Yeah, he visited, checking the guards' progress while trying to break into his mind, never succeeded though."

"That bastard," Neville spat. "Professor Lupin went too easy on him when he ripped his arm off."

They all nodded grimly.

"They are back...wow..." Ginny's eyes widened and they all looked at the entrance where Sirius had just walked through the door, dressed in the plum-coloured robes the Wizengamot members always wore while court was in session.

"Seriously, is there anything that doesn't look absolutely stunning on him?" Ron complained as McGonagall left the Staff Table to make her way to Sirius as he indicated she should.

"I don't see anyone else complaining at his outfit," grinning Neville watched as the students fell mostly silent as they caught sight of him, some curious to what had happened in the trial and others almost drooling at his outfit.

For a fleeting second Sirius' eyes sought out their table, catching Harry's with a small smile, before he turned and disappeared through the door again, opening it just far enough that they were able to see Remus, Kingsley and Amelia Bones waiting outside.

"What do you reckon is going on?" Seamus asked.

"No idea," distracted Harry frowned, unsure why Kingsley and Amelia were there. As the new Minister Kingsley was rather busy and although his presence would be required during a Wizengamot session, Harry couldn't think of why he'd be at Hogwarts now.

"Do you think Malfoy is already shipped off to Azkaban?" Ginny shuddered.

"We both requested he'd be locked up elsewhere, though I'm not sure what would be a good place," Neville answered.

"Why would you have any say in that?" Ron looked at him.

"Because Sirius discussed it with us, saying that although he was the one pressing charges, we should have a say in the demanded punishment as the attack was meant for us."

"That's the same thing he said when you stopped him from killing Pettigrew," Hermione smiled and Harry nodded.

"Yeah. He's willing to put his own personal feelings aside if he knows I'd disagree with a punishment."

"Is he trying to become as much of a saint as your parents were?" Ron grumbled.

Snorting Harry turned to him, used to the jealousy in the other's tone. "My parents were a lot of things, Ron, but they weren't even close to saints and neither is Sirius."
"Everyone is always saying they were perfect and brilliant."

"Sirius told me Mum could be very short-tempered and could hold a grudge forever without listening to the full story, though she got better as she grew older. She also had the annoying habit of drumming her nails on a desk when in thoughts," he smiled as he remembered the stories Sirius had told him.

"More than once she'd kick Dad out of the bedroom if he annoyed her and she'd hex him repeatedly for leaving the toilet seat up or tossing clothes into the washing equipment without checking the labels or colours, despite the fact that she was horrible at the same chores herself."

"And Dad was so forgetful sometimes that he'd go to the shop and return with completely different items than he'd gone for. He could be arrogant and refuse to admit he's wrong when angry. Could remain angry for a very long time, too. And he had the habit of just entering Sirius' bedroom and flopping into bed beside him, chatting his ears off."

"Your dad slept in Sirius' bed?" Ginny asked surprised.

"Every time he couldn't sleep or was kicked out of the main bedroom. He refused to sleep on the couch so if Sirius was staying over he'd crawl in beside him, regardless if Remus was there, too, or not."

He laughed. "Sometimes, when Dad really wouldn't shut up, Remus ended up sleeping besides Mum or on the couch because Dad kept him from sleeping."

"Why didn't he just silence him then?" Hermione asked.

"Dad would just undo the spell again and keep going. It drove Remus insane."

"But didn't it do the same to Sirius?"

"No. Sirius was so used to it that he'd simply tune him out when he decided he'd like to get some sleep. Used him as a pillow more than once on those occasions and trapped him on the bed."

"They sound like they were quite a pair," Katie laughed. "Didn't your dad just push him aside once he wanted to get up?"

"Never. The few times he tried to do that Sirius changed into Padfoot in his sleep and effectively trapped him. When given the choice between cuddling with his sleepy and skinny brother and being trapped by a large dog it was an easy one."

They all laughed at the mental image.

"And Sirius isn't perfect either. You know how long he can hold onto his anger and his single minded determination can drive both Remus and me nuts. He demands you do your uttermost best at all you set out to do and won't accept anything less. He's often overbearingly protective and can be an insufferable self sacrificing idiot," Harry directed at Ron. "I always thought my parents were perfect, too, and it scared me, because, how do you measure up to someone who's that perfect. But Sirius taught me that people just rather like to remember the best of people who are gone and prefer to gloss over their bad traits."

"He did the same for me. I've only ever heard worshipping stories about my parents, how brilliant they were. And they are, but they aren't perfect either," Neville revealed.

"It makes them more brilliant than when they are portrayed as perfect because it makes them
human and you know they made mistakes, too," Luna smiled warmly and both boys nodded.

"May I have everyone's attention please?"

Looking up they realised McGonagall had returned and Sirius was standing before the Staff Table now, Remus and McGonagall seated.

