

Much like he did with his animagus practice, Harry steadied his mind and his magic, staring hard at the circle he was aiming for. He knew what apparition felt like from a side-along perspective; he just had to figure out how to get that feeling himself.

The first time he tried, nothing happened. Same for the second, third and fourth tries. After a while, he started to feel a bit of a tingle of magic, but it still wasn't quite enough to just *throw himself* into nothingness and hope he might reform on the other side.

He was also starting to develop a headache.

A glance over at Draco showed he was equally frustrated, and Sirius grinned sympathetically. "That'll do it for now, I think. Like I said, it takes time. It's a bit like the animagus transformation; once you've done it once, it becomes easier. You just have to make that initial pathway in your magic."

"I'm sure if I'd succeeded in the animagus transformation, that would make me feel better," Draco sniped, folding his arms. Sirius wasn't swayed, still smiling.

"Why don't you give it a try now, I'll see if I can help you out. I know you're at least halfway there; Harry told me you managed wings the other week."

"There were feathers *everywhere*," Harry piped up playfully, sticking his tongue out at Draco's glare. "If you two are gonna work on that, do you mind if I do the same? I've only ever been a fox indoors, so far; I want to see what it's like to really be in a forest." His fox senses were so sharp, he knew it would be overwhelming the first few times.

"Sounds good, but we'll move back inside the wards, first."

Sirius left the four white circles on the grass and led them back towards the house. Harry felt the faintest tingle when they crossed the ward boundary. "Don't go too far, pup," Sirius warned. Harry gave him a thumbs up, then kissed Draco's cheek, and within an instant he was a lot lower to the ground.

As he'd anticipated, being a fox in the woods was *a lot*. There were so many smells; creatures, magical and muggle alike, the different plants, the moisture in the earth. The scents of Sirius and Draco and himself. The scent of the wards, the magic fizzing lightly under his nose.

Mindful of his boyfriend and godfather, Harry bounded off into the trees, getting used to the feel of the soft earth under his paws. It was incredible, experiencing the world like this.

In the process of becoming an animagus, Harry had read the warning stories of people who became so attached to their animal forms that they ended up stuck in them forever, unable — or unwilling — to return to human form. Even Sirius had mentioned, once or twice, how he'd almost crossed that line after spending so much time as a dog to save his sanity in Azkaban. For the first time, Harry could understand how such things could happen; being out in the woods, his fox senses in full force as he sniffed out rabbit trails and strange birds and even the scent of Buckbeak having passed through, it was a strange sort of bliss Harry hadn't