

Snape seemed to know where they were going, and eventually halted in a small clearing. “We duel here today,” he declared. “Use whatever you can to achieve your goals. Learn to think outside the box — you’re good at duelling, yes, but you’re also good at Transfiguration, and Charms. Winning isn’t about playing fair.”

“It’s about surviving,” Harry finished, familiar with the phrase by now. He flicked his wand into his hand, glancing around the clearing for anything that might be of use. A fallen branch, about ten feet behind Snape. The little muddy spot off to the left that could trip him up if Harry could nudge him in that direction. Trees that would make good coverage. This was much more Harry’s style.

They bowed, and the duel began.

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It was one of those rare times that Harry was left with only Snape in the house. Remus had been guilted into staying at headquarters for dinner, so the table at Seren Du was much quieter. Harry didn’t mind too much, though. At least until Snape almost dropped his fork. His hand went to his forearm, and Harry’s heart sank. “He’s Calling you now?” Snape nodded.

“It’s stronger than usual; this must be urgent.” The Slytherin got to his feet, abandoning his half-eaten dinner. “I’ll be back when I can. Hopefully Remus will be home soon; if you need him sooner, send Ceri. Don’t practice any magic you can’t reverse.” A new warning, after Harry had accidentally stuck himself to the ceiling while practicing some of the spells he’d learnt from a lesson with Remus, and had waited there for an hour until Snape and Remus returned from their Order meeting.

“Be safe,” Harry said in return. Snape nodded sharply, then swept out of the room to retrieve his mask and robe. Harry didn’t watch him go; seeing the man dressed in Death Eater regalia made his stomach turn.

Harry finished his dinner morosely, though he perked up a little when Ceri offered him brownies and ice cream for dessert. It was a miracle they weren’t all Dudley-sized, honestly. When he was finished, he took himself up to his room. The living room always felt too quiet when he was the only one in it.

Unfortunately, no non-reversible magic counted out his animagus practice. He was starting to get partial transformations now, just a little bit at a time, but Remus was worried he’d transform in some horrible way when there was no one home to help him, so he’d made Harry promise he wouldn’t try if no one was in the house.

That left him with only a few options, but Harry was happy to take one of them. It had been a while since he’d worked on his wandless magic. He sat cross-legged in the centre of his bed, letting the tension flow out of his shoulders.

It was getting easier, the more he worked on his animagus transformation. Sirius said it was because he was getting used to accessing his core without a focus — the transformation was