As everyone quieted down Sirius stepped forward.

"At precisely four thirty pm today Draco Lucius Malfoy was convicted for the attempted murders on Neville Longbottom and Harry James Potter-Black. After some discussion the Wizengamot has taken into consideration their requests he'd not be sentenced to Azkaban," Sirius paused as the students shot surprised glances at each other.

"Instead he has been sent to a Muggle high security prison for life, with his magic bound, a modified tongue-tying curse to prevent him from passing on knowledge of the Wizarding World and no visitors allowed."

Murmurs broke out and Pansy leaned forward to whisper with another Slytherin Harry didn't know the name of.

"Yes Miss Parkinson, I quite agree that he'd rather die than go there, it is why I insisted," the nasty Slytherin looked alarmed that Sirius had heard her over the murmurs.

"And you and Mister Montague can both serve a detention with Mister Filch tonight," Sirius stared her coldly in the eyes. "I do not tolerate that kind of language from anyone, especially not from a sixteen year old girl."

He turned to the Great Hall at large again.

"I shall warn any of you in advance, any threat made to my family will be answered harshly regardless if it's just a threat. So consider this your warning Miss Parkinson, next time you utter a threat it will get a retaliation, that is a promise."

He paused. "Maybe I'll even get my way this time and the Wizengamot would let me transfigure you into a doormat; to be left at the entrance of a Muggle shopping mall for the rest of your life while fully aware of what and where you are."

Most students chuckled at his wishful expression and Pansy's rapidly paling face as she knew he was completely serious.

"With that I thank you for your attention, enjoy your dinner and the two of you can report to Mister Filch after dinner, since the lessons are over I believe all the cauldrons could use a good scrubbing."

Filch nodded as Sirius looked at him. "I'll ensure they clean them all."

"Without magic I might add."

More than one student whistled impressed, wondering what the two had said to receive such a harsh detention from him as they knew he didn't give out many detentions in the first place.

As Sirius took his seat beside Remus the students turned back to their food.

After dinner Harry made his way to Marauder Headquarters, Sirius and Remus having left without
Letting himself in he immediately spotted Remus in the kitchen, making tea with a towel around his neck so Harry slipped his shoes off.

"Hey."

"Hey, how did Malfoy react when he learned of his sentence?"

"Screamed in rage. His mother reacted in the usual Black way though."

"Figures," taking one of the cups from him Harry moved to the living room, placing it on the table before sitting down.

"He also has to pay a fine of two million Galleons to both you and Neville for his actions but Sirius didn't think that was important to share with all the students."

"Wouldn't that leave the Malfoy family bankrupt?" frowning Harry tried to pull forth what he knew about the finances of the Malfoy House.

"The Wizengamot decided that. Sirius stood his ground on the first punishment, it was actually his idea to send him to a Muggle prison as the Wizengamot wanted to put him into Azkaban, but although he got his way, they did agree on a heavy fine as well. There is enough left that if Narcissa is careful she can live out her life, but if she doesn't then she'll need to get a job."

"Sirius' work?"

"Yes, he doesn't like her, but said she's not to blame for her son's actions so he ensured she'd have some money left after all the fines of Gringotts and now this."

"Is Sirius asleep?" Harry asked as Remus only placed one cup on the table.

"No, though he should be and it wouldn't be unwise for you to do the same as I heard you didn't sleep much last night."

"I slept a little this morning."

Sirius had woken him from a nightmare and as he'd been unwilling to go back to sleep the man had successfully distracted him by making cookies.

It had worked to make Harry tired enough to almost fall asleep at the kitchen table, so Sirius had made him lie on the couch and had read to him until he'd fallen asleep again, only waking him when it was time for lunch and revising a little more before the last exam would begin.

"A little isn't a lot so I guess it'll be an early night for all of us," Remus mused, arriving with the third cup in which he emptied a potion.

"No argument from me there. So where is Sirius if he's not asleep and there's not a shower running?"

"In the bedroom changing," Sirius answered as he came out of the bedroom, drying his hair.

"The others thought you looked rather dashing in those official robes," Harry laughed as the man dropped the wet towel over his head, knowing how much he hated those robes.

"How did the exam go?" Sirius accepted the cup Remus handed him, grimacing as he smelled the
"All right. Not as good as it could have gone, but I think I did well enough to pass," Harry tossed the towel back over his godfather's hair as it was still dripping a little.

"Even if you don't pass I know you've done your best and that's enough for me," Sirius smiled and ruffled his hair before he finished drying his own.

Taking a sip of his drink Harry smiled as Remus ran a hand through Sirius' short messy hair to bring it back into the style it usually fell into when it was completely dry while Sirius emptied his cup.

"Sirius...there was something the others mentioned at dinner that made me think..." he waited until those warm grey eyes turned to him, aware the man had trouble focusing moments after taking a potion.

