

He would never ask, though. It wasn't worth the risk — now Harry was here, there would be chaos if he went unnoticed for more than about ten minutes.

Besides, if he went to Seren Du they'd have a hard time getting him to ever leave again.

A knock on the door made him groan, but his ire lessened when he recognised Sirius' magic on the other side of the door. He dropped his ward, inviting the animagus in and rolling onto his side. His cheeks flushed at the look on his godfather's face. "I'm not mad at you," Sirius assured. "Not like Molly is. But she can stuff it, quite frankly — her youngest son is an arse." Harry snorted. "Did yelling at him help any?"

"Made me feel a bit better," Harry muttered, shifting aside so Sirius could join him on the single bed. The older man shuffled beside Harry, leaning against the headboard and stretching his legs out. After a beat, Harry rolled closer to him, burrowing his face in the man's side. "I hate this, Padfoot," he admitted, eyes stinging with tears. "This house... it's bad enough on its own, but they just *won't leave me alone*. I've got no privacy and far too many secrets and I still can't get a full night's sleep without waking up from one nightmare on another, and as soon as I wake up they're just *pestering me* and it's only going to get worse when school's back in because Dumbledore will be there, and no one here seems to even *care* that Cedric is dead or that Dudley is dead or *anything*! I can't even bloody go outside for some fresh air!" Across the room, the desk rattled. Harry swallowed back the lump of emotion in his throat. "I want to go home, Sirius," he whispered, staring up at the man with desperate eyes, red-rimmed and tearful.

"I know, pup," Sirius sighed, running his hand through Harry's hair. "I do, too."

Guiltily, Harry realised that Sirius had been stuck in this house for just as long as he had. He opened his mouth to apologise, but Sirius shook his head. "No, don't — I've had years of experience being trapped in this dump with people I hate," he said wryly. "I'd say at least we've got some good ones on our side — the other Weasley kids, and Remus, and even Tonks when she's around — but it's really not the same when all you need is a day or two to yourself." He kept stroking Harry's hair, and the boy leaned into the touch, feeling the tension slowly leak from his frame. "I'm sorry, pup. You've not had time to process anything about your cousin — that's a complicated bit of grief if I've ever seen one. And hell, you haven't really dealt with Cedric's death yet, not really." His voice was knowing, and Harry didn't deny it. The Hufflepuff's death still felt like a gaping wound in his chest. "I wish I could do more to help. I wish it wasn't so easy for Molly to boss me around in my own damn home."

"She's got Dumbledore on her side," Harry pointed out. "You never stood a chance."

"Neither of us did," Sirius agreed. "I wish I could take you home and let you fly and swim and bake with Ceri for a while. Wish I could get Draco there, and Cissa too — get them out of that bastard's clutches, get them somewhere safe. But... safe won't last long, these days, until we've done something about it. And doing all those things would only bring more trouble down on our heads."

Harry hummed quietly in agreement. Slowly, his breathing was beginning to steady itself again, his emotions draining from him until all he had was exhaustion and a deep, aching sadness. "I didn't mean to have such a meltdown." He wasn't going to apologise to Ron, but