

Harry gripped the front of his godfather's blouse, throat aching and eyes itching like he was going to cry but the tears didn't come. He couldn't steady his tumultuous emotions long enough for his body to decide to cry.

Sirius just held him, murmuring words of comfort, carding a hand through his hair. "Everything is gonna be alright, kiddo," he promised. "It's all over now. Everything's done. You can rest."

Choking on a ragged breath, Harry did just that, burying his face in Sirius' chest and just falling into the embrace. Sirius kept him upright, leading him over to the nearest bench so he could sit and just hold Harry like he was a small child, cradling him. Harry didn't even notice when the animagus lifted his wand and send off a Patronus.

He did notice when several more sets of footsteps entered the hall. He raised his head, seeing the whole family — Charlie, the two Malfoys, Remus and Snape — come hurrying over, stopping just short of the embracing pair.

"Harry," Draco started, worry plain on his face. "I... are you alright?"

"We looked everywhere," Remus said, "where did you even go?"

Draco and Snape both had knowing expressions, and Harry just shook his head. Now wasn't the time to drop that bombshell. "Doesn't matter," he murmured. "I just... I needed some space."

"Of course, yeah," Draco agreed instantly. "Are you okay?"

Harry couldn't help but laugh. What a ridiculous question.

"Tell you what, pup," Sirius murmured, chin still propped on Harry's head. "I think it's time we all went home. We've been living in this bloody castle long enough — you need some distance from this place before you're back in it for the next four months."

"It would do my old heart some good if we didn't live in a place where you could walk through the walls whenever you please," Remus agreed, making Harry smile despite himself.

Home sounded good.

"I— I need to go pack, then," he started, trying to wrestle his way out of Sirius' embrace, but the dark-haired man held fast.

"The elves can handle it," he insisted. "Your friend Dobby."

"I'll send word to Minerva," Snape volunteered.

It seemed they wanted to get Harry home before he changed his mind, wandered off through another wall to a place where they couldn't follow. Guilt gnawed at him for that — it wasn't fair on them, he shouldn't have done that, he just kept worrying people — but he pushed it away, letting Sirius pull him to his feet and start directing him towards the door.