"Do you remember what you told us in the snow after Dumbledore's trial?"

"Which part?"

"Of Dumbledore trying to break into your mind."

"Yes, but I told you before, I don't know what he was after," Sirius looked at him curiously.

"I think I might know. We were talking about Pure-Bloods and heir training when I mentioned you showed me memories of Dad's. They seemed shocked you were present during those because they are private?"

"They are?" Remus looked alarmed and Harry couldn't help but chuckle. The man was usually present when Harry had his lessons so Harry hadn't thought anything about it.

"I trust you," Sirius waved him off. "It never really occurred to me that were private lessons. Both your dad and grandfather wanted me to be there so I was."

"They said they are really private and not even the matriarch could be present for them."

"It's true that your grandmother was never present during those lessons," Sirius admitted, looking a little confused and Harry realised he truly had no idea.

"Neville and Daphne said that only heirs are allowed in the room during those lessons so I reminded them that Dad had blood adopted you with my grandparent's blessing."

"What did they say to that?" Remus asked, eyes narrowing.

"They asked about the ritual, if they had just given their blessing or gave blood. So I told them Grandpa had only requested to drink from the cup first and Gran last, right?"

"Yes," Sirius frowned as Remus took a sharp breath. "What?"

"You've always hated learning rituals so I am not surprised you didn't notice. Did Uncle Charlus request it or did he insist on drinking first?"

"He insisted, wh..." Sirius trailed off as it finally dawned to his muffled mind. "You mean..."

"That he added his own blood into the potion to make it official," Harry acknowledged.
"No...he wouldn't have...I mean..." Sirius looked completely bewildered at the realisation and as he closed his eyes Harry recognised the tell-tale signs of him accessing his own memories so he and Remus both waited for his godfather to check it for himself.

"That sneaky...why?" he finally said as he opened his eyes again, looking lost.

"I don't know. But he officially accepted you as his son and second heir and that's what I think Dumbledore was after when he tried to break into your mind, the Potter secrets."

"Why? Even if Dad accepted me as a second heir then I'd still only be third in line after you...oh."

"You became Regent when Dad died, the secrets automatically being passed to you because I was under-aged. At least that's what Neville said."

"How would Dumbledore even know he became an official heir if he himself didn't even know?" Remus asked.

"He was Chief Warlock," that was all Remus needed to understand and they fell into silence, each lost in their own thoughts.

"But I don't know any secrets of your family," Sirius eventually brought up.

"Might not be aware you have them. What do you know about the Potter inheritance?"

"I know their history, family tree and all their properties. Have access to the Vaults and the House Elves listen to me. There's nothing that's a secret."

"Secret properties perhaps?" Harry suggested.

"All of them can only be accessed by a Potter so there's no use in keeping them a secret. The only thing that might be considered a secret is their Warding. It is very advanced, only the Blacks' have better Wards."

"But you know how to get through their wards?" Remus checked.

"Yes, but Dad taught me how to get through any of their wards so I don't think that counts as a secret Dumbledore might try to get his hands on."

"No, but just because he taught you how to get through them, doesn't mean others can. And just because you know about something doesn't mean it's not a secret to others. It's a shame we can't go and ask him what he was after," Remus mused.

"Why not? He's in Azkaban."

Both men looked at him and Sirius sighed. "Sorry, I completely forgot with the trial and all. Dumbledore passed away this morning."

"That's rather fast, how did he die?" surprised Harry frowned. The man had only been in Azkaban for a few months.

"He hung himself in his cell with his own robes," Sirius told him honestly and Harry nodded, not really feeling regret for the manipulator's death after all he'd done to his family.

"So we may never find out what he was after," he concluded.

"I suppose not," Sirius pulled a face. "That explains why James kept telling me stories about his
ancestors. I always assumed he told me them so that in case something happened to him I could pass them down to you, but if I think back then I have to admit he’s been telling me them since the adoption."

"I suppose Dad wasn't the one who changed the records either. Professor McGonagall couldn't change them back because you had officially become a Potter, their blood in your veins. It just changed into Potter-Black when Arcturus overruled Orion and Walburga's attempt to disinherit you."

Harry refused to call those two Sirius' parents any longer, not giving them the status only his own grandparents deserved and had been given. He noticed a look of horror crossed Sirius' expression as his words seemed to make him realise something, but he was distracted from asking what was wrong when Remus suddenly chuckled.

"That makes sense, yes."

"What's so funny?" Sirius asked, expression having vanished as he wrapped an arm around Harry's waist and pulled him closer. The gesture seemed a little desperate to Harry so he shuffled closer without comment as he instinctively knew not to ask what had spooked the man so suddenly.

"It suddenly occurred to me that they probably never told you about it because they thought you knew. After all, it was only shortly after you came to live with them that you began to call them mum and dad."

