

“Yeah. Let’s do it.” His hands were steady as he took the vial from Snape, carefully pouring the potion into the bowl in front of him. The three adults stepped far back as the potion began to steam, its faint green vapours twining around Harry. He breathed it in with his eyes closed, lungs filling with the scent of smoke and green wood and magic. He let his mind fall into the meditative state that had become so familiar to him in the last week, and even before that. He let his magic relax, reach out, curl inwards. He followed it, followed the ozone smell to the deep heart of himself. He didn’t dare think, couldn’t let his brain do anything other than follow its instinct. Animals relied on instincts, after all.

Inside his mind, he was in a forest. He was barefoot, the earth soft under his feet, trees towering all around him. It wasn’t a forest he recognised. Something told him to walk deeper, so he did.

It was dusk, the faintest light from the fading sun filtering through the trees, just enough to let Harry see where he was going. He looked down at himself, and saw he was entirely naked. He wasn’t cold, and he couldn’t find it in himself to be embarrassed. He kept walking.

Something was humming. Distant, quiet, tuneless but somehow... comforting. Familiar. His magic, maybe? It pushed him forward, urged him to keep walking. The air smelled like new growth.

The trees parted to reveal a small clearing, tufts of lush green grass sprouting from the forest floor. In the centre of it all, sat staring at Harry with yellow-green eyes, was an animal.

Harry stepped forward. The animal didn’t blink. Its pointed ear twitched, the white tip of its tail dragging to curl around its body.

“Hello,” Harry greeted, bowing to the creature. It rose on four paws and ducked its narrow snout to the ground, its gaze still locked with Harry’s. It cocked its head, and sat down again.

Harry drew closer. When he looked at it, he could see a smattering of lighter-coloured fur on the animal’s forehead, right where his own scar would sit. The rest of its fur was a dark russet-red, fading into white under its belly. “You’re beautiful, aren’t you?” Was that a narcissistic thing to say? Harry didn’t really care. It was a fact.

The animal stood once more, turning a graceful circle so Harry could look at it from all angles. Its footsteps were soundless on the dark earth, and it froze when Harry took one more step towards it. He reached out a hand. The animal jumped closer, butting its head against Harry’s fingers.

And then he woke up.

He blinked his eyes open, staring at the ceiling of the living room. He’d fallen back against the cushions, at some point. The potion in the bowl had stopped steaming. Harry still felt a little lightheaded, but a grin split his face.

“Well?” Sirius asked, still far across the room but looking at Harry with hopeful grey eyes. Harry sat up, a quiet laugh huffing between his lips.