

"I know, pup, but things happen. You always need a back-up plan."

"I appreciate your concern, but I have it handled," Narcissa declared. "I'm worth far more at my husband's side than I would be cowering behind my sister's skirts." Her smirk was cold, and every inch a Slytherin. "I've always been a better dueller than Lucius, at any rate."

That drew a short laugh from Sirius. "And he knows it," he muttered proudly. "I know you want to help, but all the same... I think it would be worth getting back in touch."

"Andromeda would be pleased to hear you weren't as lost as she feared," Snape said, quiet voice cutting through the tension between the cousins. Narcissa's expression faltered.

"...I suppose," she said eventually. All of a sudden, she cleared her throat, and was smiling once more. "How rude of us, carrying on this dreadful conversation over Harry's birthday meal. I do apologise. Though I feel you've hardly noticed, with those moon-eyes you're giving my son." This smirk was equally Slytherin as the last, but much warmer, a playful glint in her eyes. Harry ducked his head.

"Mother!" Draco complained, his pale cheeks turning crimson. "Leave him alone."

"And miss my one chance of the year to watch my darling boy and his beau be so smitten?" she teased, smoothing her son's hair down with a saccharine smile. "I believe it's my right as a mother, after watching the pair of you be so utterly oblivious last year."

Harry wondered if it was possible to explode from too much blood to the face. He looked to his godfathers for help, but knew they would be useless. Sirius' grin spelled danger.

"Does my bitter old heart good to see young love," he sighed dramatically. "Harry's been positively heartbroken, unable to write to his boyfriend all summer. It's torture, watching him sigh away at the window, yearning for his paramour."

"Sirius!" Harry let out a strangled yelp, eyes wide. He didn't dare look Draco — or anyone — in the eye. "None of that is true!" Sure, he'd hated not being able to write to Draco. And maybe he'd spent more time than he should have worrying about how Draco was faring with Voldemort in his house. But there had been no *sighing at windows*.

"I do hope Draco has been a little more discreet in his pining, considering your company," Snape drawled, dark eyes alight with amusement. Great, now even *Snape* was getting in on the teasing!

"I haven't been pining!" Draco protested. "And I bet you were worse when you were my age. You're with a Gryffindor too, you know."

"But my Gryffindor knew where I lived in the summer, and knew that my parents hardly cared where I was," came Snape's easy retort. Remus' smile widened at the possessive, going starry-eyed like he always did when reminiscing about the good parts of his teenage years. Harry could hardly imagine it; Remus coming to visit Snape in his muggle town, sneaking away together for privacy over the summer. He grimaced — he didn't *want* to imagine it.