"So you think it was all just one big misunderstanding between us?" Harry couldn't help but snicker at the disbelief in his godfather's voice and expression, the switch in moods having vanished again.

Trust his father and godfather to be geniuses, but complete idiots when it came to something like that.

"And what are you snickering about?" Sirius mock-glared at him, making Harry laugh.

"Just that you and Dad were both insane idiots."

Remus snorted. "Insanity is hereditary; you get it from your children."

Laughing Sirius ruffled Harry's hair, ignoring his protest. "Sounds about right."

"Where did you get that from?"

"It's something our Italian neighbour used to say whenever her grandchildren misbehaved. Remember the Rossis, Siri?"

"Hmmm yes, Mrs. Rossi always brought over lasagne and pasta because Remus often looked sick," Sirius smiled.

"She would always watch an American show this guy hosted and he'd say that and she loved to repeat it."

"Sounds like she was nice," Harry commented.

"She was, as was her husband," feeling his godfather press a kiss into his hair he smiled and leaned into his embrace, leaning against his godfather's side.

Closing his eyes he listened to the rhythm of his godfather's heartbeat, relishing in the knowledge
that exams were over and all he had left to do now was simply relax and enjoy the presence of the people he loved most.
Leaning back in his seat Harry watched amused as Fred cheered as he moved his last token home, winning the game.

"Congrats."

"Thank you, thank you," he bowed theatrical to them while Luna cleared the modified Ludo game away and shrunk it before handing it to Harry so that he could pocket it.

"Do you think Sirius and Professor Lupin will bring other Muggle games into Hogwarts next year?" Neville asked.

"When are you going to start calling Remus by his name?" Harry laughed.

"I couldn't...I mean, he's our Professor," Neville stuttered.

"So is Sirius," George countered.

"Yeah, but I'm his ward."

"So?" Fred grinned.

Neville chuckled. "It would be weird to call him Professor after everything."

"But it is not weird to keep calling Remus by his title even though the two are technically married?" Luna asked and Neville blinked.

"That is a bit weird, yeah," he acknowledged. "I should try to call him by his first name, shouldn't I?"

"I know Remus would appreciate it, you are indeed Sirius' ward, making you part of the family. It makes him feel left out," Harry grinned as Neville blushed.

"I..." the opening of the door cut him off and they all looked up to see Hermione standing there.

"I'm sorry to interrupt, but...could I come sit here for the last bit of the journey?" she asked timidly, looking down to hide her red eyes and shifting nervously as they looked at each other.

"Sure," Harry shrugged and gratefully Hermione sat down beside Fred.

"Thank you...what are your plans for the holidays?"

"We'll be working on the shop non-stop now so that we can open as quickly as possible," Fred answered. "You?"

"My parents are going to take me camping in France so that we can spend some quality time together."

"Sounds nice, how long are you going?" Neville asked.
"Until the beginning of August so that we can spend some time at home, too."

"You're not going to spend time with Ron?"

Hesitating Hermione shook her head, biting her lip as she looked down again.

Not wanting to press her, Harry nodded and turned to Luna.

"Are you and your dad leaving immediately for Sweden? Or are you going to spend some time at home first?"

"We'll stay at home for a week until the next Quibbler comes out, the issue with the Spectrespects that I gave Sirius early, but then we'll go travelling," Luna confirmed. "You'll stay home for the first full moon in July?"

"Yeah. It's on Monday and since we have no idea how Remus will react to two full moons in one month while under Wolfsopoly, Sirius wanted to give him a familiar environment just in case. If there are no problems we'll leave Wednesday for Italy."

"I'll be spending most of my time with my parents," Neville smiled as Harry turned to him.

"You better make sure you all return for the opening of our shop," George threatened, grinning.

"We wouldn't miss it for the world," Harry assured him before he frowned at Hermione, who was staring at him. "What is it?"

"I'm sorry...it's just... thank you, all of you."

"For what?" Neville asked.

"Not pressing me for answers. I'm sorry I've never shown the same tact."

Fred stared at her in shock. "That's twice in less than half an hour that you're apologising!"

Blushing Hermione looked down to her hands. "I'm trying to change my bossy ways and not listen to others anymore."

"It's a nice change," Luna acknowledged. "The Wrackspurts are slowly leaving you alone."

"That's...nice of them," Hermione smiled faintly as the boys grinned.

"Luna's going to hunt down the Crumple-Horned Snorlack in Sweden," George informed her.

"Snorkack," Neville and Harry corrected him in unison, making Luna and the twins laugh.

"Right, Snorkack. My apologies my lovely lady."

"You hang out with Sirius too much," Luna accused George as he bowed to her.

"There is no such thing as hanging out with him too much," Fred grinned, glancing outside. "We're approaching the station."

"Are you coming to the opening, too?" Neville asked Hermione while shrinking his trunk and pocketing it.

