

The latter half of the man's words made Harry pause, his thoughts returning to the night before. "Look. Um. About Sn— Professor Snape." The professor paused in his packing, face turning apprehensive. "I know you said that you know him differently — I mean, clearly; you went to school together and all. And he was decent last night. But all the rest of the time... he hates me. He's constantly singling me out and giving me detention even though my Potions' work is no worse than Ron's, and it's way better than Neville's! He's awful to me all the time and I know he hated my dad but I'm not him, and surely— can you talk to him, or something?"

He winced at the slight crack in his voice; the last thing he wanted was to sound like a whiny little child. He just didn't *understand*. Snape seemed to have two totally different personalities these days, and Harry brought out the worst in him.

Lupin sighed, leaning against his desk. "Professor Snape doesn't hate you, Harry, I can promise you that," he declared. Harry raised a skeptical eyebrow. "I'm serious. Yes, the history between him and James — and him and Sirius — is... complicated, to say the least. And I don't doubt that Severus uses James' name against you far more often than he should. But you have to understand, cub; when we were younger, it was even harder to be a Slytherin than it is now. Severus' contemporaries were the likes of Avery and Lestrangle and Malfoy. Being a Slytherin of particular talents, he was — and still is — expected to run in certain circles."

It started to dawn on Harry with a sickening sort of clarity. "Circles that wouldn't like hearing he'd been nice to Harry Potter in class," he finished dully. Lupin grimaced, but nodded.

"He walks a dangerous line. With Dumbledore on one side, and... others waiting in the shadows. He must act as he is expected to act, regardless of his personal feelings on the matter. But I promise you can trust him, Harry. Now more so than ever, if I won't be in the castle. He's a good ally to have." His lips quirked wryly. "I trust him with my life, and he has earned that trust a dozen times over. Regardless of any... issues we may have had as schoolboys." Lupin clapped Harry on the shoulder, squeezing gently. "Does that help to hear?"

"It does, actually. Thank you." Harry had been learning all year about the roles people had to play in public — including the roles he himself was destined to hide behind. Clearly it was all far more complicated than Lupin made it seem; but Harry hadn't expected him to air Snape's personal business to a student, even his cub. Something settled in his chest at the confirmation, though — Snape was just keeping up appearances, the same as the rest of them.

Harry could work with that.

He was about to ask another question when they were interrupted by a knock on the open door — Professor Dumbledore, looking apologetic. "I'm afraid it's time. Your carriage is at the gates, Remus. I thought I might escort you down." He didn't look entirely thrilled to see Harry in there talking to Lupin, and Harry tried not to glare at the old man.

"I'll come with you," Harry said, daring the headmaster to tell him otherwise.