

What If: Stupefy

Black and Lupin stood shoulder to shoulder, wands raised.

"You should have realized," said Lupin quietly, "if Voldemort didn't kill you, we would. Good-bye, Peter."

Hermione covered her face with her hands and turned to the wall.

"NO!" Harry yelled. He ran forward, placing himself in front Pettigrew, facing the wands. "You can't kill him," he said breathlessly. "You can't."

Black and Lupin both looked staggered.

"Harry, this piece of vermin is the reason you have no parents," Black snarled. "This cringing bit of filth would have seen you die too, without turning a hair. You heard him. His own stinking skin meant more to him than your whole family."

"I know," Harry panted. "We'll take him up to the castle. "We'll hand him over to the dementors . . . He can go to Azkaban . . . but don't kill him."

"Harry!" gasped Pettigrew, and he flung his arms around Harry's knees. "You - thank you - it's more than I deserve - thank you -"

"Get off me," Harry spat, throwing Pettigrew's hands off him in disgust. "I'm not doing this for you. I'm doing it because - I don't reckon my dad would've wanted them to become killers - just for you."

No one moved or made a sound except Pettigrew, whose breath was coming in wheezes as he clutched his chest. Black and Lupin were looking at each other. Then, with one movement, they lowered their wands.

"You're the only person who has the right to decide, Harry," said Black. "But think . . . think what he did . . ."

"He can go to Azkaban," Harry repeated. "If anyone deserves that place, he does . . ."

Pettigrew was still wheezing behind him.

"Very well," said Lupin. "Stand aside, Harry."

Harry hesitated.

"I'm going to stun him," said Lupin. "That's all, I swear."

Harry stepped out of the way.

"*Stupefy*," Lupin intoned. A short burst of red light and Peter Pettigrew slumped over. After quickly splinting Ron's leg, Lupin checked Snape's pulse at Hermione's quiet question. "There's nothing seriously wrong with him. You were just a little - overenthusiastic. Still out cold. Er - perhaps it will be best if we don't revive either of them until we're safely back in the castle." Ever the professor, he addressed the three students, "We can take them like this . . ." He waved his wand at Pettigrew and muttered "*Mobilicorpus*."

As though invisible strings were tied to Peter's wrists, neck, and knees, he was pulled into a standing position, head still lolling unpleasantly, like a grotesque puppet. He hung a few inches above the ground, his limp feet dangling.

Harry picked up his invisibility cloak and tucked it safely into his pocket.

Using Snape's wand, Black muttered "*Mobilicorpus*" and Snape floated into the air beside Pettigrew.

Crookshanks leapt lightly off the bed and led the way out of the room, his bottlebrush tail held jauntily high.

Only part of his attention focused on controlling the unconscious Peter Pettigrew, Remus Lupin thought about the repercussions of what he'd learned this evening.

Wormtail had been the traitor, not Padfoot. Changing just this one fact seemed to upset all of his perceptions of the past twelve years. All those years he'd tried to convince himself to hate Sirius and pity the memory of Peter, now were shown to be wasted time.

Shaking his head to himself slightly, he overheard Sirius and Harry talking about the fact that Sirius had been named as Harry's godfather. Though it wasn't news to Lupin, he wondered how Harry had found out that fact. When Sirius tentatively offered to take Harry away from his Muggle relatives, Lupin held his breath. He knew how much making such an offer meant to Padfoot. At Harry's first incredulous reaction of, "What - live with you?"

Lupin's stomach fell. Such a rejection would devastate his old friend. Remus heard the hurt and pain in Sirius's voice as he tried to gloss over the offer and Harry's reaction, but all the despair evaporated in Lupin's mind and Sirius's voice as Harry forcefully corrected their fears. In fact, he sounded nearly desperate to escape the Dursleys.

After that emotional scene between Harry and Sirius, not another word was spoken until they got out from under the Whomping Willow. They'd made it halfway from the Willow to the castle before the clouds parted. As the moonlight flooded the grounds, Lupin had one horrified moment to remember that he hadn't taken his Wolfsbane Potion that evening before the lycanthropic curse began its soul-wrenching work on his body.