"I hope to come with Mum and Dad. They heard about your plans through Sirius and are curious."
"Sirius told your parents about us?" surprised Fred turned to her.

"We ran into them at a restaurant on Sirius' birthday party. Had a few drinks with them and at some point they asked questions about the Weasley family," Harry explained.

"According to Dad Sirius spoke very highly of you and looked exited to see you fulfil your dream," Hermione added. "He's looking forward to properly meet you both some time."

"It would be nice to meet your parents, too, I don't think I've ever seen them outside that one time at Gringotts," George tried to recall.

"I haven't spent much time with them since being accepted into Hogwarts. I was more interested in learning all there is to know about this world and trying not to be left out."

"Why would you be left out?" Harry frowned.

"Because Ron took every opportunity to push me away from you and keep you to himself. By spending as much time as I could at the Burrow I didn't feel as left out from our friendship. I know, you never intentionally wanted to make me feel left out," she hurried to add at Harry's expression.

"But whenever I came later, Ron held a strong claim on you and tried to keep your attention on him at all times. And you never even realised because you're much too kind to even think others would act that way."

"Why didn't you say something?" sighed Harry, lifting his glasses and rubbing a hand over his itchy eyes.

"Because I was afraid that if I brought attention to it, you would be pulled away completely. I...I don't actually find Ron a nice person, Harry, I just tolerated his presence because he was such close friends with you."

"But why didn't you pull away when Harry began to keep his distance from him then?" George asked.

"I didn't have anyone else and with Harry pulling away from us both I...simply hung around," she let out a wry laugh. "Sirius was actually the one who told me point blank that Ron wasn't a friend and made me realise I'm only hurting myself by hanging out with him."

"He's smart like that," Luna said. "Bit blunt, but he's right. Ron can be very hurtful to others and only uses them for his own gain."

"I wish I had realised that before," Harry sighed, returning his glasses to his nose and watching as the others shrunk their trunks too. He was the only one without actual luggage, but the others had taken Sirius' advice so they wouldn't have to drag them around with them.

"It's going to be strange, not speaking to you for two months," Hermione suddenly said.

"If you want we could write?"

"Like pen pals?"

"If you'd like. I'm doing the same with the rest."

"We'll send Smell-o-grams!" Fred grinned.

"Smell-o-what?" confused Neville looked at him.
"It's something a ghost said in a Muggle movie Sirius and Remus took us to see just after Christmas," Harry chuckled.

"Casper," Fred clicked his fingers as the name came to him. "Those three ghosts were hilarious."

"I noticed. It was quite a sight to behold. All four of them were in hysterics at the things three mischievous ghosts did, usually pranking two humans."

"You two should have seen it. It's a play, but then on a big flat screen and the scenery changes without them using magic. It's brilliant!" George exclaimed.

"Maybe we could all go see one some time," Luna suggested.

"That would be nice," they all agreed.

"What time was Sirius going to pick you up?" Luna asked while they put on their coats as the train began to slow down.

"He didn't say, just asked me to stay with those two until he could come pick me up," Harry indicated to the twins.

"Why are you travelling by train anyway?" Hermione suddenly asked.

"Sirius took me aside last night and asked me to join the twins because there was some important business he and Remus had to take care of before they could pick me up."

"I doubt it's is going to be very long," Fred grinned.

"How so?"

"They are standing at the platform," George laughed.

Leaning forward to look over George's shoulder, both of Luna and Harry's breathings stocked and they quickly pulled the small curtains shut and turned.

"No time to lose, there's people waiting for us," George cheerfully turned Neville and Fred around, ignoring their confusion while Harry grinned at Luna and a confused Hermione.

"What..."

"Just get outside," Harry cut her off, and as they were unhindered by trunks they were able to hurry out of the train as it came to a stop.

"You go first, Neville, I need to straighten Harry's jacket," Luna ordered, twisting so that the blond passed her.

"Why are you acting so..." his eyes widened and he trailed off as he stared at the two people standing almost directly across of their door.

"Hello honey," Alice Longbottom greeted her son, dressed in dark blue Wizarding robes, her short hair hidden underneath a small hat.

"M-mum? Dad?"

"Hey Nev," Frank Longbottom smiled, dressed in equally blue robes.
Harry' eyes glistened as he took in his friend's shock at seeing his parents there, suddenly understanding what business his guardians had to attend to so urgently.

"Mum!" breaking out of his stupor Neville dashed forward to hug his parents.

"Hi pup," Sirius' voice tore his eyes away from the beautiful scene before him and he grinned as he stepped forward to give both Sirius and Remus a hug too, relishing in the warmth of their embrace until Neville called out.

"Guy's, I'd like you all to meet my parents."

Nodding, Harry broke free from his guardian’s embrace and turned.

"Hi, it's nice to meet you," he shook Neville's dad's hand as the man held his out.

