

There was no time; Lupin gasped harshly, hunching until he was almost on all fours. His head lengthened, his clothes ripped, his skin began to sprout fur. Harry backed away several steps in horror, and within seconds there was an enormous wolf stood in front of them. A huge black dog tackled it, Sirius throwing himself at the mercy of the wolf, but it batted him aside with a growl.

Harry stared, transfixed. Snape moved to stand in front of him, wand raised. In all the chaos, no one noticed Pettigrew lunge for freedom until all of a sudden he was shrinking, leaving a tangle of ropes in his wake as he scurried off into the night. Snape cursed, shooting off a spell, but whether he was aiming for Pettigrew or for the werewolf, he missed. The werewolf growled again, striking out with one huge paw. Snape went flying, hitting the grass with a dull thud.

He didn't get up.

Hermione let out a quiet moan of horror. Sirius whined, then let out a loud howl that made the werewolf turn away from Harry and the others. It howled in return, setting off at a sprint towards the forest, after Sirius. After a minute, they heard a dog yelp in pain. Harry glanced down at the unconscious — *hopefully just unconscious* — Snape, at Ron equally limp beside him. Then he turned on his heel and ran after the dog and the wolf.

Sirius needed help. There was no way he could tackle a werewolf alone.

Hermione called after him, no doubt staying with Ron, but Harry didn't falter — he had to get to Sirius.

He could hear yelping coming from by the lake — until it stopped abruptly. Harry picked up his pace, fear pounding through his veins, wand clutched in his hand.

When the lake was in sight, Harry knew why the yelping had stopped. The werewolf was gone, but Sirius was on the bank of the lake, a man once more, moaning with his hands over his ears. And swooping ever closer were a whole hoard of dementors.

Harry felt the cold hands reaching into his chest, sucking out all his happy memories. He tried to hold onto them, raising his wand like Lupin had taught him. "Expecto Patronum!" *Sirius wants me to live with him. I'm going to be free.* "Expecto Patronum!" *I have my godfather back. No more Dursleys.* "Expecto Patronum!"

*There.*

Suddenly, a huge blinding light emerged from his wand, sending the dementors reeling back screaming. Harry's hand shook around his wand, the screaming still in his ears, his vision going fuzzy. He could make out some sort of four-legged animal — something with antlers? — galloping across the lake, driving the shadowy creatures away, but his knees gave way all the same, the magic burning through his exhausted body.

And then, everything went black.

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