**The Secret Garden**

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**Summary**

When Harry's aunt and uncle die, he is sent to Hogwarts, to live with his only remaining relative, Severus Snape. There he discovers a mysterious secret garden that has been locked for ten years. Why? And what is that strange crying he hears in the night?

**Notes**

For the Classic Canon Challenge, this story is heavily based on "The Secret Garden" by Frances Hodgson Burnett, and draws upon some of the dialog and situations in that story. No copyright infringement is intended.

For HP fans - 1) I'm messing with family genealogies (obviously), 2) I'm making Ginny older than she is in Canon, between Charlie and Percy, 3) I'm making the Dursleys a little more well-off, enough to be able to afford a full-time cook and maid, as well as an au pair when the boys were little.
"There is No One Left"

When Harry Potter was sent to Hogwarts to live with his uncle, he was the most unprepossessing child ever seen. He had a thin little body, unruly dark hair, large glasses, and a closed-off expression quite disagreeable in one so young.

His parents had died when Harry was very young, and he'd been sent to live with his maternal aunt and uncle in Little Whinging where his uncle, Vernon Dursley, was the representative for a large and important company. His aunt, Petunia, was reputed to be a great beauty, and cared only to go to parties and amuse herself with important and elegant people. She hadn't wanted Harry at all, and only took him in because she was the only blood relation he had left. And so Harry was handed over to the care of an au pair and promptly forgotten.

Dudley, his cousin, had also been turned over to the nanny but whereas Harry was ignored by the servants in general, Dudley was obeyed and given his own way in everything, so that by the time he was six years old, he was as tyrannical and selfish a little pig as ever lived. Dudley was the same age as Harry, but they were as different as two boys could be. Where Harry was thin, Dudley was fat. Where Harry was quiet and self-effacing, Dudley was loud and pushy. Where Dudley was always dressed in the latest and most expensive clothes, Harry was given Dudley's cast-offs when they became too worn or too small for him to wear.

During summer vacation, Dudley's favourite sport was to chase and torment Harry, unless it was too wet or hot. On days like that, Dudley would lie on the couch, watching television and eating chocolate and biscuits. Harry didn't spend much time in the house in the summer. In fact, he left after dressing in the morning and didn't re-enter until Dudley had gone up to bed. Fortunately, Dudley was rarely at home during the rest of the year.

When Dudley was six, Petunia had engaged a private tutor for the boys (thinking that Harry could make himself useful for a change and help Dudley with his homework). The first tutor had disliked Dudley so much that he gave up his place in three months, and when other tutors came to try to teach them, they went away in a shorter time than the first one. In the end, Dudley was sent away to the junior school Vernon had attended, the au pair dismissed, while Harry was more ignored than ever. So if Harry had not really wanted to learn how to read, he would never have managed at all.

Harry liked to read. More than that, he liked to read in a secret hiding place he had made for himself at the back of the garden where the yew hedges grew thick enough to hide him away from the rest of the world. He would wriggle through a hole in the hedge, a hole too small for Dudley to fit through, and slither on his belly like a snake until he reached the corner where the yew made a perfect little nest. In the colder weather, he'd take some old blankets he'd found in the rubbish with him and wrap up in it to stay warm. In the summer, it was cool under there, almost as cool as the house.

Harry would pull out the book he'd borrowed from the bookcases in the living room (they had come with the place and Vernon Dursley had kept them because they made him look more educated) and read for hours. His favourites were tales of magic and adventure, and after he'd finished the books, he'd lie in his green nest and imagine that he was a great sorcerer or a mighty wizard. In his dreams, he was more powerful than the Dursleys and they cowered before him - even Dudley - but he was magnanimous and spared their lives before banishing them from his kingdom forever.

He was reading in his little nest one day in December when he heard his aunt come out into the garden with someone else. He peeked through the shrubbery and saw that it was a fair-haired man
wearing an odd sort of uniform. Harry watched them curiously and wondered why the man
looked so solemn and his aunt so frightened.

"Is it so very bad?" she asked.

"Worse than the Prophet lets on," the man said.

Petunia scowled, and Harry thought it made her look less lovely and more like a horse. "Surely
they won't attack here? Dumbledore - "

"Begging your pardon, ma'am, but Minister Fudge has his doubts about Dumbledore's ability to
keep the Death Eaters in check. You-know-who may be dead, but his followers have been
growing steadily over the past two years. Attacks on Muggles in the area are increasing. You
ought to leave immediately, Mrs Dursley."

"Nonsense! I'm hosting a very important party this weekend and I simply cannot leave. Besides,
Dumbledore assured me that the protections in place are very strong."

Harry heard no more as they went back into the house. He closed his book and lay there with his
chin resting on his hands, thinking about what he had heard. What were Muggles? Who was
Dumbledore? And what was a Death Eater?

Puzzling over those words and snuggled up warm in his blanket, he fell asleep.

For the next few days, the entire household was occupied with getting ready for the dinner party.
Several of Vernon's most important clients were attending, and Petunia's reputation as a hostess
was at stake. Petunia had ordered a new suit for Dudley, as he was home for the Christmas
holidays, and Harry privately thought that his cousin looked like a small whale in the black suit.

Needless to say, Harry would not be attending the party.

Two hours before the party, Cook roughly shoved a piece of unbuttered bread into Harry's hands,
and Maid pushed him out the back door. Harry carefully tucked it into the pocket of his oversized
jacket, grabbed his favourite books and a torch, and made his way to his hiding place. Before
crawling into the nest, he looked up wistfully at the Christmas lights decorating the house and
garden, and listened to the chattering servants as they went about their work. His stomach growled
as delicious scents wafted through the air, and he sighed as he pulled out the piece of bread.
Wishing he could block out all sounds of the merriment he was excluded from, he crawled into his
nest, wrapped himself up in his blanket, pulled out a book and the torch, and started reading. He
didn't notice the faint glow that surrounded his hiding place, the sign that a Silencing spell had
been put in place.

He also didn't notice when, hours later, the sounds of merriment changed into screams of terror as
a dozen masked and dark-robed figures burst into the house above and began firing off curses.

Harry opened his eyes to find that it was morning and that his glasses had slid off his nose to join
his book and the flashlight in the dirt. He rubbed his eyes and put the glasses back on, then sat up
and looked around. It was very quiet, and he wondered what time it was. It must have been very
early for he couldn't even hear the servants going about their morning work.

He sighed; Maid was sure to punish him for being out all night - if she had even noticed that he
was gone. He decided to try sneaking into his bed before she noticed. Picking up his book, he
crawled out of his hiding place and looked around.

It was obviously later than he'd thought, for the air was already still and hot. There was a vague smell like old smoke in the air, and something else unpleasant he didn't recognize. There was not a sound to be heard.

Puzzled and wary, Harry crept out of the bushes and headed towards the house. Hoping that Cook would be asleep after last night's festivities, he opened the back door and peered inside.

The kitchen was empty, the stove cold, and the table littered with last night's dishes. Harry frowned; it wasn't like Cook to allow such mess. Feeling more uneasy by the moment, he paused only to grab a slice of bread from one of the plates, a piece of fruit, and a brown bottle sitting on the table. Then he retreated to his secret spot to break his fast and think.

It was possible that the Dursleys had decided to go off on holiday for Christmas, or perhaps to safety as that man had suggested. But why would they have taken Cook and Maid? And if they'd left the servants, why had they left the kitchen in such disarray?

Harry sipped the contents of the bottle, not sure what it was. But he was thirsty, so he drained the bottle. The drink made him so sleepy that he could scarcely keep his eyes open, so he curled up into a ball and went to sleep.

When he awakened, Harry rolled onto his back and stared up at the shrubbery overhead. He wondered if someone would eventually notice he was missing and come looking for him. He heard something rustling in the leaves and when he looked down, he saw a little snake gliding along, watching him with eyes like jewels. He was not frightened. He often talked to the little grass snakes.

"How queer and quiet it is," he said. "It sounds as if there were no one in the house but me and the snake."

*Two-legged thingssss come.* the snake hissed.

Harry sat up. "Really? Where are they?"

*Over there!* The snake lifted its head, turning it toward the house. Almost the minute he did, he heard the back door open and low voices speaking.

"What devastation!" he heard one voice say. "How many Death Eaters do you think there were?"

"Hard to tell," another voice said. "Eight or more, at the least. The poor bastards didn't stand a chance."

"Good thing the Ministry removed the bodies earlier. Could barely sort them out as it was."

"Pity; she was a pretty thing once. Dursley and the child, too, I suppose?"

"Should have left when I warned her."

Harry recognized that voice. It was the man who'd been there earlier in the week. He crept out to the edge of bushes, listening intently, hoping to find out where his aunt and uncle had gone.

"Silly thing; insisted on staying because of a party. Lot of good that did her."

The man turned around and looked across the garden, straight at Harry. Spotting him, he froze.
"Mundungus!" he cried out. "There's another child here! A child alone, in a place like this! Merlin help us, who is he?"

Harry felt the urge to run away and hide; his uncle would certainly be cross with him for letting people outside the family see him. But his aunt would be even angrier if he was rude to her friends.

"I'm Harry," he said politely. "I'm sorry, but the Dursleys appear to have left. I don't know where Cook and Maid are, but if I see them, I can give them a message for my aunt and uncle."

"It's the child no one ever saw," said the man, turning to his companion. "It's Harry Potter!"

Harry was surprised that the man knew his name.

One of the other men, dressed like the first, came forward. "Haven't you been in the house, lad?"

"I'm not allowed," Harry said simply. "Do you know where everyone is?"

The man who the other had called Mundungus looked at him very sadly. "Poor kid," he said. "There's nobody left."

It was in that strange and sudden way that Harry found out he'd been orphaned again. That was why the place was so quiet. There was no one in the house but himself and the little snake.

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"Harry, Harry, Very Scary"

Harry had been shunted aside by his aunt and uncle most of his life and tormented by Dudley every day, so he could hardly have been expected to miss them very much when they were gone. He was anxious about being left alone in the world; even if he hadn't loved the Dursleys. They had taken care of him after a fashion, and now he didn't know where he would go or who would look after him.

He knew he was not going to stay at the house where he was first taken. Mrs Figg was an elderly woman who lived alone in a rambling house that smelled like cabbage and in which lived a dozen cats. The first day he was there, Mrs Figg had sat him down with a photograph album of all the cats she'd ever owned and fed him stale biscuits and tepid tea while he dutifully looked through it. He made what he hoped were polite noises and slipped outside as soon as he could.

That had been a mistake. One of Dudley’s schoolmates lived next door to Mrs. Figg and the minute Harry came out, Piers set upon him, along with Dennis, Malcolm and Gordon. No longer able to take refuge in his secret place, Harry found himself the subject of a new game called "Harry hunting", a game that involved him running as fast as he could while the four boys chased him. If they caught him, they pummeled him, so Harry had extra incentive to run as fast as he could. It also possibly explained how he ended up on Mrs Figg’s roof without quite knowing how he got there.

The elderly clergyman who lived on the other side of Mrs Figg organized a rescue and scolded Harry for doing something so dangerous as climbing up the drainpipe to the roof. Harry protested his innocence, saying he just jumped and somehow landed on the roof, and the clergyman gave him a stern look and advised Mrs Figg to wash his mouth out with soap to teach him a lesson about lying.

One day, while Piers and his gang were chasing Harry through the nearby zoo, he tripped over his worn-out trainers and ended up sprawled on the ground - nose-to-nose with a sleeping boa constrictor. The snake rose up, hissing, and Harry abruptly wondered where the glass enclosing the reptile had gone.

*Clumsssy two-leg!*

*Sssorry,* Harry managed to say. *I fell. I didn't mean to ssstartle you.*

The snake tilted its head and studied Harry. *You sssspeak, two-leg?*

Just then, the four boys came running up, gleeful at seeing Harry already down and ready to pound him. Sighting the snake, they all screeched to a halt and screamed, pointing at it and yelling for help.

The snake looked back at Harry. *You want me to sssqueeze them?*

*No!* Harry replied.

*But they hurtss you.*

*I'll be fine. You'd better leave before someone gets here.*

With a nod, the snake lowered its head and slithered off.
"You were - you were talking to it!" Piers stuttered.

Harry sat up, quietly brushing the dirt off his shirt and waiting for the fists to start hitting. When they didn't, he looked up to see that they were looking at him in terror.

"S-s-cary," Dennis stammered. "You're a bloody freak, Potter!"

"Scary Harry!" Malcolm chimed in. "Scary Harry!"

The nickname stuck. On the bright side, Piers and his gang left Harry alone for several days after that.

"Hey, Scary Harry!" Gordon called out, the week after the snake incident. The gang had become bolder after several days had gone by without Harry doing anything strange. "You're going to be sent home next week, after the New Year. And we're glad."

"I'm glad, too," answered Harry. "Where is home?"

"He doesn't know where home is!" said Gordon, with all the scorn of an eleven-year-old. "You are going to your uncle. His name is Severus Snape."

"I don't know anything about him," Harry said.

"I know you don't," Gordon said. "You don't know anything. Too stupid to go to school, weren't you, Potter? I heard mum and dad talking about him. He lives in a great, big, empty old place in Scotland and no one goes near him. He's so cross he won't let them, and they wouldn't come if he would let them. He's a vampire, too."

"I don't believe you," Harry said, and ran into the house. But he thought it over a great deal afterward, especially when Mrs. Figg told him that night that he was going to his uncle, Professor Snape, who lived at Hogwarts Castle. Harry sat quietly on the sofa, resigned to having his fate decided by others, and didn't respond when Mrs Figg kissed his forehead before leaving him alone.

"He is such a quiet child," she said softly to Mundungus Fletcher out in the kitchen. "And his mother was such a pretty, lively creature. He's a bit…odd, too, if you take my meaning. The children call him 'Scary Harry', and though it's naughty of them, one can understand."

"Perhaps if his aunt and uncle had allowed him into company more often, he wouldn't have turned out so strange," Mundungus said. "It's very sad. Many people never knew they had a second child at all. Sturgis said he nearly jumped out of his skin when he turned around and saw him standing by himself in the middle of the garden." He sighed. "Still, I pity the boy, going to live with Snape. Wouldn't want any kin of mine to go there, that's for sure."

Harry, who had been listening quietly in the living room, slipped upstairs and cried himself to sleep.

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At the end of the week, Harry came down to breakfast with his meagre belongings packed into a knapsack to find the living room almost entirely filled by a large man. Besides being the tallest person Harry had ever seen, he had long, tangled black hair and a beard, and black eyes that twinkled with good humour upon seeing Harry.

"Harry, lad, look at yeh! Las' time I saw you, you was only a baby. Yeh look a lot like yer dad, but yeh've got yer mum's eyes."

Harry blinked. "I'm sorry - you know me?"

"'Course I do. Known yeh since yeh was born. Was me that brought yeh here, not that I was too keen on the idea, mind. Rubeus Hagrid, Keeper of Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts. I'm here ter take yeh home, Harry."

Home. It sounded too good to be true, and probably was. "I'm all packed. When do we leave?"

"Right now, if yeh like. Best be sayin' good-bye ter Mrs Figg. Don't expect yeh'll be seein' her again fer a good long while."

Harry found Mrs Figg in the kitchen, thanked her for looking after him, and accepted another kiss on the forehead. Relieved to escape from her overwhelming affection, he returned to the living room and Hagrid.

"Ready," he said, picking up his knapsack.

"Right, then." Hagrid pulled an old sock out of his pocket and held it out to Harry. "Jus' take ahold o' this."

Harry did, wondering why Hagrid wanted him to hold a smelly old sock. As he grabbed the end of it, he felt a queer pulling sensation in his navel. A moment later, he found himself standing on the platform of a train station. He looked around in stunned surprise.

"What was that?" he asked. He felt faintly nauseous and a little weak in the knees.

"Portkey," Hagrid said matter-of-factly, folding up the sock and putting it in his pocket. "Bes' way fer travelin' long distances if yeh don' have yer Apparation license."

"But - but that was like magic!"

Hagrid blinked in surprise. "'Course it was, Harry. How else do yeh expect a wizard ter travel?"

"A - a what?"

"A wizard, Harry."

Now Harry really felt sick. Hagrid had the wrong person. He knew it had been too good to be true. He was looking for another Harry, one that belonged to a home and a family, not him. He wasn't a wizard, just Harry. He told Hagrid this, and the large man chuckled.

"Not a wizard, eh? Never made things happen when yeh was scared or angry?" Harry's eyes widened and Hagrid smiled. "Oh, yeh're the right one, no mistake." He brushed back the fringe on Harry's forehead to reveal Harry's scar. "Only one wizard in the world has that mark. Nah, yeh're
a wizard, righ' enough, an' a thumpin' good'un, I'd say, once yeh've been trained up a bit. With a mum an' dad like yours, what else would yeh be?"

"Then - then my parents were wizards, too?" Harry shook his head. "No, you're wrong. My parents were just regular people, and they were killed in a car crash when I was a baby."

"A car crash?" Hagrid roared, making several bystanders jump and edge away. "A car crash kill Lily an' James Potter? It's an outrage! Harry Potter not knowin' his own story when ev'ry kid in our world knows his name!"

"But why? What happened?"

The anger faded from Hagrid's face. He looked anxiously around them and then muttered, "Not here. Come, Harry."

Harry followed as Hagrid led him onto the train and into a private compartment. Once the corridor door was shut, he said, "I don' know if I'm the righ' person ter tell yeh, but someone's got ter, and it's certain the master won'."

They sat in silence for a few minutes. Harry felt the train start moving, and something about its movement seemed to reassure Hagrid. He combed his beard for a few minutes, then said, "It begins, I suppose, with a person called - called - well, I don' like saying his name if I can help it. No one does."

"Why not?"

"Gulpin' gargoyles, Harry! People are still scared o' him, tha's why. See, there was this wizard who went...bad. As bad as you could go. And his name was..." Hagrid gulped, then leaned forward and whispered, "Voldemort." He shuddered. "About twenty years ago, he started gatherin' followers. Them were dark days, Harry. Didn't know who ter trust.

"Yer parents wouldn' have anythin' ter do with him, and that must've vexed him somethin' fierce. On Halloween night ten years ago, he came ter yer house an' - an' - killed 'em. An' then - an' this is the real myst'ry of the thing - he tried to kill yeh, too. Wanted ter make a clean job of it, I suppose, or maybe he just liked killin' by then. But he couldn't do it. His curse didn' work on you, an' that's why yer famous, Harry. No one ever lived after he decided ter kill 'em, no one except you. Gave yeh that scar righ' enough."

Harry swallowed hard around the lump in his throat. "What happened to - You-Know-Who?"

"Some say he died. Codswallop, in my opinion. Most reckon he's still out there somewhere but lost his powers. Too weak to carry on. Still got followers, though. It's them as killed your aunt an' uncle."

"Death Eaters," Harry breathed, and when Hagrid looked at him, startled, he said, "Mr Fletcher said something about them at the Dursleys."

"Ah," Hagrid said. He gave Harry an uncertain look, as if wondering if there was something he should say or do for the boy, but Harry's expression was closed off. Hagrid cleared his throat. "Well, it's a long trip ahead of us. Bes' be havin' a little rest now." Before Harry's eyes, the man wrapped his large coat around himself, closed his eyes, and went to sleep.

Harry stared out of the window for a long time, watching the passing scenery and trying to think. It was been a confusing and painful day. He'd learned that the things he'd thought he'd known about his parents were wrong. Was it better knowing they'd died because of a wizard's enmity rather than in a senseless auto accident? Either way they were dead, and either way he felt guilty.
for surviving when they had not. And the Dursleys - was he responsible for their deaths? Were they attacked because of him? Or were they just random targets?

His head hurt from trying to puzzle it all out. He closed his eyes and leaned his head against the cool window, letting the coolness soothe the ache. Before too long, the monotonous movement of the train lulled him to sleep as well.

It was quite dark when he awakened again. The train had stopped at a station and Hagrid was shaking him.

"Come on now, Harry. Yeh've had yer sleep, time to open yer eyes. We're at Hogsmeade station, an' Mrs McGonagall will be waitin' for yeh."

Harry stood up and tried to keep his eyes open as Hagrid led the way off the train. It was raining outside, and they hurried into the station house. The station was a small one, and nobody but themselves seemed to be getting out of the train. The stationmaster spoke to Hagrid in a rough, good-natured way.

"The carriage is waitin' for you outside. Best be getting the young man in out of the damp."

Hagrid nodded his thanks and led Harry outside to where a large, black carriage waited. Harry was surprised to see such an old-fashioned vehicle, and even more surprised to see that there wasn't a horse to pull it. Hagrid gestured for him to get in and closed the carriage door behind Harry.

He handed Harry his knapsack and said, "Don' worry, Harry. Everythin'll be fine. If yeh need me, I've got a little place at the end o' the garden; yeh're welcome ter come by anytime."

Harry nodded. The carriage immediately began to move, and Harry nearly fell into the seat rather than sitting down properly. He stuck his head out the window and looked towards the front of the carriage, but there were no horses to be seen.

He sat back down, his eyes wide. "Magic," he breathed.

"No, thestrals," said another voice from within the carriage. "Although I expect you can't see them."

Harry's head snapped around; he hadn't known there was someone else in the carriage. Opposite him sat a thin, stern-looking woman with black hair pulled back into a bun. She wore a long emerald green gown, and her beady eyes peered out from behind her square glasses.

"I'm Mrs McGonagall, housekeeper at Hogwarts. This is Hogsmeade, the closest town to the castle. It's about five miles across the moor to Hogwarts."

Harry had no idea what a moor was, and as he looked out the carriage window, he was disappointed that he couldn't see anything in the dark. All he was aware of was a vast openness stretching out on either side of the road.

"What's a moor?"

"Miles and miles and miles of wild land that nothing grows on but heather and gorse and broom, and nothing lives on but red deer and cattle and sheep."

"I feel as if it might be the sea, if there were water on it," Harry said. "It sounds like the sea just now."
"That's the wind blowing through the bushes," Mrs McGonagall said. "It's a wild, dreary place to some, though there's plenty that likes it--particularly when the heather's in bloom. Now, let's have a look at you."

As she spoke, she pulled out a wand and muttered, "Lumos!" and the end of her wand lit up. In the light it put out, she studied Harry with a critical air.

"My, you're a pale little thing!" she exclaimed. "Not at all like your parents - but then again, perhaps you'll improve as you grow. Children alter so much." Under her breath she added, "Although there's nothing likely to improve children at Hogwarts, if you ask me."

"What's it like? Hogwarts, I mean."

"It's a queer place. It's a grand place, but big and a bit gloomy. The Professor's proud of it in his way. The house is a thousand years old, and there are nearly a hundred rooms in it, though most of them are shut up and locked. And there are pictures and fine old furniture and things that have been there for ages, and there's a big park round it, and gardens and trees with branches trailing to the ground--some of them."

"And my uncle? Professor Snape? What's he like?" Harry had been thinking about his uncle ever since Gordon had mentioned him. Was he really a vampire? Harry had never seen one. And he longed to know more about his uncle, especially how they were related. While he had been living with Mrs Figg, he had begun to wonder why he had never seemed to belong to anyone, even when his aunt and uncle had been alive. Other children seemed to belong to their fathers and mothers, but he had never seemed to really be anyone's little boy. No one had ever taken any notice of him. He wondered if Snape would be any different.

Mrs McGonagall gave him a sharp look. "Professor Snape is a brilliant man, one of the best in his field. For all the good it does him. He was a sour young man and got no good of all his money and fame 'til he was married."

Harry's eyes widened. He had never thought about vampires being married and he was surprised. Mrs McGonagall saw this, and as she was a talkative woman, she continued with more interest.

"Miss Rose was your mother's sister, and a sweet, pretty thing she was, too. He'd have walked the world over to get her a blade of grass that she wanted. Nobody thought she'd marry him, but she did, and people said she married him for his money. But she didn't--she didn't. And when she died--"

Harry gave an involuntary gasp. "Oh! Did she die?" He had just remembered a story he'd read about a vampire who'd fallen in love with a beautiful mortal, and it had made him suddenly sorry for Professor Snape. He longed to know more about his only relative, even if he was an uncle-by-marriage and not blood-kin.

"Yes, she died," she answered. "And it made him worse than ever. He cares about nobody. He won't see anyone. Most of the time he's traveling, and when he's at Hogwarts, he shuts himself up in the dungeons and won't let anyone but Filch near him. Filch is an odd fellow, but he took care of the master when he was a child and knows his ways."

It sounded like something in a book and did not make Harry feel better. A house with a hundred closed up rooms, on the edge of all this wilderness, with a sour master who shut himself up in it sounded dreary.

"What you're to be kept at Hogwarts for I don't know, unless it's the easiest way. He's not going to trouble himself about you, that's for certain. He never troubles himself about anyone."
She stopped herself as if she had just remembered something in time. "You needn't expect to see him when he's here, because ten to one you won't," said Mrs McGonagall. "And you mustn't expect that there will be people to talk to you. You'll have to play about and look after yourself. You'll be told what rooms you can go into and what rooms you're to keep out of. There's gardens enough. But when you're in the house, don't go wandering and poking about. Professor Snape won't have it."

"I shan't want to go poking about," Harry said. Just as suddenly as he had begun to feel rather sorry for Professor Snape, he ceased to be sorry and to think he was unpleasant enough to deserve all that had happened to him.

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When Harry opened his eyes in the morning, it was because a housemaid had come into his room to light the fire. Harry lay and watched her for a few minutes, then began looking around the room. It had been too dark to see it properly last night, and he'd been too tired to do more than shuck his clothes and climb into bed.

He had never seen a room like it, and he thought it both curious and gloomy. Along one wall was a large bay window flanked by heavy draperies that looked like they could be pulled across to hide a person. The walls were dark, and covered with a tapestry depicting a forest scene. There were fantastically dressed people, under the trees, and in the distance he could glimpse the turrets of a castle. Harry could have sworn the figures on the tapestry were moving, but decided it must be his eyes.

He looked back out the window, and saw what looked like endless amounts of flat grey land. "Is that the moor?"

The housemaid looked out the window. "Yes. Do you like it?"

"I'm not sure," Harry admitted. "It's so grey and…and big. I'm afraid I'd get lost on it."

"You just think that because you don't know it yet," she said practically. "Once the spring comes, it'll be covered with gorse, and with heather in the summer, and then you'll see."

Harry listened to her, puzzled. His aunt and uncle's servants had never talked to him like this, like he was a real person. Taking their cue from Petunia, they had alternated between ignoring and ill-treating him, and in return he hadn't bothered to learn their names. While towards Dudley, they'd always behaved with a grovelling sort of subservience, probably because Dudley was not above slapping the servants when he was angry or didn't get his way. He wondered what this girl would do if someone slapped her in the face. She was a good-natured looking creature, but her firm way of speaking and red hair made him think that she'd probably slap back.

"You are a strange servant," he said.

She picked up the ash bucket and laughed, without seeming the least out of temper. "I suppose I am. If this was a grand manor with a fancy mistress, I'd probably be nothing more than a scullery-maid - I'm too free and easy with my tongue. But this is a funny house, and Mrs McGonagall gave me the place out of kindness two years ago when I turned eighteen. She and my mother were friends when they were just girls. M'name's Ginny, by the way."

"Are you going to be my servant?" Harry asked, a bit timidly. He'd never had one before, and he wasn't sure that he'd be able to boss anyone around the way Dudley had.

"I'm Mrs McGonagall's servant," Ginny said stoutly. "But I'm to do the housemaid's work up here and wait on you a bit. Don't think you'll need much waiting on, though."

Harry agreed, relieved.

"That's good. When you hear about some rich folks' children, it's a wonder they don't turn out to be fools. What with nannies and being washed and dressed and taken out to walk as if they were puppies!"

"It's different for them, I suppose," Harry murmured, uncomfortably reminded of Dudley. It wasn't that he missed Dudley, really, only this place was so new and so strange that for a moment he
longed to be back in his secret place where no one could find him, where his only worry was to avoid his cousin. Unbidden, a tear rolled down his cheek and splashed on the sheet.

Ginny seemed to feel sorry that she'd made him cry, and she came over to the bed and leaned over him. "You mustn't cry, Master Harry. I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings, but please don't cry anymore."

Harry rubbed the tears away with the back of his hand and nodded, his throat still too tight to talk. Ginny looked relieved and smiled at him.

"It's time to get up now. Mrs McGonagall said I was to serve your meals here in the nursery, and I've got a lovely breakfast set out for you in the next room."

Harry slid out of bed and went into the bathroom to wash his face and brush his teeth. When he came out, there were clothes lying on the bed - unfamiliar clothes.

"Those are not mine," he said. "Those are nicer than mine."

"Professor Snape ordered Mrs McGonagall to get them in London for you, a whole closet of clothes, robes as well. He said you'd probably only have Muggle things, and those he can't abide. And it's a good thing, too, because whoever packed your kit must have made a mistake. There's no way those clothes could have fit on such a little thing as you!"

Harry touched the shirt and trousers, astonished that he was the recipient of such finery. Even the underthings and shoes were new. He began to think he'd been hasty in thinking ill of his uncle; surely he must be a kind man to take this much trouble for a child he'd never seen.

He started to pull off his nightshirt, then realized that Ginny was still in the room and blushed. She laughed at seeing his red cheeks.

"Don't mind me! I grew up in a cottage full of boys - two older and four younger - so you haven't got anything I haven't seen. Aye, many's the time I've washed them, too. Especially, George and Fred - they seem born to roll in mud." As Harry turned even redder, she relented. "I'll turn my back, then. You let me know if you need help with buttoning or anything."

Once Ginny's back was turned, Harry tore off his nightshirt and scrambled into his pants, shirt, and trousers. He sat down on the bed to pull on his socks and shoes.

"All right, you can turn around now."

Ginny turned, giving him an amused look. "Modest little thing, aren't you? And now that I see you in proper clothes, I can see you're smaller than I thought. Nothing but skin and bones - Mum would say that you could use a bit of fattening up."

She led the way into the next room. Harry found that it was rather like the room he'd slept in, not a child's room at all but a grown-up person's room, with gloomy old pictures on the walls and heavy old oak chairs. A table in the centre was set with a good substantial breakfast, but as he'd seldom been allowed more than a slice of bread for breakfast - with butter if Cook was feeling charitable - he looked with some confusion at the bowl Ginny set before him.

"What's that?" he asked.

Ginny looked at him in astonishment. "What, you don't know what porridge is?" Harry shook his head. "Then what on earth did those Muggles feed children? All sorts of outlandish things, I should imagine."
Harry thought she spoke of his relatives as if they had lived in some foreign country, instead of just the south of England. One of the words she said puzzled him. "Muggles?"

"Non-magic people," Ginny said.

Harry's eyes widened. "Are you a wizard, too?"

Ginny laughed. "A witch, thank you very much, and of course I am! Everyone in these parts is either a witch or a wizard, although there are a few squibs as well."

"Can you do magic?" Harry asked eagerly. "Can I watch?"

It was Ginny's turn to look astonished. "haven't you ever seen magic done before?"

Harry shook his head. "Hagrid used something called a port- port-"

"Port-key," Ginny said helpfully. "Strictly speaking, Hagrid's not allowed to do magic. Watch, then."

Saying that, she pulled a wand out of her sleeve and waved it over the table as she said, "Wingardium Leviosa." Before Harry's astonished eyes, the sugar bowl lifted from the table and drifted over to Harry's bowl. Ginny made a gesture with her wand, and the sugar spoon dumped two spoonfuls onto Harry's porridge. Then the milk pitcher floated over and added milk to the bowl.

"There you go," Ginny said, as the pitcher settled onto the table once more. "Get some of that into you, and you'll feel more the thing."

Harry tentatively took a bite of the porridge. "It's good!" he said, surprised, and Ginny laughed.

"Told you, didn't I? Now I'll just go and make your room all tidy."

Harry was reluctant to let the talkative housemaid go away and said quickly, "Stay with me, please! I'd like to hear more about your family. I don't have any brothers or sisters, only my cousin and, well…"

Ginny's face softened. "I'm sorry, Master Harry. You must be missing them terribly."

Harry shrugged, not wanting to admit that he didn't miss them that much because he hardly ever saw them. "What's your family like?" he asked instead.

Ginny smiled widely and plopped down in a chair at the table. "Well, there's seven of us although only three are left at home. Bill - he's the oldest - is in London, working for Gringott's bank, and Charlie's journeyman to a dragon-master. Percy, he's the clever one, won a scholarship to a Boys' school so he's only home over the holidays. Then there are the twins, Fred and George - they're apprenticed to the local apothecary, although they seem to blow up more things than they make, least ways at home. And then there's Ron. He'd be about your age, Ron would, and you'll not find a finer boy in these parts. Smart, too - not book-smart, like Percy, but magic-smart. Mum says he has the strongest gift of all of us, and the kindest heart, too. There's not a creature on the moor that doesn't know to come to Ron for healing, and him only eleven. Mum says he's as near to a moor creature himself."

Harry listened, absently eating his porridge as she talked. He began to feel an interest in Ron, and as he'd never really been interested in anyone before, it was a curious sensation. Never having had a friend or a family member care for him, Harry had never learned to care for anyone else, either. It wasn't that he was self-centred, precisely, for he didn't care much for himself, either, but rather
there was a coldness where a warm heart should be. Harry didn't know it, but listening to Ginny talk about her family, that cold began to thaw.

"Father works for the Ministry, although they don't pay him near what he's worth, the dear man. When we were all mites, Mum was hard-pressed to scrape up enough to feed us all, but somehow she managed. Mum always manages, smiling and laughing as though she hadn't a care in the world so as not to worry us. I was glad to get this post so that I could help out, and Bill and Charlie help, too. Percy's books cost a fair knut, and his school robes as well, and the twins are wanting to set up shop once they finish their apprenticeship. And Mum would like to buy Ron a proper wand; the one he has now was Grand-dad's, but there's nothing like a properly fit wand."

Harry wanted to ask more, to find out where wands came from and how one was properly fitted for one, but Ginny looked at the clock on the mantle and jumped up from her chair with a startled cry.

"Oh! I didn't know it was getting to be so late! And me with my chores barely started."

Harry flushed, feeling guilty that he had kept Ginny from her work, and stammered an apology.

Ginny's face softened, and she ruffled his hair saying, "Never you mind, Master Harry. It was a pleasure to see a happy look on your face, and Mrs McGonagall did say I was to make sure you're all settled. Now, you wrap up warm and run out and play. It'll do you good and give you an appetite for your luncheon."

Harry went to the window and looked out. The moor looked so big and frightening, with no small places to hide and feel safe. Ginny took one look at his face and said, "You needn't go out onto the moor. There's plenty of gardens and paths and trees right close to the house."

Harry's heart eased at that; perhaps he'd find a little cranny somewhere quiet where he could sit and think. He'd learned so many new and strange things over the past few days, and longed for the peace and quiet of his little nest.

He put on his cloak - a strange, long thing quite unlike the old jacket of Dudley's that he'd worn on winter days - and Ginny showed him the way downstairs.

"If you go around that way, you'll come to the gardens," she said, pointing to a gate in a wall of shrubbery. "There's lots of flowers in summer-time, but there's nothing blooming now." She seemed to hesitate a second before she added, "One of the gardens is locked up. No one has been in it for ten years."

"Why?" Harry asked. Here was another locked door added to the hundred in the strange house.

"The Professor had it shut when his wife died so sudden. He won't let anyone go inside. It was her garden, you see. He locked the door and buried the key." Ginny looked around as a bell on the wall jangled. "There's Mrs McGonagall's bell ringing--I must run."

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After Ginny was gone, Harry turned down the walk that led to the door in the shrubbery. He could not help thinking about the garden that no one had been into for ten years. He wondered what it would look like and whether there were any flowers still alive in it. When he had passed through the shrubbery gate, he found himself in great gardens, with wide lawns and winding walks with borders or clipped hedges. There were trees, and flowerbeds, and evergreens clipped into strange shapes, and a large pool with an old grey fountain in its midst. But the flowerbeds were bare and wintry, the fountain was not playing, and there were no small nooks or crannies in which a small boy might hide himself. This was not the garden that was shut up.

He wondered how a garden could be shut up. You could always walk into a garden, couldn't you? Even if there was a hedge around it with a gate that locked, even if the hedge was very high, you could crawl through the bushes and get inside, couldn't you? Especially if you were a rather small and skinny boy.

