

“I grew up in the same town as your mother’s family; Cokeworth, not far from Wolverhampton. Lily and I met when we were seven, and Petunia was... not pleased with our association. Especially not once Lily got her Hogwarts letter and I was allowed to tell her the truth about magic,” Snape explained.

“You knew my mum when she was little? What was she like?”

“That is a story for another time, Potter,” Snape said, his tone surprisingly gentle. “One that I would be willing to share with you. Not tonight, however.”

“You’re safe from Dumbledore here, cub. He’ll never even know you’re gone,” Remus promised.

“And you wanna know the best part?” Sirius was practically bouncing in his seat as he spoke. “The place is Unplottable, and the woods are full of old, wild magic — you can do as much magic as you like here and the Ministry won’t know a thing.”

Harry’s eyes were round and gleaming at the prospect of being able to do as much magic as he wanted all summer. “Brilliant.”

When their plates started growing empty, there was a small pop, and the centre of the table suddenly held a delicious-looking tower of profiteroles. “Your house elf is going to give me diabetes, Black,” Snape muttered, though he served himself a decent-sized bowl of the dessert. Sirius barked out a laugh.

“She’ll calm down eventually, she’s just happy to have people to cook for again. Besides, according to her we could all do with a bit more meat on our bones. I can’t say she’s wrong, to be honest.”

Harry looked around the table; all four of them were indeed painfully skinny, Sirius and Harry more than the other two. “It’s like being at Hogwarts, but better,” Harry remarked, swallowing a mouthful of profiterole.

There wasn’t much talking while the four ate their dessert, and when the table was clear Remus cleared his throat. “I thought we might head to the living room and talk for a while. There’s still so much Sirius and I don’t know about your life, Harry, and I thought it might be good for Sirius and Severus to learn about what happened to you last summer.” The two men in question gave him a concerned look, and Harry grimaced. Yes, he had a lot of explaining to do.

The living room turned out to be upstairs, and Ceri already had a fire going to ward off the evening chill. It held two comfortable-looking sofas and a pair of squashy armchairs, and Harry chose one of the sofas, surprised when Sirius sat next to him. Remus and Snape took the other sofa.

Ceri popped into the room. “Can Ceri be getting sirs anything to drink?”

“Just tea if you wouldn’t mind, Ceri,” Remus requested. The house elf nodded, her large ears flopping, and she returned moments later with a tea tray set for four, a small pile of biscuits in