When Lupin froze in place, Snape's unconscious body bumped into him. Black froze in place, realizing the situation with his lycanthropic friend in one blinding moment of terror. He threw an arm out, halting the progress of Harry and Hermione as they supported their wounded friend.

"Oh, my -" Hermione gasped. "He didn't take his potion tonight! He's not safe!"

"Run," Black whispered, thinking fast. "Run. Now."

When Harry made an abortive movement toward the twitching professor, Black caught him around the chest and threw him back. "Leave it to me - RUN!"

There was a terrible snarling noise. Lupin's head was lengthening. So was his body. His shoulders were hunching. Hair was sprouting visibly on his face and hands, which were curling into clawed paws. Crookshanks's hair was on end again; he was backing away -

As the werewolf reared, snapping its long jaws, Sirius transformed into Padfoot. Padfoot grasped the werewolf about the neck and started to pull it backward, away from the innocent bystanders and toward the Forbidden Forest.

The three students and two unconscious men were the only witnesses as the gigantic dog and werewolf fought, locked jaw to jaw, claws ripping at each other. Finally giving a howl, the werewolf took flight, retreating toward the forest.

Black was bleeding; there were gashes across his muzzle and back, but he tenaciously scrambled up again and tore after the werewolf. The sound of his paws faded into silence as his form became lost from their view as he chased his werewolf friend.

"Should've seen that coming earlier," Hermione muttered from under Ron's left arm, trying to support his whole weight herself.

Grinning for a moment at Hermione, Harry said, "We'd better get these three up to the castle and tell someone about everything. Come -"

But then, from beyond the range of their vision, they heard a yelping, a whining: a dog in pain . . .

"Sirius," Harry muttered, staring into the darkness.

He had a moment's indecision, but there was nothing he could do for Pettigrew or Snape at the moment, and by the sound of it, Black was in trouble -

Harry turned in place, trying to pinpoint the sound. The yelping seemed to be coming from the ground near the edge of the lake.

Just as he was about to run over, the yelping stopped abruptly. Harry could vaguely see that Sirius had turned back into a man. He was crouched on all fours, his hands over his head. Harry thought he could hear moaning, but it was difficult to tell over the distance.

And then Harry saw them. Dementors, at least a hundred of them, gliding in a black mass around the lake toward Sirius. They appeared to be encircling their target.

"Hermione, think of something happy!" Harry yelled, raising his wand.

"I'm going to live with my godfather. I'm leaving the Dursleys," Harry muttered to himself under his breath.

He forced himself to think of Black, and only Black, and began to chant: "Expecto patronum! Expecto patronum!"

Black gave a shudder, rolled over, and lay motionless on the ground, pale as death.

"Expecto patronum! Hermione, help me! Expecto patronum!"

"Expecto patronum!" Hermione dutifully chanted from behind him. Lacking any experience with the advanced charm, her wand merely emitted a thin wisp of silver.

Harry paused in his chanting. Simply repeating the words wasn't producing the effect he needed. Without the numbing cold and his mother's dying scream distracting him, Harry focused his entire concentration onto one thought. Sirius was going to be freed and he was going to be leaving the Dursleys forever.

"EXPECTO PATRONUM!"

And out of the end of his wand burst, not a shapeless cloud of mist, but a blinding, dazzling, silver animal. He screwed up his eyes, trying to see what it was. It looked like a horse. It was galloping silently away from him, across the grounds. He saw it lower its head and charge at the swarming dementors . . . Now it was galloping around and around the black shape huddled on the ground, and the dementors were falling back, scattering,

retreating into the darkness . . . They were gone.

The Patronus turned. It was cantering back toward Harry across the ground. It wasn't a horse. It wasn't a unicorn, either. It was a stag. It was shining brightly as the moon above . . . it was coming back to him . . .

It stopped mere feet from him. Its hooves made no mark on the soft ground as it stared at Harry with its large, silver eyes. Slowly, it bowed its antlered head. And Harry realized . . .