He was just thinking this when he saw that, at the end of the path he was following, there seemed to be a long wall, with ivy growing over it. He hadn't thought about a stone wall surrounding a garden, a wall that would have a door that could be locked, and his heart sped up. Was this the locked garden? He went toward the wall and found that there was a green door in the ivy, but when he turned the knob it opened easily. Disappointed to realize that this was not the closed garden, he went through the door. He found that it was a garden with walls all round it and that it was only one of several walled gardens that seemed to open into one another. He saw another open door revealing bushes and pathways between beds containing winter vegetables. Fruit-trees were trained flat against the wall, and over some of the beds there were glass frames. The place was bare and ugly, Harry thought, as he stood and stared about him. It might be nicer in summer when things were green, but there was nothing attractive about it now.

He heard a tuneless whistle coming from the direction of the open door, and then Hagrid walked through the doorway, a long shovel over his shoulder. He looked startled when he saw Harry and then smiled.

"Mornin', Harry!" Hagrid called out. "Fine day ter be out an' about."

"What is this place?" he asked.

"One o' the kitchen-gardens," he explained. "It's where we grow the vegetables an' fruit the household uses."

"And what is that?" Harry asked, pointing at the doorway Hagrid had just come through.

"Another o' them. An' there's the orchard the other side o' that."

"Can I go in them?" Harry asked.

"If yeh like. But there's nothin' to see." Hagrid shifted the shovel to his other shoulder, and said apologetically, "Can't stay an' chat today, Harry. Got a bit o' clearin' up ter do."

Harry nodded in understanding. Grown-ups never had time for him; it was a fact he knew and understood. At least Hagrid had taken the time to stop and talk to him for a minute or two.

Harry went down the path and through the second green door. There he found more walls and
winter vegetables and glass frames, but in the second wall there was another green door that was not open. Perhaps it led into the garden that no one had seen for ten years. As he was a curious child, Harry went to the green door and turned the handle. He hoped the door would not open because he wanted to be sure he had found the mysterious garden, but it did open quite easily, and he walked through it and found himself in an orchard.

There were walls all round it also and trees trained against them, and there were bare fruit-trees growing in the winter-browned grass, but there was no green door to be seen anywhere. Harry looked for it, and when he had entered the upper end of the garden he had noticed that the wall did not seem to end with the orchard but to extend beyond it as if it enclosed a place at the other side. He could see the tops of trees above the wall, and when he stood still, he saw a bird with a bright red breast sitting on the topmost branch of one of them. Suddenly the robin burst into his winter song, almost as if he had caught sight of Harry and was calling to him.

He stopped and listened to the robin, and somehow the robin's cheerful, friendly little whistle gave him a pleasant feeling. Even though he was used to loneliness, the big closed house and big bare moor and big bare gardens had made him feel as if there was no one left in the world but himself. If he had been used to being loved, this would have broken his heart. But even though he was quite self-sufficient, he was desolate and the cheerful birdsong made him smile. He listened to the song until the robin flew away. He liked the robin and wondered if he should ever see him again. Perhaps he lived in the mysterious garden and knew all about it.

Perhaps it was because he had nothing whatever to do that he thought so much of the deserted garden. He was curious about it and wanted to see what it was like. Why had His uncle buried the key? If he had loved his wife so much, why did he hate her garden? He wondered if he should ever see his uncle, but he knew that if he did, he should not like him. Nor would his uncle like him.

"People never like me," Harry thought. "And I never can talk as other children do. They are always talking and laughing and making noises."

He thought of the robin, and of the way he seemed to sing his song just for Harry, and as he remembered the treetop he had perched on, Harry stopped rather suddenly on the path.

"I believe that tree was in the secret garden. I feel sure it was," he said. "There was a wall round the place and there was no door."

He walked back into the first kitchen garden and found Hagrid digging there. He stood beside Hagrid and watched him a few moments, then spoke to him.

"I've been into the other gardens," he said. "And into the orchard."

Hagrid chuckled, a deep sound that made Harry feel almost as warmed as he had from the birdsong. "There was nothin' ter prevent yeh."

"There was no door into the other garden."

"What garden?" Hagrid asked, stopping his digging for a moment.

"The one on the other side of the wall. There are trees there. I saw the tops of them. A robin was sitting on one of them and he sang."

A slow smile spread across the groundskeeper's face. He turned about to the orchard side of the garden and began to whistle, a low soft whistle. He could not understand how such a large man could make such a coaxing sound. Almost the next moment, a wonderful thing happened. He
heard a soft little rushing flight through the air, and it was the robin flying to them, and he actually alighted on a big clod of earth quite near to Hagrid's foot.

"Here he is," Hagrid chuckled, and then he spoke to the bird as if he were speaking to a child. "Where have yeh been, yeh cheeky little beggar? I've not seen yeh yet today. Have yeh begun courtin' this early in the season?"

The bird put his tiny head on one side and looked up at Hagrid with his soft bright eye which was like a black dewdrop. He seemed quite familiar and not the least afraid. He hopped about and pecked the earth briskly, looking for seeds and insects. It actually gave Harry a queer feeling in his heart, because the robin was so pretty and cheerful and seemed so like a person. He had a tiny plump body and a delicate beak, and slender delicate legs.

"Will he always come when you call him?" he asked almost in a whisper.

"Aye, that he will. I've known him ever since he was a fledgling. He come out o' the' nest in the other garden an' when first he flew over the wall he was too weak to fly back for a few days an' we got friendly. When he went over the wall again the rest o' the brood was gone an' he was lonely an' he come back ter me."

"He looks like he knows we're talking about him," Harry said, watching the little fellow in fascination. He'd never had a chance to see a bird this close; Dudley and his friends threw stones at any birds that came near the Dursley place.

"Yeah, he's a conceited one," he chuckled. "Likes ter hear folk talk abou' him. An' curious--bless me, there never was his like for curiosity an' meddlin'. He's always comin' ter see what I'm plantin'. He knows all the things the Professor never troubles himself ter find out. He's the' head gardener, he is."

The robin hopped about busily pecking the soil and now and then stopped and looked at them a little. Harry thought his black dewdrop eyes gazed at him with great curiosity. It really seemed as if he were finding out all about Harry. The queer feeling in his heart increased. "Where did the rest of the brood fly to?"

"There's no knowin'. The old ones turn 'em out o' their nest an' make 'em fly an' they're scattered before yeh know it. This one was a knowin' one, an' he knew he was lonely."

Harry went a step nearer to the robin and looked at him very hard. "I'm lonely," he said. The robin seemed to look at him even more closely, and Harry thought he saw a sympathetic gleam in the bird's eyes.

Hagrid began to dig again, driving his shovel deep into the rich black garden soil while the robin hopped about. "It's no wonder yer lonely," he said with a sigh. "Yeh'll be lonelier 'fore all's said an' done, too." He glanced over at the bird. "I'm lonely myself 'cept when he's with me. He's the only friend I've got here at the castle."

"I have no friends at all," Harry said. "I never had. I wasn't allowed to leave the house, and Dudley's friends hated me, just like he did."

Suddenly a clear rippling little sound broke out near him, and he turned round. He was standing a few feet from a young apple-tree, and the robin had flown on to one of its branches, then burst out into a scrap of a song. Hagrid laughed outright.

"What did he do that for?" Harry asked.

"He's made up his mind ter make friends with yeh. Has taken a fancy ter yeh, I don' doubt."
"To me?" Harry moved toward the little tree softly and looked up. "Would you make friends with me?" he said to the robin just as if he was speaking to a person, in a voice that was soft and eager and coaxing. "Would you?"

Hagrid laughed again. "Why, yeh said that as nice as if yeh'd been talkin' to wild things all yeh life. Don' reckon Ron could have asked nicer."

"Do you know Ron?" Harry asked, turning round rather in a hurry.

"Ev'rybody knows him. Ron wanders abou' ev'rywhere. The very bramble an' heather knows him. I warrant the foxes show him where their cubs lie an' the skylarks don' hide their nests from him."

Harry would have liked to ask some more questions as he was almost as curious about Ron as he was about the deserted garden. But just that moment, the robin gave a little shake of his wings, spread them and flew away. He had made his visit and had other things to do.

"He's flown over the wall!" Harry cried out, watching him. "He's flown into the orchard, into the garden where there is no door!"

"He lives there," Hagrid said. "He came out o' the egg there. If he's courtin', he's makin' up ter some young madam that lives among the old rose bushes there."

"Rose bushes? Are there rose bushes?"

Hagrid flushed and muttered. "I shouldn't'a said that," he muttered and, taking up his shovel again, began to dig.

"Are there rose bushes?" Harry persisted.

"There were ten years ago," he mumbled.

"I should like to see them," Harry said. "Where is the door? There must be a door somewhere."

Hagrid looked uncomfortable. "There was ten years ago, but there ain't now."

"No door!" Harry said. "There must be."

"None as any one can find, an' none as is any one's business. Don' yeh be pokin' yer nose where it's got no cause to go," Hagrid said brusquely. "Here, I must get on with me work. Go an' play, there's a good lad."

And with that, he stopped digging, threw his shovel over his shoulder and walked off, without even glancing at Harry or saying good-bye.

At first, each day seemed exactly like the others. Every morning, he awoke in his bedroom and found Ginny kneeling upon the hearth building the fire. Every morning, he ate breakfast in the nursery, and after breakfast, he gazed out of the window onto the huge moor that seemed to spread out on all sides and reach to the sky. After he had stared for a while, he realized that if he did not go out, he would have to stay inside and do nothing, for there were no toys or games or other childish amusements in the nursery.

He didn't much care for being outside here at Hogwarts, and only the mystery of the garden and the lure of the robin drew him out. Hagrid was wary when they talked, as if afraid Harry would...
ask him more about the locked garden. The walled gardens were too big and open, and the wind blew his thin body about, making him ache with cold. He had to run to keep warm, and although he didn't know it, this was the best thing for him. Big breaths of fresh air filled his lungs, running strengthened his muscles, and the wind whipped some red colour into his pale cheeks.

After a few days spent almost entirely outside, Harry awoke one morning to realize that he was ravenous. He'd been hungry nearly all of his life, as far as he could remember, since Cook hadn't been one to waste good food on someone like him. But this hunger was different; it seemed to reach all the way down into his toes. He finished his bowl of porridge and then devoured a plate of toast and jam.

"My, you're hungry today!" Ginny said approvingly as she cleared the breakfast dishes. "Keep eating like that, and you'll fatten up nicely. It's playing out in all that fresh air that does it, gives you an appetite."

"I don't play," Harry said, not admitting that he didn't really know how to play games like other children. Using an excuse he'd heard from Dudley, he said, "I have nothing to play with."

"Nothing to play with!" exclaimed Ginny. "My brothers play with sticks and stones, or shout and run about and look at things."

Harry didn't shout, but he did look at things as there was nothing else to do. He walked around the gardens and wandered about the paths in the park. One place he went to more often than to any other, and that was the long walk outside the gardens with the walls round them. There were bare flowerbeds on either side of it and against the walls ivy grew thickly. There was one part of the wall where the creeping dark green leaves were bushier than elsewhere. It seemed as if that part of the garden had been neglected for a long time. The rest of it had been clipped and made to look neat, but at this lower end of the walk it had not been trimmed at all.

A few days after he had met the robin, Harry walked along the wall again and wondered why it was so neglected. He had just paused to look at a long spray of ivy swinging in the wind when he saw a gleam of scarlet and heard a cheerful chirp. There, on the top of the wall, perched the robin, tilting forward to look at him with his small head on one side.

"Oh!" he cried out. "Is it you?" And it did not seem at all strange that he spoke to the bird as if he were sure that he would understand and answer.

The robin did answer. He twittered and chirped and hopped along the wall as if he were telling Harry all sorts of things. It seemed to Harry as if he understood him, too, though he was not speaking in words. It was as if he said, "Good morning! Isn't the wind nice? Isn't the sun nice? Isn't everything nice? Let us both chirp and hop and twitter. Come on! Come on!"

Harry laughed, and as the robin hopped and took little flights along the wall he ran after him. "I like you! I like you!" he cried out, and he chirped and tried to whistle, which he did not know how to do in the least. But the robin seemed to be quite satisfied and chirped and whistled back at him. At last he spread his wings and made a darting flight to the top of a tree, where he perched and sang loudly. That reminded Harry of the first time he had seen the robin. He had been swinging on a treetop then, and he had been standing in the orchard. Now he was on the other side of the orchard and standing in the path outside a wall, and there was the same tree inside.

"He's in the garden no one can go into," he said aloud. "It's the garden without a door, and he lives in there. How I wish I could see what it is like!"

He ran up the walk to the green door he had entered the first morning. Then he ran down the path through the other door and then into the orchard, and when he stood and looked up, there was the
tree on the other side of the wall, and there was the robin just finishing his song and beginning to preen his feathers with his beak.

"It is the garden," he said. "I am sure it is. Hagrid said there was no door, and there is no door. But there must have been one ten years ago, because my uncle buried the key."

This gave him so much to think of that he began to be quite interested and feel that he was not sorry that he had come to Hogwarts. He stayed out of doors nearly all day, and when he sat down to tea at night he felt hungry and drowsy and comfortable. Ginny would keep him company, chattering away about her family or her work, and Harry liked to listen to her. Ginny didn't mind staying; she was used to a cottage full of brothers and found it dull in the servants' hall downstairs.

One day, Harry decided to ask her a question. "Why does my uncle hate the garden?"

"Are you still thinking about that garden?" she asked. "That was just the way with me when I first heard about it. Mind, Mrs McGonagall said it's not to be talked about. There's lots of things in this place that's not to be talked over. That's the Professor's orders. His troubles are not servants' business, he says."

"Why did he hate it?"

"It was Miss Rose's garden that she had made when first they were married, and she just loved it. Him and her used to go in and shut the door and stay there hours and hours, reading and talking. When her sisters visited here, they'd spend all day together in the garden, having picnics and such. There was a swing he'd made with magic so it would swing her without anyone pushing it, and she used to sit there and swing by the hour. But one day when she was sitting there, the rope holding up the swing broke and she fell on the ground. She was hurt so bad that next day she died, no matter what potions they tried. The doctors thought he'd go out of his mind and die, too. That's why he hates it. No one's never gone into that garden since, and he won't let any one talk about it."

Harry did not ask any more questions, but instead thought about this new piece of information. He wondered what it would be like to love someone so desperately that one would nearly go mad from grief at their loss. He'd never loved anyone like that in his life, and he knew that no one had ever loved him like that. Or at all, if he was honest, although he supposed his parents had loved him. It made him feel a little more kindly towards his uncle, even though he had yet to see the man. And when he fell asleep that night, he dreamed about a lonely garden and the even lonelier man who hated it.

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The Cry in the Corridor

The next night, Harry sat on the hearthrug, staring into the fire as he continued to think about the garden and the man. Ginny finished clearing up the supper dishes, then sat down on the rug next to him and ruffled his hair teasingly.

"Are you still thinking about that garden?" she asked. "My, you're a tenacious one, aren't you?" She tucked her feet under her and made herself quite comfortable. "Listen to the wind wuthering around the house," she said. "You could bare stand up on the moor, if you were out on it tonight."

Harry did not know what "wuthering" meant until he listened, and then he understood. It must mean that hollow, shuddering sort of roar, which rushed round and round the house as if a giant no one could see were buffeting it and beating at the walls and windows to try to break in. But one knew it could not get in, and somehow that made one feel very safe and warm inside a room with a warm fire.

He stared at the fire and listened to the wind wuthering, which seemed louder than ever. Although he didn't know it, three good things had happened to him since he had arrived at Hogwarts: he had made friends with a robin, he had worked up a healthy appetite instead of hunger from lack of feeding, and he had found out what it was like to feel sorry for someone. Three good things, and everyone knows there is magic in the number three.

As he was listening to the wind, he began to hear something else. He didn't know what it was because at first he could hardly distinguish it from the wind. It was a curious sound, as if a child was crying somewhere. He knew that the wind sounded rather like a child crying, but this was inside. He turned and looked at Ginny.

"Do you hear any one crying?" he said.

Ginny suddenly looked confused. "No," she answered. "It's the wind. Sometimes it sounds as if some one was lost on the moor."

"But listen," Harry said. "It's in the house, down one of those long corridors."

At that moment, a door must have been opened somewhere for a great draft of wind blew along the corridor and the door to Harry's room was blown open with a crash. As they both jumped to their feet, the lamp was blown out, and the crying sound was plainer than ever.

"There!" Harry said. "It is some one crying, and it isn't a grown-up person."

Ginny ran and shut the door and turned the key, but before she did they both heard the sound of a door shutting with a bang and then everything was quiet.

"It was Peeves," Ginny said, referring to one of the ghosts that haunted the castle. "He's been up to mischief all day. The Baron must have got tired of it and took care of him."

Harry looked at the housemaid doubtfully. He'd met Peeves and the Bloody Baron, as well as several other ghosts who haunted the castle, on his third day there, and although the poltergeist was annoying, he'd never made a noise like that. And there was something awkward in Ginny's manner that made him stare very hard at her. He did not believe she was telling the truth.

The next day the rain poured down in torrents, and when Harry looked out of his window, the moor was almost hidden by grey mist and cloud. There would be no going out today.
"What do you do in your cottage when it rains like this?" he asked Ginny.

"Try to keep out from under each other's feet mostly. There seem to be a lot of us then. Mum's a good-tempered woman, but she gets a bit cross by the end of the day. The twins go out to the shed and play there, and Ron doesn't mind the wet. He goes out on the moor, rain or shine. He says he sees things on rainy days that he doesn't see any other time. He found a little owl half-drowned in the rain once, brought it home, and nursed it back to health. Pigwidgeon, he called it, and it hops and flies about with him everywhere."

Harry loved to hear Ginny talk about the cottage and its inhabitants. The twins seemed to tumble about and amuse themselves like a litter of puppies, but he was most interested in her mother and Ron. When Ginny told stories of what "Mum" said or did, it always sounded so comfortable.

"If I had an owl, or even a cat, I could play with it, but I have nothing."

Ginny looked perplexed. "Can you read?"

"Yes."

"Then why don't you read something?"

"I haven't any books."

"That's a pity," she said. "If Mrs McGonagall would let you to into the library, you could find something. There's thousands of books there."

Harry did not ask where the library was because he was suddenly inspired by a new idea. He made up his mind to go and find it himself. He was not worried about Mrs McGonagall. She always seemed to be in her comfortable sitting-room downstairs.

In this strange place, one scarcely ever saw any one else at all. Harry's meals were served regularly, and Ginny waited on him, but no one else troubled themselves about him in the least. Mrs McGonagall had come to look at him the day before, at the end of his first week at Hogwarts. She had given him a gold coin that she said was pocket-money from his uncle, but she didn't inquire what Harry did or tell him what to do.

He stood at the window for about ten minutes after Ginny had gone downstairs. He was thinking over the new idea that had come to him when he heard about the library. It had brought back to mind the hundred rooms with closed doors, and he wondered if they were all really locked and what he would find if he could get into any of them. Were there really a hundred? What if he went and counted the doors, just to see? It would be something to do since he could not go out.

He had learned when he was young never to ask for permission to do things because all he'd get was a slap and a sharp 'no!'. So he'd never thought to ask Mrs McGonagall if he might walk about the house. The only part of the house he'd seen was the back stairs Ginny took him down every morning, although he had a vague memory of entering the main hall on the night of his arrival and seeing a staircase moving of its own accord. At the time, he'd thought it was exhaustion playing tricks on his mind, but now he wondered. If there were pictures and tapestries with people that moved on them, why not moving staircases?

He opened his door and went into the corridor, then began wandering. To his left was the end of the corridor and the back stairs to the kitchen and the garden door, so he turned right. It was a long corridor, and it branched into other corridors, some of which ended at a blank wall, some of which had staircases to lead you to another level. There were a dozen staircases: wide, sweeping ones, narrow, rickety ones, some that led somewhere different every time you stepped on them or had a
step that made an odd noise when you stepped on it. There were doors and doors, some with
knobs that bit you when you touched them, and some that giggled, and some of the doors weren't
doors at all but walls that were just pretending. There were pictures on the walls, some of
landscapes, but most often they were portraits of men and women in strange costumes made of
satin and velvet, and they moved and spoke to him as he passed by.

Surely no other boy had ever spent such a strange morning. It seemed as if there was no one in all
the huge, rambling house but his own small self, wandering about upstairs and down, through
narrow passages and wide ones, where it seemed to him that no one else had ever walked. Since
so many rooms had been built, people must have lived in them, but it all seemed so empty that he
could not quite believe it to be true.

It was not until he climbed to the next floor that he found a door that opened when he turned the
handle. He was almost frightened for a moment when he felt it turn without difficulty. It was a
massive door and opened into a big bedroom. There were embroidered hangings on the wall, and
inlaid furniture stood about the room. A broad window with leaded panes looked out upon the
moor.

After that, he found more doors that opened and saw so many rooms that he became quite tired.
He began to think that there really must be a hundred, although he had not counted them. In all of
them there were old pictures or old tapestries with strange scenes worked on them. There were
curious pieces of furniture and curious ornaments in nearly all of them. In one room, which looked
like a lady's sitting-room, the hangings were all embroidered velvet, and in another room was set
out the most beautiful chess set he'd ever seen. The pieces were carved from ivory, and when he
touched one of the pawns, it moved of its own accord across the board.

In all his wanderings, he had seen nothing alive, but in this room he saw something. Just after he
had turned away from the chess set, he heard a tiny rustling sound. It made him jump, and he
looked around at the sofa by the fireplace. In the corner of the sofa, there was a cushion, and in the
velvet that covered it there was a hole. Out of the hole peeped a small head with a pair of
frightened eyes in it. Harry crept softly across the room to look. The bright eyes belonged to a fat
grey rat, and the rat had eaten a hole into the cushion and made a comfortable nest there.

"If it wasn't so frightened, I would take it back with me," he thought. He decided to try to come
back again to visit it - if he could remember how to get back.

He had wandered about long enough to feel too tired to wander any farther. Two or three times he
lost his way by turning down the wrong corridor and was obliged to ramble up and down until he
found the right one. Once the staircase moved while he was on it, depositing him on the wrong
side so that he was obliged to start again, but at last he reached his own floor again. He was some
distance from his own room and did not know exactly where he was.

"I believe I have taken a wrong turning again," he said, standing still at what seemed to be the end
of a short passage with a tapestry on the wall. "I don't know which way to go. How still
everything is!"

It was while he was standing here and just after he had said this that the stillness was broken by a
sound. It was another cry, but not quite like the one he had heard last night. It was only a short
one, a fretful childish whine muffled by passing through walls.

"It's nearer than it was," Harry said, his heart beating faster. "And it's crying."

He put his hand accidentally upon the tapestry and then sprang back, feeling quite startled. The
tapestry was the covering of a door that fell open and showed him that there was another part of
the corridor behind it. Mrs McGonagall was coming up it with her bunch of keys in her hand and
a very cross look on her face.

"What are you doing here?" she said, and she took Harry by the arm and pulled him away. "What did I tell you?"

"I turned round the wrong corner," Harry explained. "I didn't know which way to go, and I heard someone crying." He quite hated Mrs McGonagall at the moment, but he hated her more the next.

"You didn't hear anything of the sort," said the housekeeper. "You come along back to your own nursery, or I'll box your ears."

And she took Harry by the arm and half pushed, half pulled him up one passage and down another until she pushed him in at the door of his own room.

"Now," she said, "you stay where you're told to stay or you'll find yourself locked up. The master had better get you a tutor, as he said he would. You're one that needs someone sharp to look after you. I've got enough to do."

She went out of the room and slammed the door after her. Harry went and sat on the hearthrug, pale with rage. He did not cry, but ground his teeth.

"There was some one crying--there was--there was!" he said to himself.

He had heard it twice now, and sometime he would find out. He had found out a great deal this morning. He felt as if he had been on a long journey and had found something to amuse himself. He had played with the chess set and had seen the fat grey rat in its nest in the velvet cushion.

He would find out about the crying child. He would.
The Robin Who Showed the Way

Chapter by dkwilliams

The next day, when Harry woke and looked out the window, he saw that the rainstorm had ended. The grey mist and clouds had been swept away in the night, and a brilliant, deep blue sky arched high over the moorland. Never had Harry dreamed of a sky so blue. This was a deep, cool blue that almost seemed to sparkle like the waters of some lovely lake. Here and there, high in the sky floated small clouds of snow-white fleece. The far-reaching world of the moor itself looked softly green instead of gloomy purple-black or awful dreary grey.

"Ginny! Look at the moor!"

"Yes," Ginny said with a cheerful grin. "The storm's over for a bit. That's because springtime's on its way. It's a long way off yet, but it's coming."

"I thought perhaps it always rained or looked dark in Scotland."

"My, no! Nothing of the sort! I told you that you'd like the moor after a bit. Just you wait till you see the gold-coloured gorse blossoms, and the broom, and the heather flowering, all purple bells, and hundreds of butterflies fluttering and bees humming and skylarks soaring up and singing. You'll want to get out on it at sunrise and live out on it all day like Ron does."

"I should like to see your cottage."

Ginny stared at him a moment curiously before she took up her polishing brush and began to clean the grate. "I'll ask Mum about it," she said. "It's my day off today, and I'm going home after I finish my morning work. She's one of those people that nearly always sees a way to do things. Mrs McGonagall thinks a lot of Mum."

"I think I like your mother."

"I should think so," Ginny agreed. "No one could help liking her whether they'd seen her or not. When I'm going home to her on my day off, I just jump for joy while I'm crossing the moor."

"I like Ron, and I've never seen him."

"I wonder," she said, looking over Harry, "what Ron would think of you?"

"He wouldn't like me," Harry muttered. "No one does."

"Do you like yourself?"

Harry thought it over. "Not really. But I never thought of that before."

Ginny grinned. "Mum said that to me once. She was at her washtub, and I was in a bad temper and talking ill of folk. She turns round on me and says, 'There you stand saying that you don't like this one and you don't like that one. How do you like yourself.' It made me laugh and it brought me to my senses in a minute."

Ginny went away in high spirits as soon as she had given Harry his breakfast. Harry felt lonelier than ever when he knew Ginny was no longer in the house. He went out into the garden as quickly as possible, and the first thing he did was to run round and round the fountain flower garden ten times. He counted the times carefully, and when he had finished he felt in better spirits.
The sunshine made the whole place look different, although it was still cold. The high, deep, blue sky arched over Hogwarts as well as over the moor, and he kept lifting his face and looking up at it, trying to imagine what it would be like to lie down on one of the little snow-white clouds and float about.

He went into the first kitchen garden and found Hagrid working there with two other gardeners.

"Mornin', Harry!" Hagrid called out. "Springtime's comin'. Can yeh smell it?"

Harry sniffed and thought he could. "I smell something nice and fresh and damp."

"That's the earth," he answered, digging away. "It's in a good mood makin' ready ter grow things. It's glad when plantin' time comes. It's dull in the winter when it's got nothin' ter do. In the flower gardens things'll be stirrin' down below in the dark. The sun's warmin' 'em. Yeh'll soon see bits o' green spikes stickin' out o' the black earth after a bit."

"What will they be?"

"Snowdrops first, then crocuses an' daffydowndillys. Have yeh ever seen them?"

"No. Aunt Petunia hated flowers. She said they were a lot of bother and mess. Will they grow overnight?"

"Well, you'll have to wait for 'em. They'll poke up a bit higher here, an' push out a spike more there, an' uncurl a leaf this day an' another that. You watch 'em."

"I will," Harry promised.

Very soon he heard the soft rustling flight of wings again and knew at once that the robin had come again. He was very pert and lively, and hopped about close to his feet, and put his head on one side and looked at Harry so slyly that he asked Hagrid a question.

"Do you think he remembers me?" he asked.

"Remembers yeh!" Hagrid asked indignantly. "He knows ev'ry cabbage stump in the gardens, let alone the people. He's never seen a little lad here before, an' he's bent on findin' out all about yeh. There's no need ter try ter hide anythin' from him."

"Are things stirring down below in the dark in that garden where he lives?"

"What garden?" Hagrid asked, becoming wary again.

"The one where the old rose bushes are." He could not help asking, because he wanted so much to know. "Are all the flowers dead, or do some of them come again in the summer? Are there ever any roses?"

"Ask him," Hagrid said, gesturing toward the robin. "He's the only one as knows. No one else has seen inside it fer ten years."

Ten years was a long time, Harry thought. That was almost as long as he'd been alive.

He walked away slowly, thinking. He had begun to like the garden just as he had begun to like the robin and Ron and Ginny's mother. He was beginning to like Ginny, too. That seemed a good many people to like when you were not used to liking. He thought of the robin as one of the people.
He went to his walk outside the long, ivy-covered wall over which he could see the treetops. The second time he walked up and down, the most interesting and exciting thing happened to him, and it was all through Hagrid's robin.

He heard a chirp and a twitter, and when he looked at the bare flowerbed, there was the robin hopping about and pretending to peck things out of the earth, as if to pretend that he had not followed Harry. But he knew the robin had followed him, and the surprise filled him with delight.

"You do remember me! You do!"

Harry forgot everything else as he bent down and tried to make something like robin sounds. He chirped and talked, and the robin hopped and flirted his tail. His red waistcoat was like satin, and he puffed his tiny breast out and was so pretty that it was really as if he were showing Harry how important a robin could be.

Oh, to think that he should actually let Harry come near to him! He knew nothing in the world would make Harry startle him in the tiniest way. He knew it because he was a real person, only nicer than any other person in the world. Harry was so happy that he scarcely dared to breathe.

The flowerbed was not quite bare. It was bare of flowers because the perennial plants had been cut down for their winter rest, but there were tall shrubs and low ones, which grew together at the back of the bed, and as the robin hopped about under them he saw him hop over a small pile of freshly turned up earth. He stopped on it to look for a worm.

Harry looked at it, and as he looked, he saw something almost buried in the newly turned soil. It was something like a ring of rusty iron or brass, and when the robin flew up into a tree nearby, he put out his hand and picked the ring up. It was more than a ring, however. It was an old key that looked as if it had been buried a long time.

Harry stood up and looked at it, almost frightened, as it hung from his finger.

"Perhaps it has been buried for ten years," he said in a whisper. "Perhaps it is the key to the garden!"

He looked at the key quite a long time. He turned it over and over, and thought about it. He did not think about consulting an adult about it, not even Hagrid or Ginny. All he thought was that if it was the key to the closed garden, and he could find out where the door was, then perhaps he could open it. Then he could see what was inside the walls, and what had happened to the old rose bushes. If he liked it, he could go into it every day, and shut the door behind him. He would have a safe little nest again, all his own. No one would ever know where he was because they would think it was still locked. The thought pleased him very much.

He put the key in his pocket and walked up and down the walk. No one but him ever seemed to come there, so he could walk slowly and look at the wall, or, rather, at the ivy growing on it. The ivy was the baffling thing. However carefully he looked, he could see nothing but thickly growing, glossy, dark green leaves. He was very disappointed. It seemed so horrid to be near it and not be able to get in.

He took the key when he went back to the house, and made up his mind that he would always carry it with him when he went out, so that if he ever should find the hidden door he would be ready.

Mrs McGonagall had allowed Ginny to sleep at the cottage, but she was back at her work in the morning with cheeks redder than ever and in the best of spirits.
"I got up at dawn," she said. "It was pretty on the moor with the birds waking up and the sun rising."

She was full of stories of the delights of her day out. Her mother had been glad to see her and they had got the baking and washing all out of the way. She had even made each of the younger children a little cake.

"I had them all piping hot when they came in from playing on the moor. Ron said our cottage was good enough for a king."

In the evening, they had all sat round the fire, and Ginny and her mother had mended stockings while she had told them about the little boy who had lived with Muggles all his life.

"They liked to hear about you. They wanted to know all about the Muggles and about tellyvision and all. I couldn't tell them enough."

"I'll tell you a great deal more before your next day off," Harry offered, "so that you will have more to talk about."

"Would you really do that, Master Harry? It would set them clean off their heads."

"Did Ron and your mother like to hear you talk about me?"

"Why, Ron's eyes nearly started out of his head, they got so round," Ginny said. "But Mum, she was put out about you being all by yourself. She said, 'Hasn't Professor Snape hired a nanny or a tutor for him?' and I said, 'No, he hasn't, though Mrs McGonagall says he will when he thinks of it, but he might not think of it for two or three years.'"

"I don't want a nanny!" Harry said, remembering all too clearly the one he and Dudley had shared.

"Well, you ought to have someone to teach you wizarding things, at least!"

Harry had rather liked the tutor they'd had for a short time, who had praised him for his eagerness to learn. And he liked the idea of learning to be a wizard. "What kind of classes would those be?"

Ginny frowned in thought. "Well, Percy's learning Charms and Transfiguration and History and such. I expect that's the sort of thing you'd need to learn."

"Well, that doesn't sound so bad," Harry said slowly, "but I like having you to talk to, and I really don't need anyone else."

Ginny smiled widely at that. "I like you, too, Master Harry, and I brought you a present." She got up from the table and went over to where she had hung her cloak hung on a peg because she had come straight to his room upon her arrival back at the castle.

Harry blinked. He'd never been given a present, and he wasn't exactly sure what he should say. How could a cottage full of nine people afford to buy presents? He was even more surprised when she returned to the table with a broom in her hand. What kind of a present was a broom? Was Ginny telling him that he was supposed to do his own chores about the place? Was - and his heart seized at this - was Ginny no longer to wait upon him?

"Take it, Master Harry," she said. Gingerly, Harry took it in his hands. "Mum was cleaning out the attic last week, and she found Charlie's old things that he had stored away there. This was among them, and he's got no further need of it as his employer provides him with one - and a good thing, too, as often as they've caught fire from getting too close to the dragons. So she thought you
might like to have it."

"A broom," Harry said cautiously.

Ginny laughed. "Haven't you ever seen a racing broom before this?"

"A racing broom? What's it for?"

"Why, for flying with, of course! Watch me."

Placing the broom on the floor, Ginny held her hand out over it and said, commandingly, "Up!" The broom instantly leapt into the air, slapping against the palm of her hand. Then she straddled the broom and pushed off from the ground, hovered for a moment, then settled back down.

"See? That's all there is to it."

Harry's mouth had fallen open the moment the broom had jumped up, and his eyes got as big as saucers as he watched her hover off the ground. "Do you - do you think I can do that?"

"Without a doubt!" Ginny said stoutly. "Mum says James Potter was the best chaser she'd ever seen and could have played Quidditch professionally if he'd had a mind to."

So many questions popped into Harry's mind - what did a chaser chase, and what was Quidditch - but foremost in his mind was wanting to try that broom. With Ginny's encouragement, he called up the broom and was delighted when it responded. He straddled it as Ginny had done, pushed off gently - and found himself floating a few feet off the ground.

"I did it!" he gasped, breathless with excitement. "Ginny, I did it!"

"I knew you could," she said proudly. "I knew you could. Now, put on your things and take it out in the garden. Not too high, mind! And stay within the garden."

Harry hurried into his thick cloak and grabbed his broom. He opened the door to go out, then suddenly thought of something and turned back slowly.

"Ginny. Thank you." He said it stiffly because he wasn't used to people doing kind things for him, or for feeling kindly towards another. "And would you tell your mother thank you as well?" Then, because he didn't know what else to do, he held out his hand.

Ginny gave his hand a shake, smiling as she did. "You're a funny one, Harry Potter. If you'd been Our Ron, you'd have given me a kiss."

Harry flushed. "Do you want me to kiss you?"

Ginny laughed. "No, that's all right. Run off outside and play."

Harry felt a little awkward as he went out of the room. Ginny was so friendly and didn't seem to expect anything from him. He wasn't quite sure how to react to that.

Once out in the garden, Harry mounted his broom again. Heeding Ginny's warning, he kept low to the ground, following the path. The sun was shining, a little wind was blowing, not enough to affect his flying, but just enough to ruffle his hair and bring the fresh scent of newly turned earth to his nose. He flew around the fountain garden, up one walk and down another. He flew into the kitchen garden and saw Hagrid digging and talking to his robin. He flew down the walk towards them, and Hagrid lifted his head, looking at him in amazement.
"Blimey, Harry, look at yeh!" he exclaimed, standing up and leaning on his shovel. "That takes me back a number of years, it does. Was a time when there was a whole flock o’ children flyin’ up an’ down the garden here. Master Severus, Master Lucius, the Evans girls - that’d be your mum, Harry - an’ their friends. There’d be nearly a dozen children all about the place, an’ it would fairly ring with laughter." He sighed. "Them were the days, Harry. Who’d guess that twenty years later, only Master Severus would be left."

