

Chapter 11

Pomfrey released all three of them from the hospital wing after lunch the next day, and Harry had nearly forgotten that the world kept going on without them. The castle was almost entirely deserted, everyone taking advantage of the glorious weather and the lack of exams and the last Hogsmeade visit before the end of the school year. No one had any idea what had happened in the night, how close an innocent man had come to losing his life.

That was the thing about Hogwarts. It never failed to remind you that the universe didn't revolve around you.

Everyone knew, of course, that Sirius Black had been caught and escaped again. The Hogwarts rumour mill was a creature unto itself. But no one knew the truth.

None of the trio felt like going to Hogsmeade after everything that had happened. Ron's leg, despite being fixed up by Madam Pomfrey, was still sore and stiff, and privately Harry thought the redhead was shell-shocked from learning his pet rat had been a grown man the entire time. Hermione, on the other hand, seemed to finally be feeling the effects of her overloaded schedule; she'd gone up to bed, telling the boys not to wake her even if she slept through dinner.

That left Harry alone, wandering through the grounds in the bright sunlight, finding himself at the edge of the lake. He could hardly wrap his head around it all — he'd performed a proper Patronus charm, right there, and saved Sirius' life and his own. Hermione had been time-travelling for the entire bloody school year. It was *madness*.

"Alright, Harry?" It was Neville, his shirtsleeves rolled up to his elbows and dirt smudged across his forehead. "You and Ron weren't in the dorms last night. I... what happened? Are you okay?"

"Yeah, it's... a long story," Harry dismissed with a shake of his head. "What are you up to?"

"I've been helping Professor Sprout get the greenhouses ready for the summer," Neville explained. "With all the students gone, she'll be looking after them all by herself, and some of the plants need to be moved first. I just came to get a bit of fresh air." Neville sat down on the sand beside Harry, briefly bumping the smaller boy's shoulder with his own. "You ready to leave?"

"I never am," Harry replied wryly. Neville knew he didn't like his muggle relatives, and he gave Harry a sympathetic grimace.

"Maybe you could come visit me and gran for a bit," he suggested. "Dumbledore can't keep you locked up with the muggles forever, right?"

Harry wanted to point out that the headmaster could and definitely would if he thought it would help his plans, but he stayed quiet. "Yeah, maybe." That would be nice, going to