

“You’re here!” she crowed in delight, practically jumping on Harry in a hug. He couldn’t help but laugh, smiling into her strawberry-scented hair.

“Hi, Gin.”

When she pulled back, she kept her hands on his shoulders, studying him carefully. “You’re looking better than I thought you would. Are you alright?” Harry didn’t know how much of the question was for show, and he shrugged.

“All things considered, not bad.” That seemed to be enough for the redhead, and she nodded decisively.

The door opened again, and Snape strode in, his customary sneer on his face. Harry didn’t react at the sight of him, though he saw the faintest flicker of approval in the man’s dark eyes when he saw the Gryffindor. “I see we are to be *blessed* with Potter’s presence once more,” he drawled. Sirius growled, only to get a whack on the shoulder with Mrs Weasley’s wooden spoon.

“Severus, goodness, is it time already? Kids, come on, we’d better get you upstairs — yes, Fred, George, for the last time that means you as well! I don’t care if you’re of age, you’re still in school, and you’ll stay out of all this.” With a plate piled high with sandwiches floating behind her, Mrs Weasley beckoned Harry over. “I thought I’d put you in with Ron, dear; I’ll show you the way.”

“Harry’s taking my old room, Molly,” Sirius said, stepping forward and placing a hand on Harry’s shoulder. “I’ll take him up.”

“Nonsense; the boys share all the time when they’re at the Burrow, it’s no trouble.”

“Harry is my godson, and this is my house,” Sirius reminded her firmly. “He’s had a difficult summer, and if he wants the privacy of his own bedroom, he can have it.”

Mrs Weasley turned to Harry, as if expecting him to argue and insist he wanted to share with Ron. Harry had no intention of doing so, and flashed his godfather a smile. “Thanks, Sirius.”

“No problem, kid.” Sirius grinned, reaching out to steal one of the sandwiches. “Come on, I’ll show you around. Stay quiet in the main hall, now; my mother’s portrait is sleeping. She’s a bit of a hag, you don’t want to wake her up.”

That explained the whispering earlier. Before Mrs Weasley could protest, Sirius had grabbed the plate of food and was headed for the door, three redheads and Harry in his wake. They tiptoed up two flights of stairs, lined with a grotesque collection of severed house elf heads, and turned to a door with a tarnished silver nameplate. *Sirius Orion Black*. Sirius nudged the door open with his elbow.

It was as dark and austere as the rest of the house, though clearly teenaged Sirius had done his best to lighten it up — a Gryffindor banner took up half of one wall, along with a collection of muggle posters of scantily clad women posing with motorbikes. Sirius flushed