

mix. It'll be hard enough explaining what a dementor is to them, let alone what one was doing all the way out here by itself. I don't want to scare them."

Shacklebolt pursed his lips. "Perhaps you're right. It can't do any harm to let them believe what the doctors said. It's not like it changes the poor boy's outcome at all."

"Tell them, don't tell them, it makes no difference to me — if they don't know, they can't go screaming about dementors through half of Surrey and cause the Obliviation team the stress," Runcorn remarked with a roll of his eyes. God, Harry wanted to hex the man. Did he not care even a little bit that a teenage boy was all but dead? Just because the boy was a muggle.

"Very well; I'll go with your wishes, Mr Potter. And once again, I'm terribly sorry for your loss, and the Ministry will do whatever we can to find the truth of the situation. If there's anything we can do to help, please do let us know." Shacklebolt seemed sincere, but it just made Harry angrier. They both knew the Ministry wasn't going to do a damned thing.

"Thank you. I think I'd just like to go to bed, if you don't mind." Harry sent a pointed glance to the door.

"Of course. Send an owl if you have any questions or concerns, or you change your mind about telling your family and they wish to speak to an official," Shacklebolt said. Harry knew he would be doing neither of those things, but he nodded all the same, managing a tight attempt at a smile. The two wizards didn't bother going back out the door, merely apparating straight out of the hallway. Once they were gone, Harry let out a long breath, running a hand through his hair. Merlin, this was a clusterfuck of a situation.

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The Dursleys weren't back until early the next morning. Harry was awake as soon as he heard the front door open — he'd barely been asleep, uncomfortable in the room after getting used to his bed in Seren Du, his dreams full of cloaked amorphous figures and sucking, rattling breaths.

Petunia was sobbing quietly. Harry wondered if she'd been crying the entire night. He heard Vernon murmuring to her, his voice surprisingly soft. Of course, the only things the man seemed to actually care about were his reputation and his son.

"I'll put the kettle on," Petunia declared shakily.

"No, Pet, let's just go to bed. We had enough tea at the bloody hospital," Vernon sighed. If Petunia protested, Harry couldn't hear it. He listened silently to the stairs creaking under Vernon's weight, and their bedroom door shut with a click. His heart was in his throat.

He couldn't stay here. So far, his aunt and uncle had no idea he'd returned — if Vernon saw his face now, so soon after losing his son... Harry probably wouldn't have much of a face left by the end of it. Even if Ceri brought him food, he'd still need to use the bathroom. If he stayed, they'd notice him eventually.

He couldn't stay here.