

“It’s too late for that, pup,” the animagus said. Harry’s heart leapt to his throat — it had to be bad, to make Sirius look like that. “Tonks just sent a message; the auror department is a madhouse right now. There was a mass breakout at Azkaban.”

Harry looked up at Neville, just in time to see the blood drain from his friend’s face.

“Yeah,” Harry said weakly, hating that the joy was still simmering in the back of his mind. “That’ll do it.”

Gathering armies, indeed.

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The news was all over the front page of the *Daily Prophet* the next morning. Ten pictures; ten Death Eaters who were at large once more. The sight of all three Lestranges staring up at Harry made his jaw clench, and he looked sideways at Neville. The boy had been ashen-faced since he’d heard the news, and Harry had noticed the Silencing charm around his bed that night. From the dark circles under his eyes, Harry would bet that Neville’s sleep had been more nightmare-plagued than his own.

On the blond’s other side was Ginny, her hand wrapped tightly around Neville’s. “I’m so sorry,” she breathed, voice cracking. “Neville, fuck, I... I’m so sorry.”

Neville gave a tiny shrug, mechanically eating his toast. Harry pressed his shoulder to his friend’s in quiet sympathy. What else could he do? There was nothing to say to make the situation any better.

Neville wasn’t the only one hit hard by the news. At the Hufflepuff table, Susan was squeezed tight between Ernie and Hannah, who were hiding her from view and had been since she’d burst into tears at the sight of the men who had tortured and killed every member of her family barring her Aunt Amelia. The Hufflepuffs around them were quiet, sharing worried looks between them.

Reading the full article just made anger flare in Harry’s gut — Fudge was blaming the breakout on Sirius.

Luckily, he wasn’t the only one who realised how utterly ridiculous that was.

“If Black was going to break everyone out, surely he’d have done it when he got loose,” he heard from the Ravenclaw table behind him.

“You-Know-Who has the dementors, I’m telling you,” someone else from further up the Gryffindor table declared. “It’s been obvious ever since one of them got Potter’s cousin. Fudge just can’t admit he fucked up that badly.”

Harry hated how flippantly Dudley’s death was being bandied about the hall, but if it was helping people realise the truth about the Ministry’s incompetence, he couldn’t argue against it. It was something Fudge couldn’t deny, not after how quickly the news had spread around school — and back to the parents, Harry would bet.