"Hello. Siri told us all...about you," Neville's mum smiled warmly, surprising Harry by pulling him into a short hug before giving Luna one, too.

"Neville's told us so much about you both, too," Luna accepted the hug before shaking his dad's hand.

"Hey Ali, why don't you tell him your big surprise?" Sirius grinned as Fred, George and Hermione received a hug from her, too.

"You greeting me here isn't the big surprise?" Neville asked, leaning against his father as the man wrapped an arm around his shoulders.

"No," his mother's smile widened. "We come home."

"You... for how long?" Neville's grin grew into a beam.

"T-the thirty...first of August," his father smiled.

"Really?" tears of joy appeared in his eyes and he threw his arms around his father again, hugging him tightly.

"Really," his mother laughed.

"What do you say? Shall we return to the Manor for some afternoon tea?" Neville's grandmother spoke up for the first time.

All three nodded and Alice turned to give Sirius a quick hug, whispering something in his ear while Neville shook hands with the others before giving Luna a hug.

After releasing her, he dashed forward to throw his arms around Sirius, making the older man laugh while pulling him close for a long moment and it was with shining eyes that Neville stepped back again.

"Everyone... have a lovely vacation," Neville's mum smiled while his dad nodded, each taking one of Neville's hands and with final greetings they followed Neville's grandmother to one of the fireplaces to Floo home.

"That just leaves the seven of us, where are your brother and sister?" Remus asked as he shifted closer to Sirius and Harry.

The movement alerted Harry of the many eyes on them, most of them interested and curious. And
although no one unfamiliar made any indication of coming their way, it still irritated Harry to know they'd never be able to just walk around unnoticed.

But his disapproving frown changed into a smile as he noticed Remus had moved further into Sirius' personal space, placing a hand on his lower back that Harry knew looked utterly possessive to others but was simply reassuring to Sirius in a crowd of people.

"Hey guys, had a good year?" Bill's familiar voice made him turn in time to see the man clasp hands with his brothers and Sirius and Remus.

"The best, yours?"

"Good, very good in fact. I've gotten engaged last week," he announced with a large grin.

"That's great!" Fred and George exclaimed and Luna and Harry grinned.

"When is the big day?"

"We hope next August, but you'll all get invites when we've settled on a date," Bill turned to Sirius."I meant to catch you alone this morning, but you left again before I could reach you. Thank you."

"What for?" confused Sirius looked at him. "I only congratulated Fleur on her engagement."

"Not for that, although you are two of the few wizards who haven't turned into a drooling mess, unable to speak to her."

"I'm not really into blonds," Remus teased and Bill laughed as he took notice of their stance.

"So I've heard. I believe congratulations are in order for you two, too."

"Thanks," both men chuckled at his knowing grin.

"But I wanted to say thank you for what you've done for my siblings. Dad told me you've been supporting Gin and helped the twins follow their dreams. I've been to see their place and it's better than I could have ever hoped for."

"I only supported their plans, it's all their own hard work that's making their dreams come true," Sirius ruffled George's hair, making him laugh and swat at him.

"Still, thank you."

"They are family," Sirius shrugged before looking around.

"Speaking of, there seem to be two red-heads missing from the bunch I'm supposed to collect."

"Knowing Ron he probably still had to grab all his stuff and they are both stuck in the crowd now," Harry shrugged, the others laughing as they knew it was probably true.

"Isn't that your dad, Luna?" Sirius asked, waving at the students who yelled their goodbyes at him and Remus.

"Yes, that's Daddy," she smiled warmly and Harry turned to see an eccentric-looking wizard waving at them from a distance.

"Well, have fun hunting down Crumple-Horned Snorkacks in Sweden but be careful, I want my
favourite Ravenclaw back in one piece,” Sirius ordered, giving her a warm hug.

"Should you be taking favourites, Professor?” Bill teased.

"Only when it comes to family," Luna stuck out her tongue to him as they separated again and then turned to give Harry and the twins a hug, too, before nodding to Remus, Bill and Hermione.

"Have a lovely vacation!” with that she ran towards her father to embrace him.

Both waved before they made their way to the Floos, too.

"Hi honey,” he turned to see Monica and Wendell Granger hug their daughter and he smiled as they separated again.

"It is nice to see you three again,” Monica smiled as she shook hands with everyone, introducing herself and her husband.

"You must be the twins Sirius told us about.”

"Yes, it is nice to meet you,” they both nodded. "Hermione told us you were interested in coming to the opening of our shop?"

"Yes, Sirius told us about your dream and I would love to see the magical variant of a joke shop,” Wendell confirmed.

"If you'd like we could send you an owl once we know the date of our grand opening,” George suggested.

"That would be very nice. Well, honey, we should be going or we'll hit the worst of the traffic jam,” Wendell ruffled his daughter's hair.

"All right. I hope you'll all have a nice vacation and I'll write to you, Harry.”