"Who's 'Master Lucius'?"

Hagrid suddenly looked horrified. "I shouldn't'a told yeh that. Forget I said it."

*Another mystery*, Harry thought. Remembering Hagrid's reaction when he'd pestered him about the garden, Harry decided to let it go for the moment.

"Mrs Weasley sent the broom," Harry said, dismounting so he could display it. "It belonged to Charlie."

"Charlie always were a wicked one fer flying. Could'a made one o’ the professional teams, only he were that mad about dragons." There was a certain look in Hagrid's eyes that made Harry think that Charlie wasn't the only one who liked dragons. "Let's see yeh go, then."

Eagerly, Harry mounted the broom and flew it slowly around the kitchen garden, being careful not to bump into any of the garden stakes or trellises. When he dismounted, Hagrid applauded.

"Well done, Harry! James Potter would have been proud ter see you, an' no mistake."

Harry flushed with pleasure. "You think so?"

"I know it," Hagrid said stoutly, then glanced over at the robin. "See how he's watchin' yeh. Thinks yeh're another robin, I've no doubt."

Harry liked the idea of being a bird like the robin and chirped at the robin who chirped back. Then the robin took off and flew down the walk, stopping once to turn and look back at Harry.

"Look, he's invitin' yeh to fly with him. Go on, lad."

Harry eagerly flew after the robin, following him down the paths and around the gardens. At length, they ended up on Harry's special walk, and there the robin settled on a long, swaying branch of ivy, critically watching as Harry approached. He twittered something that sounded like a mixture between approval and a critique, and Harry laughed.

"Don't be so hard on me! I just learned to fly today; were you any good as a fledgling?"

As Harry landed on the walk beside the robin, he felt something heavy in his pocket and looked back at the robin. "You showed me the key yesterday. You ought to show me the door today, but I don't believe you know where it is."

The robin flew from his swinging spray of ivy on to the top of the wall and he opened his beak and sang a loud, lovely trill, as if showing off. One of the nice little gusts of wind rushed down the walk, and it was a stronger one than the rest. It was strong enough to wave the branches of the trees, and it was more than strong enough to sway the trailing sprays of untrimmed ivy hanging from the wall.

Harry had stepped close to the robin, and suddenly the gust of wind swung aside some loose ivy trails. Harry caught the ivy in his hand because he had suddenly seen something under it - a round knob, the knob of a door.
He pushed the leaves and ivy aside, his hands shaking a little in excitement. His heart was thumping, and the robin was singing, and there was a hole in the wall. It was the lock of the door that had been closed ten years, and he drew out the key and found it fitted the keyhole. He tried to turn it, he used two hands to push at it, but it wouldn't turn. After ten years of being closed up, the lock was frozen

Harry thought he would cry with frustration. He'd found the key, he'd found the door, and he still couldn't get into the garden. He pulled out the key, pulled back his arm, intending the hurl the key away.

It was the twittering of the robin that stopped him, and he looked up to see the bird hopping up and down on the wall. He flew down, right in front of Harry's face, then back up to the wall, and it was suddenly as clear as if he had spoken.

He could fly over the wall.

He took a long breath and looked up and down the long walk to see if any one was coming. No one was coming. No one ever did come, it seemed. He took another long breath, half-terrified of flying high enough off the ground to clear the wall, and then resolutely mounted his broom. With only a little wobble, he lifted off the ground, lifted as high as the wall, and then he was over it and landing on the other side.

He was standing inside the secret garden.

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It was the sweetest, most mysterious-looking place any one could imagine. The high walls were covered with the leafless stems of climbing roses that were so thick they were matted together. Harry knew they were roses because he had seen them in books, and these looked just like the ones that had surrounded Sleeping Beauty's enchanted castle. The ground was covered with grass, and there were clumps of bushes that were surely roses if they were alive. There were numbers of these bushes that had been pruned and trained to look like little trees, but now were wild and tangled. There were other trees in the garden, and one of the things that made the place look strange and lovely was that vines had run all over them. They swung down long tendrils like curtains, and here and there, they had crept from one tree to another and made lovely bridges of themselves. And there were so many odd little nooks and crannies and such that he could hardly take them in.

Harry thought it must be different from every other garden in the world, and from any other place he had ever seen in his life. He felt a tingle running through his body, and it was as if he could feel the life-force of every single plant growing in the garden. Every hair on his body seemed to be standing on end, and his senses felt keener than ever.

It was the silence he noticed next. "How still it is!" he whispered. "How still!" Then he waited a moment and listened. "No wonder it is still," he whispered again. "I am the first person who has spoken here for ten years."

He leaned his broom against the wall and stepped softly as if afraid of waking someone. He walked under one of the fairy-like brown arches between the trees and looked up at the tendrils forming them.

"I wonder if they are all dead," he said. "I hope they aren't."

He was inside the wonderful garden, he had come over the wall, and he felt as if he had found a world all his own. The sun was shining, and the sky over this particular piece of Hogwarts seemed even more brilliant and blue than it was over the moor. Everything was strange and silent, and he seemed to be hundreds of miles away from any one, but somehow he did not feel lonely at all.

"I won't let it be dead," he said aloud. "I won't."

He walked around the whole garden. There were grass paths here and there, overgrown with weeds and shadowed by the drooping tendrils. In one or two corners there were alcoves of evergreen with stone seats under them, just perfect for hiding in with a book.

Near the second of these alcoves there had once been a flowerbed, and he thought he saw something sticking out of the ground -- some sharp little green points. He remembered what Hagrid had said and knelt down to look at them.

"They look alive," he whispered. "They might be crocuses or snowdrops or daffodils." He bent very close to them and sniffed the fresh scent of the damp earth. "Perhaps there are some other ones coming up in other places. I will go all over the garden and look."

He walked slowly, keeping his eyes on the ground, and found many more pale green points pushing their way up out of the earth. He became quite excited again.

"It isn't completely dead. Even if the roses are dead, there are other things alive."
He didn't know much about gardening, but the grass seemed so thick in some of the places that he thought the little points did not seem to have room enough to grow. He found a sharp piece of wood and dug around the little plants until the grass and weeds were cleared.

"Now they look as if they could breathe," he said. "I'm going to do all I can see, and if I don't have enough time today, I can come back tomorrow."

He went from place to place, digging and weeding, and getting so warm that he shed his cloak. He enjoyed himself so much that without realizing it he was smiling as he worked. He worked the garden until it was time to go to dinner. In fact, he was rather late in remembering, and as he was putting his cloak back on, he realized that he'd been working for several hours. And he had been happy, really happy, for the first time that he could remember.

"I will come back this afternoon," he said, looking all round at his new kingdom, and speaking to the trees and the rosebushes as if they heard him.

Then he ran lightly across the grass, picked up his broom, and flew back over the wall.

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He had such red cheeks and bright eyes, and ate such a good dinner that Ginny was delighted.

"Two pieces of meat and two helpings of rice pudding!" she said. "Mum will be pleased when I tell her what the broom riding's done for you."

Harry nodded and drained his pumpkin juice, and Ginny filled the glass again. "Ginny, what are those white roots that look like onions? I saw some in the beds Hagrid was working."

"Those are bulbs. Lots of spring flowers grow from them. The very little ones are snowdrops and crocuses, and the big ones are narcissi and jonquils and daffodils. The biggest of all are lilies and purple flags. Ron's got a whole lot of them planted in our garden."

"Does Ron know all about them?" Harry asked, a new idea taking possession.

"Our Ron can make a flower grow out of a brick wall. Mum says he just whispers things out of the ground."

"Do bulbs live a long time?" Harry asked anxiously. "Would they live years and years if no one helped them?"

"They're things that help themselves," Ginny said. "That's why poor folk can afford to have them. If you don't trouble them, most of them will work away underground for a lifetime and spread out. There's a place in the park woods here where there's snowdrops by thousands - you should be able to see them just about now, if you walk out there to look. They're the prettiest sight, and no one knows when they were first planted."

"I wish the spring was here now. I want to see all the things that grow in gardens." He had finished his dinner and gone to his favourite seat on the hearthrug. "I wish... I wish I had a little spade."

"Whatever do you want a spade for?" Ginny asked, laughing. "Are you going to take up digging? I must tell Mum that, too."
Harry looked at the fire and thought a little. He knew he had to be careful if he wanted to keep his secret kingdom. He wasn't doing any harm, but if his uncle found out that he could go into the garden, he would be very angry. He might even take away Harry's broom, and Harry couldn't bear that.

"This is such a big, lonely place," he said slowly. "The house is lonely, and the park is lonely, and the gardens are lonely. So many places seem shut up. There is no one to talk to here except you and Hagrid, and you both have to do your work. I thought that if I had a little spade, I could dig somewhere as he does, and I might make a little garden if he would give me some seeds."

Ginny's face lit up. "There now!" she exclaimed, "if that wasn't one of the things Mum said! Said it would do you a world of good to be given a piece of earth for your own, to work and care over."

"Really?" Harry said, much impressed. "Your mum knows a lot of things, doesn't she?"

"Well, as she says, a woman who brings up seven children learns something besides her A B C's. Especially with the twins around, always ready for mischief."

"How much would a spade cost--a little one?"

"Well, in Hogsmeade, I saw a little garden set with a spade, rake, and fork all tied up together for fifteen sickles, and they were stout enough to work with, too."

"I have some money," Harry said. "Mrs McGonagall gave me some from my uncle. She said I was to have a galleon a week to spend, and she gives me one every Saturday. I've got three now - is that enough?"

"More than enough. In the shop they sell packages of flower seeds for two knuts each, and our Ron knows which are the prettiest and how to make them grow. For the price of a galleon, he could buy the tools and two dozen packets of seeds. He walks over to Hogsmeade often, just for the fun of it."

Harry was excited by this news. "Can I write him a letter and ask him? Would you help me write it so I say the right things?"

Ginny smiled. "Of course I will."

"You're a wonderful girl!" Harry cried. "I didn't know you were so nice."

Ginny blushed a little. "I've got some paper and ink in my room for writing to Bill and Charlie. I'll get it, and we can write out your note today."

She ran out of the room, and Harry stared into the fire. "If I have a spade," he whispered, "I can make the earth nice and soft, and dig up weeds. If I have seeds and can make flowers grow, the garden won't be dead at all. It will come alive."

He didn't go out again that afternoon because when Ginny returned, she had to clear the table and carry the dishes downstairs, and when she got into the kitchen, Mrs McGonagall had needed her to do something, so Harry waited for what seemed like a long time before she came back. Then it was a serious piece of work to write to Ron. Harry had been taught a little by their tutors and had taught himself to copy words out of the books he read, but he'd never tried to put them together in a letter. So Ginny told him what to write down, and Harry wrote it out as carefully as he could.
Dear Mr Ron Weasley:

I hope you are well. Ginny has told me that you might be able to go into Hogsmeade and buy a set of garden tools and some flower seeds so that I might make a flower bed. Pick the easiest to grow because I have never done it before. I enclose a galleon to pay for these items. I will tell your sister many more stories so that she may tell them to you on her next day off.

Yours truly,

Harry James Potter

P.S. Tell your mother 'thank you' for the broom. It's brilliant.

"How do we get it to Ron?" Harry asked when he had carefully finished the letter and sealed it in an envelope with a galleon coin.

"We'll send it by one of the house owls," Ginny said. At Harry's surprised look, she laughed. "I forgot that you've never sent anything by owl. Come, I'll show you."

Ginny led the way down the back stairs and then up a winding stairway that seemed to go up forever. At the top of the stairs was a large room, and sitting on perches about the room were several owls.

"That's Professor Snape's," she said, pointing to a large, sulky looking owl in the corner. "Only he uses that one. And that brown one over there, that's Mrs McGonagall's. You can use any of the other owls if you need to send a message."

He chose a large white one that seemed very friendly, and Ginny told him she was called Hedwig. Ginny showed Harry how to secure the envelope to the owl's leg, how to clearly speak the directions to the owl, and then they both watched as the owl flew out the window and off into the sky.

"How shall I get the things when Ron buys them?" Harry asked when the owl had disappeared from sight.

"He'll bring them to you himself. He has a broom, too, and he'd like to fly over this way."

"Oh!" Harry exclaimed. "Then I shall see him! I never thought I should meet Ron."

"Do you want to see him?" Ginny asked, for Harry looked very pleased.

"Oh, yes! I've never seen a boy who can heal animals and make flowers grow by talking to them. I want to see him very much."

Ginny gave a little start, as if remembering something. "I almost forgot. I asked Mum, and she said she'd talk to Mrs McGonagall herself."

"Do you mean--"

Ginny nodded. "Yes. Ask her if you might be driven over to our cottage some day for a visit."

It seemed as if all the interesting things in the world were happening in one day, and Harry was fairly stunned with the joy of it all. To think of going over the moor in the daylight and when the sky was blue, and to go into the cottage which held seven children!
"Does she think Mrs McGonagall would let me go?" he asked, anxiously.

"Yes, she thinks she would. She knows what a tidy woman Mum is and how clean she keeps the cottage."

"If I went I should see your mother as well as Ron," Harry said, thinking it over and liking the idea very much.

His work in the garden and the excitement of the afternoon ended by making him feel quiet and thoughtful. Ginny stayed with him until tea-time, but they sat in comfortable quiet and talked very little.

But just before Ginny went downstairs for the tea-tray, Harry asked, "Ginny, has Peeves been making trouble again today?"

Ginny started slightly. "What makes you ask that?"

"Because while I was waiting for you to come back, I opened the door and walked down the corridor to see if you were coming. And I heard that far-off crying again, just as we heard it the other night. There isn't a wind today, so you see it couldn't have been the wind."

"Well," Ginny said, looking flustered. "You mustn't go walking around in the corridors and listening. The Professor would be so angry that there's no knowing what he'd do."

"I wasn't listening. I was just waiting for you and I heard it. That's three times I've heard it."

"My word! There's Mrs McGonagall's bell," Ginny said, and she almost ran out of the room.

"It's the strangest house any one ever lived in," Harry said drowsily. He dropped his head on the cushioned seat of the armchair near him. Fresh air, and digging, and flying had made him feel so comfortably tired that he fell asleep.

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The sun shone down for nearly a week on the secret garden, and Harry spent every moment he could in it. He liked the feeling that when its beautiful old walls shut him in, no one knew where he was. It was like being shut away from the world in a magical place. He'd read stories about secret gardens like this, gardens in which people went to sleep for hundreds of years. Which really, when he thought about it, seemed like a silly idea. It was much more fun to curl up in a corner of his garden, wide awake, and look around at the changes he was slowly making.

Harry was a determined person, and he was absorbed in the project of reclaiming his little kingdom. He dug and pulled weeds, finding it fascinating work. He found more of the pale green points; they seemed to be starting up everywhere, and each day he found new ones. There were so many that he remembered what Ginny had said about snowdrops by the thousands, and about bulbs spreading and making new ones. These had been left for ten years. He wondered how long it would be before they showed that they were flowers. Sometimes he stopped digging and tried to imagine what it would be like when the garden was covered with thousands of flowers in bloom.

He went out to the woodland park one day, to where the snowdrops were blooming. They seemed to cover the ground, so many that he couldn't begin to count them, and Harry became even more eager to see his flowers bloom.

He got to know Hagrid better over the week as well. He surprised the groundskeeper several times by seeming to fall out of the sky and land right next to him. The truth was, he was afraid Hagrid would walk away if he saw him coming, so he was careful not to give any warning before swooping down on his broom. But Hagrid didn't seem to mind his company at all, smiling as he saw Harry, and Harry was careful not to ask any awkward questions.

"Yeh're like the robin," Hagrid said one morning, when Harry popped up out of nowhere while Hagrid was working outside the potting shed. "I never know when I'll see yeh, or which side yeh'll be comin' from."

"He's friends with me now," Harry said.

"That's jus' like him, makin' up ter people an' showing himself off." Hagrid looked Harry over and it seemed that there was approval in his eyes. "How long have yeh been here?"

"A month," Harry said promptly. He'd gotten his fourth galleon from Mrs McGonagall just that morning.

"Yeh're beginning ter do Hogwarts credit. Yeh're a little bit fatter than yeh were and not quite so pale."

Harry was not vain and never thought much of his looks, so he just shrugged. "I know I'm fatter. My trousers fit better now. There's the robin, Hagrid!"

There, indeed, was the robin, and he looked nicer than ever. Hagrid chuckled.

"There yeh are," he said. "Yeh can put up with me fer a bit when yeh has no one better. I know what yeh're up ter. Yer courtin' some bold young madam."

"Look at him!" Harry said, watching in fascination as the robin hopped closer to Hagrid, tilting his head engagingly.

"Nah, yeh'll not get 'round me with yer pretty tricks," Hagrid said, pretending to ignore the robin.
The robin spread his wings and flew right up to the handle of Hagrid's spade, alighting on the top of it. Hagrid chuckled. "Yeh do know how ter get at a chap."

He stood without stirring until the robin flew away, then chuckled again and went back to his digging.

"Have you got a garden of your own?" Harry asked.

"A little bit o' one behin' my hut. Grow mandrakes an' fanged geranium, an' Devil's Snare in the shed."

"Any flowers?"

"Haven't much call fer flowers, although I have a patch of honking daffodils beside the front door."

"But if you did. What would you grow?"

Hagrid scratched his chin. "Roses, most likely."

Harry's face lit up. "Do you like roses?"

Hagrid nodded. "I learned a lot about roses from a young lady I was gardener ter. She was right fond o' them, like they was children. I've seen her bend over an' kiss them. That were a long time ago, though."

"Where is she now?"

"Gone," Hagrid said shortly, digging his spade more deeply into the ground.

"What happened to the roses?" Harry asked.

"They was left ter themselves."

"Did they die? Do roses die when they are left to themselves?"

Hagrid flushed. "Well, I got ter like them, an' she liked them. Once or twice a year, I'd go an' work with them a bit, prune 'em. Just enough so as they'd live."

"How do you know if they're dead or alive when there aren't any leaves?"

Hagrid gave Harry a suspicious look. "Why do yeh care so much about roses an' such, all o' a sudden?"

Harry felt his face flush. "I - when I was at the Dursleys, I had a little place I made for myself in the garden. I'd hide there when things got bad. I - I was pretending I had a place like that here, a place all my own. And I was thinking about what kinds of things I'd like there - birds and flowers and such. I've read about roses and they sound nice. I'd like to have some if I ever had a place like that."

Hagrid nodded, his eyes fixed on Harry. Quickly, Harry said, "Do you go see those other roses now?"

"Not this year. Been too busy." He gestured back at the plot he was working. "Mrs McGonagall says the master may stay here fer a long spell this year, an' he'll be wantin' his herbs an' such fer makin' his potions."
"Is that what he does?" Harry asked, curious to learn more about his mysterious uncle.

"Best potions master in England," Hagrid said proudly, as if Professor Snape's reputation reflected directly on him. "Maybe even in the world. All he seems ter care fer since Miss Rose passed on. If he'd a mind ter, he coulda set up shop an' made a fortune at it."

"So why didn't he?"

Hagrid shrugged. "Snapes aren't shopkeepers, more'n likely. An' he don' got the heart ter deal with most folks, neither."

Harry thought about that as he walked on towards his garden. There were other gardeners working along the long walk, trimming the hedges and sweeping the paths, so he had to take the long walk that curved around the other side of the garden. There was a laurel edge on the other side of the walk, and a little gate to let you into the large park surrounding Hogwarts. Harry thought about talking another look at the snowdrops before going into his garden.

He stopped with his hand on the gate, his attention caught by a strange sight. A boy was sitting under a tree, his back against it, a battered looking wand in his hand. He was about the same age as Harry but looked to be taller, thin and gangling, with red hair and freckles. But what fascinated Harry was what he was doing with his wand.

With an almost lazy air, he was trailing the wand through the air, and in front of the wand, leaves were dancing as if to an unheard waltz. Beside him, a brown squirrel was sitting, from behind a bush nearby a pheasant was delicately stretching his neck to peep out, and quite near him were two rabbits sitting up and sniffing with tremulous noses, all watching the boy conduct his silent symphony.

When he saw Harry, he stopped and smiled at him, then rose slowly from the ground, so as not to startle the wild animals.

"I'm Ron," he said. "And you must be Harry Potter."

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The Bird's Nest

Ron spoke to Harry as if he knew him well, as if they were friends who had been separated for just a short time. Harry didn't know much about how to talk to children his own age and flushed, feeling unaccountably shy.

"Did you get my letter?" he asked.

Ron nodded. "That's why I've come."

He stooped to pick up a package from the ground. "I've got your gardening tools. There's a spade, a rake, a fork, a hoe, and a trowel. They're good ones, too. And two dozen packages of seeds."

"Will you show me the seeds?" Harry asked. He wished he could talk as Ron did, so quick and easy. It sounded as if he liked Harry and was not the least bit afraid he wouldn't like him back. Although his clothes were patched and his hair roughly cut, he was clean and neat, and there was a fresh scent of grass and leaves about him, almost as if he were made of them.

Ron held up a roughly tied packet. "Best not open them here where they'll be tossed about. Have you got a place to put them?"

Harry flushed at this question, and his thin hands clutched each other. Ron gave him a curious look.

"You've got a bit of garden, haven't you? Or won't they give you any?"

He took a deep breath. Something about Ron made him trust him completely. "Could you keep a secret, if I told you one? A great secret?"

Ron looked more puzzled than ever but answered good-humouredly. "I keep secrets all the time. Secrets about animal nests and fox dens. Yeah, I can keep a secret."

Without quite meaning to, Harry reached out and grasped Ron's sleeve. "I've stolen a garden," he said, very fast. "It isn't mine. It isn't anybody's. Nobody wants it, nobody cares for it, nobody ever goes into it. Perhaps everything is dead in it already. I don't know. But they're letting it die, and I won't let that happen! I won't! I found it myself and I got into it myself."

"Where is it?" Ron asked.

Harry got up, his legs feeling a bit shaky. "I'll show you." He saw that Ron had a broom, lying on the ground by the package of seeds. "You'll need that."

He led Ron over to the laurel path and, making sure that no one was watching, mounted his broom and flew over the wall. Ron followed him, landing on the soft earth beside him on the other side.

"This is it," Harry said. "It's a secret garden, and I'm the only one in the world who wants it to be alive."

Ron looked round and round about it. "This is bloody brilliant! And do you feel that? It's magic. This place is just full of magic."

For a few minutes, he stood looking around him and Harry watched him anxiously. He wasn't sure what he'd do if Ron hated the garden, or if he thought it was dead. Then Ron began to walk
about softly, his eyes taking in everything.

"I never thought I'd see this place," he said at last, in a whisper.

"Did you know about it?" Harry asked, surprised.

Ron made a sign. "We must talk low," he said, "or someone'll hear us and wonder what we're up to in here."

"Oh! I forgot!" Harry said, putting his hand against his mouth. "You know about the garden?" he asked again, almost in a whisper.

Ron nodded. "Ginny told us. We used to wonder what it was like and how to get in." He gave Harry an amused look. "None of us ever thought to just fly over the wall."

Harry pulled the key out of his pocket. "I found the key but the door's stuck."

Ron carried the key over to the door and peered at the lock. "Just a bit rusted, that's all." He muttered a few words under his breath as he waved his wand, then tried the key in the lock. It turned smoothly and he pulled the door open a little, then closed and locked it again. He handed the key back to Harry, and Harry looked at him in wonder.

"You can do magic, can't you?"

Ron chuckled. "What, that? It's just a little scouring spell from 'The Household Book of Handy Spells'. Even Gilderoy Lockhart could do that one."

Harry hadn't the slightest idea who that was, but it didn't seem to matter because Ron was looking around the garden again. His eyes seemed to be drawn to the tangle of grey branches and ivy, at the creeping vines and twisted bushes, and he looked happy.

"There'll be a lot of nests here, come springtime. The safest nesting place in England, I should think. Hard to get through that tangle of roses and vines and trees, even for a cat."

"Will there be roses? Are the flowers and trees here alive, or are they all dead?"

"Some of them are dead, but not all. Look here."

He stepped over to the nearest bush, an old one with sprawling branches twisted up with more of those vines. "There's a lot of dead wood that should be cut out, but there's some new bits as well. Look, I'll show you a spell my friend Neville taught me. He's apprenticed to Madam Sprout at the local greenhouses, and there's not much about plants that he doesn't know."

Pointing at the bush with his wand, Ron softly chanted some words that Harry couldn't quite understand. Immediately, a hazy outline surrounded the bush, and Harry could see that although parts of it were brown, most of it was green.

"That's its aura, and the green means it's still got life in it," Ron explained.

"It does?" Harry asked, excited. "It's alive."

Ron smiled. "As alive as you or me. It should be budding out any day now."

Harry cried out in a whisper, "Let's go round the garden and see what else is alive!"

Ron was as eager as he was. They went around from tree to tree, and from bush to bush, and at each one Ron cast his spell and Harry watched avidly for signs of life in the auras. More were
"They've run wild," Ron said, "but the strongest ones have thrived. They'll need a bit of pruning, mind. It'll take a fair bit of work to get this garden back in order, and these clematis and honeysuckle vines need to be sorted, but there'll be a lot of flowers here this summer."

"I wouldn't want to make it look like a gardener's garden," Harry said, "All clipped and tidy. It's nicer like this with things running wild, all tumbled up together."

Ron nodded. "It'll still take a lot of work."

Hesitantly, Harry asked, "Will you come again and help me to do it? I can dig and pull up weeds, and I'll do whatever you tell me to do. You will come, won't you?"

"I'll come every day, if you want me to," Ron answered with a smile. "It sounds like fun. We might even have enough room in here, once it's tidy, to play a little one-on-one Quidditch."

"Ginny mentioned Quidditch, and Hagrid said my father was a chaser, but I don't know what either of those are."

Ron's eyes lit up. "Quidditch is just about the best game in the world! My brothers and me play it out on the moors sometimes. Charlie was really good, played for the house team at the local day school. He could have played professionally - "

" - but he liked dragons more," Harry finished. "Yeah, Hagrid told me." The boys exchanged a grin.

"Let me show you how to clear away the deadwood," Ron said. Taking out his wand, he cast the spell for the aura again, then carefully set the tip of his wand against the place where the brown of the aura was showing and traced it around the branch, murmuring another spell in a clear voice. Then he tapped the branch, and the dead wood fell to the ground, the raw end of the branch sealed over with a protective coating.

"Do you think I could learn to do that?" Harry asked, shy again.

"I expect you could," Ron said, grinning at him. "After all, you defeated a Dark Wizard when you were one year old; cutting off dead branches should be easy." He paused and frowned as a thought came to him. "You'll have to get your uncle to buy you a wand, though."

Harry frowned. "That might be a bit tricky. He hardly ever comes to Hogwarts anymore, and when he does, he doesn't stay long. I haven't seen him yet, and I've been here a month."

"Mrs McGonagall might ask him," Ron said, a little uncertainly. "She writes him every week; Ginny posts the letters for her."

"I don't think she likes me," Harry said gloomily. "I'll never get a wand, not if she has anything to say about it."

"Well, you don't need a wand for everything," Ron said reassuringly. "Some of the jobs can only be done by hand." He stared at the ground a few feet away. "Who did that?"

It was one of Harry's own little clearings round the pale green points, and he flushed. "I did. It looked as if they didn't have any room to breathe, so I cleared the weeds out around them."

"You did right," Ron said approvingly, and Harry flushed with pleasure. "A gardener couldn't have done better. Those are crocuses narcissus, and over here are daffodils. They must have been
nearly suffocated, or they would have been nearly ready to bloom by now."

He went from one clearing to another. "You've done a lot of work in a short time."

"I like it," Harry said, feeling a bit bolder. "I like the smell of the earth when it's turned up. I like working. I'm eating much better than I used to."

"It's good for you," Ron said. "There's nothing like hard work to feed the appetite, and nothing like good food to make you grow strong and tall. You haven't had it easy, for all that you're famous; it's the simple things that'll make you whole again."

Harry felt as if he were one of the wild creatures that Ron had found out on the moor, homeless and injured, and the words the other boy spoke were the best medicine he could have had. It was like a balm to his lonely soul, and he could almost feel himself getting stronger as Ron talked.

Feeling shy again, he said, "Can you show me the seed you brought now?"

They sat down, and Ron took the package out of his coat pocket. He untied the string and out tumbled so many packages with bright coloured pictures that Harry was overwhelmed.

"There's a lot of mignonette," Ron said. "They're the sweetest smelling flower and will grow wherever you cast them. Most of these are dead easy to grow - they'll come up and bloom if you just whistle to them." He grinned at Harry. "Literally, as they've had a spell cast on them."

Harry always felt that however many years he lived he would never forget that first morning when his garden began to grow. Ron told him all about the flowers as he helped plant the seeds: what they looking like, what they smelled like, what kind of care they needed. He worked all the time he was talking, and Harry followed him and helped when he could.

When they finished planting the seeds, Ron looked around with a rather puzzled look. "It's a secret garden sure enough," he said, "but seems like some one must have been in it since it was shut up ten years ago."

"But the door was locked and the key was buried," Harry said. "No one could get in."

"Unless they came over the wall like you did," Ron agreed. "Hagrid can't fly a broom, the master is never here and hates the garden, I can't see McGonagall going to such trouble for a garden, and the other servants would be too scared to disobey Professor Snape's orders. But it seems to me that there's been a lot of pruning done here and there over the years."

"But how could it have been done?" Harry asked.

Ron shook his head. "Yeah, how could it have been done?" He suddenly looked around.

"Where's that robin that's calling us?" he asked.

The chirp came from a thick holly bush, bright with scarlet berries. "Is it really calling us?" Harry asked.

"Yeah," Ron said, as if it was the most natural thing in the world. "He's calling someone he's friends with, as good as saying 'Here I am, I want a bit of a chat'. Whose robin is he?"

"Hagrid's, but I think he knows me a little."

"He knows you," Ron said in his low voice again. "And he likes you, too."

"Do you think he really does?" Harry asked eagerly.
He wouldn't come near you if he didn't. Birds are choosy about their friends, worse than people."

"Do you understand everything birds say?"

Ron's grin spread until he seemed all wide, red, curving mouth, and he rubbed his red head. "I think I do, and they think I do. I've lived on the moor so long, I've watched them break shell and learn to fly, until I think I'm one of them."

He laughed and came back to sit on the bench in the alcove next to Harry. "Ron," Harry said, "you are as nice as Ginny said you were. I like you, and you make the fifth person I like. I never thought I should like five people."

Ron looked at him in surprise. "Only five people that you like? Who are the other four?"

"Your mother, Ginny," Harry checked them off on his fingers, "Hagrid, and the robin."

Ron laughed so hard that he was obliged to stifle the sound by putting his arm over his mouth. "I know you think I'm strange, but I think you're the oddest boy I've ever met."

Harry drew a deep breath and did something he had never done. He leaned forward, looked Ron in the eye, and asked him a question.

"Do you like me?"

Ron grinned. "Yeah. I do. I like you, and so does the robin."

"That's two, then," Harry said. "That's two for me."

Harry was startled as the big clock in the courtyard struck the hour and he realised he had to go in to dinner. "I have to go," he said with a sigh. "And you'll have to go too, won't you?"

Ron grinned and held up a packet of wrapped sandwiches. "My dinner's easy to carry about with me," he said. "Mum always makes me something to take with me." He unwrapped the napkin, exposing two slices of bread with something in between. "It's sometimes nothing but bread and butter," he said, "but today I've got cheese, too. Run on and eat. I'll be done with mine first, and I'll get some more work done before I start back home." He sat down in the sheltered alcove out of the wind.

Harry could scarcely bear to leave him. Suddenly it seemed as if he might be a sort of wood fairy who might be gone when he came into the garden again. He seemed too good to be true. Harry went slowly halfway to the door in the wall, and then he stopped and went back.

"Whatever happens, you--you never would tell?"

Ron's cheeks were distended with his first big bite of sandwich, but he managed to smile encouragingly.

"If you were a bird and showed me your nest, do you think I'd tell anyone?" he asked. "Not me. You're as safe as a bird in a nest."

And Harry was quite sure he was.
Harry ran so fast that he was out of breath when he reached his room. His hair was ruffled and his cheeks were bright pink. His dinner was waiting on the table, and Ginny was waiting near it.

"You're a bit late," she said. "Where have you been, Master Harry?"

"I've seen Ron!" Harry burst out.

"I knew he'd come," Ginny said. "How do you like him?"

"I think--I think he's wonderful!"

Ginny looked rather taken aback but pleased, too. "Well," she said, "we think he's the best lad ever born, but we're family."

"I think he's perfect."

Ginny chuckled delightedly. "I knew you'd like him when you met him. How did you like the seeds and tools?"

"How did you know he brought them?"

"I never thought of him not bringing them. He'd bring them if they were anywhere in England. He's such an honest lad."

Harry was afraid that Ginny might begin to ask difficult questions, but she did not. She was very much interested in the seeds and gardening tools, and there was only one moment when Harry was worried. This was when she began to ask where the flowers were to be planted.

"Who did you ask about it?" Ginny asked.

"I haven't asked anybody yet," Harry admitted. "I'm not sure who to ask. I know Mr Filch is the caretaker, but he snarls whenever he sees me, and his cat tried to bite me."

"If I were you, I'd ask Hagrid. Professor Snape lets him do what he likes because he was here when Mrs. Snape was alive, and he used to make her laugh. She liked him. Perhaps he'd find you a corner somewhere out of the way."

"If it was out of the way and no one wanted it, no one could mind me having it, could they?"

Harry said anxiously.

"There wouldn't be any reason. You wouldn't do any harm."

Harry ate his dinner as quickly as he could, and when he rose from the table, he was going to put on his cloak again, but Ginny stopped him.

"I've got something to tell you," she said. "I thought I'd let you eat your dinner first. Professor Snape came back this morning, and I think he wants to see you."

Harry turned quite pale. "Why? He didn't want to see me when first I came."

"Well," Ginny said, "Mrs McGonagall says it's because of my mother. She was walking to Hogsmeade, and she met him there. She'd never spoken to him before, but Mrs. Snape had been
to our cottage two or three times. He'd forgotten but Mum hadn't, and she stopped him. I don't
know what she said to him about you, but she said something that put him in mind to see you
before he goes away again."

"Is he going away again soon?"

"Bound to--he never stays long, and he's gone for months at a time."

Harry was glad. If his uncle did not come back until autumn, there would be time to watch the
secret garden come alive. Even if he found out then and took it away from him, he would have
had that much at least.

"When do you think he will want to see--"

He did not finish the sentence because the door opened, and Mrs McGonagall walked in. She had
on her best green robes, a tartan hat, and her collar was fastened with a large brooch. She looked
nervous and excited.

"That will never do!" she said, taking a look at Harry and noting with disapproval that his trousers
were muddy. "You must change immediately. Ginny, help him into a clean shirt and trousers, and
then his best robe. Professor Snape sent me to bring him to him in his study. And do see if you can
do something with that hair!"

All the pink left Harry's cheeks. His heart began to thump, and he felt himself changing into a stiff,
silent child again. He didn't even answer Mrs McGonagall, but turned and walked into his
bedroom, followed by Ginny. He said nothing while his clothes were changed, standing quite still
as she buttoned up the stiff black robes, and didn't even wince as she tried to tidy his unruly black
hair.

Mrs McGonagall sighed. "Well, I suppose that's the best we can hope for. Come, child."

In silence, Harry followed Mrs McGonagall down the corridors. He knew his uncle would not
like him, and he would not like the man, either.

He was taken to a part of the house he had not been in before, a level below the first floor. It was
dark and cold, and Harry shivered. At last, Mrs McGonagall stopped and knocked, and when
someone snapped, "Come in!", she opened the door.

"This is Master Harry Potter, sir," she said.

"You can go and leave him here," a quiet voice said. It was little more than a whisper, and yet
Harry could hear it clearly and shivered. "I will ring for you when I want you to take him away."

When she went out and closed the door, Harry could only stand waiting, twisting his hands
together. The room was dark, and he could make out an outline of the man standing in front of the
fire. He appeared to be tall and thin and almost completely black, from his hair down to his shoes,
except for his sallow skin.

"Mr Potter," he said. It sounded almost like a hiss, and Harry shivered. "Come here."

Harry reluctantly moved closer.

