Black barked out a laugh. "That's the name he's been going by, is it? How *cute*." He lunged towards Hermione on the bed, but Lupin held him back.

"Sirius, no! They won't understand, you need to explain."

"We're running out of time, Moony!" Black argued. "I can explain after he's dead, now give me that rat!"

"Harry deserves an explanation," Lupin insisted firmly. "After everything, he deserves that."

"What the bloody hell are you saying about my rat?" Ron cut in loudly, glaring at the pair. Through lack of a wand, his fists were raised defensively. He edged closer to Hermione, and Black snarled.

"Don't touch him!" His eyes were wild, Lupin's hand on his shoulder holding him back. "You can't take him, not now I finally have him in reach!

"Pettigrew's dead," Harry said, confused. "You killed him. Everyone knows that."

"Everyone *thinks* they know," Black breathed, grinning madly. He lunged forward again, and Ron yelped — then the redhead grabbed Scabbers and held him close to his chest, turning to the door.

"This is ridiculous," he declared. "You're all nutters. I'm getting Dumbledore, or the aurors, or—"

"No!" The cry came unbidden from Harry's lips, but he wasn't the only one — Black and Lupin both shouted too, Lupin raising his wand to send ropes at Ron's ankles to stop him from leaving. But at the same time, Harry flung an arm out, a burst of magic slipping instinctively from his fingers. He wasn't even sure what he'd been trying to do, but whatever it was interfered poorly with Lupin's spell — Ron stumbled as the magic hit him, then there was a truly disturbing popping noise, and all of a sudden the redhead blanched, falling unconscious, his right leg splaying out at a horrifying angle. Harry's stomach lurched.

"Oh, shit," he murmured, eyes wide.

"The rat!" Black cried, as Scabbers tried to make a run for it. With a wave of Lupin's wand, a metal cage appeared around the creature, which squeaked and thrashed violently in the new confines. "Just kill him, Remus!" Black wailed, but Lupin shook his head.

"Harry needs proof, Sirius," he replied calmly. He turned to Harry, his amber eyes imploring. "Everyone thought Sirius killed him. Even I believed it until tonight. But the map doesn't lie. I would know."

"He's just a rat!" Hermione sobbed. "He's been in Ron's family for ages!"

"Yes, quite a few years, I'd imagine," Black agreed grimly. "Far longer than a regular rat could be expected to live." Harry sucked in a sharp breath.

"I— I don't know if Ron ever said how long. He was Percy's before Ron got him."