"I'll allow your magical signature to pass through our ward as you don't have an owl of your own,” Sirius bent down to open Crookshank's transport cage and as the animal eagerly licked his palm he brushed his other hand over the thick fur. "I'll see you in two months, my friend.”

Chuckling Hermione raised the cage a little so that Sirius didn't have to bend so low, allowing Crookshanks to play a little with him before Sirius closed the cage again and straightened.

"I guess we'll see you at the opening of Triple W in a few weeks time." 

Nodding Hermione wished them all a good vacation, giving Harry a quick hug before she and her parents made their way to the entrance.

"Well, I suppose we should take our leave too, I'm dying for a cup of tea,” Remus announced as they travelled through.

"We're going to have to do some grocery shopping if you want some tea or even food," Sirius chuckled. "I sent Dobby to our vacation address to ready it so there won't be anything in the house yet.”

"Then we'll find a nice little place to have a cup and then make our way to a grocery store,” Harry decided, turning to the Weasleys.

"Well, have a great time preparing your shop and send an owl when the opening date is known.”
"We will, have a great vacation, too, and we'll see you at the opening," both twins shook hands with him and Remus before pulling Sirius into a three way hug.

"I've never seen them hug anyone outside of Mum and Ginny," the surprise on Bill's face made Harry laugh.

"They've been hugging him a lot the last few months. I think Sirius is rubbing off on them," Harry smiled.

"Not a bad thing to happen," the long-haired Weasley smiled as his gaze turned to Harry.

"I think he might just be the best thing that has ever happened to my family."

"Yeah, he's the best thing that ever happened to me," Harry readily agreed, blinking surprised when Bill ruffled his hair.

"I did say my family didn't I?" He glanced up as he spotted something. "Ah, you were right; they are still stuck in the train. Better go now if you don't want Ron to nag you to come over this summer while you have other plans."

"How..." trailing off at Bill's wink he allowed the man to gently push him towards Sirius and Remus, the former immediately taking his hand.

"We'll be off then, see you soon," they greeted and with a last wave they made their way towards the entrance.

"We'll be walking to that little place?"

"No, but there is a large row before the Floos that we have no intention of getting stuck in. Why Floo when we can Apparate, too?" Remus laughed as Harry stuck out his tongue at him.

"Who knows Moony; maybe I'll even let our boy transport us, just to see if he's ready for next year."

Harry's eyes widened as he realised what Sirius was implying.

"Really?"

At Sirius' wink he began to pull both men with him in excitement.

During the Easter holidays Sirius had taught him how to Apparate, but although he'd been able to practice a little he had no real experience yet.

"So that's why you wanted to visit the pharmacist in Diagon Alley before we'd come to pick him up," Remus teased, yelping as Harry slapped his arm after they were given the clear to travel through.

"Oh, that reminds me," a few meters from the entrance Sirius stopped and turned around, pulling Harry into a hug.

"Welcome home, pup."

Grinning to stop his own set of joyful tears from slipping down, Harry wrapped his arms around his godfather in return, holding him close as he finally realised the reason his godfather had wanted him to travel home by train.
From the quiet ruffle through his hair that Remus gave him and the kiss his godfather dropped into it Harry knew both men knew how much their gesture had meant to him and he pulled back with a brilliant smile, leaning against Sirius for a long moment.

"It's a nice thing you did for Neville, too," he eventually managed to bring out.

"It seemed unfair to only give us the joy of picking our child up from the station, so we figured we'd ask if they were interested in joining us instead of surprising him when he'd come home."

"This was better," Harry was sure of it; the blinding smile on his friend's face had been enough evidence of that. "They seemed to be doing well."

"Better than expected really. The speech therapy is going well and they are recovering at remarkable speed," Sirius nodded as they made their way to the street.

"Will they return to St Mungo's after the summer holidays?"

"Yes. They still need a lot of therapy but they are learning to take care of themselves again at an amazing rate. If they keep this up I wouldn't be surprised if they'd be moving home for good within a year or two."

"That would be the greatest gift ever for Neville," grinning Harry took his godfather's hand and squeezed it.

"It would be," Remus agreed, coming to a stop a few streets away from the station and as he turned to them Harry felt his heart skip a beat in excitement and nervousness.

"Now, remember what to do?"

Nodding Harry took Sirius' arm, folding it determined between his own and his body.

"Good, then I want you to Apparate us to the British library so that we can enjoy some hot chocolate and if you succeed I suppose you can have some pie with it."

Nodding Harry closed his eyes, aware Remus was taking a few steps away from them, but didn't let it distract him as he concentrated on Apparating them.

He was distantly aware of the familiar uncomfortable feeling he associated with Apparating, but it wasn't as bad any more since he'd become used to it and even before he opened his eyes he already knew he'd successfully done it.

Grinning he turned to his godfather as Remus appeared beside them.

