

keeping it subtle. Other than Tonks teasing the older man — which she also did to just about everyone else in the house — there was no real sign of them being any closer than colleagues, or friends.

But at last, it was the day before they were all due to go back. Harry's trunk was packed, his Christmas homework done and a pile of notes for the HA that Remus had helped him with hidden away beneath his school robes.

Sirius was hiding his sadness well, but Harry could tell his godfather wasn't looking forward to seeing him go. "You'll be alright," Harry assured him, squeezing him around the waist. "You know Bill and Charlie will come visit loads. And Tonks, too."

For some reason, Sirius blushed at that. Harry eyed him weirdly. Then he shook his head to himself; whatever that was about, he wasn't getting involved.

"Harry, dear?" Mrs Weasley stuck her head into the living room, where Harry was playing gobstones with Fred. "Can you come down to the kitchen, please? Professor Snape's here to see you."

The gobstone went flying out of Harry's hand. "Sorry?" Snape? What did he want?

"Professor Snape, dear. In the kitchen."

"What did you *do*?" Fred whispered, equal parts terror and awe. Harry shot him a helpless look, shrugging.

"Nothing! I don't think?"

There was only one way to find out. Harry jogged down to the kitchen, where Professor Snape was indeed waiting for him. The man was in his usual black teaching robes, and looked like he'd rather be anywhere else.

Sirius was sat at the table opposite him, which probably had something to do with it. The pair were glaring at each other hatefully, and Harry pursed his lips. Were they being watched?

"You asked to see me, Professor?"

"Sit down, Potter." Snape's tone was cold. Sirius sneered.

"Don't you give him orders in my house, Snape."

Harry ignored the byplay between the two, taking a seat. Eventually, Snape turned to look at him. "The headmaster has sent me to tell you, Potter, that he wishes for me to begin instructing you in the art of Occlumency."

Harry stared blankly at Snape. The man's black eyes flashed warningly. "What's Occlumency, sir?" he asked dumbly, playing along. Whether Snape was merely worried about Extendable Ears, or something more sinister, Harry wasn't sure.