"Closer, boy." Snape said impatiently. "I won't bite, in spite of what they say about me. And yes, I
have heard the rumours."

Harry came closer to the fireplace, and Snape glanced at him briefly before looking back at the
"Are you well, boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are too thin. Do my servants take good care of you?"

"I'm getting fatter," Harry said, a little defiance in his voice. "I was skinnier when I came."

"No doubt." There was a sneer in his uncle's voice, and Harry flushed. "I'll have none of those Muggle fads of dieting or stuffing yourself with useless pap, boy. You'll eat plain, healthy food and like it."

Pot calling the kettle black, Harry thought uncharitably. Now that he was closer, he could see that his uncle was not just thin; he was positively gaunt.

"Yes, sir," he forced himself to say, aware that he sounded surly rather than obedient.

To his surprise, Snape responded with a bark that sounded almost like a laugh. "There's some spirit in you after all. Those Muggles didn't quite manage to beat it out of you." Snape darted another look at him, then leaned his elbow on the mantle and rubbed his forehead against his hand.

"I forgot you," he muttered, and it seemed as if there was a hint of worry in his voice, more for himself it seemed than for Harry. "I intended to send you a nanny or someone of that sort, but I forgot."

The uncertainty in his uncle's voice made Harry step forward, feeling a little bit of courage rise. "Please, sir. I - I'm too old for a nanny. I wouldn't mind a tutor, though."

Snape continued rubbing his forehead. "That was what the Weasley woman said," he muttered absently.

"She knows about children," Harry said. "She's had seven. She knows what's best for them."

Snape lifted his head, and snarled, "And I don't?"

Frightened, Harry took a step back. "S-sorry, sir…"

His uncle sighed and seemed to collapse in on himself. "You're quite right. I haven't the slightest idea what to do with children. Why I should be saddled with - " He broke off and said, in an impatient voice, "So you wouldn't mind a tutor, would you, Potter? You shall certainly have one - - it's past time you learned about the Wizarding world. I expect you don't know the first thing about potion making, for example?"

"No, sir," Harry admitted then, gathering his courage again, said, "That's what you do, isn't it, sir? Hagrid said you're the best Potion master in England, possibly in the world."

Snape turned to look at Harry, his face still mostly in shadow, but the boy could see the hint of a sneer on his face. "Oh, did he? I'll thank that great buffoon to keep his opinions to himself. Merlin knows why I keep him on," he muttered.

Harry bit his tongue, knowing that the Professor kept Hagrid on because his wife had loved the large, kindly man.
"What else would you not mind doing, boy?"

"I - I like being outside. I run and play and - and I have a broom now. Mrs Weasley sent it to me. I fly and look at the gardens, and it makes me hungry. I'm getting fatter every day."

Harry could tell that Snape was watching him now although his face was still in shadow. "Do you like looking at the gardens, boy?"

"Oh, yes!" Harry said fervently. "I like that more than anything, sir! I look at the beds and see if things are starting to stick up out of the earth. It's - it's like magic, sir." Suddenly worried that he might upset his uncle by mentioning gardens, he bit his lip.

To his surprise, what little he could see of his uncle's face softened. "I once knew someone who liked gardens very much," he said softly, and in a much gentler tone of voice he said, "Come here, boy, where I can see you properly."

Encouraged by the softer tone but also feeling a little shy, Harry stepped forward into the firelight, his eyes fixed on the carpet by his feet.

"Look up at me, child," his uncle said impatiently. "I am a poor guardian for any child, too wretched and selfish to care about anyone but myself, but I shan't beat you. I want you to be comfortable, so long as you do not trouble me. So look at me, boy, and tell me what you need. Books? Toys? Games?"

"Please, sir, I -- Might I have a wand, sir?"

"A wand?" Snape repeated, sounding a bit startled by the request. "That's all you want? A wand?"

Harry nodded, still not looking up. "Yes, sir. I've never had toys or games before, so I'm not sure I'd know what to do with them, although books would be nice. But - if I had a wand, sir, I could learn to do magic. And if I'm to be a wizard, I should know how to do magic, shouldn't I, sir?"

With this, Harry lifted his head and fixed his eyes on his uncle, beseechingly. To his surprise, his uncle gasped and took a step back.

"Your - your eyes," Snape whispered.

"Sir?" Harry said, puzzled by this reaction.

"You have Lily's eyes," he murmured. His hand slowly extended towards Harry, as if irresistibly drawn to him. "Just like…"

Harry stared at his uncle, wide-eyed. Seeing him clearly for the first time, he saw that the man had a thin sallow face curtained by lank black hair, a large nose, and black eyes that seemed to bore into Harry's. Eyes that almost screamed the man's pain, even as he looked at Harry as if he scarcely saw him, as if he was seeing something else. Harry felt a sudden lump fill his throat, so palpable was the other man's pain.

His uncle's outstretched fingers brushed against his cheek, then suddenly clenched into a fist and pulled back. "Get out," he snapped.

"Sir?" Harry asked again, startled by this abrupt change.

"Are you an imbecile? Did you not understand what I just said?"
"May I have a wand, sir? You never said."

"Yes, yes," Snape said impatiently. "You'll have your wand. I'll send Ollivander up to fit you personally."

Feeling suddenly brave at forcing this agreement, he said, "And might I have a bit of earth? To plant seeds in? A bit of garden that's not wanted by anyone else?"

"You can have as much bloody earth as you want," Snape snarled. "Just get out - now! And send McGonagall in -- no doubt she's hovering at the door, listening to everything I say."

"Thank you, sir," Harry said, and hurried to the door, not wanted to chance his uncle's shifting moods.

Mrs McGonagall was indeed in the hallway, and Harry paused only long enough to gasp, "He wants you to go in!" before running as fast as he could towards his room -- away from a man whose pain seemed to fill the very air.

He didn't realize until he reached his room that tears were running down his cheeks.

He stopped in his room only long enough to throw off his good robes, drag on his cloak, and grab his broom. He ran as quickly as he could to the garden, and when he flew over the wall, he could see that Ron was not working where he had left him. The tools were neatly gathered together in the little alcove, but there was no Ron anywhere to be seen.

"He's gone," he said sadly. "Was he really here? Or was he just another ghost?"

Something white was caught under one of the tools, and Harry picked it up. It was a corner of the letter he'd sent to Ron, and printed carefully on it were four words above a little drawing of a bird sitting on a nest:

_I will come back_

Slowly, Harry walked back to the house and up to his room. Ginny was there when he entered, and she beamed at him. "Mrs McGonagall said the master said you're to be allowed to play in the garden all you like, and to have a tutor for half-day three times a week."

"He said I could have my garden," Harry said quietly. "I can have it anywhere I want. And I'm to have a wand as well."

"Well, that was nice of him, wasn't it?" Ginny said, plainly impressed. "He must have taken a liking to you."

Thinking of the way his uncle had shouted for him to leave, Harry doubted that, but then he remembered that painful look on his face and the way he'd reacted to Harry's eyes. _Lily's eyes_, he thought to himself. _My mother's eyes_. And then another thought came to him - what colour had Rose Snape's eyes been?

"What have you got there?" Ginny asked, gesturing towards the paper in Harry's hands.

Harry showed her. "It's from Ron. He had to leave before I got back."

"I never knew our Ron could draw like that. It's a thrush on a nest, as natural as life."

Harry knew that Ron had meant the picture to be a message, a promise that he would keep the
secret of the garden. That night, he went to sleep with Ron's picture under his pillow, and the memory of a bitterly unhappy man in his mind.

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Harry had planned to spend the next day working in his garden with Ron, but the weather is never reliable, particularly in the springtime. He was awakened in the night by the sound of rain beating against his window. It was pouring down in torrents, and the wind was wuthering round the corners and in the chimneys of the huge old house. Harry sat up in bed and felt miserable and angry.

"The rain came because it knew I did not want it."

He threw himself back on his pillow and buried his face, hating the sound of the heavily beating rain. He hated the wind and its wuthering. He hated all of it.

"It sounds just like a person lost on the moor and crying," he said.

He had been lying awake turning from side to side for about an hour, when suddenly something made him sit up in bed and listen.

"It isn't the wind now," he said in a loud whisper. "That isn't the wind. It's different. It's that crying I heard before."

The door of his room was ajar, and the sound came down the corridor, a far-off faint sound of fretful crying. He listened for a few minutes, and each minute he became more and more sure. He knew he must find out what it was. It seemed even stranger than the secret garden and the buried key.

Perhaps the fact that he was in a rebellious mood made him bold. "I'm going to find out what it is. Everybody's in bed, and I don't care about Mrs McGonagall. I don't care!"

There was a candle by his bedside and he lit it, then quietly slipped into the corridor. It looked very long and dark, but he was too excited to mind that. He thought he remembered the corners he must turn to find the short corridor with the door covered with tapestry—the one Mrs McGonagall had come through the day he had gotten lost. The sound had come up that passage, he was sure of it. So he went on with his dim light, almost feeling his way, his heart beating so loud that he fancied he could hear it.

The far-off faint crying led him on. Sometimes it stopped for a moment or so and then began again. Was this the right corner to turn? He stopped and thought. Yes, it was. Down this passage and then to the left, and then up two broad steps, and then to the right again. Yes, there was the tapestry door.

He pushed it open very gently and closed it behind him. He stood in another corridor, a short one, with three doors on each side. He could hear the crying quite plainly, though it was not loud. It was on the other side of the wall to his left, and he could see a glimmer of light coming from beneath the first door. Someone was crying in that room, and it was quite a young Someone.

He walked to the door, pushed it open, and entered.

It was a room as big as his own bedroom, and the furniture in it was obviously scaled for a child, not new but of fine quality. There was a fire smouldering faintly on the hearth, and a lamp burning on the night table by the side of a carved four-poster bed hung with brocade. Here was the real nursery, and Harry wondered why he'd been quartered in another part of the house until he saw that the bed was occupied by a boy, crying fretfully. Harry wondered if he was in a real place, or
if he had fallen asleep again and was dreaming without knowing it.

The boy had a sharp, delicate face, the colour of ivory with eyes too big for his face. He had also a lot of fair hair that tumbled over his forehead and made his thin face seem smaller. He looked like he had been ill, but he was crying more as if he was tired and cross than as if he were in pain.

Harry stood near the door, candle in hand, holding his breath. Then he crept across the room, and as he drew nearer, the light attracted the boy's attention. He turned his head on his pillow and stared at Harry, his eyes opening so wide that they seemed immense.

"Who are you?" he said at last in a half-frightened whisper. "Are you a ghost?"

"No, I'm not," Harry answered, his own whisper sounding frightened. "Are you?"

The boy stared. Harry could not help noticing what strange eyes he had. They were grey, and they looked too big for his face because they had black lashes all round them.

"No," he replied after waiting a moment or so. "I am Draco Malfoy. Who are you?"

"I'm Harry Potter. Professor Snape is my uncle."

"He's my uncle, too," said the boy.

"Your uncle, too!" Harry gasped. "No one ever told me I had another cousin. Why didn't they?"

"Come here," Draco said, still keeping his strange eyes fixed on Harry with an anxious expression.

He came close to the bed, and Draco put out his hand to touch him.

"You are real, aren't you?" he said. "I have such real dreams, and I thought you might be one of them."

"I will pinch you if you like, to show you how real I am," Harry said, grinning. "I thought you were another ghost, too."

"They aren't allowed in here," Draco said, an imperious tone in his voice. "Uncle Severus won't allow them." He looked Harry over carefully. "Where did you come from?"

"From my own room. The wind was making such a noise that I couldn't sleep, and I heard some one crying and wanted to find out who it was. Why were you crying?"

"Because I couldn't go to sleep and my head aches. Tell me your name again."

"Harry Potter. Did no one ever tell you I had come to live here?"

Draco shook his head. "No," he answered. "They daren't. I won't let people see me and talk about me."

"Why?" Harry asked.

"Because I am always like this, always ill. My uncle won't let people talk about me, either. If I live, I may be a squib, but I shan't live. I have convulsions, and one day they'll kill me." He said it matter-of-factly, as if he was almost proud of being ill.

"Oh, what a strange house this is!" Harry said. "Everything is a kind of secret. Rooms are locked up and gardens are locked up--and you! Have you been locked up?"
"No. I stay in this room because I don't want to be moved out of it. It tires me too much."

"Does your uncle come and see you?"

"Sometimes, when I am asleep. He doesn't want to see me."

"Why not?"

The boy's lips trembled. "Because--because--I think my father killed my aunt, the night I was born. Uncle Severus' wife."

Harry frowned. "I thought she died from a fall. I thought he hated the garden because she fell off the swing there and died."

"What garden?" Draco asked.

"Oh! just--just a garden she used to like," Harry stammered. "Have you been here always?"

"Nearly always. Sometimes I have been taken to hospitals like St. Mungo's, but they couldn't help me. They told my uncle there was nothing wrong with me, and that I should get out in the fresh air, but they're wrong! I'm very ill!"

"If you don't like people to see you," Harry said, "do you want me to go away?"

Draco grabbed the sleeve of his dressing gown, holding it tight. "No! Don't go away. I'll know it's all a dream if you go away. Sit down here and talk with me."

Harry set his candle on the nightstand and then sat down on the edge of the bed. "What do you want me to tell you?"

"About you. I want to know all about you."

Harry told Draco about living with his aunt and uncle, and his nest in the garden. He told him about Mrs Figg and her cats, and the boys who had chased him and called him 'Scary Harry'. He told him about Hagrid, about coming to Hogwarts. He talked about Ginny and Ron, about learning to ride a broom and wanting to do magic.

"Can you do magic?" Harry asked Draco, remembering that Ginny had said that all the people here were magical folk.

"Of course I can't, Potter," Draco said sharply. "That's what being a squib means. Don't you know anything?"

"No," Harry said frankly. "I don't know much about the Wizarding world. I've been living with Muggles for ten years. I've never been to Muggle school, either; my aunt and uncle wouldn't let me. The Professor says I'm to have a tutor, three half days a week."

"Probably old Professor Lupin," Draco said with a sneer. "He was my tutor, but studying made my head hurt, so I made Uncle Severus send him away."

Harry's eyes widened with surprise. "You didn't want to learn? Why not?"

Draco shrugged. "Not much point when I'm going to die soon, is there? Besides, Lupin was a werewolf."

Harry's eyes widened. "Really? That's brilliant!"
"You may think being mauled to death by a werewolf is 'brilliant', Potter, but I don't."

"Well, if you're going to die anyway, it'd be better to get it over with rather than lying around waiting, wouldn't it? Besides, don't you know anything? Werewolves only change at night when there's a full moon. They're perfectly safe during the day."

Draco looked at him suspiciously. "How do you know?" he asked. "I thought you didn't know anything about the Wizarding world."

Harry shrugged. "Muggle movies."

Draco blinked, and gave him an uncertain look, but didn't seem to want to admit that he didn't know what Harry was talking about. "How old are you?" he asked.

"Eleven," Harry said. "And you're ten."

"How do you know that?" he demanded in a surprised voice.

"Because when you were born the garden door was locked and the key was buried. And it has been locked for ten years."

Draco half sat up, turning toward him. "What garden door was locked? Who did it? Where was the key buried?" he exclaimed as if he were suddenly very much interested.

"It--it was the garden Professor Snape hates," Harry said nervously. "He locked the door when his wife died. No one--no one knows where he buried the key."

"What sort of a garden is it?" Draco persisted eagerly.

"No one has been allowed to go into it for ten years," was Harry's careful answer.

But it was too late to be careful. Draco was too much like he was. He, too, had had nothing to think about and the idea of a hidden garden attracted him as it had attracted Harry. He asked question after question. Where was it? Had he ever looked for the door? Had he asked the gardeners?

"They won't talk about it. I think they have been told not to answer questions."

"I would make them," Draco said imperiously.

"Could you?" Harry faltered, beginning to feel frightened. If Draco could make people answer questions, who knew what might happen!

"Everyone is obliged to please me," he said haughtily. "I told you that. If I were to live, this place would one day belong to me because my father was Uncle Severus' brother. They all know that. I can make them tell me."

Harry thought uncharitably that Draco was like Dudley, that he was spoiled and thought the whole world belonged to him. But Dudley had never talked about not living. And how coolly Draco spoke about it, as if it was something he'd always known and accepted.

"Do you really think you won't live?" he asked, partly because he was curious and partly in hope of making him forget the garden.

"I don't suppose I shall," Draco answered as indifferently as he had spoken before. "Ever since I remember anything, I have heard people say I shan't. I shouldn't be alive--my mother was killed
by the Cruciatus curse and they had to cut me out of her body. I had convulsions all the time when I was a baby; I still do sometimes."

"Do you want to live?"

"No," he answered, in a cross, tired fashion. "But I don't want to die. When I feel ill, I lie here and think about it until I cry."

"I've heard you crying three times, but I did not know who it was. Were you crying about that?"

He did so want him to forget the garden.

"I dare say," he answered, and waved a hand dismissively. "Let us talk about something else. Talk about that garden. Don't you want to see it?"

"Yes," Harry said, quietly.

"I do," Draco went on persistently. "I don't think I ever really wanted to see anything before, but I want to see that garden. I want the key dug up. I want the door unlocked. I would let them take me there in my chair. That would be getting fresh air. I am going to make them open the door."

He had become quite excited, and his strange eyes began to shine like stars, looking more immense than ever.

"They have to please me," he said. "I will make them take me there, and I will let you go, too."

Harry's hands clutched each other. Everything would be spoiled--everything! Ron would never come back. He would never again feel like a thrush with a safe-hidden nest.

"Oh, don't--don't do that!" he cried out.

Draco stared as if he thought Harry had gone crazy. "Why?" he exclaimed. "You said you wanted to see it."

"I do," he answered, almost with a sob in his throat, "but if you make them open the door and take you in like that, it will never be a secret again."


Harry's words almost tumbled over one another. "You see--you see," he panted, "if no one knows but ourselves--if there was a door, hidden somewhere under the ivy--if we could find it, and if we could slip through it together and shut it behind us, and no one knew any one was inside, and we called it our garden and pretended that--that we were thrushes and it was our nest, and if we played there almost every day and dug and planted seeds and made it all come alive--"

"Is it dead?" Draco interrupted.

"It soon will be if no one cares for it," Harry said. "The bulbs will live but the roses--"

Draco stopped him again, as excited as Harry. "What are bulbs?"

"They are daffodils and lilies and crocuses. They are working in the earth now--pushing up pale green points because spring is coming."

"Is spring coming?" Draco asked eagerly. "What is it like? You don't see it in rooms if you are ill."
Harry closed his eyes, smiling as he thought about what Ginny and Hagrid had told him about spring. "It is the sun shining on the rain, and the rain falling on the sunshine, and things pushing up and working under the earth. If the garden was a secret and we could get into it, we could watch the things grow bigger every day, and see how many roses are alive. Don't you see?" he said passionately. "Don't you see how much nicer it would be if it was a secret?"

Draco dropped back on his pillow and lay there with an odd expression on his face. "I never had a secret," he said, "except that one about not living to grow up. They don't know I know that, so it is a sort of secret. But I like this kind better."

"If you won't make them take you to the garden, I feel almost sure I can find out how to get in. And then if they want you to go out in your chair, and if you can always do what you want to do, perhaps--perhaps we might find some boy who would push you, and we could go alone and it would always be a secret garden."

"I should like that," Draco said slowly, his eyes looking dreamy. "I should like that. I should not mind fresh air in a secret garden."

Harry began to recover his breath and feel safer because the idea of keeping the secret seemed to please him. He felt almost sure that if he kept on talking and could make Draco see the garden in his mind, as Harry had seen it, he would like it so much that he could not bear to think that everybody might tramp in to it when they chose.

"I'll tell you what I think it would be like, if we could go into it," Harry said. "It has been shut up so long perhaps things have grown into a tangle."

Draco lay quite still and listened while Harry talked about the vines which might have clambered from tree to tree and hung down, about the many birds which might have built their nests there because it was so safe, about the roses growing everywhere. And then he told him about the robin and Hagrid. There was so much to tell about the robin, and it was so easy and safe to talk about it that he ceased to be afraid. The robin pleased Draco so much that he smiled until he looked almost pleasant.

"I didn't know birds could be like that," he said. "But if you stay in a room you never see things. What a lot of things you know! I feel as if you had been inside that garden."

He didn't know what to say, so he didn't say anything. Draco evidently didn't expect an answer, and the next moment he gave Harry a surprise.

"I'm going to let you look at something," Draco said. "Do you see that rose-colored silk curtain hanging on the wall over the mantel-piece?"

Harry hadn't noticed it before, but he looked up and saw it. It was a curtain of soft silk hanging over what seemed to be a picture.

"Yes," he answered.

"There's a cord hanging from it," Draco said. "Go and pull it."

Harry got up, much mystified, and found the cord. When he pulled it, the silk curtain ran back on rings and uncovered a picture.

It was a picture of four young women, two redheads and two blonds. The two redhead girls were sitting close together, and as Harry stared, they smiled at him and put an arm around each other. They had bright green eyes and laughing faces, and looked so much alike that Harry wondered if they were twins. Standing behind them was one of the blond girls, and she sneered...
disdainfully and turned her face away from Harry, but not before he recognized the girl as his Aunt Petunia. The other blond girl was sitting in front of the twins. She was easily the most beautiful—and the youngest—of the four, although a pout marred her beauty. Harry thought that maybe she didn't like being covered up.

"That's my mother," Draco said, and Harry guessed that he meant the young blond. He thought he could see a similarity between their faces, although her eyes were blue, not grey like Draco's. "I don't see why she had to die. Sometimes I hate her for doing it. I hate Father more for killing her."

Harry turned and stared at him, not sure what to say.

"That's Petunia at the top—she was the eldest and a squib. The twins are Lily and Rose; Rose was married to Uncle Severus, and I suppose Lily must be your mother. You have their eyes, you know. My mother, Narcissa, was the youngest." Draco closed his eyes and turned his head away. "Close it again."

Reluctantly, Harry did so. He would have liked to look at his mother longer. "Why is the curtain drawn over them?"

Draco grimaced. "I made them do it," he said. "Sometimes I don't like to see Mother looking at me. She smiles too much when I am ill and miserable, and I'm quite sure Aunt Petunia hates looking at me."

Harry had to agree that Aunt Petunia probably would. He wanted to ask more about Draco's father, about his mother's death, about the mystery of what happened in the garden, but Draco was looking tired and Harry was suddenly worried.

"What will Mrs McGonagall do if she finds out I've been here?" he asked.

"She'll do as I tell her," Draco answered. "And I'll tell her that I want you to come here and talk to me every day. I'm glad you came."

Harry smiled; it was nice to be wanted by someone, even if it was a spoiled boy. "So am I. I'll come as often as I can, but," he hesitated, "I'll have to look every day for the garden door."

"Yes, you must," Draco agreed, "and you can tell me about it afterward." He lay thinking a few minutes, as he had done before, and then he spoke again. "I think you should be a secret, too," he said. "I won't tell them until they find out. I can always send the nurse out of the room and say that I want to be by myself. Do you know Ginny?"

"Yes, I know her very well," Harry said. "She waits on me."

Draco nodded his head toward a door by the fireplace. "She's asleep in the nanny's room next door. Nurse Pomfrey usually sleeps there, but she went away yesterday to stay overnight with her sister, and she always makes Ginny attend me when she wants to go out. Ginny will tell you when to come here."

Now Harry understood Ginny's troubled look when he had asked questions about the crying. "Ginny knew about you all the time?"

"Yes; she often attends to me. The nurse likes to get away from me, and then Ginny comes." He yawned.

"I've been here a long time," Harry said. "Shall I go away now? You look sleepy."

Draco blinked. "I wish I could go to sleep before you leave me," he said rather shyly.
"Shut your eyes," Harry said, sitting back on the bed. "I'll sing a song to make you go to sleep."

"I should like that, perhaps," Draco said drowsily.

Somehow, Harry was sorry for him and didn't want him to lie awake, so he began to sing a very quiet song he remembered the au pair singing to Dudley when he had a toothache.

"That's nice," Draco said, more drowsily still, and Harry went on singing. And when he looked at Draco again, his black lashes were lying close against his cheeks for his eyes were shut and he was fast asleep. He got up softly, took his candle, and crept away without making a sound.

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The moor was hidden in mist when the morning came, and the rain had not stopped pouring down. Harry was dejected. There could be no going out of doors.

Ginny was so busy that Harry had no opportunity of talking to her about Draco, but after dinner, he asked her to sit with him in his rooms. She came, bringing the jumper she was always knitting when she was doing nothing else, and told him that Professor Snape had left that morning. It had thrown the household into disarray as he'd just arrived the day before and they were all expecting him to stay for a month or more.

"What's the matter, Master Harry?" she asked Harry as soon as they sat down. "You look as if you have something to tell me."

"I do. I found out who was crying."

Ginny let her knitting drop on her knee and gazed at Harry with startled eyes. "You haven't!"

Harry nodded. "I heard it in the night. And I got up and went to see where it came from. It was Draco. I found him."

Ginny's face became pale with fright. "Master Harry!" she said, half crying. "You shouldn't have done it. You'll get me in trouble. I never told you anything about him, but you'll get me in trouble. I'll lose my place, and what will Mum do?"

"You won't lose your place," Harry said firmly. "He was glad I came. We talked, and he said he was glad I came."

"Was he?" Ginny said. "Are you sure? You don't know what he's like when anything vexes him. He's a big lad to cry like a baby, but when he's in a passion, he'll scream the house down, just to frighten us. He knows we don't dare call our souls our own."

"He wasn't vexed. I asked him if I should go away and he made me stay. He asked me questions, and I sat on the bed and told him about the Dursleys, and the robin, and the gardens. He let me see the picture, the one with both of our mothers in it. And before I left him, I sang him to sleep."

Ginny fairly gasped with amazement. "I can scarcely believe it. It's as if you'd walked straight into a dragon's lair! If he'd been like he is most times, he'd have thrown himself into one of his tantrums and roused the house. He won't let strangers look at him."

"He let me look at him. I looked at him all the time, and he looked at me. We stared!"

"If Mrs McGonagall finds out, she'll think I broke the Professor's orders, and I'll be packed back to Mum."

"He's not going to tell Mrs McGonagall anything about it yet. It's to be a sort of secret just at first. And he says everybody is obliged to do as he pleases."

"Well, that's true enough--the bad lad!" Ginny sighed, and wiped her forehead with her apron. "He wants me to come and talk to him every day. And you're to tell me when he wants me."

"Me!" Ginny gasped. "I shall lose my place for sure!"
"You can't if you are doing what he wants you to do and everybody is ordered to obey him," Harry argued.

"Do you mean to say that he was nice to you? And you want to go back?"

"I think he almost liked me."

"Then you must have bewitched him!" Ginny decided, drawing a long breath.

"I don't think so," Harry said, frowning in thought. "I don't remember saying any spells, and I don't know any."

Ginny's face softened. "The magic is in your heart, Master Harry, only you're just now discovering it."

Harry shrugged, not understanding what she meant. "I just went into his room, and I was so surprised to see him, I stood and stared. And then he turned round and stared at me. And he thought I was a ghost or a dream, and I thought perhaps he was. And it was so strange being there alone together in the middle of the night and not knowing about each other, so we began to ask each other questions. And when I asked him if I must go away, he said I must not." He looked over at Ginny. "What's the matter with him?"

Ginny sighed. "Nobody knows for certain. Nurse Pomfrey says his mother was cursed near to death by one of Death eaters, right here in Miss Rose's garden while Miss Rose lay dead beneath the broken swing. It was the Crucius curse, a curse so painful that people have died or been driven mad by it, and no one knows how long his mother was tortured by it. Her poor heart gave out, and the mediwizards had to take Master Draco from his mother's body to save his life. They weren't certain he would live, and Nurse says he had the most horrible convulsions as a baby. It was touch and go for months. Professor Snape was half-mad with grief because of Miss Rose's death, and he wouldn't set eyes on the baby. He said it'd be a squib if it lived, and most likely a murderer like its father, and it'd better die."

"What's a squib? Draco said something about Aunt Petunia being one, and that he was one, too."

"A squib is a non-magical person born of Wizarding parents, which means that they can't do magic," Ginny said. "I don't know if he's a squib or not. The Professor hired a tutor for Master Draco, and he tried to teach the young master, but he refused to learn. They had a specialist from St. Mungo's look at him, and he said the young master needed less coddling and more fresh air, but he'd have none of that! The tantrum he threw - thought he'd bring the house down for sure that time."

"I think he's a very spoiled boy."

"He is. I won't say that he hasn't been ill a good bit. He's had coughs and colds that nearly killed him two or three times when he was younger."

"Do you think he will die?"

"I expect he could, if he put his mind to it, but Mum says there's nothing wrong that fresh air and something to take his mind off dying won't cure. He lies there all day, reading picture books and taking medicine, so it's no wonder he's cross and ill."

Harry sat and looked at the fire. "I wonder if it wouldn't do him good to go out into a garden and watch things growing. It did me good."

The bell rang and Ginny rolled up her knitting. "I dare say the nurse wants me to stay with him a
bit," she said. "I hope he's in a good temper."

She came back in ten minutes with a puzzled expression. "You have bewitched him for sure. He's sitting on his sofa instead of in bed, and he told the nurse to go away and not come back until tea-time. The minute she was gone, he told me to bring you to his room and not to tell anyone else. You'd better go as quick as you can."

Harry was quite willing to go. He didn't want to see Draco as much as he wanted to see Ron, but since he couldn't go out to see Ron, he was happy to spend the day with Draco.

There was a bright fire on the hearth when he entered the nursery, and in the daylight, he saw it was a very beautiful room. There were rich colours in the rugs and hangings that made it look glowing and comfortable in spite of the rain falling outside. Draco looked rather like a picture himself. He was wrapped in a velvet dressing-gown and sat on a day bed, propped against a big brocaded cushion.

"Come in, Harry," he said. "I've been thinking about you all morning."

"I've been thinking about you, too," Harry said. "You don't know how frightened Ginny is. She says Mrs McGonagall will think she told me about you and then she will be sent away."

He frowned. "Go and tell her to come here," he said. "She is in the next room."

Harry opened the connecting door and brought a rather frightened Ginny back with him. Draco was still frowning.

"Are you to do what I please, or are you not?" he demanded.

"I have to do what you please, sir," Ginny faltered, turning quite red.

"Has McGonagall to do what I please?"

"Everybody has, sir."

"Well, then, if I order you to bring Master Harry to me, how can McGonagall send you away if she finds it out?"

"Please don't let her, sir," pleaded Ginny.

"I'll send her away if she dares to say a word about such a thing," said Master Draco grandly. "She wouldn't like that, I can tell you."

"Thank you, sir," Ginny said, bobbing a curtsy, "I want to do my duty, sir."

"And I'll take care of you," Draco said more grandly still. "Now go away."

When the door closed behind Ginny, Draco found Harry gazing at him in astonishment.

"Why do you look at me like that?" he asked. "What are you thinking about?"

"I am thinking about two things."

"What are they? Sit down and tell me."

"The first is that you acted just like a prince in a storybook I read, once. He wore fine velvet and had emerald and diamonds on his crown. He spoke to his people just like you spoke to Ginny, and everyone had to do what he said. I think they would have been killed if they hadn't."
"I shall make you tell me more about that prince presently," he said, "but first tell me what the second thing was."

"I was thinking how different you are from Ron."

"Who is Ron?" he said. "What a strange name!"

He thought that he could tell Draco about Ron without mentioning the secret garden. He had liked to hear Ginny talk about him, and thought Draco might, too.

"He is Ginny's brother, and he's just turned twelve. He isn't like any one else in the world. He knows how to heal all sorts of animals, and all the animals on the moor come right up to him, like he was one of them. He knows ever so much about magic, and gardens, and growing things. I think he can talk to the animals. He asked the robin questions, and it seemed as if they talked to each other in soft chirps."

Draco lay back on his cushion, and his eyes grew larger and larger. "Tell me more about him," he said.

"He knows all about eggs and nests. He knows about everything that grows or lives on the moor."

"Does he like the moor?" Draco asked. "How can he when it's such a great, bare, dreary place?"

"It's the most beautiful place," Harry protested. "Thousands of lovely things grow on it, and there are thousands of little creatures all busy building nests and making homes. They are so busy and having such fun under the earth or in the trees or heather. It's their world."

"How do you know all that?" Draco asked.

"I've never been there, really. I only drove over it in the dark. I thought it was hideous. Ginny told me about it first, and then Ron. When Ron talks about it you feel as if you saw things and heard them, and as if you were standing in the heather with the sun shining and the gorse smelling like honey—and all full of bees and butterflies."

"You never see anything if you are ill," Draco said restlessly. He looked like a person listening to a new sound in the distance and wondering what it was.

"You can't if you stay in a room," Harry said.

"I couldn't go on the moor," Draco said in a resentful tone.

Harry was silent for a minute. "You might, someday."

Draco moved as if he were startled. "Go on the moor! How could I? I am going to die."

"How do you know?" Harry said unsympathetically. He didn't like the way Draco had of talking about dying, almost as if he were boasting about it.

"I've heard it ever since I remember," Draco answered crossly. "They are always whispering about it and thinking I don't notice. They wish I would, too."

Harry felt quite rebellious. "If they wished I would, then I wouldn't, just to show them. Who wishes you would die?"

"The servants because they hate me. I think Nurse Pomfrey expects Uncle Severus to give her a nice settlement once I'm gone, in gratitude for her service, the more fool her. And I think my uncle
wishes it, too."

"I don't believe he does," Harry said, quite obstinately, thinking of the lonely man in the dark room, staring into the fireplace.

That made Draco turn and look at him again. "Don't you?" he said.

"No. If he wanted you to die, he wouldn't have a nurse here to look after you, and he wouldn't have taken you to see those specialists. Like the mediwizard from St. Mungo's, the one that said you needed fresh air and such. Did he say you were going to die?"

"No…"

"What did he say?"

"He didn't whisper," Draco said, plucking at his cover with long fingers. "The others always whispered, and I hated that. He said, 'The lad might live if he would make up his mind to it.' "

"I'll tell you who would make you want to live," Harry said. "I believe Ron would. He's always talking about living things. He never talks about dead things, or things that are ill. He's always looking up in the sky to watch birds flying--or looking down at the earth to see something growing. And he laughs such a big laugh that it makes you want to laugh, too."

He pulled his stool nearer to the daybed and smiled as he remembered that laugh. "Don't let's talk about dying. I don't like it. Let's talk about living. Let's talk about gardens and growing things and Ron. And then we can look at your pictures."

It was the best thing he could have said. To talk about Ron meant to talk about the moor and about the cottage and the nine people who lived in it. And about Ron's mother, and the racing broom, and the moor with the sun on it, and pale green points sticking up out of the black sod. And it was all so alive that Harry talked more than he had ever talked before--and Draco both talked and listened as he had never done either before. And they both began to laugh over nothing as children will when they are happy together.

They laughed so hard that in the end they were making as much noise as if they had been two ordinary, healthy, natural children, instead of a lonely, unloved boy and a sickly boy who believed that he was going to die.

They enjoyed themselves so much that they forgot the pictures and they forgot about the time. They had been laughing quite loudly over Hagrid and his robin, and Draco was actually sitting up as if he had forgotten about his spasms, when the door opened and in walked Nurse Pomfrey and Mrs McGonagall.

Nurse Pomfrey started in alarm, and Mrs McGonagall almost fell because the nurse had accidentally bumped against her.

"Merlin, help us!" exclaimed poor Mrs McGonagall with her eyes almost starting out of her head.

"What is this?" Nurse Pomfrey said, coming forward.

Harry was reminded of the prince again as Draco answered as if neither the nurse's alarm nor Mrs McGonagall's terror were of the slightest consequence. He was as little disturbed or frightened as if an elderly cat and dog had walked into the room.

"This is my cousin, Harry Potter," he said. "I asked him to come and talk to me. I like him. He must come and talk to me whenever I send for him."
Nurse Pomfrey turned reproachfully to Mrs McGonagall, and the housekeeper paled. "I don't know how it happened. There's not a servant on the place that'd dare to talk--they all have their orders."

"Don't be silly, McGonagall. Nobody told him anything," Draco said. "He heard me crying and found me himself. I am glad he came."

Harry saw that Nurse Pomfrey did not look pleased, but it was quite plain that she didn't dare oppose her patient. She waved her wand over Draco and frowned as she noted his rapid pulse.

