

“You say the sweetest things,” he murmured in reply. Black snorted.

Hermione stared at Professor Snape in astonishment, still cradling her clearly broken arm. “Professor,” she breathed in horror. “No, please — you have to get the headmaster! Ron is—” She broke off with a whimper as Snape glared at her, nudging the unconscious Weasley with his foot.

“He is alive,” he dismissed, and turned back to Lupin. “Talk.”

“I thought Peter was dead,” the werewolf said hoarsely. “I thought — I didn’t know what Sirius wanted with Harry, but I thought Peter was long gone. Until I saw him on the map tonight, and then saw Sirius’ name.” He turned to Black, brow furrowing. “How? How did you find him, Sirius?”

“He was in the paper,” Black said, reaching into his robe and pulling out a battered piece of paper. It was the Daily Prophet, from the issue talking about the lottery Mr Weasley won. The picture of all the Weasleys in Egypt, Scabbers perched on Ron’s shoulder. “I saw it, when the Minister came to inspect. On the front page. I knew him at once... how many times have I seen him transform? I knew I had to leave as soon as I read the boy was a Hogwarts student. I couldn’t let him— Harry,” Black broke off in another moan, wrapping one arm around his stomach as his shoulders shuddered. Lupin squeezed him assuringly.

“He’s alright, Padfoot. Harry’s fine.” He looked from the photo, to Scabbers, and back again. “Good Merlin,” he said slowly. “His front paw.”

“What about it?” Harry asked quickly, craning his neck to look at the picture.

“All that was left of Pettigrew was a finger,” Snape murmured, comprehension dawning in his dark eyes.

Harry whipped around to look at Scabbers, who had frozen in fear in his cage. His front paw was, as it had always been, missing a toe.

“I didn’t think he had the brains for it,” Snape said, meeting Black’s gaze for the first time. “What did he do, cut it off and run?”

Black nodded. “Screamed all about how I betrayed Lily and James, then blew the street up with his wand behind his back, lopped off his finger and transformed.”

“So simple,” Lupin whispered. “Yet brilliant.”

“A first for old Pete,” Black agreed with a dark chuckle.

“So what, he faked his death and hid from you because he knew you betrayed my parents?” Harry retorted angrily, wondering where the whole story was going.

“I’d never betray Lily and James,” Black declared fiercely, snarling like his animal counterpart. “But it was my fault. I convinced them I was the obvious choice, I told them to make Pete the Secret Keeper instead. We didn’t trust Moony ‘cause of his boyfriend — sorry,