

“Is everything okay? Is he alright?” Harry asked, brain immediately throwing dozens of disaster scenarios his way.

“He is well. The mutt is merely having a difficult time; Remus didn’t feel it prudent to leave him alone.”

Harry winced; Sirius was doing a lot better since moving into Seren Du, but every now and then he had nightmares from Azkaban and got stuck inside his own head for a little while. It was happening less and less, especially after Snape helped him with his Occlumency shields over the summer, but... twelve years surrounded by dementors had left him with a lot of damage.

“Oh,” he said, feeling awkward now he knew it was just him and the Potions Master. “I’ll, just, uh— go, then. Sorry to disturb you.”

“Not so fast, Potter,” Snape drawled before Harry could put the cloak back on. The man looked skyward for a moment, like he might regret what he was about to say, but carried on nonetheless. “There was clearly a reason for your visit here. Sit; perhaps I may be of assistance. I am not Remus, but I’m also not an idiot.”

Harry blinked, needing several seconds to comprehend the man’s words. Snape was... inviting him to stay? “Oh,” he said again. “I— okay then. If you’re sure.” Harry walked over to his usual spot on the sofa, and his eyebrows rose when a steaming teacup floated his way. “Thanks.”

Snape sat in his armchair, raising one eyebrow. “Well? What dilemma do you need a way out of now?”

Harry bit his lip. Snape had been a lot better since the summer, in private at least. He could trust him. “Well, I know what the egg’s clue means now. I just don’t really know what to do about it.” He drank his tea, unsurprised that it was exactly the way he preferred it. Snape was a spy, after all; he was supposed to be observant. “I have to be able to breathe underwater for an hour.”

He explained the mermaid’s song to Snape, whose lips pursed. “Of course they’re sending you into the Black Lake in *February*,” he muttered. “No wonder Poppy asked for those extra-strength Pepper-Up potions. Honestly!”

Harry hadn’t even thought about the issues that might arise from the temperature of the water, and grimaced. Could he hold a Warming charm for an hour? Should he just wear one of his charmed robes, even though it would slow him down in the water?

“There is of course the Bubblehead charm,” Snape continued, demonstrating with a wave of his wand. A large bubble appeared around his head, like he was wearing a fishbowl as a helmet. “Useful for being underwater, and also to avoid noxious fumes from potions. I often teach it to my NEWT students.” His voice was somewhat distorted by the bubble, but Harry could still hear him. Another wave of his wand, and the spell ended. “However, keeping the spell up for a full hour — especially in the face of whatever trials there will no doubt be waiting for you — requires a lot of concentration, and is a risk for someone as unfamiliar