

“What? *God*, no!” That seemed to startle Snape. “That was what they were like? That was—that’s what *he* was like?” In none of the stories Sirius and Remus had ever told, did they mention that. “That... that wasn’t a prank. That was *assault*.” He hadn’t seen if they had in fact removed Snape’s underwear, but even without them going that far it was still sexual assault. “Why didn’t Remus do anything?”

“He stopped them, the second Potter even hinted at... well, you saw,” Snape said stiffly. “He was always... reluctant to interfere, when they got going. He worried that if they knew about us, they would abandon him, or worse. They were his pack. He couldn’t face that.”

“You don’t let that happen to someone you love,” Harry argued firmly. “How can you forgive him for that? And Sirius! Sirius was—“ Harry didn’t even have *words* for the way he felt, watching his godfather do something so cruel. “They reminded me of my cousin, and his friends.”

Snape’s lips became a thin line. “Sometimes, I forget that your childhood was more similar to mine than James Potter’s.”

Harry winced. “Sometimes I like to forget my childhood existed at all,” he retorted bluntly. He ran a hand through his hair. “God, no wonder you hated me at first. How the hell have you and Sirius managed to even be civil, let alone sort-of friends?”

“Amends were made, for various incidents,” Snape said. “Our school years were... complicated, to say the least. Sometimes in life you have to decide to move past things that hurt, because continuing to hold anger over them can make things worse. Needless to say, Black and I will never be bosom buddies, but for the cause of a greater good we can be companionable. As for Remus... that history is even more complicated, and suffice to say I do not owe you an explanation.”

Harry went wide-eyed, nodding. “Yes, sir.” But he still couldn’t fathom it, forgiving people who treated you like that. Forgiving people who stood by and let it happen. “Is... is that when you and my mum stopped being friends, sir?”

Slowly, Snape gave a jerky nod. “She forgave me, eventually,” he said. “But by that time, the damage had been done.” He rubbed unconsciously at his left forearm, where the Dark Mark lurked beneath his sleeve.

An awkward silence spread between them. Then, Harry steeled himself. “Excuse my bluntness, sir, but we both know I’m not that good a Legilimens,” he said frankly. “I should never have seen that. Any other day, you’d never let me get that far. What the hell is wrong with you today? Sir,” he added belatedly, not wanting to push his luck. Snape scowled, tucking some of his hair behind his ear.

“You’re more skilled at it than you think,” he admitted offhandedly. “But you’re right, you never should have seen that. Albus called me into his office this morning, to give a report on your Occlumency progress.”

Harry’s shoulders tensed, but he still didn’t understand how that could have Snape so thrown. “He’s done that before, right? What was different this time?”