

Valiantly, Ron stood between Black and Harry, declaring the Azkaban escapee would need to go through him to get to his godson. But far from striking him down in an instant like one might expect, Black shook his head wildly, insisting that only one life need end that night.

“Why d’you suddenly care about casualties?” Harry retorted quietly. “Didn’t bother you when you blew up Pettigrew and all those muggles, did it? He was your friend! My father was your friend!”

“You don’t understand, Harry,” Black insisted. “If you only knew the full story... it’s my fault, I won’t deny that... but you’ve got to listen to me... you don’t understand.”

“I understand more than you know,” Harry spat. “They trusted you, and you betrayed them. You were their friend! You were their secret keeper!”

Black howled in anguish, reeling back. “No, no, you’ve got it all wrong,” he moaned. “The truth, you need to hear the truth!” Black squeezed his eyes shut as if pained, and Harry took his chance, diving for his wand. Crookshanks dove as well, his claws digging into Harry’s forearm. Hermione screamed. The cat seemed determined to keep Harry from his wand, and Harry growled, shoving the ball of ginger fur aside and *reaching* — his wand rolled towards him, just enough for him to grasp it. Crookshanks’ claws sliced him through from wrist to elbow as he rolled to his feet, but Harry barely registered the pain, pointing his wand squarely at Black’s chest.

“Going to kill me?” Black asked with hollow eyes. Crookshanks hopped up onto the man’s chest, planting himself firmly and staring Harry dead in the eye.

What the hell was wrong with Hermione’s cat??

Suddenly, they could hear muffled footsteps from somewhere else in the shack. Harry’s heart leapt into his throat, and Ron called out. Black jumped up, but it was too late; the footsteps were thundering towards them, and the door burst open to reveal Professor Lupin, wide-eyed and wand raised.

“Expelliarmus!” The wand Black held flew out of his grasp — but so did the wand in Harry’s hand. Lupin caught both of them, staring across the room at Black. “Where is he?”

Harry narrowed his eyes in confusion. Who? Black pointed across the room at Hermione, who stared back incredulously, still on the bed. “Me? What?”

“But then, why... unless—” Lupin’s eyes were darting from Hermione to Black like he was watching a tennis match. “Unless you switched without telling me? To him?”

“I’m sorry, Moony,” Black wailed. “We should’ve trusted you. We should’ve told you! Peter convinced us you were the traitor!”

“Professor Lupin,” Harry asked hesitantly. “Remus. What’s going on?”

“Harry,” Lupin’s voice was calm. “Cub. I think we’ve made a very big mistake.”