"Full marks I'd say," the man smiled and Sirius cheered.

"A piece of pie it is, good job."

Laughing Harry followed his godfather as the man began to make his way to the small restaurant near the library.

Slipping a hand in Sirius' he turned the man around to wrap his arms around his neck in a hug once more, without any other reason than knowing he could.

"Thank you, for welcoming me home," he directed to both men, receiving two smiles in return.

And, aware this was just the start of two full months with having both men completely to himself
he grinned, almost drunk on excitement and grabbing Remus' hand, too, he began to pull the two people he loved more than anyone towards the small restaurant so that he could enjoy every moment with them.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: We’re coming to the end of an amazing journey, just a small epilogue left now. As of yet, there are no plans to continue this story with a sixth year. Although I will continue to write for the series, it will mostly be in the past.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone for their support and brilliant reviews, both subscribed and anonymous reviews. Thank you for reading and enjoying my take on the Harry Potter universe and for following me into their world. Also a very special thank you to my friend Kitty, for endlessly supporting me and her willingness to look over my work and beta it, thank you.

Hopefully until a next time.
Harry looked up from his breakfast when he saw something out of the corner of his eyes and his stomach flip-flopped as he spotted an owl flying directly towards the window.

"Siri?" he whispered, causing his godfather to look up from the book he was reading.

"Hmmm, ah," he turned to look at Harry before smiling and rising to his feet to open the window and allow the handsome tawny owl access.

"Aren't you going to get that?" Sirius asked amused as the owl landed on the table.

Taking a deep breath Harry leaned forward to remove the large square envelope from the owl's right claw, nervously fingering it as Sirius fed the owl some bacon before it took off again.

"What happens if I failed?" he asked, not sure why he was so nervous as he knew he'd done well.

"Then I will send you to bed with bare feet tonight," Sirius threatened.

Harry's mouth twitched slightly at the mock-stern look on his face before his godfather slipped an arm around his shoulder and pressed a kiss against his temple.

"You haven't failed, pup, but if for some insane reason you did, then we'll just look at extra tutoring these last few weeks and you can sign up for a re-examination."

"Right."

"And regardless of what's in that envelope, you worked very hard these last few months. Especially in our private lessons you've worked extremely hard and I am tremendously proud of you."

"But I want to give you reason to be proud of me," Harry knew he was whining now but he couldn't help but feel it was true.

"And you do, every day again. O.W.L.s only give you a better chance at following the career you want; it's not the end if they aren't received."

"But you, Remus and my parents all received plenty of O.W.L.s."

"Because we studied hard from the beginning. You've only been taking your studies seriously since this year. Open that envelope; I think you will be pleasantly surprised."

Nodding Harry slid the envelope open and pulled the thick parchment out of it, leaning against his godfather's side as he took a deep breath and unfolded the paper.

Ordinary Wizarding Level Results

Pass Grades:

Outstanding (O)

Exceeds Expectations (E)

Acceptable (A)
Fail Grades:
Poor (P)
Dreadful (D)
Troll (T)

Harry James Potter-Black has achieved:
Astronomy: O
Care of Magical Creatures: O
Charms: O
Defence Against the Dark Arts: O
Ancient Runes: O
Herbology: O
History of Magic: E
Potions: O
Transfiguration: O
Arithmancy: E

"Well done, looks like you beat Remus' and your mum's scores," Sirius commented and pressed another kiss to his temple.

"T-ten...I received ten O.W.L.s," Harry could only stare at the results in shock, only half aware of Sirius leaving his side for a few moments before sitting back down again.

It was only as he looked up into the grinning face of his godfather that a small smile slipped over his own lips.

"I passed everything."

"Yeah you did. Calls for a celebration, doesn't it?"

Looking at the table at his godfather's indication, Harry grinned as he caught sight of two large pieces of Treacle tart.

"So that was what you were doing in the kitchen last night! What would you have done if I had failed?"

"Given it to Remus," Sirius teased before pulling him into a hug. "Congratulations Harry."

"Thanks."

Sirius ruffled his hair before handing him a fork. "There's more than half a tart left in the fridge for Remus to tuck into when he returns from the store. He's going to be very proud of you too, you know?"
Smiling Harry nodded, very pleased with his own scores, missed the grin that slid over his godfather's face as he tucked into his piece.

He was afraid the beam would become a permanent feature on his face as Remus returned and congratulated him, too.

Harry was overjoyed when they presented an envelope to him that held three tickets to the qualification match between Malawi and Ireland two days before his birthday.

But even better than that was the pride in himself that he felt when Sirius framed a copy of his results and hung them on the fridge in full display while Remus added the original one to the new scrapbook he'd begun to keep.

But as he curled up beside his godfather on the couch he decided that the best feeling of all was the feeling he got from knowing he'd given the people he loved a reason to be proud of him.

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