

advise against it. I'm not so arrogant as to think I've discovered all of the secrets down here, and I don't want you getting hurt."

He was sure Salazar still had a few that he wasn't sharing, the sneaky bastard.

"So." He clapped his hands together, determined to get them all on track before they could freak out too much about the new surroundings. "Back to Patronus charms, then?"

Umbridge certainly wasn't going to find them down there.

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Sirius wanted to punch something. He stalked through the corridors of Grimmauld, restlessness coursing through his veins. He hadn't been outside since Dumbledore had fled Hogwarts; the old man had practically moved in to Grimmauld Place, showing up at all hours, sometimes with nothing in particular to say — like he was checking to see Sirius was where he was supposed to be. It was utterly galling, being checked on like a recalcitrant child, and Sirius *desperately* wished he could give the man a piece of his mind.

But he couldn't, because they were still pretending they didn't hate the manipulative bastard.

Fleeing Hogwarts in such a *courageous* move and letting the media paint him as the driving force behind the students learning to defend themselves had done nothing but strengthen Dumbledore's reputation as protector of the Light, to the point where Sirius was beginning to wonder if he hadn't orchestrated the whole thing himself. The man no longer had to worry about the students, or Umbridge breathing down his neck, and there was no auror in Fudge's pocket *actually* capable of arresting the great Albus Dumbledore.

As long as the headmaster made sure to look sad and express how *awful* he felt about leaving the school vulnerable — though assuring that Minerva had everything in hand until he could return — everyone ate it up. Sirius wanted to strangle him.

"Hey." He whipped around at the whisper, raising his eyebrows at the sight of Charlie Weasley, dimples and all, leaning in a nearby doorway with mischief in his eyes. Sirius' heart thudded painfully. "You busy?"

"Do I look busy?" Sirius retorted, a little sharper than necessary. It didn't bother Charlie, who held out a hand.

"Come here, I want to show you something."

It took less hesitation than it probably ought to for Sirius to slip his hand into the dragon-tamer's calloused one, letting the shorter man drag him up the stairs and down the left hand corridor. Sirius' brow furrowed in confusion when Charlie opened the door to the formal dining room. It was the largest room in the house, used for parties and the like when Sirius had been a child, and Sirius hadn't stepped foot in it since he'd ripped all the wallpaper down and painted it pale gold. What could Charlie possibly want to show him in there?