"I am afraid there has been too much excitement, which is not good for you, my dear," she said.

"I should be excited if Harry is kept away," Draco retorted, his eyes beginning to sparkle dangerously. "I'm better. He makes me better. We will have tea together."

Mrs McGonagall and Nurse Pomfrey looked at each other in a troubled way, but there was evidently nothing to be done.

"He does look rather better," ventured Nurse Pomfrey. "But he looked better this morning before the boy came into the room."

"He came into the room last night. He stayed with me a long time, and sang me a song that made me go to sleep," Draco said. "I was better when I woke up. I wanted my breakfast. I want my tea now. Tell Ginny, McGonagall."

Mrs McGonagall didn't stay in the room long, only saying a few words of warning before going to summon Ginny. Draco must not talk too much, he must not forget he was ill, nor that he tired easily. Harry thought that there seemed to be a number of uncomfortable things Draco was not to forget.

Draco looked fretful and kept his strange black-lashed eyes fixed on the housekeeper's face. "I want to forget it," he said at last. "Harry makes me forget it. That's why I want him here."

Mrs McGonagall didn't look happy when she left the room, and gave Harry a puzzled look. He had become silent again, and it was apparent that she could not see what the attraction was. But Draco actually did look brighter, and she sighed as she left.

"They are always wanting me to eat things when I don't want to," Draco said as Ginny brought in the tea and put it on the table by the sofa. "Now, if you'll eat, I will. Those muffins look so nice and hot. Tell me about princes."

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Waiting Out the Rain

It rained for the rest of the week. Although Harry missed being able to see the garden and Ron, he was too busy to be bored. He had spent hours every day with Draco in his room, talking about princes and gardens and Ron and the cottage on the moor. They had looked at Draco's picture books together, and sometimes Harry had read a little to him. When Draco was amused and interested, Harry thought he hardly looked like an invalid at all, except that his face was so colourless and he was always lying in bed or on the sofa.

To Harry's surprise, Mrs McGonagall accepted the change in events with good grace. Only once had she made a comment, while walking Harry back to his room after tea half-way through the week.

"You're a sly young one to go slipping around the house at night like that, and Merlin knows what the master will say when he finds out, but there's no denying it hasn't been a blessing to the rest of us. He's not had a tantrum or a crying fit since you made friends. Nurse Pomfrey was just about to give up the case because she was so sick of him, but she says she doesn't mind staying now that you've gone on duty with her." And she even laughed a little and ruffled his hair before leaving Ginny to put Harry to bed.

In his talks with Draco, Harry tried to be very cautious about what he said about the secret garden. He wanted to find out first if Draco was the sort of boy you could tell a secret to. He wasn't in the least like Ron, but he was so pleased by the idea of a secret garden that Harry thought perhaps he could be trusted. And if he could be trusted, it would be possible to take him into the garden--after all, that doctor had said fresh air would do Draco good. Perhaps if he had a great deal of fresh air, and if he talked with Ron and let Ron's healing magic work, then Draco might not think so much about dying.

His plans to tell Draco about the garden were thwarted for most of the week. First of all, there was the incessant rain. Harry felt that he really couldn't divulge the secret of the garden without talking it over with Ron first. The other boy knew much more about human nature and healing than Harry, and Harry was sure that he would know what to do about Draco. The other reasons why Harry kept putting it off had to do with Draco himself.

On the day after Harry met Draco, he was summoned to the library while Draco was having his nap after dinner. Waiting there, he found a strange old man waiting for him beside a table covered with dozens of boxes. The man turned as Harry entered the room, his wide, pale eyes shining like moons through the gloom of the library.

"Hello," Harry said awkwardly.

"Well, well," the man said. "Harry Potter. I thought I would be seeing you before now, but no matter." His silvery eyes examined Harry without blinking, and Harry thought they were a bit creepy. "You have your mother's eyes. It seems only yesterday she was in my shop, buying her first wand. Ten and a quarter inches. Long, swishy, made of willow--nice wand for charm work."

Harry's eyes brightened as he realised that this man must be here about his wand. He glanced at the boxes on the table, and the name Ollivander's Fine Wands almost jumped out at him.

"Your father, on the other hand, favoured a mahogany wand. Eleven inches. Pliable. A little more power and excellent for transfiguration. Well, I say your father favoured it --it's really the wand that chooses the wizard, of course."
Mr Ollivander had come so close that he and Harry were almost nose to nose. "And that's where..." Mr Ollivander touched the scar on Harry's forehead with a long, white finger. "I'm sorry to say I sold the wand that did that. Thirteen-and-a-half inches. Yew. Powerful wand, very powerful, and in the wrong hands..."

He sighed and then pulled a long tape measure out of his pocket. "Which is your wand arm?"

Harry blinked. "I'm right-handed."

"Hold out your arm, then. That's it." He measured Harry from shoulder to finger, then wrist to elbow, shoulder to floor, knee to armpit, and round his head. As he measured, he said, "No two Ollivander wands are quite the same, just as no two wizards are the same. And of course, you will never get such good results with another wizard's wand."

Harry suddenly realised that the tape measure was working on its own. Mr Ollivander was sorting through the boxes and then he opened one of them.

"Right then, Mr Potter. Try this one. Beechwood and dragon heartstring. Nine inches. Nice and flexible. Just take it and give it a wave."

Harry took the wand and waved it like he'd seen Ron do. Several books flew off the shelves and Mr Ollivander snatched it out of his hand almost at once.

"Maple and phoenix feather. Seven inches. Quite whippy. Try -"

Harry tried, but he'd hardly raised the wand when it was snatched back by Mr Ollivander.

"No, no--here, ebony and unicorn hair, eight and a half inches, springy. Go on, go on, try it out."

Harry had no idea what Mr Ollivander was expecting. The pile of boxes on the table was getting smaller and the pile on the floor larger, but the longer it took, the happier Mr Ollivander seemed to be.

"Not to worry, not to worry! We'll find the perfect match here somewhere." He picked up a box and frowned. "I don't remember packing this one, however...yes, why not. Holly and phoenix feather, eleven inches, nice and supple."

Harry took the wand. He felt a sudden warmth in his fingers. He moved the wand in a swishing motion through the air, and a stream of red-and-gold sparks shot from the end of firework.

"Oh, bravo!" Mr Ollivander cried. "Yes, very good, indeed."

He started putting the other wands back into their boxes, muttering, "curious...very curious."

"Sorry," Harry said, "but what's curious?"

Mr Ollivander fixed Harry with his pale stare. "I remember every wand I've ever sold, Mr Potter. Every single wand. It so happens that the phoenix whose tail feather is in your wand, gave another feather--just one other. It is very curious indeed that you should be destined for this wand when its brother gave you that scar."

Harry swallowed, his eyes widening.

"Yes. The wand chooses the wizard. I think we must expect great things from you, Mr Potter. After all, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named did great things. Terrible, yes, but great."
Harry shivered. And as he left the library, he felt Mr Ollivander's eyes on him.

When Harry got back to his room, he was surprised to find two servants taking the clothes out of his wardrobe while Ginny stood to the side wringing her hands.

Harry's heart plunged into his feet. Had Professor Snape heard about his midnight sortie and ordered him sent from the house? Where would he go if he had? He had no other relatives in the world!

"Oh, Master Harry!" Ginny said in relief at seeing him. "I told them that you wouldn't like it, but they wouldn't listen! Master Draco's orders, they said."

"Orders?" Harry asked. "To do what?"

"To move you into the nursery, Master Harry," one of the other maids said timidly.

Harry frowned. "And Draco told you to do this? Without asking me?"

"He said he wanted you closer to him--"

"Put those down," Harry said sharply. "I'm going to talk to Draco. Don't touch anything while I'm gone."

He stormed off to the nursery. Draco looked up with a smile as he entered his room.

"Harry! Did you get your wand?"

"Why did you tell them to move my things?" he demanded, interrupting Draco.

Draco blinked. "I wanted you closer to me."

"And did you stop to think what I wanted? Did you even ask?"

Draco gave him an incredulous look. "Why should I ask?"

"Why? Because it's polite, that's why! It's what people do."

"People do what I want them to do," Draco said imperiously. "Besides, do you like where you are now?"

Harry opened his mouth to say that he did, then closed it. Although his room was dark and gloomy, he did like being able to look out onto the moor in the morning. And he liked sitting in front of his fire in the evening, alone, thinking over the day. However, it would be good to be closer to Draco, and it might not be so bad to share the fire together after tea.

"It'd be nice to be closer to you, but it would have been better if you'd asked," Harry said. "And I'd like to see the room before I decide whether to move."

Draco smiled smugly and rang the bell on the table beside his sofa. Mrs McGonagall appeared, and Draco said, "Show Harry his new room, McGonagall."

Mrs McGonagall compressed her lips but led Harry down the little hallway to the room on the other side of the nurse's. Like Draco's room, it had obviously been designed for a child. The bed was smaller but, as Harry found out by hopping up on it, very comfortable. One wall was lined with bookshelves, and there was a trunk at the foot of the bed filled with old toys. Curious, Harry pulled out a rather ragged looking stuffed wolf and found the initials SS inked in childish script on
the bottom of one foot.

"Was this room my uncle's?" he asked Mrs McGonagall. She nodded, and he said, "Who did the other room belong to?"

Instead of replying, Mrs McGonagall crossed to the window and pulled back the curtain. Harry caught his breath as he realized that this room also overlooked the moor, and the view was even better than his current room.

An hour later, Harry had been moved into his new room. But he couldn't help being a little annoyed by the smug look on Draco's face.

"Why does it make you angry when someone looks at you?" he asked Draco one day.

"I've always hated it," Draco answered. "Even when I was very little. My nanny took me to the seaside, and when she took me out in my carriage, everybody would stare. Ladies would stop and talk to my nanny, then they would begin to whisper, and I knew then they were saying I shouldn't live to grow up. Sometimes the ladies would pat my cheeks and say 'Poor child!' Once when a lady did that, I screamed and bit her hand. She was so frightened that she ran away."

"She probably thought you'd gone mad like a dog," Harry said, not at all admiringly.

"I don't care what she thought," said Draco, frowning.

"Why didn't you scream and bite me when I came into your room?"

"I thought you were a ghost or a dream," he said. "You can't bite a ghost or a dream, and if you scream they don't care."

"Would you hate it if--if another boy looked at you?" Harry asked uncertainly.

Draco lay back on his cushion and paused thoughtfully. "There's one boy," he said quite slowly, as if he were thinking over every word, "there's one boy I believe I shouldn't mind. It's that boy you told me about--Ron."

"I'm sure you wouldn't mind him," Harry said.

"The animals don't mind him, and perhaps that's why I wouldn't, either," Draco said. "He's a sort of animal charmer, and I am a boy animal."

Then Draco laughed and Harry laughed, too. In fact, it ended in their both laughing a great deal and finding the idea of a boy animal hiding in his hole very funny indeed.

Harry decided that he needn't worry about Draco meeting Ron.

The day after Harry moved into his new room, while Draco was taking his nap after lunch, Harry decided to explore the room on the other side of the nursery corridor. Taking care to keep quiet, he opened the door across from his own room and found himself in a nursery playroom.

It was a bright, cheerful room, although sadly neglected like so many of the locked rooms Harry had seen. Shelves of toys, games, and stuffed animals, long since abandoned, ringed the room. A dusty rocking horse stood in one corner, and a child-sized table sat in the middle of the room with a half-finished puzzle on top. Childish drawings had been framed and hung on the walls, and an old broom was gathering dust in the corner.
Harry walked around the room, looking at everything but not touching. He had learned early on not to touch any of Dudley's toys, and the habit was hard to break. Besides, he thought the room was rather sad and neglected, and he wondered why no one had bothered to clean it up for Draco's use.

The next room was completely different, but just as neglected. It was obviously a schoolroom, with nine desks arranged in three rows before a chalkboard. Bookcases once more encircled the room, but these were empty. He opened one of the desks and found a tattered copybook inside. Curious, he turned the page and looked at the inscription.

*Property of Lucius Malfoy*

His heart started pounding. *Master Lucius*, he heard Hagrid say. *I am Draco Malfoy*, he heard a childish voice declare. And then, that same voice saying, with a quiver in it, *I don't see why she had to die. Sometimes I hate her for doing it. I hate Father more for killing her.*

He stared at the copybook for a long time. "Master Lucius" had lived here at Hogwarts once, had taken lessons in this room, had probably slept in Draco's room. He was somehow related to Professor Snape. He was Draco's father. And he had killed Draco's mother, and possibly Snape's wife.

He laid his forehead down on the desk and sighed. The mystery just kept getting stranger and stranger.

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On the first morning that the sky was blue again, Harry woke very early. The sun was pouring through the windows in slanting rays, and there was something so joyous in the sight of it that he jumped out of bed and ran to the window. He opened the window, and a great waft of fresh, scented air blew in upon him. The moor was green, and the whole world looked as if something Magic had happened to it. There were tender little fluting sounds here and there and everywhere, as if scores of birds were beginning to tune up for a concert. Harry put his hand out of the window and held it in the sun.

"It's warm!" he said. "It will make everything grow faster now."

He kneeled down and leaned out of the window as far as he could, breathing big breaths until he laughed because he remembered what Ron's mother had said about the end of his nose quivering like a rabbit's.

"It must be very early," he said. "The little clouds are all pink and I've never seen the sky look like this. No one is up. I don't even hear the gardeners."

That thought made him scramble to his feet.

"I can't wait! I am going to see the garden!"

He was dressed in five minutes and out of the nursery corridor in ten, broom in hand. He knew a small side door that he could unbolt himself, and he flew downstairs in his stocking feet and put on his shoes in the hall. He unbolted the door, and when it was open, he sprang across the step with one bound. There he was, standing on the grass, with the weak spring sun pouring down on him. Sweet smells wafted about him, and twittering and singing came from every bush and tree. He ran around the shrubs and paths towards the secret garden.

"It's different already," he said. "The grass is greener and things are sticking up everywhere. This afternoon, I'm sure Ron will come."

The long rain had done strange things to the herbaceous beds that bordered the walk by the lower wall. There were things sprouting and pushing out from the clumps of plants, and here and there glimpses of royal purple and yellow unfurling among the stems of crocuses and daffodils.

When he reached the place where the door hid itself under the ivy, he was startled by a curious loud sound. It was the hoot of an owl, and it came from the top of the wall. When he looked up, he saw a small owl sitting on the top, looking down at him very wisely indeed. He mounted his broom and flew over the wall, and there sitting under one of the trees was Ron.

Harry flew across the grass. "Ron! How did you get here so early? The sun has only just risen."

Ron got up, laughing and glowing and tousled. "I was up long before the sun. How could I have stayed in bed? There's work to be done, so I came straight here."

Harry grinned at him, understanding what he was saying.

At that moment, the little owl flew down and landed on Ron's shoulder, gripping the rough material of his coat with its talons. Ron didn't seem to mind, only looking at the little fellow with amusement.

"This is Pigwidgeon."
"The owl you rescued," Harry said, staring at the little creature in fascination. It noticed his regard and practically bounced on Ron's shoulder.

"Silly little beggar," Ron said affectionately, then gestured towards the flowerbeds. "Look over there, Harry."

Harry flung himself down on his knees, smiling widely at the sight of a whole clump of crocuses that had burst into flowers of purple and orange and gold.

They ran from one part of the garden to another and found so many wonders that they were obliged to remind themselves that they must whisper or speak low. Ron showed Harry swelling leaf buds on rose branches that had seemed dead. They found thousands of new green points pushing through the mould and put their eager young noses close to the earth to sniff its warmed springtime scent. They dug and pulled and laughed, and Ron showed Harry how to cast the plant aura spell with his new wand.

There was every joy on earth in the secret garden that morning. Midway through the morning, Ron suddenly put his arm on Harry's sleeve, halting his movements, his eyes fixed on something atop the wall.

"We mustn't move," he said softly. "It's Hagrid's robin. I knew he was hunting for a mate when I saw him last. He's found one, and she's building the nest. He'll let us stay if we don't frighten his mate."

They settled down softly upon the grass and sat there without moving.

"It's part of springtime, nest building," Ron said. "You can lose a friend in springtime easier than any other season if you're too curious."

"If we talk about them, I can't help looking," Harry said as softly as possible. "We must talk about something else. There's something I want to tell you."

"What?"

"Well--do you know about Draco?"

Ron turned his head to look at Harry. "What do you know about him?"

"I've seen him. I've talked to him every day this week. He wanted me to come, and says I'm making him forget about being ill and dying."

Ron looked actually relieved as soon as the surprise died away from his face. "I'm glad. I knew I mustn't say anything about him, and I don't like hiding things."

"Don't you like hiding the garden?"

"I'll never tell about it," he answered. "But I said to Mum, 'I've got a secret to keep. It's not a bad one, you know that. It's no worse than hiding where a bird's nest is.' "

"What did she say?"

Ron grinned. "She rubbed my head and said I can have all the secrets I like; she trusts me."

"How did you know about Draco?"

"Everybody in Hogsmeade knows about Master Draco, but they don't talk about him because the
Professor doesn't like it. Mrs McGonagall stops in our cottage whenever she goes to Hogsmeade, and she talks to Mum about him. How did you find out? Ginny said you'd heard him crying and were asking questions she didn't know how to answer."

Harry told him about the midnight wuthering of the wind that had wakened him, and about the faint far-off sounds of crying that had led him down the dark corridors with his candle. When he described the small ivory-white face and the strange black-rimmed eyes, Ron shook his head.

"They're just like his father's eyes. They say the Professor can't bear to see him awake because he loved his brother so much, and knowing that Master Lucius killed his own wife and the Professor's drives him mad."

"What happened to Draco's father?"

"He's in Azkaban, and has been for ten years. It was Professor Snape who found him, lying stunned on the ground near the two women, and it was his testimony that sent his brother to prison."

Harry thought it was no wonder that his uncle's eyes had been so full of pain. "Poor Uncle Severus," he said softly, "and poor Draco. Do you think he really wants to die?"

"No, but he wishes he'd never been born. Mum says that's the worst thing on earth for a child. Children who aren't wanted scarcely ever thrive. The Professor would buy anything money can buy for the lad, but he'd rather forget he's alive."

"Draco's so afraid of dying that he's barely living," Harry said softly.

Ron sat for a few minutes in silence, then lifted his head and looked around the garden. "When we first got in here, it seemed like everything was grey and dead. Look around and tell me if you see a difference."

Harry looked around and caught his breath. "It looks as if a green mist is creeping over everything."

"Yes. And it'll get greener and greener until the grey's all gone. Can you guess what I was thinking?"

"Something about Draco?"

"I was thinking that if he was out here, he wouldn't be thinking about dying. He'd be watching for buds to break open on the rose bushes, and he'd be healthier. I was wondering if we could talk him into coming out here, in that chair they have for him."

"I've been wondering that myself. I've thought of it almost every time I've talked to him," said Harry. "I've wondered if he could keep a secret, and I've wondered if we could bring him here without any one seeing us. I thought perhaps you could push his chair. He could order the gardeners to keep away so they wouldn't find out."

Ron was thinking very hard as he scratched Pigwidgeon's back.

"It'd be good for him, spending time with us," he said. "We don't care about his father, or his back twisting. We're just two kids watching a garden grow. I think that would be the best medicine for him."

"There's something else," Harry said. "He thinks he's a squib. One of the doctors said he might be, because of being inside his mother when she was cursed."
"Ginny said he wouldn't even try when the schoolmaster was here," Ron said, "but I think he was afraid to try, afraid to know for certain. If we bring him here, he's certain to feel the magic in this place."

"He likes to hear about the gardens. I didn't dare tell him much, but he said he wants to see it."

"Then we'll have him out here," Ron said with certainty. Then he smiled. "Have you noticed that the robin and his mate have been working while we're sitting here?"

Ron made one of his low, whistling calls, and the robin turned his head and looked at him inquiringly, holding a twig in his mouth. Ron spoke to him as Hagrid had.

"Get on with building your nest, lad. You haven't got time to lose."

"I like to hear you talk to him!" Harry said, laughing delightedly. "Hagrid scolds him and makes fun of him, and he hops about and looks as if he understands every word, and I know he likes it. Hagrid says he is so conceited he would rather have stones thrown at him than not be noticed."

Ron laughed too, then said to the bird, "Go on with you. Build your nest. You know we won't tell a soul, and you won't tell anyone that we're building a nest here, too."

And though the robin did not answer, because his beak was occupied carrying twigs, Harry knew that when he flew away with his twig to his own corner of the garden, the glint in his dew-bright eyes meant that he would not tell their secret for the world.

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They found a great deal to do that morning, and Harry was late in returning to the house. He was also in such a hurry to get back to his work that he quite forgot Draco until the last moment.

"Tell Draco I can't come and see him yet," he said to Ginny. "I'm very busy in the garden."

Ginny looked rather frightened. "Master Harry, it may make him angry if I tell him that."

But Harry was not as afraid of Draco as other people were, and he was used to other people not caring if he was around. "I can't stay," he answered. "Ron's waiting for me."

The afternoon was even lovelier and busier than the morning had been. Already nearly all the weeds were cleared out of the garden, and most of the roses and trees had been pruned. Ron had taught Harry spells for tying up trailing vines and creepers, and taught him how to activate the whistling charm to make the seeds start growing.

"There'll be apple blossoms overhead," Ron said, working on pruning the apple tree and healing gashes caused by falling limbs over the years.

The robin and his mate flew backward and forward like tiny streaks of lightning. Sometimes the little owl soared away over the tree tops in the park, and each time he came back he was nearly quivering with excitement, so much so that he nearly fell off a branch once as he hooted at Ron, just as if he were relating his adventures.

When they finally took a rest late in the afternoon, Ron looked over Harry approvingly. "You're a good bit stronger than you were when you came. The exercise is good for you."

"I'm getting stronger every day, and fatter, too. Mrs McGonagall will have to get me bigger trousers. And my hair's getting longer, too--it doesn't stick up quite so much."

The sun was beginning to set and sending deep gold-coloured rays slanting under the trees when they parted.

"It'll be fine tomorrow," said Ron. "I'll be at work by sunrise."

"So will I," said Harry.

He ran back to the house as quickly as he could. He wanted to tell Draco about Ron's owl, and about the robin and his mate, and about the flowers that were blooming. So it wasn't very pleasant when he opened the door of his room and saw Ginny waiting for him with an anxious face.

"What's wrong?"

"It's Master Draco. I wish you'd talked to him earlier. He's been close to going into one of his tantrums all day."

Harry's lips pinched together. After having been mistreated by the Dursleys, he had come to enjoy his new freedom, and he saw no reason why an ill-tempered boy should interfere with that. Dudley had been quick to inflict his bad temper on others when he was ill, and to him, Draco seemed to be doing the same thing. He didn't know enough about sick people to know that there was a difference between Dudley's malingering and Draco's nervous ill health.

Draco wasn't on his sofa when Harry went down the hall to his room. He was lying flat on his
back in bed, and he did not turn his head toward Harry as he came in.

"Why didn't you get up?" he said.

"I did get up this morning when I thought you were coming," Draco answered, without looking at him. "I made them put me back in bed this afternoon. My back ached and my head ached and I was tired." In a petulant voice, he added, "Why didn't you come?"

"I was working in the garden with Ron."

Draco frowned and condescended to look at him. "I won't let that boy come here if you stay with him instead of coming to talk to me," he said.

Harry flew into a fine passion. He was hot and tired from working in the garden, and disappointed that he couldn't share the secret with Draco as he had planned to. So his temper snapped.

"If you send Ron away, I'll never come into this room again!" he retorted.

"You'll have to if I want you," said Draco.

"I won't!" said Harry.

"I'll make you," said Colin. "They'll drag you in."

"Will they, Your Highness?" Harry snapped. "They can't make me talk when they get me here. I'll sit and clench my teeth and never tell you anything. I won't even look at you. I'll stare at the floor!"

They glared at each other. If they had been two little street boys, they would have sprung at each other and had a rough-and-tumble fight. As it was, they did the next thing to it.

"You're selfish!" cried Draco.

"What are you?" Harry said. "Selfish people always say that. Any one is selfish who doesn't do what they want. You're more selfish than I am. You're the most selfish boy I ever saw!"

"I'm not!" snapped Draco. "I'm not as selfish as your fine Ron is! He keeps you playing in the dirt when he knows I'm all by myself."

Harry's eyes flashed fire. "He's nicer than any other boy that ever lived!"

"He's a common cottage boy off the moor!" Draco sneered.

"He's better than a common prince!" Harry retorted. "He's a thousand times better!"

Because he was the stronger of the two, he was beginning to get the better of Draco. Draco turned his head on his pillow and shut his eyes, and a big tear ran down his cheek. "I'm not as selfish as you, because I'm always ill, and I'm sure my spine is twisting because of the curse," he said. "And I am going to die besides."

"You're not!" contradicted Harry unsympathetically.

Draco opened his eyes quite wide with indignation. He had never heard such a thing said before. He looked both furious and slightly pleased, if a person could be both at one time.

"I'm not?" he cried. "I am! You know I am! Everybody says so."
"I don't believe it!" Harry said stoutly. "You just say that to make people sorry. I believe you're proud of it. If you were a nice boy, it might be true, but you're too nasty!"

In spite of his weakness, Draco sat up in bed in quite a healthy rage. "Get out of this room!" he shouted, and he caught hold of his pillow and threw it at Harry. He was not strong enough to throw it far, and it only fell at his feet, but Harry was as angry as if it had hit him.

"I'm going," he said. "And I won't come back!" He walked to the door, and when he reached it, he turned round and spoke again.

"I was going to tell you all sorts of nice things. Ron brought his owl, and I was going to tell you all about him, and the robin and his mate. Now I won't tell you a single thing!"

He marched out of the door and slammed it behind him. There, to his great astonishment, he found Nurse Pomfrey standing as if she had been listening and, more amazing still, she was laughing.

"What are you laughing at?" Harry asked.

"At you two," said Pomfrey. "It's the best thing that could have happened to that sickly, pampered thing--to have someone stand up to him." She laughed into her handkerchief again. "If he'd had a brother to fight with, it would have been the saving of him."

"Is he going to die?"

"I don't believe so," said the nurse. "Hysterics and temper are half what ails him."

"What are hysterics?" asked Harry.

"You'll find out if you work him into a tantrum after this, but you've given him something to have hysterics about, and I'm glad of it."

Harry went into his room not feeling at all as he had felt when he had come in from the garden. He was cross and disappointed but not at all sorry for Draco. He had looked forward to telling him a great many things, and Draco had spoiled everything by being disagreeable. As Harry bathed, he decided that he wouldn't tell Draco about the garden. He could stay in his room and never get any fresh air and die if he liked! It would serve him right!

Ginny was waiting for him when he came in from the bathroom wearing his nightshirt and dressing gown, and Harry was a little disappointed to see that she had brought his tea to his room. For the past week, he and Draco had taken tea in Draco's room, and had looked at his books and talked until time for bed.

A large wooden box sitting on the table allayed his disappointment. Its cover had been removed, revealing that it was full of neat packages.

"Professor Snape sent it to you," said Ginny. "It looks as if it has books in it."

Harry remembered what Snape had asked the day he had gone to his study, about wanting anything like games or toys. He opened the first package and found several beautiful books such as Draco had, all about gardens. His name was inscribed on the flyleaf, and Harry ran his fingers over the letters for a long time before he put the book down to look at the other packages. There was a small chess set, a card game, a beautiful little writing-case with a gold monogram on it, and a set of quill pens and inkstand. Everything was so nice that he forgot to be angry with Draco. He had not expected his uncle to remember him, and his heart warmed with pleasure.

"The first thing I shall write with that quill will be a letter to tell him I am much obliged."
If he had still been friends with Draco, he would have run to show him his presents at once. They would have looked at the pictures and read some of the gardening books, and perhaps tried playing the games. Draco would have enjoyed himself so much he would never once have thought he was going to die or have put his hand on his spine to see if it was twisting. He had a way of doing that which Harry could not bear because Draco always looked so frightened. He had never told any one but Harry that most of his "tantrums", as they called them, grew out of his hysterical hidden fear. Harry had been sorry for Draco when he had told him that.

"Draco always begins to think about it when he's cross or tired," he thought to himself. "And he has been cross today. Perhaps--perhaps he has been thinking about it all afternoon."

He stood still, looking down at the carpet and thinking.

"I said I would never go back again…" he hesitated, knitting his brows, "but perhaps, just perhaps, I will go and see--if he wants me--in the morning. Perhaps he'll try to throw his pillow at me again, but…I think I'll go."

Harry had been up since dawn, so he was glad to go to bed. As he laid his head on the pillows, he murmured, "I'll go out before breakfast and work with Ron, and then afterward…afterward I'll go see Draco."

It was the middle of the night when he was awakened by such dreadful sounds that he jumped out of bed in an instant. Doors were opened and shut, there were hurrying feet in the nursery corridor, and someone was crying and screaming at the same time, screaming and crying in a horrible way.

"It's Draco," he thought. "He's having one of those tantrums the nurse called hysterics. It sounds awful."

As he listened to the sobbing screams, he didn't wonder that people were so frightened that they gave Draco his own way in everything rather than hear them. He put his hands over his ears, and felt sick and shivering.

He wondered if Draco would stop if he dared go to him, and then remembered how he had driven Harry out of the room and thought that perhaps the sight of him might make Draco worse. If it could get worse. Now he regretted moving to the nursery; the screams were impossible to ignore from only two doors down. Even when he pressed his hands tightly over his ears, he could not keep the awful sounds out. He hated them so, and was so terrified by them, that suddenly they began to make him angry. He felt as if he would like to fly into a tantrum himself and frighten Draco as he was frightening Harry.

He flung back the covers and got out of bed. "He should be stopped! Somebody should make him stop!"

Just then, his door opened and the nurse came in. She was not laughing now by any means. She even looked rather pale.

"He's worked himself into hysterics," she said in a great hurry. "He'll do himself harm. No one can do anything with him. You come and try, like a good child. He likes you."

"He turned me out of the room earlier," Harry snapped.

It was not until afterward that Harry realized how funny it was that the adults were so frightened that they came to a little boy. He flew down the hall, his temper mounting, so that he felt quite wicked by the time he reached the door. He slapped it open and stomped across the room to the four-posted bed.

"Stop it!" he almost shouted. "Stop it this instant! I hate you! Everybody hates you! I wish everybody would run out of the house and let you scream yourself to death! You will scream yourself to death in a minute, and I wish you would!" It wasn't a nice thing to say, but Harry didn't care about nice right now. He just wanted the screaming to stop.

Draco had been lying on his face, beating his pillow with his hands, and he actually jumped around at the sound of Harry's furious voice. His face looked dreadful, white and red and swollen, and he was gasping and choking, but Harry didn't care.

"If you scream again, I'll scream, too," Harry said. "And I can scream louder than you can!"

Draco had stopped screaming because Harry had startled him so. The scream that had been coming almost choked him. The tears were streaming down his face and he shook all over.

"I can't stop!" he gasped and sobbed. "I can't--I can't!"

"You can!" Harry snapped. "Half that ails you is hysterics and temper--just hysterics--hysterics--hysterics!" and he smacked the bed with his hand each time he said it.

"I felt my spine twisting--I felt it," choked out Draco. "It's twisting and then I'll die." He began to writhe again, and turned on his face and sobbed, but he didn't scream.

"You didn't feel any such thing," Harry said fiercely. "There's nothing the matter with your horrid back--nothing but hysterics! Turn over and let me look at it!"

He liked the word "hysteries", and felt somehow as if it had an effect on Draco. "Nurse Pomfrey," he commanded, "come here and show me his back this minute!"

Nurse Pomfrey, Mrs McGonagall, and Ginny had been standing huddled together near the door staring at him, their mouths half open. The nurse came forward as if she were half afraid.

"Perhaps he--he won't let me," she hesitated in a low voice.

Draco heard her, however, and he gasped out between sobs, "Sh-show him! He-he'll see then!"

It was a poor thin back to look at when it was bared. Every rib could be counted and every joint of the spine. Harry bent over and examined them with a solemn face.

There was a minute's silence, for even Draco tried to hold his breath while Harry looked up and down his spine, as intently as if he had been the great doctor from St. Mungo's.

"It's not twisted at all. It's as straight as mine or anyone's. You've got backbone lumps, but that's only because you're so thin. Mine used to stick out as much as yours do until I began to get fatter. If you ever say your spine is twisting again, I'll laugh!"

Draco rolled over and lay there, blinking up at Harry. There was a look on his face, half-hope and half-fear that his hopes would be crushed. "Really? You're not lying to me, to make me feel better, are you?"

"Of course not," Harry snapped. "I don't care if you feel better or not. I just want you to shut up so we can sleep."
Nurse Pomfrey said, "I didn't know where he got that idea from, Master Harry. I'm sure I've never said anything about twisting spines."

"It was something one of the doctors said," Draco muttered, "when I was little. He thought I was asleep."

Pomfrey's face lit up with comprehension. "Oh! My dear, he said it was a wonder your spine wasn't twisted, having suffered that curse while in utero. He never said it would become twisted. My dear child, have you worried about that all this time?"

Draco nodded. "It won't?" he asked, pathetically.

"Of course not! I could have told you that any time, if you'd only asked."

"There!" said Harry triumphantly.

Draco turned on his face again. Except for his shuddering breaths, he lay still for a minute although great tears streamed down his face and wet the pillow. Presently he turned and looked at the nurse again, and he spoke to her in a voice more like a little boy's instead of a spoiled prince.

"Do you think--I could--live to grow up?"

Pomfrey's face softened. "You probably will if you do what you're told to do, and not give way to your temper."

Draco's tantrum had passed, and he was weak and worn out with crying. This perhaps made him more ready to admit weakness and seek comfort, for he slid his hand toward Harry's. Harry's own temper had abated, and he covered Draco's hand with his own, in acceptance of his silent apology.

"I'll--I'll go out with you, Harry," Draco said. "I won't hate the fresh air if we can find--" He seemed to remember just in time to stop himself from saying "if we can find the secret garden" and he ended, "I'd like to go out with you if Ron will come and push my chair. I'd like so much to see Ron, and the owl, and the other animals."

Harry smiled at him. "He'd like that, too. Ron said that the best thing in the world for you would be just being outside, and I do believe he's the best healer in the world."

Nurse Pomfrey remade the tumbled bed and straightened the pillows. Then she made the two boys a cup of tea. Mrs McGonagall and Ginny gladly slipped away, and after everything was in order, the nurse looked as if she would very gladly slip away also. She yawned quite openly as she looked at Harry, who had pushed a big footstool close to the four-poster bed and was holding Draco's hand.

"You should get back to bed, Master Harry. He'll drop off after a while, if he's not too upset. Then I'll lie down myself."

"Would you like me to sing you that song?" Harry whispered to Draco.

His hand pulled Harry's gently, and he turned his tired eyes on him appealingly.

"Oh, yes!" he answered. "It's such a soft song. I'll go to sleep in a minute."

"I'll put him to sleep," Harry said to the yawning nurse. "You can go if you like."

"Well," said the nurse, with an attempt at reluctance. "If he doesn't go to sleep in half an hour, you must call me."
Harry nodded. The nurse was out of the room in a minute and as soon as she was gone, Draco pulled Harry's hand again.

"I almost told," he said softly, "but I stopped myself in time. I won't talk and I'll go to sleep, but you said you had a whole lot of nice things to tell me. Have you--do you think you've found out anything at all about the way into the secret garden?"

Harry looked at his tired face and swollen eyes, and his heart relented.

"Yes," he answered, "I think I have. And if you'll go to sleep, I'll tell you about it tomorrow."

Draco's hand trembled. "Oh, Harry!" he said. "If I could get into it I think I'll live to grow up! Do you suppose that instead of singing the song, you could just tell me softly--as you did that first day--what you imagine it looks like inside? I'm sure it'll make me go to sleep."

"Yes," Harry replied. "Shut your eyes."

Draco closed his eyes and lay quite still, and Harry held his hand and began to speak in a very low voice.

"I think it has been left alone so long that it has grown into a lovely tangle. I think the roses have climbed into the trees, and the vines of honeysuckle and clematis hang from the branches and walls. Some of the flowers have died, but many are alive, and when the summer comes there will be curtains of flowers. I think the ground is full of daffodils and lilies and iris working their way out of the dark. Now the spring has begun, perhaps--perhaps--"

The soft drone of his voice was making Draco's eyes close, and Harry saw it and went on.

