

Chapter 43

Chapter Notes

CW for mentions of child abuse/neglect

The first thing Harry registered upon stepping through the door of Number Twelve was his godfather's smiling face.

"Sirius!" His relief was real; he hadn't seen the man in almost a week, and what a *hell* of a week it had been. He threw himself into his godfather's arms, some of the tension leaving him when Sirius hugged him tight.

"I've got you, pup," he promised in a fierce whisper. "You're alright."

Harry almost broke down there and then, but muffled voices reminded him they weren't alone. Reluctantly, he pulled back, making a face when he saw their surroundings. Sirius had mentioned the house was in poor shape, but he hadn't expected it to be so... dark.

"Good to see you, mate!"

"About time you showed up!"

The twins were whispering, which Harry found odd, but they beamed at him from behind Sirius. Nudging past the animagus, George ruffled Harry's hair, tucking him between himself and Fred and leading him through a door off to the side. Harry found himself in a very full kitchen, the smell of cooking meat making his stomach rumble.

"Oh, Harry, dear!" The twins were dislodged as their mother hurried over, and Harry tried not to stiffen too much when he was bundled in a rib-cracking hug. "Look at you, you're far too skinny, you poor thing!" She patted his cheek, eyeing him over with a frown on her face.

"Pale as a ghost, too. Have you been getting any sun at all?"

Harry wasn't *that* pale, and he grit his teeth — as far as she knew, he'd been shut in his room all summer; was she trying to rub it in?

"I'm afraid you can't stay long; it's almost time for the Order meeting. But I'll make you a quick sandwich to take up with you — did you have lunch? Never mind; you're a growing boy, you can always eat more! I'll only be a minute."

Harry turned towards the table, around which were several people he didn't recognise, all of whom were staring at him with varying levels of interest. He was saved having to say anything by the door opening, and Ginny skidding in past Tonks.