"Prongs," he whispered.

But as his trembling fingertips stretched toward the creature, it vanished.

Harry still stood there, hand outstretched when Hermione walked up to him and touched his shoulder. "Harry; I can't believe it . . . You conjured up a Patronus that drove away all those dementors! That's very, very advanced magic . . ."

"Prongs," Harry repeated his whisper, ignoring her rambling as his mind was still fixed on the image of the magnificent animal that had just been standing in front of him.

Harry was brought out of his reverie when he heard Ron shout, "Oy! Hey, you two. Snape's coming around."

Harry turned to find Ron sitting on the ground, his wand pointed at the still hovering Pettigrew, splinted leg sticking straight out in front of him. Snape was leaning down, crouched on all fours and shaking his head slowly. He quickly pulled himself together and was already on his feet, eyes taking in the scene as Harry and Hermione rejoined them.

Harry was helping Ron back to his feet as Snape stared fixedly at Peter. "Pettigrew?" he murmured with a frown.

"Professor?" Hermione timidly asked.

When Snape's eyes snapped over to her and narrowed, she took an involuntary step back. Gathering her composure, she said, "Professor, Ron's leg has been broken and Sirius is hurt." She pointed toward Sirius, and Snape immediately strode off in that direction.

Once there, he alternated his attention between the unconscious man at his feet and the still floating form of Pettigrew. Shaking his head, he leaned forward to retrieve his wand from the ground. With it, he conjured a stretcher and levitated Sirius into it. Guiding it back toward the students, Snape was still looking at Pettigrew with a thoughtful frown.

"At first, I believed that Black had Confounded Potter, Weasley, Granger, and even Lupin. However, with Pettigrew here . . ." Snape trailed off in his narration of events, eyes on the still unconscious Peter Pettigrew at the far end of the Hospital Wing under the guard of a pair of Aurors. Black, conscious again and with his own pair of Auror guards, was in another bed across the aisle from him. Since waking, Black's eyes alternated from loathing glares at Pettigrew, to angry looks at Snape, to hesitant, hopeful looks at Harry.

"Well," Dumbledore stood from his chair by Harry's bed. He turned and addressed the man standing behind him. "Cornelius, do you have any questions for Professor Snape?"

"Yes," the portly Minister of Magic said, looking up from his frowning appraisal of the floor. "How do you know that that," he pointed, "is Peter Pettigrew? Other than testimony from three students who had never previously met him and a convicted murderer, I've heard no evidence he is Peter Pettigrew."

Dumbledore's eyes narrowed slightly. "I recall him as a student, Minister. I can assure you that he is indeed Peter Pettigrew. Minerva, Filius, Pomona, Poppy, Hagrid, and Argus were all on staff at the time as well. Would you like one of them to testify?"

Snape smoothly interrupted as Fudge began puffing up. "He was a classmate of mine, Minister. I assure you that the man in that bed is Peter Pettigrew."

"Which means that the murder that Sirius was convicted of didn't happen," Harry pointed out quickly.

"Indeed," Dumbledore concurred. "In point of fact, he never WAS convicted if my memory serves me. He was imprisoned without a trial; unjustly as it turns out. As for the Muggles, I think we've proven it was Peter who killed them in the process of trying to frame Sirius."

Fudge was turning a mottled red and white color.

"Therefore," Dumbledore continued serenely, "I would think that asking for his immediate public exoneration and release isn't totally out of the question."

"Now see here," Fudge blustered. "There's still being an unregistered animagus, the escape, attacking one of your portraits, Dumbledore, attacking young Weasley here -"

"Twelve years in that hellhole," Black's hoarse voice drifted over into their conversation. With that one observation, Sirius settled back down against his pillow and stared at the Minister with his burning black gaze.

"He has more than paid for any crimes he may have committed prior and any crimes since, Minister," Dumbledore went on, drawing Fudge's unnerved attention back.

"Since my leg is already healed, I waive that one," Ron added from his bed. "Oh, and don't forget to return any assets that may have been taken from him."

"Adjusted for inflation," added Hermione.

