

“Harry, you can’t be serious!” Hermione protested. “Don’t tell me you believe this?”

It sounded mad, Harry knew. But the desperation in Lupin’s eyes... that couldn’t be faked.

There was a loud creak as the door swung open on its hinges, knocking against Ron’s shoulder, and for a second nobody moved. But nothing happened.

“No one ever knew there were three unregistered animagi running around Hogwarts in our school days,” Lupin said, gaze flicking between Harry and Hermione. “They always said they’d register after the war, but— well.”

“Hurry *up* Remus,” Black muttered impatiently. “I’ve waited twelve years for this, I don’t want to wait any longer!”

“They need the truth, Sirius. We need to do this properly.” Lupin squeezed his friend’s shoulder. He turned back to Harry. “They learned to keep me company, you see. The potion Severus makes for me is a fairly recent invention. When I was in school, it didn’t exist, and my transformations were... awful. Having them around in their animal forms, I didn’t want to hurt them like I did humans. They could stop me from hurting myself.” He shook his head, hair falling into his eyes. “All year, I’ve been debating whether to tell someone about Sirius’ form. When he got into the castle, I knew he had to be transforming to stay hidden. But I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t betray James’ memory like that. So I stayed quiet, because he was pack, and even after twelve years I couldn’t believe he would truly hurt Harry.”

“*You swore to me.*” The new voice startled all of them, when Snape whipped off Harry’s invisibility cloak and revealed himself in the corner of the room, wand held aloft at Lupin’s face. “You *swore* on Lily’s memory that you weren’t helping *him*.” He glared at Black, who looked from Snape to Lupin and then let out a loud groan.

“Really, Moony? Snivellus? *Again?*”

“Shut *up*, Sirius!” Lupin bit out. “Severus, please, allow us to explain.”

“I think I’ve heard enough,” Snape said icily. “You left the map open on your desk, Lupin. I came to bring you your potion, and to my surprise, whose name did I see running across the lawn? I should’ve known you were helping him all along. After all you said...”

“*Severus,*” Lupin took a step towards the man, ignoring the wand in his face, voice raw with pain. “You don’t understand. I never helped him, but we got it all wrong. *Please*, just listen, for me.”

“Please, Professor Snape,” Harry added. He’d never been so polite to Snape in his life, but if it made him hold off for just *five more minutes*. “Trust him. There’s something going on here.”

“Oh, there’s something going on alright,” Snape muttered, his eyes lingering on Lupin’s hand curled around Black’s shoulder. He stared at Lupin for a long time, then... he lowered his wand. “If you betray me again, I *will* kill you, wolf,” he said to Lupin, who sobbed in relief.