

The next morning, Harry woke with a sharp gasp, empty grey eyes the only thing he could see. He cursed softly, clenching his hands in his duvet — his brain had somehow melded his guilt about both Cedric and Dudley, until his dream became watching Cedric get his soul taken by a dementor in the middle of that graveyard.

Harry could still feel the cold.

He took a shower in an attempt to warm up, glad it was still too early for most people to be awake, and desperately wishing he was still at Seren Du. There, nightmares were greeted with a sympathetic hug from Remus, a cup of tea from Ceri, and then at least an hour of forcing his brain into more productive pursuits by duelling with Snape.

Harry couldn't believe how much he actually *missed* the Potions Master.

Nightmares in Grimmauld Place were an entirely different kettle of fish; Harry had wiped all traces of it from his face by the time he went down to breakfast, not wanting either Mrs Weasley or Hermione to begin the *concerned* questioning, as if he were one wrong word away from another shouting match.

They might not have been far off with that assessment, but the nightmares wouldn't be the thing to trigger it. He was just so *tired*. After weeks of being free to process his grief, Remus and Snape and even Sirius giving him the space and comfort to do so on his own terms, having to lock it up tight — or worse, *perform* his grief for the satisfaction of others — was beginning to gnaw at him, constantly, making his skin itch and his stomach churn. It wouldn't be so bad if he could sneak off for a quick cuddle with either of his godfathers, but there was hardly a moment of privacy in Grimmauld. It was somehow worse than the Burrow the summer before; despite being a much bigger house, everyone seemed to congregate in the same five rooms, and Harry wasn't quite brave enough to go exploring in the rooms that hadn't been fully cleaned and cleared of dark magic. Hiding in his room only got him so far — Ron and Hermione had figured out where it was after the first week.

With school drawing ever closer, they seemed to have decided it was time to bring Harry back into the fold — or someone had instructed them to, perhaps. Either way, it meant the pair were constantly hounding him for attention now, Ron pestering him to play chess or exploding snap, while Hermione asked incessantly about his summer homework.

He got lucky, through breakfast. Ron was busy stuffing his face, and Hermione seemed too tired to begin the Harry Inquisition. He was able to keep his head down and eat his breakfast — and ignore the concerned glances Sirius sent his way. Remus had gone, no doubt back to Seren Du for the day. Part of Harry hated him for being able to travel so freely.

Since Hermione was *under the weather* — Harry heard her mutter something to Ginny about cramps, and wisely decided to ask no further — the teenagers were allowed a chore-free morning. Harry told Ron that he too wasn't feeling well, and the oblivious redhead decided both his friends had clearly caught the same germs, so he went to go bother the twins while they rested.

Unfortunately, Harry's luck began to fail around lunchtime.