"He was never given a trial?" Harry demanded, still simmering over everything he'd been hearing.

"Perhaps an investigation into Barty Crouch is in order?" Snape asked.

The three students and Sirius looked at him in amazement, never expecting him to side with a Marauder, even in such a small way.

Fudge was looking from one face to another with his jaw set. "Now see here -" he started.

"Or would you rather I speak with the Daily Prophet?" Black's voice came again.

Only Dumbledore saw Harry immediately close his mouth, similar words unspoken.

Snape let out an inarticulate sound of amusement before quietly leaving without a word to anyone.

Fudge turned his suddenly frightened gaze back to Black and opened his mouth once or twice, looking like a landed fish. "Very well," he finally conceded, cramming his green bowler hat onto his head.

"Thank you for your time this evening, Cornelius," Dumbledore said graciously, eyes twinkling merrily. "I expect you'll want to take Callisto and Frank," he indicated the two Aurors standing over Sirius, "with you, and I can send the dementors off since the danger has passed."

"Yes, yes," the Minister growled, waving the two Aurors out the door and following silently.

The instant the door slammed shut, Harry let out a loud whoop of excitement.

"Indeed," Dumbledore said to Harry, eyes twinkling brighter than ever. Ron and Hermione were grinning at Harry widely. Even the two remaining Aurors could be seen fighting their smiles.

"Professor, Sirius told me that he is my godfather. Does this mean that I can go and live with him?" Harry's eyes begged for even more good news this evening.

Dumbledore paused in thought for a moment. "We originally left you in the care of your aunt and uncle for your protection. Since your defeat of him two years ago, Harry, no further sign of Voldemort has been noted. I do not see why you cannot live with Sirius so long as certain security precautions are taken."

Sirius cracked his first true smile in a very long time. Harry let out another, even louder whoop, causing Madam Pomfrey to stick her head out of her office to identify the disturbance. "If you're making that much noise, you're obviously feeling fine. You three may go," she indicated the students and then waved them out the door.

Hermione and Ron stood and headed toward the door. Harry went and took a seat beside Sirius's bed. At Madam Pomfrey's look, he cheerfully said, "I'm going to visit with my godfather if that's fine with you, Madam Pomfrey."

When she turned her shocked eyes to Dumbledore, the headmaster simply smiled at her. "I, too, shall be going. Good evening, Poppy, Harry, Sirius, Marcus, Jessica," he nodded to each of them, ending with the two quiet Aurors still standing over Pettigrew.

"Hey, Sirius! Have you read the Prophet this morning?"

Sirius Black walked into the kitchen, toweling his hair dry. "What?" he asked shortly, but not quite rudely. He was recovering from his time in Azkaban, but was still a long way from his previous, happy-go-lucky self.

As he was skimming the page handed to him, he was given a condensed version, "Remember Snape's suggestion to investigate Crouch? Fudge actually did, and it was discovered that he'd smuggled his son out of Azkaban just as his wife was dying. He'd been living at his father's house under *Imperio* us and an invisibility cloak. According to the Prophet, Barty Crouch Junior is already back at Azkaban," Sirius shuddered, "and Senior is going to be standing trial. Percy Weasley is interim head of Department of International Magical Cooperation, apparently."

"Did I hear you mention Percy?" Harry Potter asked as he entered the kitchen.

Remus Lupin nodded and repeated the news story.

"Good on him," Harry opined, munching on a piece of toast.

Sirius asked, "Ready to go to King's Cross? We'll need to leave within an hour to catch the Express."

Harry nodded.

Sirius turned to Remus. "You, too, Moony?"

As Lupin nodded, Harry raised an eyebrow. "Second year as Defense professor, Moony. Keep this up and everyone might think you've broken the position's curse."

Lupin grinned. "Well, if I hadn't agreed, who knows who Albus would've ended up hiring?"

Harry chuckled, remembering the two professors before Lupin at the position. "This year ought to be fun."

Remus grinned a little wider, thinking about the upcoming Tri-Wizard Tournament. "That it should, Harry, that it should."
