

Consciousness returned to Harry in two stages; the first stage of groggily blinking open his eyes, and the second stage of almost falling out of bed in his haste to get on his feet. “Mr Potter!” Madam Pomfrey exclaimed, rushing to his bedside as he struggled to stand. “Kindly desist, you’re going to hurt yourself!”

“Sirius!” Harry cried out. The nurse’s eyes went soft.

“No need to worry, my dear. Black is locked away upstairs, the dementors will be with him any minute. He can’t hurt you now.”

“What!” Her words had the opposite affect she intended as Harry tried to sit up once more. “No, they can’t, he’s innocent!” Surely Snape had explained?

He reached for his glasses, looking around the hospital wing as everything came into focus. Ron was passed out in the bed opposite, his bandaged knee propped up on a pillow. Hermione occupied the bed beside his, awake and looking just as horrified, her arm in a splint. And several beds down lay Professor Snape, still completely unconscious. Shit! He was their one hope of getting the headmaster and the Minister to see reason!

Harry’s shout must have been heard from the corridor, as the next minute, Minister Fudge himself was on the ward, accompanied by Professor Dumbledore.

“Minister, you’ve got the wrong man, Black’s innocent!” he insisted, and Fudge’s eyebrows rose in alarm.

“I say, dear boy; he must have hit you with quite the Confundus charm!”

“Harry’s right!” Hermione agreed, jumping out of bed herself. “Wake up Professor Snape, he’ll tell you!”

“Children, please, calm yourselves!” Madam Pomfrey cut in. “You’ve had quite the ordeal, it’s natural to be confused. Just lie down, and—“

“Professor Snape can confirm it,” Harry echoed Hermione. “Just wake him up.”

“Professor Snape has a very severe concussion; to wake him from that prematurely could cause serious brain injury,” Pomfrey scolded. It was on the tip of Harry’s tongue to tell her to just do it anyway, but he resisted. Brain damaged Snape wouldn’t help anything.

“Black must have filled their heads with his ridiculous tale,” Fudge said with a shake of his head. “Something about a rat, and Peter Pettigrew.”

“It’s the truth! Pettigrew’s an animagus, he was Ron’s rat, it was his fault my parents died!” Harry argued.

“Minister, if I might have a word with my students. Alone, if you don’t mind, Poppy?” Dumbledore requested. Neither the Minister nor Pomfrey looked impressed at being thrown out of the ward, but they did as the headmaster bid, Fudge declaring he was going to go wait for the dementors.