"Perhaps they are coming up through the grass. Perhaps there are clusters of purple crocuses and gold ones even now. Perhaps the leaves are beginning to break out and uncurl, and perhaps the grey is changing and a green gauze veil is creeping over everything. And the birds are coming to look at it because it is so safe and still. And perhaps--perhaps--perhaps--" very softly and slowly indeed, "the robin has found a mate and they're building a nest."

And Draco was asleep.

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Spring Has Come

After the disturbances of the night, Harry didn't wake early the next morning. When Ginny brought Harry his breakfast, she told him that Draco was a little feverish this morning, as he always was after he'd worn himself out with a fit of crying. Other than that, though, he was quiet.

"He said to me, first thing when I went into his room this morning, 'Please ask Harry if he will please come and talk to me.' Just think of him saying please!" Ginny smiled and shook her head. "It's strange what a fancy he's taken to you. And what you said to him last night! Poor lad's been so spoiled all his life, he didn't know what to make of you. Will you go see him this morning?"

"I'll run and see Ron first," Harry said. "No, I'll go and see Draco first and tell him--I know what I'll tell him."

He had his cloak on when he appeared in Draco's room, and for a second Draco looked disappointed. He was still in bed; his face was pitifully white and there were dark circles under his eyes.

"I'm glad you came," Draco said. "My head aches, and I ache all over because I'm so tired. Are you going somewhere?"

Harry nodded and sat down on the bed. "I won't be long," he said. "I'm going to Ron, but I'll come back. Draco, it's about the garden."

Draco's whole face brightened and a little colour came into it. "I dreamed about it all night. I heard you say something about grey changing into green, and I dreamed I was standing in a place all filled with little green leaves. I'll lie here and think about it until you come back."

In five minutes, Harry was with Ron in their garden. The owl was with him, and this time he'd brought a tame squirrel. "This here is Nut." When he said "Nut", the squirrel leaped on to his right shoulder.

They sat down on the grass, and Harry told Ron about the previous night. He could see that Ron felt even sorrier for Draco than he did.

"That poor lad, lying shut up and seeing so little that he gets to thinking of things that set him off screaming." He shook his head. "We have to get him out of there and into the sunshine, before he goes out of his head completely."

Harry nodded. "Yes. He's fascinated with you and wants to see you and your animals. When I go back to the house, I'll ask him if you can come see him tomorrow. And as soon as we can, we'll bring him out here."

It was hard to leave the garden when it was so beautiful, but the memory of Draco's pale, worn face strengthened his resolve. He went back to the house, and as soon as he sat down by the bed, Draco sniffed the air. "You smell like flowers and fresh things," he said, smiling.

"It's the wind from the moor."

There was so much to talk about. It seemed as if Draco could never hear enough of Ron and his animals.

"Do they really understand everything Ron says?" Draco asked.
"It seems as if they do," answered Harry. "Ron says anything will understand you if you're friends with it for sure."

Draco sighed. "I wish I was friends with things," he said, "but I'm not. I never had anything to be friends with, and I can't bear people."

"Can't you bear me?" asked Harry.

"Yes," Draco answered. "It's funny but I even like you."

"I used to think I couldn't bear people, either. I should have detested you if I'd met you before I became friends with the robin and Ron."

Draco put out his thin hand and touched Harry. "Harry, I wish I hadn't said what I did about sending Ron away. I hated you when you said you liked him. I was jealous. But I wouldn't mind Ron looking at me. I want to see him."

"I'm glad you said that," answered Harry, "because...because..."

Quite suddenly it came into his mind that this was the minute to tell him. Draco knew something new was coming. "Because what?" he cried eagerly.

Harry caught hold of both his hands. "Can I trust you? I trusted Ron because birds trust him. Can I trust you for sure?"

Harry's face was so solemn that Draco almost whispered his answer. "Yes--yes!"

"Well, Ron will come to see you tomorrow morning, and he'll bring his creatures with him."

"Oh!" Draco cried out in delight.

"But that's not all," Harry went on, almost pale with solemn excitement. "The rest is better. There is a door into the garden. I found it. It is under the ivy on the wall."

If he had been a strong, healthy boy, Draco would probably have shouted Hooray!, but he was weak. His eyes grew bigger and he gasped for breath.

"Oh, Harry!" he cried out with a half sob. "Will I see it? Will I get into it? Will I live to get into it?" and he clutched Harry's hands.

"Of course you'll see it!" said Harry indignantly. "Of course you'll live to get into it! Don't be silly!"

And he was so un-hysterical and natural, that he brought Draco to his senses. Draco began to laugh at himself, and a few minutes afterward Harry was sitting on his stool by the bed, telling him what the garden was really like, and Draco's aches were forgotten, and he listened, enraptured.

"It's just what you thought it would be," he said at last. "It sounds just as if you had really seen it. You know I said that when you told me first."

Harry hesitated about two minutes and then boldly spoke the truth. "I had seen it, and I had been in," he said. "I found the way in weeks ago. But I didn't dare tell you because I was afraid I couldn't trust you for sure!"

Draco gave him a tentative look. "But now you can?"

Harry smiled. "Yes. Now I can."
Harry smiled. "Yes. Now I can."

The doctor from Hogsmeade had been sent for the morning after Draco had had his tantrum. He was always sent for when such a thing occurred, and he always found, when he arrived, a shaken boy lying in bed, sulky and so near hysteria that he was ready to break into fresh sobbing at the least word. In fact, Dr. Kettleburn dreaded and detested these visits.

"How is he?" he asked Mrs McGonagall rather irritably when he arrived. "He will break a blood-vessel in one of those fits some day. The boy is half insane with hysteria and self-indulgence."

"Well, doctor," answered Mrs McGonagall, "you'll scarcely believe your eyes when you see him. That other little orphan, Harry Potter, has bewitched him. He just stormed in here last night and ordered Master Draco to stop screaming, and startled him so that he actually did stop. And this morning, well, come up and see."

Dr Kettleburn was astonished by the sight he saw as he entered Draco's room. First, he heard laughter and chattering. Then he saw that Draco was sitting on his sofa in his dressing gown, sitting up straight instead of lying back on the pillows, looking at a picture book. He was talking to a boy with unruly black hair, his face glowing with enjoyment.

"Those long spires of blue ones--we'll have a lot of those," Draco was saying. "They're called Delphiniums."

"Ron says they're larkspurs made big and grand," Harry said. "There are clumps of them already."

Then they saw the doctor and stopped. Harry became quite still and Draco looked anxious.

"I'm sorry to hear you were ill last night, my boy," the doctor said, smiling tentatively.

"I'm better now, much better," Draco answered. "I'm going out in my chair in a day or two if it is fine. I want some fresh air."

The doctor sat down by him, felt his pulse, and looked at him curiously. "It must be a very fine day," he said, "and you must be very careful not to tire yourself."

"Fresh air won't kill me," said the young man.

As there had been occasions when this same young gentleman had shrieked with rage, insisting that fresh air would kill him, it wasn't surprising that the doctor was startled.

"I thought you didn't like fresh air," he said.

"I don't when I'm by myself," replied Draco. "But my cousin is going out with me."

"And the nurse, of course?" suggested Dr Kettleburn.

"No, I won't have the nurse." Draco said this so magnificently that Harry couldn't help remembering the young Prince in his storybook.

"My cousin knows how to take care of me. I'm always better when he's with me. He made me better last night. A very strong boy I know will push my carriage."

Dr Kettleburn felt rather alarmed. He didn't much care for this tiresome boy, but he was an ethical man and didn't want his patient to be put in danger. Besides, Professor Snape would have his hide if something happened to his nephew.
"He must be a strong boy and a steady boy," he said. "And I must know something about him. Who is he?"

"It's Ron," Harry said. He felt somehow that everybody who knew the moor must know Ron. And he was right, too. He saw that in a moment, the doctor's face relaxed into a relieved smile.

"Oh, Ron," he said. "If it's Ron, you'll be safe enough. He's as strong as a moor pony, is Ron."

"And he's trustworthy," said Harry.

"Very well," the doctor said. "If it amuses you, perhaps it won't do you any harm. Did you take your potion last night, Draco?"

"No," Draco answered. "I wouldn't take it at first, and then Harry talked me to sleep, all about the spring creeping into a garden."

"That sounds soothing," said Dr Kettleburn, more perplexed than ever. He'd never made such a short stay after a tantrum; usually he had to remain a long time in order to settle the boy. Today he didn't have to give any potions and he was spared any disagreeable scenes.

When he went downstairs, he was very thoughtful. He found Mrs McGonagall in the library, talking to a man with light brown hair flecked with grey.

Mrs McGonagall came over to the doctor. "Would you have believed it?"

"It's certainly a new state of affairs," said the doctor. "And there's no denying it is better than the old one." Shaking hands with Mrs McGonagall, he left the house in a much better frame of mind than he had been in upon entering it.

While Draco settled down for his after dinner nap, Harry was once again escorted downstairs to the library. This time, he found a young-looking man waiting for him. The man smiled and crossed the room to Harry, holding out his hand for a handshake as if Harry were an adult.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Potter. I am Remus Lupin, and I'm going to be your new tutor."

Harry's eyes widened. After Draco's disparaging remarks, he had expected Professor Lupin to look at least a little like the wild beast he could become. Instead, the man looked to be in his mid-thirties, and although his brown hair was flecked with grey and his robes a little on the shabby side, he looked like an ordinary man.

"Professor," Harry said politely, flushing as he realised he was staring. He shook hands.

"I see that Master Draco has told you a little bit about me," Lupin said, his hazel eyes twinkling. Harry flushed even more. "I hope you'll be a better student than he was."

"Yes, sir. I mean, I hope so, too, sir. Although," Harry added, honestly, "you should know that I don't know much about being a wizard."

Lupin nodded. "So Severus told me."

Harry blinked, surprised that his teacher called his uncle by his first name. But then again, they were about the same age, and wizarding society seemed pretty small, so they probably knew each other. He hadn't thought of his uncle as having friends, not the lonely man he'd seen the night they met.
"I understand your uncle was going to procure a wand for you. Has he done so?" Harry nodded. "May I see it?"

Harry reluctantly handed over his wand. Lupin carefully examined the wand, testing its flexibility.

"A very good wand. Have you used it yet?"

Harry flushed again, wondering if he'd done something wrong by using it without permission. Lupin chuckled.

"It's all right, Mr. Potter. Most young people can't resist the urge to experiment. As long as you were careful--"

Eagerly, Harry said, "Ron showed me how to do some charms with it."

"That would be Arthur and Molly's youngest, right?"

Harry wasn't sure; he'd never asked Ron for his mother or father's name, and Ginny hadn't mentioned them. Lupin just nodded and said, "That's fine, then. Molly's schooled most of her children since they were old enough to hold a wand, and I've heard that Ron's a dependable sort."

He gestured towards a chair and said, "If you'll take a seat, Mr. Potter, we'll get started. This first day, I want to explore just what you know and don't know, and then next week we'll begin filling in the gaps."

Harry sat down and said, "Sir? Do you think--could you call me just Harry?"

Lupin looked at him, a hint of a smile on his lips. "Very well, Just Harry." Harry chuckled, and Lupin's grin widened until both of them were laughing.

Harry decided that he was going to like his new classes, and his new tutor, immensely.

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That night, Draco slept without waking or needing to take a potion. When he opened his eyes in the morning, he lay still and smiled without knowing it—smiled because he felt so curiously comfortable. It was actually nice to be awake, and he turned over and stretched his limbs luxuriously. He felt as if tight strings that had bound him had loosened and let him go.

Instead of lying and staring at the wall and wishing he had not awakened, his mind was full of the plans he and Harry had made the day before, of pictures of the garden and of Ron and his wild creatures. It was so nice to have pleasant things to think about. And he had not been awake more than ten minutes when he heard feet running along the corridor and Harry was at the door. The next minute, he was in the room and had run across to his bed, bringing with him a waft of fresh air full of the scent of the morning.

"You've been out! There's that nice smell like yesterday!" he cried.

Harry had been running, and his hair was more unruly than ever. "It's so beautiful!" he said, a little breathless from running. "You never saw anything so beautiful! Spring has come! I thought it had come that other morning, but it was only coming. It's here now! Ron says so."

"Has it?" Draco exclaimed, and sat up in his bed. "Open the window!" he ordered, laughing half with joyful excitement and half at his own fancy. "Perhaps we may hear golden trumpets!"

And though he laughed, Harry was at the window in a moment and flung it wide. Fresh air and beautiful scents and birds' songs were soon pouring through.
"Lie on your back and draw in long breaths of the fresh air," Harry said. "That's what Ron does when he's lying on the moor. He says he feels it in his veins, and it makes him strong and he feels as if he could live forever and ever."

That caught Draco's fancy. "'Forever and ever!' Does it make him feel like that?" he asked, doing as Harry had said, until he felt that something quite new and delightful was happening to him.

Harry was at his bedside again. "Things are crowding up out of the earth. And there are flowers uncurling, and buds on everything, and the green veil has covered nearly all the grey. The nests are full, the babies hatching, and the birds are in such a hurry to feed the little ones. And the rose bushes look as full of life as can be. The seeds we planted are up, and Ron has brought the owl, and a squirrel, and a fox cub, and a newborn lamb."

Draco was listening and drawing in long breaths of air when the nurse entered. She looked at the open windows, surprise on her face.

"Are you sure you are not chilly, Master Draco?" she inquired. "You don't usually like the windows open--you told me you were sure that would give you a cold."

"No," was the answer. "I am breathing long breaths of fresh air. It makes you strong. I am going to sit on the sofa for breakfast, and my cousin will have breakfast with me."

The nurse went away, concealing a smile, to give the order for two breakfasts. When Draco was settled on his sofa and the breakfast for two was put upon the table, he made an announcement to the nurse in his most prince-like manner.

"A boy, a fox, an owl, a squirrel, and a new-born lamb, are coming to see me this morning. I want them brought upstairs as soon as they come," he said. "You are not to begin playing with the animals in the servants' hall and keep them there. I want them here." The nurse gave a slight gasp and tried to conceal it with a cough.

"Yes, sir," she answered.

"I'll tell you what you can do," added Draco, waving his hand. "You can tell Ginny to bring them here. The boy is Ginny's brother. His name is Ron and he is an animal charmer."

They ate their breakfast with the morning air pouring in upon them. Draco's breakfast was a very good one, and Harry watched him with serious interest.

"You will begin to get fatter just as I did," he said. "I'm so much hungrier now than I ever was with the Dursleys, even though they scarcely fed me."

"I wanted my breakfast this morning," said Draco. "Perhaps it was the fresh air. When do you think Ron will come?"

Ron's moorland boots were thick and clumsy and though he tried to walk quietly they made a clumping sound as he walked through the long corridors. Harry and Draco heard him marching, until he passed through the tapestry door on to the soft carpet of the nursery hallway.

"If you please, sir," announced Ginny, opening the door, "Here's Ron and his creatures."

Ron came in smiling his nicest wide smile. The newborn lamb was in his arms and the little red fox trotted by his side. Nut sat on his left shoulder and Pigwidgeon on his right.

Draco slowly sat up and stared, as he'd stared when he'd first seen Harry, but this was a stare of wonder and delight. In spite of all he had heard, he had not in the least understood what this boy
would be like. Draco had never talked to another boy before Harry, and he was so overwhelmed by his own pleasure and curiosity that he didn't even think of speaking.

But Ron did not look the least shy or awkward. He walked over to Draco's sofa and put the newborn lamb quietly on his lap, and immediately the little creature turned to the warm velvet dressing gown and began to nuzzle into its folds.

"What is it doing?" Draco asked. "What does it want?"

"It wants its mother," said Ron, smiling more and more. "I brought it to you a bit hungry because I knew you'd like to see it feed." He knelt down by the sofa and took a feeding bottle from his pocket. He turned the small, woolly head with a gentle hand and pushed the nipple of the bottle into the nuzzling mouth. The lamb sucked it with ravenous ecstasy. He carefully transferred the bottle to Draco's hand.

After that there was no wondering what to say. By the time the lamb fell asleep, Draco had asked Ron a dozen questions about how he'd found each of the animals he had, what they ate, where they slept, and so many more.

Then they looked at the pictures in the gardening books. Ron knew all the flowers by their country names. He also knew exactly which ones were already growing in the secret garden.

"There's columbine, and snapdragon, both, in the garden. The columbine look like a bed of blue and white butterflies when they're out."

"I'm going to see them," Draco said, determinedly. "I am going to see them!"

"Yes, you are," Harry said, quite seriously. "And you mustn't lose any time about it."

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"I Am Going to Live Forever!"

They were obliged to wait several days before they could implement their plan. First, there were a couple very windy days, and then Draco was threatened with a cold. Normally, this delay would have thrown him into a tantrum, but there was so much planning to do that he was kept busy. Ron came in every day, if only for a few minutes, to talk about what was happening on the moor.

The most absorbing thing, however, were the preparations to be made before Draco could be transported with sufficient secrecy to the garden. No one must see the chair-carriage after they turned a certain corner of the shrubbery and entered the walk outside the ivied walls. As each day passed, Draco had become more and more fixed in his feeling that the mystery surrounding the garden was one of its greatest charms. Nothing must spoil that. No one must ever suspect that they had a secret. People must think that he was simply going out with Harry and Ron because he liked them and did not object to their looking at him.

They had long and quite delightful talks about their route. They would go up this path and down that one and cross the other and go round among the fountain flowerbeds as if they were looking at the newly planted flowers. That would seem such a rational thing to do that no one would think it at all mysterious. They would turn into the shrubbery walks and lose themselves until they came to the long walls. Then they would simply slip through the door into the garden. It was a good plan. Now they only had to put it in place.

Rumours of the new and curious things that were occurring in the invalid's apartments had, of course, filtered through the servants' hall. Everybody wanted to hear the news from upstairs. There was a great deal of joking about the unpopular young recluse who, as the cook said, "had found his master, and good for him." The servants' hall had been very tired of the tantrums. The caretaker, Mr Filch, had more than once expressed his opinion that the invalid would be all the better for a little old fashioned discipline. Since the words manacles and thumbscrews were often mentioned at the same time, the rest of the staff ignored him.

Even so, Mr Filch was startled one day when he received orders to report to Master Draco, as the invalid desired to speak to him.

"Well, well, well," he said to himself as he climbed the stairs from the dungeon to the nursery wing, his faithful cat at his heels. "What's to do now? His Royal Highness that wasn't to be looked at calling up a man he's never set eyes on."

Mr Filch was not without curiosity. He'd never caught a glimpse of the boy, and he'd heard a dozen exaggerated stories about his uncanny looks and insane tempers. The thing he had heard of most was that he might die at any moment, and there had been numerous fanciful descriptions of a twisted back and helpless limbs, given by people who had never seen him.

"Things are changing in this house, Mr Filch," said Mrs McGonagall as she met him at the tapestry door to the nursery wing.

"Let's hope they're changin' for the better, Mrs McGonagall," he answered, although the tone of his voice indicated his doubts on that score.

"They couldn't change for the worse," she said. "And as odd as things are now, there's some that find their duties a lot easier since Mr Potter took charge of Master Draco. Don't be surprised if you find yourself in the middle of a menagerie."
It was perhaps well that he had been prepared or he might have been startled. When the bedroom door was opened a small owl, which seemed quite at home perched on the high back of a carved chair, announced his entrance by flying around madly and hooting. The young invalid was neither in bed nor on his sofa. He was sitting in an armchair, and a young lamb was standing by him shaking its tail in excited "feed me" fashion as Ron knelt, giving it milk from its bottle. A squirrel was perched on Ron's bent back, attentively nibbling a nut. Another boy with glasses and unruly hair was sitting on a big footstool, looking on.

"Here is Mr Filch, Master Draco," said Mrs McGonagall.

The young master turned and looked his servant over--at least that was what the caretaker felt happened.

"Oh, you are Filch, are you?" he said. "I sent for you to give you some very important orders."

Filch scowled. "Master Severus gives me my orders," he said, then added grudgingly, 'sir.'

"And my uncle has left instructions that my orders are to be followed," Draco said coldly.

"All right, sir," Filch grumbled. "What're your orders?"

"I'm going out in my chair this afternoon," said Draco. "If the fresh air agrees with me, I may go out every day. When I go, none of the staff are to be anywhere near the Long Walk by the garden walls. No one is to be there. I shall go out about two o'clock and everyone must keep away until I send word that they may go back to their work."

"Very good, sir," replied Filch.

"Harry," Draco said, turning to him, "what is that thing princes say when they've finished talking and want people to go?"

"You say, 'You have my permission to go,'" answered Harry.

Draco waved his hand. "You have my permission to go, Filch," he said. "But, remember, this is very important."

"Thank you, sir," said Filch, and Mrs McGonagall took him out of the room. Outside in the corridor, he gave her a twisted sort of smile. "My word!" he said, "he's got a lordly way with him, hasn't he? You'd think he was the whole Royal Family rolled into one."

Mrs McGonagall sighed. "We've had to let him trample all over every one of us ever since he was born, and he thinks that's what we were born for."

Inside the room, Draco was leaning back on his cushions.

"It's all safe now," he said. "And this afternoon I shall see it. This afternoon I shall be in it!"

Ron went back to the garden with his creatures, and Harry stayed with Draco. Harry didn't think Draco looked tired, but he was very quiet before their dinner came, and he was quiet while they were eating. He wondered why and asked him about it.

"I can't help thinking about what it will look like," Draco answered.

"The garden?"
"The springtime. I was thinking that I've really never seen it. I scarcely ever went out, and when I
did go, I never looked at anything. I didn't even think about it," he said. "That morning when you
ran in and said 'It's come! It's come!', you made me feel very strange. It sounded as if spring was
coming with a great procession and big bursts and wafts of music. That was why I said, 'Perhaps
we shall hear golden trumpets' and told you to throw open the window."

"How funny!" Harry said. "That's really just what it feels like."

They both laughed, but it was not because the idea was silly but because they both liked it so.

A little later, the nurse made Draco ready. Harry noticed that instead of lying like a log while his
clothes were put on, Draco sat up and made some efforts to help himself.

"This is one of his good days, sir," Harry heard the nurse say to Dr. Kettleburn, who dropped in to
inspect him. "He's in such good spirits that it makes him stronger."

"I'll call in again later in the afternoon, after he has come in," said Dr. Kettleburn. "I must see how
the going out agrees with him. I wish," in a very low voice, "that he would let you go with him."

"I'd rather give up the case this moment, sir, than even stay here while it's suggested," answered
the nurse with sudden firmness. "You know what a temper Master Draco has, and he's dead set
upon this."

"I hadn't really decided to suggest it," said the doctor, with his slight nervousness. "We'll try the
experiment. Ron's a lad I'd trust with a new-born child."

The strongest footman in the house carried Draco down stairs and put him in his invalid chair near
which Ron waited outside. After the manservant had arranged his rugs and cushions, Draco
waved his hand to him and to the nurse.

"You have my permission to go," he said, and they both disappeared quickly. Harry thought he
heard a stifled laugh as the nurse headed toward the house.

Ron began to push the wheeled chair slowly and steadily. Harry walked beside it, and Draco
leaned back and lifted his face to the sky. The arch of it looked very high, and the small snowy
clouds seemed like white birds floating on outspread wings. The wind swept in soft, big breaths
down from the moor and was strange with a wild, clear-scented sweetness. Draco kept lifting his
thin chest to draw it in, and his big eyes looked as if it were they that were listening--listening,
instead of his ears.

"There are so many sounds of singing and humming and calling out," he said. "What is that scent
the puffs of wind bring?"

"It's gorse on the moor," Ron answered.

Not a human creature was sighted on the paths they took. In fact, every gardener or gardener's lad,
every handyman and stable lad, had been witched away. The three children wound in and out
among the shrubbery, following their carefully planned route for the mere mysterious pleasure of
it. But when at last they turned into the Long Walk by the ivied walls, the excited sense of an
approaching thrill made them, for some curious reason they could not have explained, begin to
speak in whispers.

"This is it," Harry said. "This is where I used to walk up and down and wonder and wonder."

"Is it?" Draco asked, and his eyes began to search the ivy with eager curiousness.
"But I can see nothing," he whispered. "There is no door."

"That's what I thought," Harry said.

Then there was a lovely breathless silence and the chair wheeled on.

"That is the garden where Hagrid works," Harry said.

A few yards more, and Harry whispered again. "This is where the robin flew over the wall."

"Is it?" cried Draco. "Oh, I wish he'd come again!"

"And that," said Harry with solemn delight, pointing under a big lilac bush, "is where he perched on the little heap of earth and showed me the key."

Draco sat up. "Where? Where? There?" he cried, his eyes as big as saucers. Ron stood still and the wheeled chair stopped.

"And this," said Harry, stepping on to the bed close to the ivy, "is where I went to talk to him when he chirped at me from the top of the wall." He laughed. "He scolded me, and that's when I thought to fly over the wall. But since you can't fly over the wall yet," he said, taking hold of the hanging green curtain, "here is the door."

"Oh, it is!" Draco gasped.

Harry swung open the door. "Ron, push him in, quickly!"

And Ron did, with one strong, steady, splendid push.

Draco dropped back against his cushions, even though he gasped with delight, and he covered his eyes with his hands and held them there, shutting out everything until they were inside. Not till then did he take them away. He looked round and round as Ron and Harry had done.

Over the walls and earth and trees, swinging sprays and tendrils of tender little leaves had crept. In the grass under the trees and in the beds in the alcoves, were splashes of gold and purple and white and the trees were showing pink and snow above his head and there were flutterings of wings and faint sweet chirping and humming and scents and scents. And the sun fell warm upon his face like a hand with a lovely touch.

In wonder, Harry and Ron stood and stared at Draco. He looked different because a pink glow of colour had crept all over him--ivory-skinned face and neck and hands and all.

"I shall get well," he whispered. "Harry! Ron! I shall get well, and I shall live forever and ever and ever!"

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One of the strange things about living in the world is that it is only now and then one is quite sure one is going to live forever and ever and ever. And so it was with Draco when he first saw and heard and felt the Springtime inside the four high walls of a hidden garden. That afternoon the whole world seemed to devote itself to being perfect and kind to one boy.

The others felt it, too. Ron paused more than once in his work and said, "I've seen a lot of afternoons in twelve years, but it seems to me that I've never seen one as beautiful as this one."

"Do you think it's the magic?" Harry asked Ron, watching Draco as he lay in his chair under the apple tree. His eyes were closed and there was a faint smile on his face, and Harry thought Draco had never looked better.

"I wouldn't be surprised," Ron said, looking around the garden. "There was a lot of good magic done in this place. It far outweighs the bad."

Harry noticed that Ron looked briefly toward the broken swing. "Can you really feel what kind of magic was done in a place?"

"Sometimes," Ron said. "At home, you can feel the simple, homey magic that's been woven into the place over the years. Here, I can feel love--both for the people who used this garden and for the garden itself--and that drives away the hatred that tries to intrude."

"I don't know how anyone could feel hatred here," Harry said simply, looking around the garden with contented eyes. "I feel...I don't know. It's like I'm home for the first time in my life. Do you think my parents spent a lot of time here? Do you think that's why I feel like this?"

"I don't know," Ron said slowly. "Your mum and Miss Rose were twins, so I expect they spent a lot of time here together." Hesitantly, he added, "Your dad didn't like Professor Snape much, though."

Harry frowned. "Why not?"

Ron shrugged. "Mum says he and James Potter didn't get along very well. She didn't know much more but said Professor Lupin would. They all played together, from childhood. You should ask him."

Harry nodded. He was eager to learn anything he could about his parents, and he felt a peculiar kind of tie to Rose Snape, who had loved this garden as much as he did.

They returned to Draco's side and he opened his eyes to smile at them. "I wonder if we shall see the robin?"

"You'll see him after a bit. Since the eggs hatched, he and his mate spend a fair amount of time feeding the little ones. Mum says when she sees the work a robin has to keep those gaping beaks filled, she feels like a lady with nothing to do."

This made them giggle so delightedly that they were obliged to cover their mouths with their hands, remembering that they must not be heard. Draco had been instructed as to the law of whispers and low voices several days before. He liked the mysteriousness of it and did his best, but in the midst of excited enjoyment it is rather difficult never to laugh above a whisper.

Every moment of the afternoon was full of new things, and every hour the sunshine grew more
golden. The invalid chair had been drawn back under the canopy of the apple tree when Draco saw something he had not had time to notice before.

"That's a very old tree over there, isn't it?" he said. Ron looked across the grass at the tree, and Harry looked, and there was a brief moment of stillness as they realized it was the tree with the swing.

"Yes," Ron replied.

"The branches are quite grey and there's not a single leaf anywhere," Draco went on. "It's dead, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Ron. "But the vines have climbed all over it, and when they flower, they'll cover every bit of dead wood. It'll be very pretty then."

Harry still gazed at the tree and thought.

"I wonder why it's dead," Draco said. "It doesn't look damaged."

"Not all damage is on the outside," answered Ron. "Sometimes, there's damage done to the inside of a tree that you never see until it falls over suddenly. Then you can see it's gone rotten at the core."

"I wonder -"

"Look!" Ron said suddenly. "There's the robin! He's been foraging for food."

Draco was almost too late but he just caught sight of him, the flash of red-breasted bird with something in his beak. He darted through the greenness and into the close-grown corner and was out of sight. Draco leaned back on his cushion again, laughing a little. "He's taking them their tea. Perhaps it's five o'clock. I think I'd like some tea myself."

"I suppose it's time to go in," Harry said with a sigh. Sunset would be coming before too long, and they needed to get Draco inside before it got cold or he wouldn't be allowed out again.

"I don't want this afternoon to end," Draco said, "but I'll come back tomorrow, and the day after, and the day after, and the day after."

"Then you'll get plenty of fresh air, won't you?" Harry said.

"I'm going to get nothing else," Draco replied. "I've seen the spring now and I'm going to see the summer. I'm going to see everything grow here. I'm going to grow here myself."

"Yes," Ron said. "We'll have you walking about and digging, just like anyone else, before long."

Draco flushed tremendously. "Walk!" he said. "Dig! Shall I?"

Ron's glance at him was delicately cautious. Neither he nor Harry had ever asked if anything was the matter with his legs. "Sure. You've got legs, same as anyone else, haven't you? Nothing's wrong with them, right?"

Harry held his breath, waiting for Draco's answer.

"No, but they're so thin and weak. They shake so that I'm afraid to try to stand on them."

Harry drew a relieved breath.
"That's because you haven't used them," Ron said practically. "And because you're afraid. As you get stronger, so will your legs, and then you'll stop being afraid to stand on them."

"Really?" Draco asked, and he lay still as if he were wondering about things.

They were really very quiet for a little while. The sun was dropping lower. It was that hour when everything stills itself, and they really had had a busy and exciting afternoon. Draco looked as if he were resting luxuriously. Even the creatures had ceased moving about and had drawn together and were resting near them. Ron was watching Draco, and Harry could almost feel his magic flowing through the air toward Draco, giving him hope and making him stronger.

Or maybe it was the magic in the garden. Harry felt as if its magic had been working all afternoon, making Draco look like an entirely different boy. It did not seem possible that he could be the crazy creature who had screamed and beaten and bitten his pillow. Even his ivory whiteness seemed to change. The faint glow of colour that had shown on his face and neck and hands when he first got inside the garden hadn't quite died away. He looked as if he were made of flesh instead of ivory or wax.

Harry sighed again. "Best be getting back in, before they send someone to fetch us and ruin everything."

He and Ron wiped off the tools they'd been using and put them back in the alcove. As they were returning to Draco, Harry suddenly spotted something by the doorway in the ivy.

It was a large shape, filling up the entranceway.

"I oughta have known yeh three would be up to mischief," the figure said. "What I want ter know is how yeh got in ter Miss Rose's garden, an' what yeh're up ter."

"Oh, no," Harry whispered. "It's Hagrid!"

Hagrid stepped out of the shadows, a scowl visible on his face. "Yeh oughtn't ter be here, Harry."

Harry flushed. "The robin showed me the way, Hagrid."

Hagrid's scowl deepened. "Blamin' the robin, are yeh? I suppose he told yeh ter fly over the wall or some such nonsense."

"He did!" Harry said. "First he showed me where the key was buried, but I couldn't get the lock to work, so then he showed me how to fly over the wall. Ron fixed the lock - "

"Ron Weasley! Yeh're in on this mischief as well? What would yer mum say if she knew what yeh were up ter?"

"She knows," Ron said quietly. "I haven't told her anything, just that I had a secret I couldn't tell her, but Mum has ways of knowing."

"We're not doing anything to harm the garden," Harry protested. "We're helping! Please, please don't tell anyone!"

At his first appearance, Draco had been so surprised that he had only sat up and listened as if he were spellbound. But in the midst of it he had recovered himself and beckoned imperiously to Ron.

"Wheel me over there!" he commanded. "Wheel me quite close and stop right in front of him!"
Hagrid's jaw dropped at the sight. A wheeled chair with luxurious cushions and robes came toward him, looking rather like some sort of State Coach. A young prince leaned back in it with royal command in his great black-rimmed eyes and a thin white hand extended haughtily toward him. And it stopped right under Hagrid's nose, so it was really no wonder his mouth dropped open.

"Do you know who I am?" demanded the prince.

Hagrid stared as if he was seeing a ghost. He gazed at the boy, gulped a lump down his throat, and did not say a word.

"Do you know who I am?" demanded Draco still more imperiously. "Answer!"

Hagrid passed his hands over his eyes, and then he answered in a shaky voice. "Who yeh are? How could I not, with yer father's eyes starin' at me out o' yer mother's face. Merlin knows how yeh came ter be in here. I heard yeh was a poor cripple."

Draco forgot that he had ever had a weak back. His face flushed scarlet and he sat bolt upright. "I'm not a cripple!" he cried out furiously.

"He's not!" Harry affirmed.

"Nor a squib, neither?"

That was too much. Draco had said as much about himself, had told Harry he thought he was, but he'd never heard an adult say it. The strength that Draco usually threw into his tantrums rushed through him in a new way. He pushed himself upright in his chair and flung out his hand imperiously.

"One of you, lend me your wand." Ron's wand was lying in his palm in an instant. "Ron, what's a simple charm?"

"Wingardium Leviosa," Ron said, laying a bird's feather on Draco's lap. "It's one of the first ones I learned--well, other than house-cleaning charms. Flick the wand up and swish it, like you saw me and Harry doing earlier, and say the words clearly."

Harry watched Draco intently, muttering under his breath, "He can do it. He can, he can."

Draco concentrated for a moment, then flicked and swished as he said clearly, "Wingardium Leviosa."

To all of their astonishment--including Draco's--the feather began to float up from Draco's lap. His eyes widened in surprise.

"That's it," Ron said encouragingly. "Flick the tip of the wand just a bit to keep the feather in the air."

Draco obeyed, and his voice was filled with awe as he said, "I'm doing it! Harry, look, I'm doing it!"

Harry was grinning from ear to ear. "You're no more a squib than I am," he said proudly.

Harry looked over at Hagrid. Tears were running down his cheeks as he twisted his large hands together. "Merlin bless yeh, lad! Yeh'll make as fine a wizard as there ever was, an' no mistake o' that."
Draco lowered the wand and lay back in his chair, exhausted by his exertion. But there was no weariness in the eyes he turned up to Hagrid, only determination. "This is our garden. Harry and I want it and no one else does. Don't say anything about it to anyone else."

Hagrid nodded. "Eh, yeh're a right strong lad. Don' expect it'll be long before yeh're doin' magic as good as anyone."

"I want to stand," Draco said suddenly. "I'm not afraid anymore. I want to watch the sunset standing on my own two feet."

"Eh, are yeh sure now, lad?" Hagrid asked, concerned. "Yeh shouldn' try ter do it all in one day."

"I'm certain," Draco said, pulling away the blankets covering his legs. "Help me up," he said to Ron and Harry.

With one of his friends on each side of him, Draco slid his legs out and placed his thin feet on the grass. His legs were weak and trembled uncertainly, but he didn't allow that to deter him as he allowed them to pull him to his feet. And then Draco was standing upright, as straight as an arrow and looking strangely tall, his head thrown back and his strange eyes flashing lightning.

Ron watched Draco with sharp eyes. There were scarlet spots on his cheeks and he looked amazing, but he showed no signs of falling.

"I can stand," Draco said, and his head was still held up and he said it quite grandly.

"I told you that you could as soon as you stopped being afraid," Ron said.

