

Immediately, all the muggle-raised members of the group lit up with unholy glee. Harry grinned back at them. "I'm going to split you into two teams," he announced. "And I hope you're all familiar with the Colour-Change charm, because we're going to be using a lot of it."

Just because learning to dodge spellfire was a very serious and necessary skill, didn't mean Harry couldn't make it fun, after all.

.-.-.-.

Sirius looked around the small group, tucked away in the upstairs drawing room of Grimmauld Place. These were the only members of the Order he could trust, these days. Other than Snape, of course — and if his teenage self could hear that, he'd check himself right into St Mungo's.

"The Minister isn't interested in searching for the escapees," Kingsley said in his low, rumbling voice. He had an arm around Tonks, gently rubbing her shoulder — the young auror had been in a state ever since the news of her *dear Aunt Bella's* escape. Sirius didn't blame her; the thought of that crazy bitch running free made him feel cold inside, like the dementors were right over his shoulder again.

In his sleep, he could hear her, cackling away to herself from a few cells away, the sound echoing in the narrow stone halls of the prison.

Sirius didn't sleep much, these days.

"He's too scared that actually going after them might unearth something he's not ready to face," Tonks snorted derisively. "He's paying lip service, of course — assigning aurors, telling the press he's got it handled. But the aurors he's putting on the case can barely tell their arse from their elbow."

Sirius snorted grimly; he was very familiar with the type.

"The fact that he's still in the job is a bloody miracle," Charlie muttered, shaking his head. He was sat beside Sirius, close enough to press their legs together from knee to ankle, and Sirius was glad no one else was bringing up the matter — with the ever-present chill in his bones, he would take all the warmth and comfort he could get. Within reason. He wasn't going to get the poor man's hopes up, no matter how desperate he was for some company at night, a warm body to keep the shadows at bay. Charlie deserved better than that.

"It's not a miracle, it's a sign that Voldemort's people are already in power, and Fudge is playing right into their hands," Remus piped up knowingly. He was propped up in an armchair, wan and tired-eyed from the recent full moon. "If he were competent, he'd be dead by now."

He was right; the dark side wouldn't put up with a Minister who might actually do something to stop them, not after all the work they'd done to worm their way into government.