

“Breathe, Nev.” In their summer correspondence, Harry had learned a lot about the other boy, including what had happened to his parents. Harry could hardly imagine what it was like; having your parents alive, but them not recognising you or anyone else, their brains destroyed by excessive torture.

From Moody’s words, they were going to be studying the Unforgivables a lot over the next term. Harry wished it would be worth anything to go to Dumbledore. The man had probably happily consented to showing fourteen year-olds the worst curses known to wizard-kind. Fourteen year-olds with families destroyed by those curses.

There was an odd clunking sound, and Harry turned to see Moody walking towards them. He scowled at the professor.

“It’s alright, sonny,” Moody assured, clapping Neville on the shoulder. “Why don’t you come up to my office, have a cup of tea?” He glanced aside. “You alright there, Potter?”

“I’ve been better,” he bit out.

“I know it seems a little harsh, but you’ve got to know. No point in pretending... anyway. Come on, Longbottom. I’ve got some books that might interest you.” Neville sent Harry a pleading look, and Harry reached out to grab Neville by the arm gently.

“Actually, Professor, Neville and I were going to go finish our Charms essays before dinner. If you don’t mind.” He tried to stay polite, aware that the man still *was* a teacher, but he was reaching the end of his tether. His vision still flashed green every time he closed his eyes.

Moody stared him down for a moment, then nodded, stepping back. “If you’re sure, Potter. You boys watch yourselves. *Constant vigilance!*” With that he limped back to his office, and Neville let out a shaky breath.

“Thanks, Harry,” he murmured. “I just... I can’t, right now. Not after seeing him do that. You know what they say about the Unforgivables — for them to work, you’ve got to *mean* it.”

Harry swallowed harshly. Moody certainly meant it back in the classroom, with the spiders. Had the auror used the curses on people before, too? Surely even aurors weren’t allowed to use that kind of force.

“What was that about, then?” Ron and Hermione appeared from nowhere — apparently they hadn’t gone back to the Tower like Harry thought. Ron seemed entirely oblivious to the tension in the air. “Some lesson, eh? He really knows his stuff. The way that spider just *snuffed it*, wow, I—” He seemed to realise who he was talking to, growing quickly silent. Harry’s patience snapped.

“Fuck off, Ron,” he muttered, putting an arm around Neville and heading for the library. He didn’t feel like being in Gryffindor Tower right now.

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