Draco suddenly remembered something Harry had said, about Ron having healing magic, and he looked at Ron. "Are you making Magic?" he asked sharply.

Ron's mouth spread in a cheerful grin. "You're doing the magic yourself."

Draco drew himself up straighter than ever. "I'm going to walk to that tree," he said, pointing to one a few feet away from him. "I'm going to be standing when the sun goes down."

He walked to the tree, and though Ron held his arm as he walked, he was wonderfully steady. When Draco stood against the tree trunk, it was not too obvious that he supported himself against it, and he still held himself so straight that he looked tall. Harry thought that he looked quite splendid in spite of his thinness.

Draco fixed his eyes on Hagrid in his funny, imperious way. "Look at me," he commanded. "Look at me all over. Am I a cripple?"

"Yeh're nothin' of the sort," Hagrid said. "What've yeh been doin' with yerself, hidin' out o' sight an' lettin' folk think yeh was cripple an' half-witted?"

"Half-witted!" said Draco angrily. "Who thought that?"

"Lots o' fools," said Hagrid. "The world's full o' jackasses brayin' an' they never bray nothin' but lies. What did yeh shut yehself up fer?"

"Everyone thought I was going to die," Draco said shortly. "I'm not!"

And he said it with such decision that Hagrid looked him over, up and down, down and up. "Yeh die?" he said with a snort. "Nothin' o' the sort! Yeh've got too much pluck in yeh. Just like
this here garden, yeh're too stubborn to die."

Draco looked around at the garden. "This is our garden now. I'll come here every day. But it is to be a secret. My orders are that no one is to know that we come here. Ron and my cousin have worked and made it come alive. I shall send for you sometimes to help, but you must come when no one can see you."

Hagrid's face twisted itself into a smile. "I've come here before when no one saw me," he said.

"When?"

"The last time I was here," Hagrid said, rubbing his chin and looking round, "were about two years ago."

"But no one has been in it for ten years!" Harry cried.

Hagrid chuckled. "I'm Keeper o' the Keys here at Hogwarts. I've had my own key ter this garden since yer father was a gleam in yer granddad's eye. An' I promised Miss Rose I'd look after her garden, often as I could. Didn't matter that Master Severus said no one was ter come here. She'd given her order first."

"It wouldn't have been as alive as it is if you hadn't," Ron said.

"I'm glad you did it, Hagrid," said Draco. "You'll know how to keep the secret."

"How'd yeh like ter plant a bit o' somethin'?" Hagrid asked. "I can get yeh a rose in a pot."

"Go and get it!" Draco said. Ron helped him sit down on the ground, and Harry ran to grab their spades so Draco could dig a hole for the plant. He turned over a few spades of dirt clumsily, then got the hang of it and began digging steadily. Harry helped him out, both of them digging feverishly. Draco looked up at the sky, flushed and glowing with the strangely new exercise, slight as it was.

"I want to do it before the sun goes down," he said.

Harry thought that perhaps the sun held back a few minutes just on purpose. Hagrid brought the rose in its pot from the greenhouse, removed the plant from the pot, and handed it to Draco.

"Here, lad," he said, handing the plant to Draco. "Set it in the earth yehself, same as the queen do when she goes ter a new place."

The thin white hands shook a little, and Draco's flush grew deeper as he set the rose in the mould and held it while Hagrid made firm the earth. It was filled in and pressed down and made steady.

"It's planted!" Draco said at last. "And the sun is only slipping over the edge. Help me up, Ron. I want to be standing when it goes. I know that's part of the magic."

And Ron helped him, and the magic--or whatever it was--gave him strength so that when the sun did slip over the edge and end the strange lovely afternoon for them there Draco actually stood on his two feet--laughing.

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Thoughts to Ponder

They returned to the house, Draco once again in the invalid chair as they had decided to keep both his magic and his returning health a secret. Dr Kettleburn had been waiting some time at the house when they returned to it. When Draco was brought back to his room, the doctor looked at the two boys seriously.

"You should not have stayed so long," he said. "You mustn't overexert yourself, Draco."

"I'm not tired," said Draco. "Tomorrow I'm going out in the morning as well as the afternoon."

"I'm not sure I can allow that," answered Dr Kettleburn. "I'm afraid it would not be wise."

"It wouldn't be wise to try to stop me," said Draco determinedly. "I am going."

Harry had found out that one of Draco's chief peculiarities was that he didn't know in the least what a rude little brute he was with his way of ordering people about. He'd lived on a sort of desert island all his life, and as he'd been the king of it, he'd made his own manners. Harry sat and looked at him curiously for a few minutes after Dr Kettleburn had gone.

"What are you looking at me for?" Draco said.

"I'm thinking that I'm rather sorry for Dr Kettleburn. I was thinking just then that it must be very horrid to have to be polite to a boy who is always rude, and to have done so for ten years. I never would have done it."

"Am I rude?" Draco asked, surprised.

"If you'd been his own boy and he'd been a slapping sort of man," said Harry, "he would have slapped you."

"He doesn't dare," said Draco.

"No, he doesn't," answered Harry. "Nobody ever dared to do anything you didn't like because you were going to die. You were such a poor thing."

"But," announced Draco stubbornly, "I am not going to be a poor thing. I won't let people think I'm one. I stood on my feet this afternoon."

"It's always having your own way that has made you an odd sort of boy," Harry went on, thinking aloud.

Draco turned his head, frowning. "Am I odd?" he demanded again.

"Yes," answered Harry, "very."

"I don't want to be odd," said Draco. "I am not going to be," and he frowned again with determination. He lay thinking for a while, and then Harry saw his beautiful smile begin and gradually change his whole face.

"I shall stop being odd," he said, "if I go every day to the garden. There's good magic there in the garden. I'm sure of it."

"So am I," said Harry.
"And if I stop being odd, do you suppose I'll stop being rude as well?"

"You'll stop being rude when you start thinking about other people as people, not as your subjects. They are, you know. People."

"But then they won't do as I want."

"They'll still do as you want because Uncle Severus has told them to do so," Harry said. "But they won't mind as much if you are polite to them and remember to thank them. That was the hardest thing I had to learn when I came here. No one had ever been nice to me before, and I didn't know how to treat people who weren't always yelling at me or hitting me."

Draco frowned. "I don't like that they hit you. If they were alive, I'd make sure they were punished for that."

"I suppose they were punished, and quite severely, in the end," Harry said quietly.

Draco flushed a little at that, upset that he'd made Harry feel sad. He tried to think of something that would make Harry feel better. "Harry, open the curtain," he finally said. Harry looked over at the windows and then back at him with a puzzled look on his face, for the curtains and windows were wide open. "No, the one over the picture."

Harry eagerly hopped up and drew back the curtain over the picture of the four Evans girls. He'd wanted to have another peep at it since the day he'd first seen it, but he hadn't wanted to upset Draco.

Draco lay on his couch and looked at the picture for a long time. Harry sat down on the stool beside him and stared as well. Petunia had evidently decided to go elsewhere for her space was empty, but the twins were busy braiding Narcissa's golden hair. They smiled out at the boys cheerfully and went back to their work, and Narcissa smiled as well, blowing them a kiss.

"I think I'll leave it open from now on," Draco said slowly. "I know you'd like to see your mother sometimes, and it doesn't upset me to see my mother any more. Now that I know I'm going to live, I don't think I'll mind her smiling at me."

Harry's face fell. Much as he loved his lessons, he hated knowing that he was missing out on the afternoon's adventures in the garden. As he watched Draco and Ron go off to the garden from the top of the stairs, he felt particularly aggrieved that Draco hadn't even offered to forego his afternoon pleasure because Harry couldn't join them. With dragging feet, he made his way to the

They went to the garden the next morning, and it seemed as if overnight more flowers had burst into bloom. More green shoots were poking through the ground, and the vines seemed to move almost as they watched them. Draco was eager to learn how to work the spells that read the auras of the plants, and to help with the digging and weeding. By the time the courtyard clock struck noon to summon them to dinner, he had worked up both an appetite and a sweat.

Ron pushed the invalid chair to the front steps again where the footman was waiting and, after promising to return quickly, Draco and Harry left Ron to his midday meal. Mrs McGonagall's reminder that Professor Lupin was waiting in the library for Harry altered their plans, however.

Harry's face fell. Much as he loved his lessons, he hated knowing that he was missing out on the afternoon's adventures in the garden. As he watched Draco and Ron go off to the garden from the top of the stairs, he felt particularly aggrieved that Draco hadn't even offered to forego his afternoon pleasure because Harry couldn't join them. With dragging feet, he made his way to the
That afternoon, he couldn't seem to get anything right. His attempt to change a mouse into a glass in Transfigurations resulted in a furry glass. His drought charm caused his water glass to overflow instead of dry up. And when asked where the Goblin War of 1632 had taken place, Harry had said, longingly, "In the garden."

Lupin shut his history book sharply, startling Harry out of his trance. Realizing what he had just said, Harry flushed. Lupin sighed and, pulling over a chair, sat down beside Harry.

"Harry, your mind has clearly been elsewhere all afternoon. From your last answer, I can guess where, but I'm at a loss to understand your sudden fascination for the gardens. Yes, they are lovely at this time of year, but your uncle has gone to considerable lengths to further your education. The least you could do is pay attention."

Harry flushed even more and muttered an apology.

"Can you at least tell me why you find the gardens more appealing than your schoolwork?"

Harry looked down at his parchment, tracing circles on it with his fingertip so that he wouldn't have to look at his teacher. "I like gardens," he said helplessly.

Lupin sighed again. "Your aunt was like that. I can't tell you how many parchments she filled up with doodles of flowers and such. It used to irritate your mother no end when she was trying to get Rose to study. About the only class Rose really paid attention in was Potions, and according to Lily, that was because she liked the ones that used flower parts for ingredients."

"Uncle Severus must have been good in Potions, too," Harry said, eager to steer the conversation away from his failings and toward more information about his family. "Seeing that he made a career out of it. Is that where they met? In Potions class at their school?"

"They didn't go to a school," Lupin said. "They took classes here, at Hogwarts."

Harry had guessed that from the schoolroom upstairs, but he wanted to know more. "Why?"

"How much do you know about your parents, Harry?"

"Not much," Harry said frankly. "Aunt Petunia told me they were killed in a car crash. I never knew anything except their names and when I was born. Hagrid told me a bit, Draco a little more but I don't think he knows much either, and all Uncle Severus said was that I have my mother's eyes."

"Right." Lupin rubbed his forehead and said, "Well, as it's obvious that you're not going to learn anything today, I might as well tell you about your family--what I know, at any rate."

Harry's face brightened at that. "I'd like that, please."

"Very well. To start off with, Amelia Snape--that's Severus' mother--was first married to Leander Malfoy. They were both pure-blood families--you remember what I taught you about the difference between pure-bloods, half-bloods, and Muggle-borns, right?"

Harry nodded. He didn't quite understand why it was so important whether one had a Muggle ancestor somewhere along the line, but he'd learned the differences, as well as about pure-blood politics.

"It was an arranged match between their families, but the couple got along reasonably well and, in
due course, she presented him with a son, Lucius. The boy was barely a year old when Leander died. Many wizards courted Amelia after Leander's death, but she refused them all. So it was a considerable surprise when she married Septimus Snape three years later."

"Why was it a surprise? I mean, look at this place," Harry said, gesturing at the room. "The Snapes must be well off, and you told me they were pure-bloods, too."

"Yes, the Snapes are both rich and pure-blooded, but Septimus could never have been rightly called handsome. He was something of a recluse as well--Severus is very like his father. Quite the opposite of the pretty and vivacious Amelia, and many wondered what she could possibly see in him. The answer was simple: they had fallen in love. Septimus doted on his new wife, and within a year of their marriage, Severus was born."

"What did Uncle Lucius think of that?" Harry asked, wondering if jealousy had made Lucius attack Severus' family.

"Lucius was five years older than his half-brother, but the two of them got along quite well. Severus adored his older brother, and Lucius relished his brother's devotion."

"So how did my aunt and uncle meet?"

"Like many wizarding children, Lucius had been schooled at home till he was eleven. Amelia became very ill and, rather than sending Lucius away to school while his mother was in her last years of life, Septimus decided to continue having Lucius taught at home. He engaged a number of excellent teachers for the boys and invited two of the other pureblood families in the neighborhood, the Blacks and the Evanses, to send their children here for schooling as well. At that time, Petunia was eight, the twins were the same age as Severus, as was Sirius Black. Regulus Black and Narcissa Evans were only four at the start, but they joined their siblings when they were old enough."

"Did you go to school with them?"

Lupin shook his head. "No, my family is from the Welsh border, and I'd been bitten by then so I was being home-schooled. I was accepted as a day-student at a boys' boarding school--the same one young Percy Weasley attends now as a scholarship student. Sirius had begged his parents to be allowed to go away to school when he was eleven, and that's where I met him and your father."

"Then how did you get to know Uncle Severus and the others?"

"Sirius often invited me and James, and sometimes their roommate, Peter, to come home with him for the holidays. Regulus was still attending school here, and Sirius always had a crush on one or the other of the Evans girls, so he used to come over here for visits. Petunia transferred to a Muggle boarding school as soon as she could, and Lucius finished school when Severus and the rest of us were twelve, so there were just the three younger Evans girls, Severus, and Regulus. Of course, Lucius came back whenever he could, but he was busy taking control of the Malfoy estate now that he was of age."

Lupin smiled wistfully. "We spent almost every summer here, from the time we were twelve till we were seventeen. Racing brooms, playing games, doing things kids love to do, and of course Lily and Rose dragged us into the gardens whenever they could. Those were some of the best years of my life."

Lupin was quiet for a moment, lost in his thoughts, and Harry watching him, silently urging him to continue.
"I remember the summer we were sixteen, before our last year of school, in particular," Lupin said. "The girls had found this little enclosure that was practically barren except for a few old trees and some hideous shrubs, and they convinced the groundskeeper to let us mess about with it. Rose threw herself into it, heart and soul, and Lily bullied the rest of us into helping. James was so head-over-heels in love with Lily by then so he would have covered himself with ants if she'd demanded it."

Harry grinned at that.

"What almost no one noticed at the time was that Severus was equally smitten with Rose. He was so quiet, so quick to hide in the shadows, that most of us never noticed him, particularly that summer as his father had died the previous spring. James and Sirius liked to tease him, although Lily had reined James in pretty tightly by that summer so he mostly left Severus alone. Sirius was debating between becoming an Auror or playing Quidditch professionally, so he was pretty oblivious to everything."

"You said almost no one," Harry said shrewdly.

Lupin nodded. "Lucius noticed, of course--he spent that year here at Hogwarts as his brother's guardian. He was determined that his baby brother would get everything he wanted. And I noticed as well. Over the years, I had become accustomed to being alone, and large groups were sometimes...difficult, so I would sometimes go off by myself or just watch the others. I could see that Severus was in love with Rose, that he was the one who quietly arranged for whatever she wanted for the garden. Lucius took the public credit to allay suspicion, but he made sure Rose knew who was really responsible. By the time everyone realized they were in love, it was too late. Severus asked Rose to marry him at the end of the school year, and she accepted."

"What happened then?" Harry asked, breathlessly.

"James blew up. He and Lily were engaged by that time as well. He talked Lily into trying to get Rose to break it off, but Rose was adamant. He told Rose that if she married Severus she wouldn't be allowed in their home and he would never visit hers. He tried to get Lily to agree to that as well, but Lily had a mind of her own. She continued to visit her sisters--by that time, Narcissa and Lucius were married as well--as often as she could."

Harry frowned. "Why was my father so hard on Uncle Severus?"

"There were many reasons, but primarily they had to do with Voldemort." Harry shivered and touched his scar.

"Now, remember I told you about Voldemort and about the Order of the Phoenix? Well, it was about this time that both Voldemort and Dumbledore started gathering followers. James was one of Dumbledore's. He suspected that Lucius Malfoy was one of Voldemort's followers, and Regulus as well, and thought they would draw Severus in, too. However, Severus wanted nothing more than to remain here at Hogwarts with his new bride. He didn't need money as he had inherited this estate after finishing school. He didn't want power. He just wanted to be left alone."

"So my father disliked him because he might become one of Voldemort's followers?" Harry asked, not liking the picture this painted of his father.

"Your father was a good man, Harry, but like many pure-bloods, he was narrow-minded and extremely fixed in his opinion. He didn't like Severus when we were all kids, and when Severus' brother and best friend turned to Voldemort, it fixed James' opinion of Severus as someone not to be trusted. Later, we found it was someone else we should have distrusted--James' and Sirius'
roommate, Peter. Peter was always overshadowed by his roommates, and Voldemort promised him prestige and recognition. In return, Peter betrayed your father."

"How?" Harry demanded.

"The war was coming to its peak, and Voldemort's attacks were becoming more deadly. About this time, Lucius realized that Voldemort wasn't going to share his power with his followers, and that he was draining their estates. As his wife, Narcissa, was now pregnant with their first child, Lucius was determined to salvage both the family name and fortune for his son. He agreed to become a spy, but because it was too dangerous for him to be seen in the company of anyone on the side of the Light, he got Severus to agree to be his go-between. No one would be suspicious about a fond brother visiting his younger sibling. He would give Severus information about Voldemort's plans, and then Severus would pass that information on to Dumbledore."

Harry got a bad feeling in the pit of his stomach. "What happened?"

Lupin sighed. "No one knows for sure. One Halloween, Lucius arrived here with his wife, and he told Severus that Peter had given names of the Order members to Voldemort, and that there was going to be an attack on the Potter family. Severus went to Dumbledore to give him this information. When he returned, Rose was lying dead in the garden, Narcissa lay nearby in convulsions from the Cruciatus curse, and Lucius was Stupefied on the ground between them. The Aurors ran Prior Incantato on his wand and found that it had been used to cast the Cruciatus curse more than a dozen times. Rose's wand had been used to cast a Stupefy spell."

Harry swallowed hard. Somehow, it was more horrible knowing the details of the murders rather than imagining them.

"As nearly as they could figure, Lucius had been put under the Imperious curse, and while under it, cast the curses on his wife. Rose stunned him and then fell from the swing, or was knocked from it by Lucius as he fell to the ground. He had no memory of what had happened, but as he bore the Dark Mark and his wand had cast the spells, he was sentenced to Azkaban."

Harry frowned. "That doesn't make sense. Why would he attack his own wife?"

"The Imperious curse makes a person do things they don't want to do, puts them completely under the control of another person."

"Couldn't someone else have done it?"

Lupin shook his head. "There was no other wizard on the grounds--Hagrid may be able to do a little bit of magic, but not enough for this. And Hogwarts was heavily warded because of the war; no one could have crossed the wards without Lucius or Severus, and the only one Lucius brought with him was Narcissa."

"Draco was born that night, and his mother died giving birth to him?"

Lupin nodded. "Your parents were killed that night as well, and so was Sirius. He'd remained at your parents' house to help defend it while Dumbledore gathered his forces. We were too late; by the time we arrived, the three of them were dead, Voldemort was gone, and you bore that mark on your forehead."

"So why did I go to Aunt Petunia instead of Uncle Severus?"

"James had never relented about Severus, so Petunia and her husband had been named in his will as your guardians. And so you went to live with your aunt, Draco remained here at Hogwarts, and Severus retreated so far inside himself that I doubt he'll ever come out."
Harry bit his lip. There was something just not right about the story he'd heard, although he couldn't quite put his finger on it. And even as he ran toward the garden, Lupin having dismissed him early from his classes, the story he'd heard kept running through his mind.

There was another mystery here, and he was going to solve it.

Ron leaned his head back against the tree, scrunched his eyes closed, and then sighed and opened them. "No, mate. There's something there that doesn't make sense."

Harry nodded eagerly. He'd found Ron working on trimming the ivy surrounding the dead tree while Draco planted another rose under Hagrid's supervision, and he quickly and quietly told Ron what he'd learned.

"I felt the same thing, too," he said. "I just can't put my finger on it."

Ron surveyed the garden, as if it was a chessboard and he was studying the placement of the pieces. "My Dad was one of the Ministry people who came here that night. According to him, Miss Narcissa was lying over there," he said, indicating a marble bench beside a bed of flowers. "Miss Rose was lying under the swing, right here, and it was broken. And Master Lucius was lying on the ground between them. Professor Lupin says the wand showed that he'd cast the Cruciatius more than a dozen times, and he probably held it for a couple minutes each time."

Harry nodded, starting to see what Ron was getting at. "Aunt Rose would have seen him attack Aunt Narcissa. There's no way she would have remained in the swing while he did that."

Ron nodded. "If I were to do it, I'd have attacked Miss Rose first. Stupefied her, so that she couldn't interfere. Then I'd have had plenty of time to attack Miss Narcissa."

Harry frowned. "Aunt Rose comes out of the spell, grabs her wand, Stupefies Uncle Lucius and then what? Goes back to the swing? Which then breaks and makes her fall down dead? That doesn't make any sense, either."

"There has to have been someone else in the garden," Ron said slowly. "Professor Snape said the three of them were in the garden when he left. But what if there was someone else, someone none of them saw. And that someone did something to Miss Rose's swing--cut the rope, more than likely."

"Without anyone seeing them?" Harry said doubtfully.

"Maybe they had an invisibility cloak or were using an invisibility spell. The swing breaks and Miss Rose falls. Master Lucius turns to look, maybe starts toward her. Our invisible friend grabs Miss Rose's wand and Stupefies Lucius. Then he--or she--has plenty of time to cast the Cruciatius on Miss Narcissa. He--or she--probably only stopped when they heard Master Severus coming."

Harry drew in a deep breath. "You know what this means?"

Ron nodded. "Yeah. It means Master Draco's father is innocent."

They both looked over at the young man, happily planting under Hagrid's guidance, and then looked back at each other.

"Don't let's tell him yet," Harry said. "Not until we find proof."

"How are we going to do that?" Ron asked. "It was ten years ago!"
"We have to," Harry said grimly, "because it also means that someone here at Hogwarts is a murderer."

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Over the next two weeks, while Harry and Ron tried to solve the mystery of the murders in the garden, Draco was busy discovering the mysteries of both nature and magic.

April had arrived. The seeds Ron and Harry had planted grew as if fairies had tended them. Satiny poppies of all tints danced in the breeze by the score, gaily defying flowers that had lived in the garden for years. Honeysuckle and clematis cascaded from every tree, and irises pushed past the dying daffodils to announce their presence in the world. And the roses—rising out of the grass, tangling around the sundial, climbing up the walls and spreading over them—they came alive day by day, hour by hour. Fair fresh leaves, and buds, tiny at first but swelling until they burst into scent-filled cups delicately filling the garden air.

Draco saw it all, watching each change as it took place. Every morning he was brought out, and every hour of each day when it didn't rain he spent in the garden. Even grey days pleased him. Each day, he was able to stand a little longer, walk a little further, before finally tumbling down into the grass where he would lie "watching things growing" until he recovered his breath.

He would spend the rest of the day working with the flowerbeds or practicing the spells Ron taught him with the wand he borrowed from Harry. Draco could hardly wait for his uncle's return, for the day he would walk into his uncle's study and say, "Please, Uncle Severus, might I have a wand?" He pictured the scene many times in his mind: the surprise on his uncle's face, the pleasure at seeing him so healthy and whole, his pride in knowing that the last of the Malfoy line was not a squib. Until then, he planned on keeping his recovered health a secret.

Harry was growing, too, although he scarcely realized it at the time. No longer a quiet, scrawny boy creeping around the edges of life, he was not only regaining his proper weight and size, but also his sense of identity, of knowing whom Harry Potter was and what he wanted from the world. And what he wanted was a home, a real home - here, at Hogwarts.

The only blight on Harry's enjoyment of these beautiful days was that he had to attend lessons every other afternoon, and more than once he arrived at the library late and breathless from having run the whole way. Professor Lupin would give him a reproachful look, but he didn't say anything. Grateful for his teacher's forbearance, Harry did his best to concentrate on his studies, and in reward, Lupin would release him as soon as he was finished for the day.

Not wanting to lose any precious time in the garden, especially on the days when Harry had lessons, Draco requested that the staff provide a luncheon hamper for their midday meal. The servants would deposit it at the doorway to the long walk, and Harry and Ron would fetch it into the garden.

The difficulty was that what was a sufficient meal for one invalid, one undernourished, and one healthy boy was in no way enough for three hungry boys. They fell upon the feast provided and devoured it like ravenous beasts, and then looked wistfully into the hamper, still hungry, when it had been emptied. Since Draco was still pretending to be an invalid, he couldn't very well demand that Cook provide more or someone would become suspicious. For the same reason, he and Harry were forced to turn away a substantial part of their breakfasts and teas. So by the end of the month, Harry and Draco felt as if a ravenous wolf was growling in their bellies all the time.

"We will have to do something," Harry said in desperation one afternoon when the hamper had once more been denuded. "If there's a pudding again tonight, I won't be able to stop myself from devouring it."
"It was almost more than I could stand, sending away those lovely ham slices at breakfast," Draco sighed.

"Don't let's talk about food," Harry moaned. "I swear I'll start eating the grass if we do."

A voice from behind them said, "I have a better idea."

The three boys swung around, startled, and saw Professor Lupin standing in the open doorway to the garden. In one hand was another hamper, and in the other was a covered pail of milk. They hadn't even heard the door open.

"How did you get in here?" Draco asked furiously. "I gave strict instructions that none of the servants were to come along this walkway while I'm out."

"Strictly speaking, I'm not one of the servants," Lupin said, coming into the garden proper and shutting the door behind him. "And no, no one divulged your secret, so don't blame anyone."

"How did you know, then?" Harry asked, curiously.

Lupin gave him a half-smile as he set down the hamper and the bucket. "I guessed. Your fascination with both the gardens and with Rose Snape's story, the secretive nature of your outings, and this." Lupin reached into a pocket and pulled out a couple of rose petals. "These fell out of your hair the other day. I recognized them; Severus had that variety of rose brought in especially for Rose, and it only grows one place in Hogwarts - here."

"Why are you here?" Draco demanded.

"I'm here to make a bargain," Lupin said. "I'm a little weary of waiting for Harry to tear himself away from this delightful place, and his attention is never fully on his lessons anymore. So: I will keep your secret, and on days when the weather is fair, I will move our classroom here so that you are not obliged to leave the garden, Harry."

Draco narrowed his eyes. "And what do you want in return?"

"Three students in place of one."

" Doesn't seem like much of a bargain on your side," Draco said suspiciously.

Lupin spread his hands and said, "What can I say? I'm a teacher, and I can't abide seeing children who need lessons and aren't getting them. Oh, and these lessons will take place every afternoon, even on rainy days. We'll hold those classes indoors, in the library."

"I knew there was a catch," Draco muttered.

Lupin smiled. "What do you say, boys? I'll even sweeten the deal by providing mid-afternoon tea."

"I say, it's a deal," Harry said, eyeing the hamper longingly. "Ron?"

"I've never had formal lessons," Ron said, "just what Mum taught us. And I'm not likely to get another chance, not being as smart as Percy."

"You're smart, Ron, and don't let anyone tell you otherwise," Lupin said. "Well, Draco? The decision's in your hands."

Draco studied him intently for a long moment. "You must swear to keep all of our secrets," he
said. "On your solemn oath as a wizard."

"I swear," Lupin said readily. His eyes widened as Draco slowly pushed himself up from the ground and stood proudly on his own two feet, and then his smile widened. "It looks as if there's more than one secret being kept here," he said.

"Draco can do magic as well," Harry said proudly.

"I never thought you couldn't," Lupin said, meeting Draco's eyes steadily. "Just that you were afraid to try."

Draco nodded his head gravely and said, with all the dignity of a prince, "Then you are welcome to join us." Dignity was suddenly abandoned, and with all the eagerness of a hungry young boy, he said, "What's in the hamper?"

Lupin laughed and opened it, and the boys' eyes widened at the sight of a dozen sandwiches, little cakes, and several shiny apples.

"Those are Mum's sandwiches!" Ron exclaimed. "I'd recognize them anywhere. No wonder she was looking so mysterious this morning when I set off."

"I asked your mother for advice on what young boys like best," Lupin said, "it having been a number of years since I was one. She put this together for me."

Harry had one of the sandwiches in his hand but he hesitated, thinking of nine people in one cottage on an inadequate Ministry income. Lupin leaned forward and said softly, for his ears only, "It's all right, Harry. I paid for the supplies, and Molly added the love. And before you start worrying about me, Severus pays me a quite generous salary for teaching you."

Harry smiled at him, then unwrapped the sandwich and began eating.

After that, the afternoons were even better. Lupin was a natural teacher, and in the face of Harry and Ron's enthusiasm for the classes, Draco's interest was soon captured. Their favourites were Charms and Transfiguration, as Lupin integrated the classes with the work they were doing in the garden, but he also managed to sneak a little History past them as well.

Best of all, Lupin taught them the exercises he'd learned to build up his own thin frame when he was a teenager. Because of the transformations he was forced to suffer, he'd been as fragile as Draco, and one of his doctors had devised a series of exercises to build his strength up.

Every beautiful morning, Draco sat under the apple tree and thought about the healing magic working on his body, making him stronger. Every afternoon, he did the exercises and then walked slowly around the garden. Each day he grew stronger and could walk more steadily and cover more ground. And each day his ability to work magic grew stronger as well.

Harry, who had spent ten years of his life undernourished and confined or hiding in small spaces, found that the exercises and the healing magic helped fill out his thin body. For the first time in his life, he could do anything he liked without tiring his body excessively.

By the time they returned to the house at sunset, both Harry and Draco were pleasantly fatigued in both body and mind. Neither had any trouble sleeping. And thanks to the hamper Lupin provided for afternoon tea, they no longer had to conceal a voracious appetite for fear of revealing their secret.

Dr Kettleburn was mystified by the changes in his patient. His notorious picky appetite, while not
as hardy as the doctor would have liked, was better than it had been. The boy's face was acquiring some colour, and his thin frame was filling out. However, his legs seemed to be as weak as ever.

"You stay out in the garden a great deal," he said while examining Draco one morning. "Where do you go?"

Draco put on his favourite air of dignified indifference. "I won't let any one know where I go," he answered. "I go to a place I like. Every one has orders to keep out of the way. I won't be watched and stared at. You know that!"

"You seem to be out all day, but I don't think it has done you harm. Nurse Pomfrey says you eat more than before."

"Perhaps," said Draco, prompted by a sudden inspiration, "perhaps it is an unnatural appetite."

"I don't think so, as your food seems to agree with you," said Dr Kettleburn. "You are gaining flesh rapidly and your colour is better."

"Perhaps I am bloated and feverish," said Draco, assuming a discouraging air of gloom. "People who are not going to live are often...different."

Dr Kettleburn shook his head. He was holding Draco's wrist, and he pushed up his sleeve and felt his arm. "You are not feverish," he said thoughtfully, "and such flesh as you have gained is healthy. If you can keep this up, my boy, we need not talk of dying. Your uncle will be happy to hear of this remarkable improvement."

"I won't have him told!" Draco broke forth fiercely. "It will only disappoint him if I get worse again, and I may get worse this very night. I might have a raging fever. I feel as if I might be beginning to have one now. I won't have letters written to my uncle. I won't! You are making me angry and you know that's bad for me."

"Hush, my boy," Dr Kettleburn soothed. "Nothing shall be written without your permission. You are too sensitive about things. You must not undo the good which has been done."

He said no more about writing to Professor Snape, and when he saw the nurse he privately warned her that such a possibility must not be mentioned to the patient.

"The boy is extraordinarily better," he said. "His advance seems almost abnormal. Still, he excites himself very easily and nothing must be said to irritate him."

Harry and Draco watched them conversing with alarm. "I may be obliged to have a tantrum," said Draco regretfully. "I don't want to have one, and I'm not miserable enough now to work myself into a big one. I keep thinking of nice things instead of horrible ones. But if they talk about writing to Uncle Severus, I shall have to do something."

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Behind the Curtain

Not every day was spent in the gardens. It was spring and this was Scotland, so inevitably there were days when Harry and Draco couldn't go out because of the rain.

In the afternoons, there were classes with Professor Lupin to look forward to, and their teacher used these days to do things that couldn't be done easily in the gardens. Rainy afternoons were spent making potions, studying star charts, or curled up with a book doing research. Harry and Draco took to the latter quite easily, having spent most of their lives with books as their only friends, but Ron found this the most difficult part of the curriculum. After spending most of his days on the moors, Ron found himself fidgeting when he had to sit still for any length of time. Fortunately, Lupin was both a gifted and understanding teacher, and whenever possible, he redirected Ron's assignments to more "hands on" activities. Lupin brought in books about magical creatures, which appealed greatly to Ron, and whenever possible he brought in examples of the more tractable specimens. Ron liked that in particular, and was never happier than when lying on the floor, a krup or a kneazle sitting on him and licking his face.

With such interesting things to look forward to in the afternoon, mornings seemed dull by comparison.

"Now that I am a real boy," Draco said, "my legs and arms and all my body are so full of life that I can't keep them still. They want to be doing things all the time. Do you know that when I wake in the morning, Harry, when it's quite early and the birds are just shouting outside and everything seems just shouting for joy, I feel as if I must jump out of bed and shout myself. If I did it, just think what would happen!"

Harry laughed. "Mrs McGonagall and the nurse would come running, and they would think you had gone crazy and send for the doctor."

Draco laughed at this image of the staff, horrified by his outbreak and amazed to see him standing upright.

"I wish Uncle Severus would come home," he said. "I want to tell him myself. I'm always thinking about it, but we can't go on like this much longer. I can't stand lying still and pretending, and besides I look too different. I wish it wasn't raining today."

It was then Harry had an inspiration. "Draco," he began mysteriously, "do you know how many rooms there are in this house?"

"About a thousand, I suppose," he answered.

"There's about a hundred no one ever goes into," said Harry. "And one rainy day I went and looked into ever so many of them. No one ever knew, though Mrs McGonagall nearly found me out. I lost my way when I was coming back, and I stopped at the end of your corridor. That was the second time I heard you crying."

Draco started up on his sofa. "A hundred rooms no one goes into," he said. "It sounds almost like a secret garden. Suppose we go and look at them. Ron could wheel me in my chair and nobody would know where we went."

"That's what I was thinking," said Harry. "No one would dare to follow us. There are galleries where you could run. There are staircases that move by themselves. There is a little Indian room
where there is a cabinet full of ivory elephants. And there are so many rooms to explore--I never even got to them all."

"Ring the bell," said Draco.

When the nurse came in he gave his orders.

"I want my chair," he said. "As soon as Ron arrives, Harry and I are going to look at the part of the house which is not used. The footman can carry me up to the second floor, and then Ron can push my chair. And everyone must leave us alone."

When Ron arrived, he cheerfully agreed to the expedition. The footman carried up the chair and then carried Draco up as well, then left the three of them alone. As soon as Harry had made sure that the footman was really on his way back downstairs, Draco got out of his chair.

"I am going to run from one end of the gallery to the other," he said, "and then I am going to jump and then we will do Professor Lupin's exercises."

And they did all these things and many others. They looked at the portraits and talked to them. They went to the Indian room and amused themselves with the ivory elephants. It was a curiously entertaining morning, and the feeling of wandering about in the same house with other people but at the same time feeling as if one were miles away from them was a fascinating thing.

"I'm glad we came," Draco said as they headed down for dinner. "I never knew I lived in such a strange, big place. I like it. We'll ramble about every rainy morning. We'll always be finding new things."

That morning they had found, among other things, such good appetites that when they returned to Draco's room, it was not possible to send the luncheon away untouched. When the nurse carried the tray down-stairs, she slapped it down on the kitchen dresser so that the cook could see the highly polished dishes and plates.

"Look at that!" she said. "This is a house of mystery, and those two children are the greatest mysteries in it."

"If they did that every day," said the strong young footman, "it wouldn't be any wonder that he weighs twice as much today as he did a month ago. I shall have to give up my place in time, for fear of doing my muscles an injury."

Rainy days lost their terror after that morning. They saw more rooms and made more discoveries than Harry had made on his first pilgrimage. They found new corridors and corners and flights of steps. They found the rose-coloured boudoir again, and Ron coaxed the rat out of its hiding place so that they could feed it bits of cheese that they'd brought.

"He's a fat little fellow," Ron said, petting the rat as it ate their offerings in between furtive looks at them.

"Looks like he's felt the wrong side of Mrs. Norris at least once," Harry said, referring to Filch's cat. "He's missing a toe on his front paw."

