

The reminder of Harry's lack of family turned the headmaster's face sad and pitying in a way that made Harry itch with anger. Perhaps the old man was aiming for empathy, but he missed by a mile. "Ah, of course. Well, you should still be careful, my boy — these days are not the best to be spending time alone. It is hard to protect you if we don't know where you are." His voice was gently scolding, and Harry resisted the urge to roll his eyes. Did he really think Sirius Black would try anything in the middle of the day?

"I'm sorry, sir," he said instead, plastering a contrite frown on his face. "I suppose I didn't think about that. I was just on my way to the great hall for lunch."

"Not to worry, not to worry; I found you, after all," Dumbledore replied with a chuckle. He began to walk, gesturing for Harry to accompany him. "I hear you've been keeping yourself busy over the holidays, my boy. The Patronus charm is a rather tricky bit of magic — I'm quite impressed to see you attempting it. I must admit, I didn't expect for Professor Lupin to offer; with his health the way he is, he tends to value the time he has to rest."

The old wizard's face was friendly, and Harry knew he would've fallen for it easily six months ago. His stomach churned again — did Dumbledore disapprove of Harry learning the charm? Why? Surely any defence he had against dementors was a good thing!

"I— I told him what I hear when a dementor comes close," Harry admitted, carefully choosing his words. He didn't want Dumbledore to think he was hiding anything. "It's... I told him I couldn't listen to my mum dying over and over. Begged him to teach me." He tried not to meet twinkling blue eyes as they surveyed him, trying to clear his mind. "He— he said he was feeling alright, but if he's not well— if I should stop— I... I suppose I can handle it, sir." Poor, brave, orphan Harry Potter. Exactly what far too many people expected to see, but easy enough to give it to them when it suited him.

"Of course not, dear boy. If Professor Lupin believes he is well enough to teach you, then by all means, learn what you can. I can only imagine how difficult it must be to suffer through such a thing." Dumbledore paused, as if in thought. "I suppose mentioning your mother's death would make him keen to see you avoid such heartbreak."

Harry knew what the man was fishing for, and stifled a scowl behind brows furrowed in confusion. "Sir, I don't understand?"

"Did the professor not tell you that he and your parents went to school together?" Dumbledore sounded genuinely surprised. Internally, Harry smirked. Let him think that Harry was still in the dark, oblivious to the family he'd been kept from all this years. Let him think Harry didn't know the truth about Sirius Black.

"He said he knew them," Harry replied. "He never said... were they friends?"

"Indeed they were, my boy," Dumbledore told him. For the briefest moment, Harry thought he saw a pleased look flash across the headmaster's features. "They were all in Gryffindor together. But if Professor Lupin has not mentioned it, perhaps it's best not to bring it up. Grief can do awful things to a man, Harry. You won't want to disturb it once it's settled." He sounded sad, shaking his head with a small sigh.