

At that, Sirius glanced over to Bill, who looked troubled. The animagus wondered how the goblins were doing on the horcrux solution.

If they couldn't figure out a way to get that soul shard out of Harry safely, it would all be for nought regardless.

He set his head in his hands, resisting the urge to tear at his hair — or turn into a dog, where emotions were much easier to deal with. He'd promised Moony he'd stop doing that.

So many aspects of their plans relied on uncertainty. *If* they could fool Dumbledore for long enough and *if* they could unseat Fudge and *if* they could destroy all the horcruxes. *If* they could get Sirius free, or get Malfoy in prison.

If, if, if. Sirius hated that word.

A gentle hand on his back made Sirius look up, and he realised the room had cleared out — everyone except for Charlie, who was watching him with concern on his handsome face. "Talk to me," he urged, fingers sweeping up to massage gently at the tense knot of muscle at the base of Sirius' neck. He couldn't stop himself from melting under the touch.

"It just feels like it won't be enough," Sirius blurted. "I feel like— like I'm not holding up my end of the bargain. Harry's at school risking everything under the noses of Dumbledore and Umbridge both. He's training his classmates for war — something *none* of those kids should need to prepare for — and he's got his friends planning an entire restructure of the government, and he's dealing with those shitty visions. Meanwhile I'm here rattling around this bloody house with nothing to do but put laxatives in Dumbledore's tea when he comes for meetings."

Charlie snorted. "Have you actually?"

"Once or twice," Sirius confirmed with the barest hint of a grin. "It's hardly worth anything, though. Harry's my godson — I should be doing more to take some of this burden off his shoulders." A burden no teenager should have to bear, least of all his beloved pup, who had already been through so much.

The dragon tamer's fingers stilled. "Sirius," he sighed. "Like it or not, you're a wanted criminal. Harry knows it, we all know it — Kingsley and Tonks are doing what they can to get info on Pettigrew, but it looks like the rat is holed up tight with his master." Sirius snarled at the mention of him. "We all wish Harry didn't have to do what he's doing, but let's be honest, half of his burden is shit he decided to take on himself, the over-achieving little bastard." His voice was affectionate, despite his words. "As his godfather, all he wants you to do — all *any of us* want you to do — is support him, and love him, and give him a safe place to call home whenever he needs it. And you've done all those things. Are doing all of them."

Charlie's hand moved to cup Sirius' cheek, his other hand coming up to do the same, cradling the older man's face tenderly. He kissed him, and Sirius' heart ached. "You're doing everything you can, Sirius. I wish you'd stop being so hard on yourself."