"Doesn't seem to slow him down at all," Draco commented, watching as the rat scampered back into its hiding place.

"We should give it a name," Harry said. "Ron, you're best at naming wild things. What do you
think?"

Ron considered this for a moment. "Scabbers," he said decisively, and then smiled as the rat poked its head out of its nest again, looking for more food.

"I wonder how long he's been living here," Harry said, setting another bit of cheese on the cushion in front of Scabbers.

"I bet he's seen more of the rooms here than we have," Draco said. "Even the locked ones."

Finally sated, Scabbers disappeared back into his nest for good, and the three boys went in search of other amusements. But from then on, they made certain to stop by the rose-coloured room on rainy days so they could visit with the other captive.

A month had passed since Draco had first gone to the garden, and now May was here. As it had been another rainy day, the three boys had explored the upstairs once again and had stopped in to see Scabbers. Ron had convinced the rat to climb into his pocket, planning on returning the little fellow to his room after lessons, and had fed Scabbers scraps from his dinner. Now Ron was lying on his back on the library floor, Scabbers resting on his chest. The rat had eaten so much that it appeared to be in a food-induced coma, and Ron grinned.

"Pathetic, isn't he?"

"You're the one's who's pathetic," Harry returned. "How much did you feed him?"

Ron was about to reply when the library door swung open and Lupin entered briskly. "Good afternoon, boys. I see that you're all ready for today's lesson, with one exception. Ron, if you'd please take your seat--what in hell have you got there?"

The latter was said so sharply that the three boys jumped and stared at their normally mild-mannered teacher. His eyes were fixed on the rodent still lying on Ron's chest, and there was a feral look in those eyes that frightened Harry. He tried to remember how close they were to the full moon, and whether or not wolves considered rats to be prey.

"It's Scabbers, sir," Ron replied, closing his hand over the rat protectively. "We found him in the pink bedroom upstairs."

Lupin's mouth drew back in what could only be described as a snarl. "So that's where he's been all this time," he growled. "So simple. So brilliant."

"Professor, are you all right?" Harry asked cautiously.

Lupin glanced at him briefly and appeared to calm down a little. "Ron, hand me the rat," he said with quiet authority.

"What are you going to do with him if I give him to you?" Ron asked, a worried look on his face. He looked slightly sick, as if he was thinking that the werewolf was going to eat the creature in front of them.

"Force him to show himself," Lupin said. "If he really is a rat, it won't hurt him."

"What else would he be?" Draco asked, puzzled.

"Peter Pettigrew," Lupin said grimly. "One of Voldemort's inner circle."
All the colour drained out of Harry's face. He remembered that name--it was the name of the man Lupin had told him had betrayed Harry's parents. The man responsible for their deaths. He automatically turned back to look at the rat. "I--I don't understand."

"Peter went to school with James Potter, Sirius Black, and me. We used to spend holidays together. They knew I was a werewolf, and by our fourth year in school, they'd learned how to be animagi--wizards who can assume the shape of an animal. James' animagus form was a stag, Sirius' was a dog, and Peter's was a rat."

"But that was ten years ago!" Harry protested. "How can you be sure that this rat is Peter?"

"I'm a werewolf, Harry," Lupin said patiently. "My sense of smell is keener than yours. I spent years with Peter--I know his scent in this form as well as in his human form. And his toe--that rat is missing a toe on his left front paw. Peter lost one of the fingers on his left hand in a battle with the Aurors. That's when we found out he was a Death Eater."

Harry had a sudden thought and his face went white. "You said that he told Voldemort where to find my parents," Harry said. "Is it possible...could he have come back here with Uncle Lucius? Slipped into his pocket or something? Would he have been able to come across the wards like that?"

There was an arrested look on Lupin's face. "By Merlin, he could have! No one would have thought to look for him here at Hogwarts, and the wards aren't set to keep out animals."

Looking over at Ron, Harry saw that the same thought had occurred to him. "Then he must have been the one in the garden."

Lupin frowned. "I don't understand."

Harry nodded his head to Ron. "You figured it out. You tell him."

Ron's ears turned pink as he found himself the focus of everyone's attention. "Harry and I were discussing the--um--events in the garden, and it occurred to us that things couldn't have happened the way the Aurors thought. Someone else has to have been in the garden. We thought it might be someone in an invisibility cloak, that they cut the rope on the swing and made Miss Rose fall."

"But maybe it was someone the others wouldn't have noticed because he was small and looked like he belonged there, with the other animals," Harry said. "Someone who climbed down the rope on the swing and chewed it till it came apart."

"Then he snatched Miss Rose's wand when she fell," Ron continued. "Then he or she stunned Master Lucius, and--" His eyes slid briefly over to Draco, who was now as white as a sheet. "--and then attacked Miss Narcissa."

"That's impossible," Draco whispered through white lips. "My father killed my mother and my aunt. I heard the servants talking, and that's what they said. That's why Uncle Severus hates me."

"Ron and Harry might be right," Lupin said slowly. "We thought it was Lucius because we couldn't find a trace of any other wizard here. We didn't think to look for an animagus."

"But why would he attack my mother?" Draco asked.

Lupin sighed. "He had a crush on Narcissa but she wouldn't even look at him. He must have heard someone coming back to the garden, got into the house somehow, and has been living here ever since."
"We found him in the pink bedroom," Harry said. "He'd made a nest in a corner of the sofa there."

"Pink?" Lupin asked. "Was it rose-pink, decorated with roses around the walls?"

Harry shrugged, not having noticed, but Draco nodded and said, hoarsely, "Yes."

"That was Rose's room," Lupin said grimly. "Peter always did have a rather twisted sense of humour. Living in the room of one of the women he killed…"

Harry drew in a deep breath. "Ron, give him Scabbers."

Ron hesitated, then held out Scabbers and Lupin took him. Scabbers began to squeak, twisting and turning, his tiny black eyes bulging in his head.

Lupin pulled out his wand, holding Scabbers tightly in one hand. "Boys, take out your wands and keep them pointed at us. If he tries to get away from me, Stupefy him. You remember how to do that. Don't worry if you hit me as well--just be sure you get him."

Both Harry and Ron nodded and drew their wands.

Lupin drew a deep breath, then muttered some words under his breath. A flash of blue-white light erupted from his wand, and for a moment Scabbers was frozen in midair. The small grey form twisted, Ron yelled, and the rat fell to the floor. There was another blinding flash of light and then--a man was standing where Scabbers had been, cringing and wringing his hands.

He was a very short man, hardly taller than Harry. His thin, colourless hair was unkempt and there was a large bald patch on top. His skin looked grubby, almost like Scabbers' fur, and something of the rat lingered around his pointed nose and his very small, watery eyes. He looked around at them all, his breathing fast and shallow.

"Well, hello, Peter," Lupin said pleasantly, as though rats frequently erupted into old school friends. "Long time, no see."

"R-Remus." Even Pettigrew's voice was squeaky. "My friend…my old friend…"

"We've been having a little chat, Peter, about what happened the night Rose and Narcissa died. You might have missed the finer points while napping on Ron's chest."

"I-I don't know what you're talking about," Pettigrew said faintly. "Why would I do that?"

"Why would you spend ten years as a rat if you were innocent?" Lupin pointed out. "Did you hear that Severus has been hunting down every Death Eater that escaped, making sure they're sent to Azkaban? What safer place for you to hide than Hogwarts. Everyone knows that Severus can hardly bear to remain here for a day or two. He would never think to look for a Death Eater here, particularly not one posing as a rat."

He shook his head and said, mockingly, "Your former allies won't be too happy with you when you arrive at Azkaban, Peter. Word has it that Severus is none-too-gentle in his methods of capturing his prey because of Rose's death, and you are the one responsible."

"You--surely you don't believe this madness?" He looked into Lupin's implacable face, then at the
three boys. Draco's face was white, and both Harry and Ron looked grim.

"You betrayed James and Lily. You told Voldemort where he could find them. Then, when Voldemort told his followers, you slipped into Lucius' pocket. Why? Did you suspect he was Dumbledore's spy? Or did you just hope that he would take you back to Malfoy Mansion with him and leave you there with Narcissa, a heavily pregnant woman who couldn't defend herself, while he went to do your master's bidding?

Pettigrew was muttering distractedly; Harry caught words like far-fetched and lunacy, but he couldn't help noticing the ashen colour of Pettigrew's face.

"Ron," Lupin said, "Run and fetch Mrs McGonagall. Have her send someone for the Aurors. Fast as you can, my boy."

Ron hurried off quickly, careful not to come between Pettigrew and either Lupin or Harry. Briefly, Harry wondered why Lupin didn't ask Ron to give Draco his wand, but then he took one look at Draco's pale face and tight lips and decided that Lupin didn't want to risk Draco attacking their suspect.

Pettigrew fell to his knees and shuffled forward, hands clasped in front of him as though praying. "Please…Remus, it's Peter, your friend. You wouldn't…"

"Stay back," Lupin said grimly. "The only reason I'm not killing you right now is that we need you alive to testify."

Pettigrew blanched and he looked desperately at Harry, crawling towards him. "Harry…I was a good rat, wasn't I? You enjoyed playing with me, didn't you?"

Harry looked at him in revulsion. "Get away from me!"

"Harry…you look just like your father…just like him…"

"How dare you!" Lupin snapped. "How dare you talk about James! Because of you, his parents are dead! Because of you, he had to spend ten years with people who despised and ignored him. Because of you, Draco had to spend ten years without a mother or father. Because of you, Severus lost the love of his life and ceased caring about his own life. Three families, destroyed. Why, Peter? Just tell me why."

"Ruined?" Pettigrew spat back angrily. "Their lives were ruined? What about mine? I should have been noticed at school, but no! Who would notice anyone else with James Potter around? They certainly didn't notice his little shadow. That's what they called me--Potter's shadow. I heard them!"

Pettigrew turned his head and glared at Harry, and the boy automatically took a step back. "And even when we came here it was the same. James showing off for the girls, Sirius flirting with them, Lucius tossing around his money and his family name. Narcissa should have married me! I loved her. I would have kept her safe."

"You killed her," Lupin said implacably. "After you stunned Lucius, you picked up his wand and used it to curse her again and again. You tortured her to death."

"Yes!" Pettigrew snapped. "I wanted her to suffer as much as I had suffered. I wanted her to scream and beg and plead, and know that it was useless."

"And Rose?" Lupin asked, his voice deadly quiet. "Why not Obliviate her? Or was she dead when she fell?"
"I didn't mean to kill her," Pettigrew said, panicked now. "I didn't know the fall would kill her--I just thought it would knock her out. She--I heard something snap when she hit the ground. I didn't mean to kill her!"

"And yet you left Lucius alive," Lupin said, advancing on the man with fire in his eyes. "Sloppy work, old man. Voldemort would have been disappointed with you."

"I tried to kill him! But--but there was a noise from the house and--and--I missed. The curse hit the tree instead. There wasn't any time--I had to run, had to hide."

"So you left Lucius lying unconscious on the ground. Left him to take the blame for your crimes, to be sent to Azkaban for ten long years."

"He deserved it," Pettigrew whimpered. "He took Narcissa from me. He betrayed our master. He was a traitor."

"He was a hero," Draco suddenly said, appearing next to Harry. "You were the filthy traitor, and now you're going to pay."

Before Harry could react, Draco snatched his wand away and pointed it at Pettigrew. "Tell me the words, Professor. Tell me how to kill this...this piece of filth."

The man burst into tears, like an over-sized, balding baby, cowering on the floor and blubbering for mercy. Harry felt sick to his stomach at the sight.

"No, Draco," Lupin said quietly. "I won't let you do that to yourself. We'll hand him over to the Aurors. He'll go to Azkaban for the rest of his life." He walked over to Draco and held out his hand. "Now give me the wand."

Draco glanced briefly at Lupin, then looked back at Pettigrew. He stared at him for a long moment, hatred burning in his eyes, then he closed his eyes and swallowed. The wand wavered, lowered, as tears ran down his cheeks. Lupin gently took the wand and handed it back to Harry, then gathered the boy into his arms, offering comfort. Draco clung to him, muffling his sobs against Lupin's robes.

Feeling uncomfortable at the emotional display, Harry turned his attention back to Pettigrew, only to see the little man scurrying as fast as he could on hands and knees towards the door.

"Professor!" he cried out, alarmed, then pointed his wand at Pettigrew. "Stupefy!"

Pettigrew froze in mid-crawl just as the door burst open. Ron hurried in, Mrs McGonagall and a half-dozen Aurors on his heels. Ron took one look at the scene--Pettigrew stunned at his feet, Draco sobbing in Lupin's arms, and Harry with his wand extended--and then gave a mock-sigh. "Bloody hell. I missed all the best bits."

Lupin scooped Draco up and settled him back into his chair, then turned back to the Aurors. "Gentlemen, this man is Peter Pettigrew."

"Pettigrew!" Kingsley Shacklebolt, one of the Aurors, exclaimed. "The one who betrayed the Potters?"

"The very same," Lupin said. "I went to school with him, and I can positively identify him."

"We've been looking for him for ten years! Where's he been hiding all this time?"
"Here at Hogwarts, disguised as a rat," Harry said.

Lupin nodded. "He's an illegal animagus. And I think you'll find that he's responsible for the deaths of Narcissa Malfoy and Rose Snape, and that Lucius Malfoy is innocent. He confessed as much to the three of us," he added, indicating himself, Draco, and Harry.

"Right," Shacklebolt said, and gestured to his men. "Take him into custody."

"My-my father?" Draco asked, his voice still tremulous from his tears.

Shacklebolt's dark face softened. "Master Draco Malfoy, is it? Once we get Pettigrew's confession, we'll have your father set free immediately. My word on it."

"You can trust him," Lupin said. "He's one of the good guys."

Draco nodded, then looked beyond them to Mrs McGonagall. "Please, I'd like to go to my room now."

"Of course," the housekeeper said, gesturing to one of the footmen with her. "Carry Master Draco straight up while I call Nurse Pomfrey and Dr Kettleburn. All this excitement--it can't have been good for his nerves."

Harry watched silently as first an exhausted Draco was carried out, and then Pettigrew revived and taken away in shackles. He turned his head to find Lupin studying him with worried eyes.

"Harry? Are you all right?"

Harry nodded, his throat tight. "Do you--do you think I could have one of those hugs like you gave Draco?"

Wordlessly, Lupin folded him into his arms. Harry only shed a few tears, having learned the futility of crying when he was younger, but he felt much better. Against his teacher's shoulder he asked, longing in his voice, "Could we ask Uncle Severus to come home now? Please?"

Lupin rested his chin on Harry's head and said, "Yeah, I think we can ask Severus to come home now."

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In each century since the beginning of the world, wonderful things have been discovered. One of the things that magical people have always known is that thoughts, mere thoughts, can be as powerful as love or as deadly as poison.

So long as Harry thought he was unwanted and disliked, he was a lonely and unhappy child, watching the world from a distance without being a part of it. Forced by circumstances from his safe, if unhappy, nest, his mind gradually filled itself with robins, and moorland cottages crowded with children, with cheerful gardeners and kind-hearted housemaids, with springtime and with secret gardens coming alive day by day, and with a moor boy and his creatures. Once he started noticing and caring for other people, he discovered that there was a wonderful and interesting world out there, and that there were things better than being safe. He found that participating was better than watching, and that when you risked loving others, you might be hurt, but you might find that love returned.

So long as Draco shut himself up in his room, and thought only of his fears and weakness, reflecting hourly on his own death, he was a hysterical, half-crazy, hypochondriac. He didn't know that he could get well and could stand upon his feet if he tried to do it. When new, beautiful thoughts began to push out the old hideous ones, life began to come back to him. His blood ran healthy through his veins and strength poured into him. His acceptance of his own magical abilities opened the floodgates and let him discover a part of himself that was missing. New and better thoughts, good exercise, and magic were making him into the strong, healthy boy he was meant to be.

While the secret garden was coming alive and two children were coming alive with it, there was an unhappy man wandering about in the far-away places of the world. He was a man who for ten years had kept his mind filled with darkness and with revenge. He had spent his years hunting down dangerous wizards, former Death Eaters, and attempting to pacify his damaged heart by seeing that they rotted in prison. Once that was done, he had continued to travel, brooding over his unhappiness and ruined plans. He had never tried to put any other thoughts in the place of the dark ones. He had wandered by blue lakes, over noble mountains, through verdant forests, and had only thought these dark thoughts.

A terrible sorrow had fallen upon him when he had been so completely happy, and he had let his soul fill itself with blackness. He had refused obstinately to allow any rift of light to pierce through. He had forgotten and deserted his home and his duties to those depending upon him. When he travelled about, darkness hung over him so that the sight of him was like a wrong done to other people, because it was as if he poisoned the air about him with gloom. Most strangers thought he must be either half mad, or a man with some hidden crime on his soul. He was a tall, thin man with a drawn face and lank hair, and the name he always entered on hotel registers was, "Severus Snape, Hogwarts, Scotland."

He had travelled far and wide since the day Harry Potter came into his study, since the day when the sight of bright green eyes had sent him flying from the house like a man pursued by the Furies. He had been to the most beautiful places in Europe, though he had remained nowhere more than a few days. He had chosen the quietest and remotest spots. He had been on the tops of mountains whose heads were in the clouds, and had looked down on other mountains when the sun rose and touched them with such light as made it seem as if the world were just being born. But the light had never seemed to touch him, until one day when he realized that, for the first time in ten years, a strange thing had happened.
On the same day that Pettigrew was captured and the true story revealed, Severus Snape was staying in a valley in the Austrian Tirol. He had been walking alone through such beauty as might have lifted any man's soul out of shadow, had walked a long way, but it had not lifted his. At last he had felt tired and had thrown himself down to rest on a carpet of moss by a clear little stream that ran quite merrily along on its narrow way through the luscious damp greenness. Sometimes it made a sound rather like laughter as it bubbled over and around stones. It seemed like a thing alive, and yet its tiny voice made the stillness seem deeper.

As he sat gazing into the clear running of the water, Severus Snape gradually felt both his mind and body grow quiet, as quiet as the valley itself. He sat and gazed at the sunlit water, and his eyes began to see things growing at its edge. The leaves were green, as green as a pair of eyes that had once been so dear to him, as green as the eyes he had seen a few months earlier in his gloomy study. The green leaves danced close to a shadowed area so dark that it almost looked black, and Snape idly thought of unruly black hair above green eyes. Their child—had they had a child—might have looked like that, with Rose's green eyes and his black hair. Rose had wanted a child, but he'd been so besotted with her, so unwilling to share her with anyone else yet…and then she was gone.

For once, the thought didn't fill him with devastation, but rather an aching sort of tenderness, as a wound feels when it is beginning to heal and scab over. He thought of a timid voice asking for nothing more than a wand and a bit of earth, and it was as if a well of clean water had risen up, sweeping the dark water away. The valley seemed to grow quieter as he sat and stared at the bright green leaves. He didn't know how long he sat there or what was happening to him, but at last he moved as if he were awakening. He got up slowly and stood on the mossy carpet, drawing a long, deep, breath and wondering at himself. Something seemed to have been unbound and released inside of him.

"What is it?" he said, almost in a whisper, and he passed his hand over his forehead. "I almost feel as if I were alive!"

This singular calmness remained with him the rest of the evening, and when he fell asleep, he began to dream. His dream was so real that he didn't feel as if he were dreaming. He remembered afterward how intensely wide awake and alert he'd thought he was. He was sitting in a garden in the springtime. He dreamed that, as he sat and breathed in the scent of roses, he heard a voice calling. It was sweet and clear and happy. It seemed very far away, but he heard it as distinctly as if it had been at his very side.

"Severus!" it said, and then again, sweeter and clearer than before, "Severus!"

He thought he sprang to his feet. It was such a real voice, and it seemed so natural that he should hear it.

"Rose!" he answered. "Where are you?"

"In the garden," it came back like a sound from a golden flute.

And then the dream ended, but he did not awaken, and slept soundly and sweetly all through the night. When he awoke at last, it was brilliant morning and a servant was standing, staring at him. This servant was accustomed, as all the servants of the villa were, to the master's inability to find rest while he slept, as well as his early waking habits. And yet Snape had slept deeply though the night, waking only now, midway through the morning, so the servant had finally come in to see if the master was well. The man held out a breakfast tray, and after Snape had accepted a cup of coffee, he left.

Snape sat for a few moments, holding his coffee cup in his hand, staring at the wall where a picture of a beautiful garden hung. That strange calm was still upon him, and something more--a
lightness, as if the cruel thing which had been done to him had not happened as he thought, as if something had changed.

"In the garden!" he said, wondering at himself. "In the garden! But the door is locked and the key is buried deep."

He began to think of Hogwarts, and to wonder if he should not go home. It had been a long time since he'd seen an English spring. Thoughts of the two boys there occurred to him, and the image of two young faces, so sweet and so unalike, drifted into his mind. But unlike times in the past when those thoughts had caused him to feel anger and despair, this time he felt only a sweet longing.

He immediately got out of bed, called for the servants, and prepared to return to England.

In a few days he was in England again, walking through Kings Cross station. He found himself thinking of Lucius's boy as he had never thought in all the ten years past. During those years he had only wished to forget Draco. Now, though he did not intend to think about him, memories constantly drifted into his mind. He remembered the black days when he had raved like a madman because the child was alive and his father had killed Severus's only love. He had refused to see the child after he was born, and when he had gone to look at Draco at last, he had been such a weak, wretched thing that everyone had been sure he would die in a few days. But to the surprise of those who took care of Draco, the days passed and he lived -- but even then everyone believed he would be a deformed creature from the convulsions that racked him.

He had not meant to be a bad guardian but he had not felt like an uncle at all. He had supplied doctors and nurses and luxuries, but he had shrunk from the mere thought of the boy and had buried himself in his own misery. After a year's absence, he had returned to Hogwarts. The small, miserable-looking thing had languidly opened those large grey eyes with black lashes round them, so horribly like the eyes of the brother he had adored, the brother who had murdered his happiness, that he could not bear the sight of the boy and turned away, pale as death.

After that, he scarcely ever saw Draco except when he was asleep, and all he knew was that the boy was a confirmed invalid, with a vicious, hysterical, half-insane temper. He could only be kept from rages dangerous to himself by being given his own way in every detail. All this was not an uplifting thing to recall, but as he boarded the express train that would take him to Hogwarts, he began to think of the boy in a new way.

"Perhaps I have been all wrong for ten years," he said to himself. "Ten years is a long time. It may be too late to do anything, but still..."

He thought then of the other boy, the one who had stood in his study a few months earlier, his features barely discernable in the firelight. Lily's eyes, Rose's eyes, eyes that had looked so large behind those hideous glasses. He should have had the boy's eyes taken care of -- he had meant to mention it to Mrs McGonagall, but he'd forgotten...just as he'd forgotten the boy's very existence for ten years.

He couldn't forget, now, the look on the child's face as he spoke casually of never having toys of his own, of his resigned air. He'd seen that face in his mind the next day when, after having made arrangements with Ollivander to see to the fitting of the boy's wand, he'd passed by a toy store. On impulse, he'd gone into the store and had the clerk make up a bundle of games and books to interest a child that age, and then he'd allowed himself to forget the boy again.

"The boy is no doubt used to being forgotten," he thought with a sigh. "Still, there must be something I can do..."
A tapping on the train window caught his attention. It was a familiar looking owl, one that he recognized as belonging to Remus Lupin. Suddenly frightened that something had happened at home, he opened the window and took the letter, then tore it open.

Dear Severus,

Although you informed me when I accepted the position as tutor to your nephew, Harry, that you did not want regular reports, or, indeed, any communication from me, I feel that I must write to you now. Much has happened--too much to tell in a letter. I will only say this: I would come home if I were you. I think you would be glad to come and--if you will excuse me, Severus--I think your lady would ask you to come if she was here.

Your obedient servant,

Remus Lupin

Snape read the letter twice before he put it back in its envelope, and he couldn't help thinking about the dream. "In the garden," he murmured. "In the garden."

Although he was tired from his long trip, he was unable to rest and kept staring impatiently out of the window. He regretted now not having a Portkey made to take him directly home.

When he arrived at Hogsmeade station, he was surprised to be met by smiles and greetings from everyone he passed. It appeared that something of great importance had happened, but what it was he could not determine. The carriage ride across the moor seemed twice as long as usual, and he jumped out of the carriage before it had come to a complete halt in front of the castle steps.

Mrs McGonagall met him on the steps, looking excited and flustered. "Professor Snape! We weren't expecting--what a wonderful surprise!"

Snape frowned; he'd never seen the housekeeper looking anything but calm and collected, at least in his presence. "What's happened, Mrs McGonagall?"

"Master Lucius has come home," she said, beaming. "He arrived not thirty minutes ago. I've given him his old room, sir. The maids are airing it out right now and putting fresh linens on the bed. He's in the library resting; the poor dear looks half-starved to death, and it's no wonder. It's a miracle that he's not mad, being in that place."

"Lucius?" Snape said, his voice tight as memories, good and bad, rose up and nearly choked him.

"He was found innocent of all charges this week," Kingsley Shacklebolt said, coming out of the library to greet Snape. "The real culprit was Peter Pettigrew."

Snape gaped at him. "Pettigrew? We thought he was dead."

Shacklebolt shook his head. "Merely gone to ground. He was captured, thanks to your two nephews and the youngest lad of Arthur Weasley's. Confessed everything under Veritaserum." He reached out to touch Snape's shoulder, and said gently, "Pettigrew didn't mean to kill Rose. She died instantly, and without suffering. Unlike Narcissa, his expression seemed to say.

"The boys? My nephews--where are they?"
"Just what I was wondering myself," said a voice from the library doorway, a voice whose familiar silkiness was now rough and hoarse. Snape looked over to see Lucius standing there as straight and proud as ever, although frighteningly thin as he leaned on the silver cane that had once been for show. There was a haunted look in those grey eyes.

"Lucius," he breathed. Slowly, hesitantly, he walked over to his half-brother and then halted before him, uncertain. "Is it really you?" Memories of a garden and of betrayal hung between them both for a moment. Snape tentatively touched his brother's arm, wanting to believe, wanting the older brother he had loved back. But ten years of hatred and bitterness were hard to move past, and there was his own guilt to assuage.

Lucius seemed to understand his brother's confusion. He gave Snape a wry half-smile and covered his hand with his own. "It's not your fault," he said quietly. "Pettigrew fooled everyone."

"I should have known," Snape muttered. "I should have known that you wouldn't…that you couldn't…"

"Even I wasn't certain that I hadn't done it under Imperious at first," Lucius said, then arched an eyebrow. "Although I must say that if I were to do such a thing, I wouldn't have been foolish enough to get caught. A Malfoy would never make such a clumsy mistake."

"Of course," Snape said drily. "I should have known you were innocent, for that reason alone." He hugged his brother briefly. "Ten years. It's a wonder you're still sane."

Lucius's lips twisted in a parody of a smile. "More or less. There were one or two happy thoughts those bastards couldn't take away from me. Speaking of which, my son…?"

Snape nodded. "Draco is alive. I wish I could say that he was well, but…the doctors think he might have been damaged by the curse."

Lucius' face shadowed. "I understand. Still, he is my son, and I would like to see him."

"Of course," Snape said, and started towards the stairs to the first floor.

"Excuse me, Professor," Mrs McGonagall said. "But they're not upstairs."

Snape turned and frowned. "Not upstairs? Then where would they be?"

"Master Draco, Master Harry, and young Mr. Weasley have taken to spending their days in the garden, sir."

Lucius turned to Snape and raised an eyebrow. "I need hardly ask which one."

Snape shook his head. "I locked the door and buried the key ten years ago, Lucius. They can't--"

"My dear brother, are we wizards, or are we not? And if Harry is anything like young James was, I will wager the lad found a way into that garden, key or not."

"In the garden," Snape murmured then, at Lucius' puzzled look, he flushed uncomfortably. "A dream I had. She--Rose was calling to me, and when I asked where she was, she said, 'In the garden'."

"Then I suggest we make our way there with due haste," Lucius said. "Your arm, brother? I find that I am not quite as steady on my feet as I once was."

Snape led the way, as Harry had done, through the door in the shrubbery and among the laurels
and the fountain beds. The fountain was playing now and was encircled by beds of brilliant spring flowers. They crossed the lawn and turned into the Long Walk by the ivy-covered walls. He did not walk quickly, in deference to Lucius's health, but slowly with his eyes fixed on the path. Snape felt as if he were being drawn back to the place he had so long forsaken, and as he drew near to the garden, his step became still slower. He knew where the door was, even though the ivy hung thick over it.

Outside the door, he stopped and stood still, looking about him and listening. Inside the garden were sounds. They were the sounds of muffled cheering, of a whooshing sort of noise, exclamations and smothered joyous cries. It seemed actually like the laughter of young things, the uncontrollable laughter of children who were trying not to be heard, but who in a moment or so would burst through the door. Without quite meaning to, Snape grasped the handle of the door and pulled. It opened quite easily, and he stepped inside the garden, into a world he had nearly forgotten.

There, before his eyes, were Remus Lupin and a redheaded boy who could only be a Weasley, sitting on the ground and staring up at something in the air above them. A whoosh caught his attention, and he looked up to see two figures on brooms flash by, both in pursuit of something small and golden. Two heads, one pale and one dark, were side by side, two hands stretched out. And then one of the hands closed over the golden ball, and there was a cry of triumph as the boy nearly tumbled off his broom in his excitement.

"I did it! I caught it!"

The other boy laughed and gracefully landed on the grass beside him. "Once. How many times have I caught it now?"

"Oh, belt up, Potter!" the boy with the snitch replied cheerfully. He gazed down at the thing in his hands. "It's beautiful, isn't it?"

Snape could hardly believe his eyes. There, standing before him, was a tall, handsome boy. He was glowing with life, and flying had made his cheeks rosy-coloured. He pushed back the thick blond hair from his forehead and laughter shone in those large grey eyes.

"Draco?" Snape said, disbelief in his voice.

Draco swung around, appearing surprised. For a moment, he seemed to be disappointed to be found like this, and then he looked down at the snitch in his hand and smiled. He drew himself up to his fullest height and stepped forward.

"Hello, Uncle Severus. Welcome home."

"Draco," Snape repeated. "Is it really you?"

Draco gave a regal nod. "Yes, Uncle, it is I. As you can see, I am feeling much better these days. Also, I am not a squib, so perhaps I might have a wand like Harry?"

Snape's mind whirled. Draco, the boy everyone had told him was so near death that a breeze might kill him, the boy everyone had said was certain to be a squib, was standing before him: a healthy young wizard. He said the first thing that came to his mind.

"Perhaps we had better ask your father."

Draco's eyes automatically went to the silent figure standing behind Snape, and his eyes widened. "Father?" he said hesistantly.
Lucius stepped forward, leaning heavily on his cane. "Hello, Draco," he said, a hesitant smile on his face. "Your garden appears to have worked a miracle for you; perhaps it will be able to produce such wonders for me as well."

"Father," Draco whispered, and then he was in Lucius's arms, and they were hugging each other so tightly that it was a wonder either could breathe, both oblivious to the tears that were running down their faces.

Snape turned away from them to give them privacy and then he saw Harry Potter. The boy was watching him, wariness and a hint of defiance in those expressive eyes.

"Mr Potter," Snape said, his voice cool. "I see that you have managed to disregard my rules regarding this place."

"Yes, sir," Harry said, quietly.

"When you asked for a bit of earth, I had no idea that you meant this particular piece."

Harry lifted his chin and met his uncle's eyes without flinching. "No one wanted this garden except me. I'll apologize for breaking your rules but I'm not sorry for doing it. And you said I might have a bit of earth that no one was using."

"So I did," Snape said, nodding his head. "And it would be wrong of me to go back on my words now."

Harry blinked. "You mean...do you mean that I may keep it? This garden, I mean?"

Snape looked around at the garden, no longer neglected and abandoned, but once again restored to its former beauty by a loving hand. "I would say that you have earned it, Harry. Yes. This garden is yours."

Harry was so overjoyed by this that he threw himself at his uncle, wrapping his arms around Snape and hugging him tightly. For a moment, Snape was startled, and then he slowly folded his arms around the boy.

"Thank you!" Harry was saying, over and over again.

The shell around Snape's heart, the shell that had been frozen in place for ten years, broke open then. Feelings that he had locked away for all those years slowly unfurled, and he found himself hugging the boy back. "Harry," he murmured softly.

"You're not angry, then?" Harry asked, venturing a look up. "You won't send me away?"

Snape smiled and hugged the child once again. "This is your home, Harry, for as long as you like. Will you stay and help me make it into a proper home once more?"


"While Draco will always be welcome to visit here, I have no doubt that he and his father will want to reclaim Malfoy Manor," Snape said.

They looked over at the other pair. Lucius was now sitting on one of the benches with Draco at his feet, clapping his father's hands and talking as fast as he could.

Harry smiled. "Yes." He looked up at his uncle, uncertainly on his face. "You won't be going
away again, will you?"

"No, Harry," Snape said, smiling down into the child's face. "I won't be going away." He looked around the garden and caught sight of Remus Lupin and the redheaded boy standing quietly under the apple tree, watching them.

"Remus," he acknowledged. "Thank you for the letter, and for all that you've done for my nephews."

He didn't mention that he'd already been on his way home when he received Lupin's note. The dream of Rose and the garden was too private to be shared with anyone but Lucius and perhaps, one day--when they got to know each other better--with his nephews.

Lupin smiled. "It was a pleasure, Severus. They're both very bright, and I've enjoyed teaching them." He smiled at Harry, visibly pleased at his newfound happiness. "Hagrid peeked in a moment ago and then slipped off; perhaps I should do the same, and give the four of you some privacy."

Snape nodded. "You will be remaining to teach the boys though, won't you? Harry will still need a tutor, and even if Draco returns to his own home, I'm certain Lucius will want him to continue his lessons here."

Lupin's smile widened. "You don't get rid of me that easily, Severus." He put his arm around Ron and said, "You know, we should consider adding more students. Ron has been doing very well, and there are a few other children in the area who could benefit from schooling." His smile turned wistful. "It would be like the old days."

Snape looked around the garden, sorrow mingling with pleasure at the memory of happy days spent here. "Not entirely."

There was a tug on his sleeve and he looked down to see Harry looking up at him, sympathy in his face. "Sir?"

Snape managed a small smile. "Just remembering, Harry. Not all memories are bad ones." He put a hand on the boy's shoulder and said, "And now, take me into your garden and tell me all about it. I imagine it is quite a story."

It was the strangest story Snape had every heard. Robins and magic, the strange midnight meeting between Harry and Draco, the coming of spring, the secret kept so carefully from everyone else. The listener laughed until tears came into his eyes, and sometimes tears came into his eyes when he was not laughing. The shy, scrawny child had become a laughing, lovable, healthy young boy.

"Now," Harry said at the end of the story, "it need not be a secret any more. I dare say it will frighten them nearly into fits when they see Draco walking, when they see the four of us together."

It seemed that all the staff of Hogwarts had guessed that something of great moment was happening, for all of them appeared to have found some reason to be in the great hall that afternoon. Even Hagrid had found a reason to be there, weeding the great pots to either side of the door.

"Did you see any of them, Hagrid?" Mrs McGonagall asked.

Hagrid looked up from his work. "Yes, I did," he said, smiling.
"Together?" said Mrs McGonagall.

"Tergether, ma'am," he affirmed.

"Where were Master Draco and Master Harry? How did Master Draco look when he saw his father? What did they say to each other?"

"I didn' hear that," Hagrid said. "But I'll tell yeh this. There's been things goin' on outside that yeh house people knows nothin' about. An' what yeh'll find out--well, yeh'll find out soon enough."

He glanced over toward the lawn, and a smile crossed his face. "Look over there if yeh're curious. Look what's comin' across the grass."

When Mrs McGonagall looked, she threw up her hands and gave a little shriek. Every man and woman within hearing bolted across the hall and stood looking through the window with their eyes almost starting out of their heads.

Across the lawn came the Master of Hogwarts, looking as many of them had never seen him and as others only distantly remembered. By his side walked young Harry Potter, his hand firmly clasped by his uncle, the young boy talking and the older man listening with a faint smile on his face. Beside them walked another pair, this one in silence, but it was a contented silence: Lucius Malfoy, master of Malfoy Manor, and by his side, Master Draco, with his head up in the air and his eyes full of laughter, walked as strongly and steadily as any boy in England.

The End

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