

## Wolf's Den Night

Harry Potter tiptoed down the stairs of Number Seventeen, Privet Drive, his arms filled with bedding. An alarm clock rested on top of the pile of cloth, since he'd have to be up early in the morning.

*It's den-night, and a Marauder just doesn't sleep in a bed on den-night. It isn't right.*

Though he doubted either the adults of his Pack or his friends and siblings of the Pride would understand why he had chosen to den up in the particular spot he was headed for. In fact, they would probably ask him – some at the tops of their lungs – if he was out of his mind.

*But I have to do it. I don't know why, but I have to.*

Harry stepped onto the hallway floor and bent to set his sheets and pillow on the floor. Turning as he straightened, he took a deep breath.

*There it is.*

Anyone who didn't know his story, and possibly some people who did, would think it strange for a boy rising fifteen to be staring anxiously at a cupboard door. After the first shiver wore off, Harry found it strange himself.

*This isn't the same cupboard. No one ever put me in here. And it was a long time ago, anyway.*

He stepped forward and laid his hand on the latch. His fingers trembled as they closed around it.

*I'm strong. I can do this.*

Slowly, the door opened, as silently as he'd assured it would when he'd oiled the hinges that morning. The boxes piled within had been cleared to either side, making a space where a boy who wasn't too tall could fit, if he curled up tightly and didn't bring any bulky blankets.

Quickly, before he could change his mind, Harry snatched up the sheets. The alarm clock fell from them and clanged onto the floor, making enough noise to wake the whole street. Harry scrambled into the cupboard, reached out behind him to sweep the clock inside, and pulled the door almost shut behind him.

*Because only a fool would shut himself into a cupboard...*

His heartbeat gradually slowed as he panted. When he could hear other sounds again, all he heard was the usual sleepy creaking of a house at rest. No unusual noises came from upstairs, no voice demanding sleepily what *that* had been, no angry shouts or shrill yells.

*Too lucky for my own good.*

Harry began to rearrange himself and the sheets, unwinding them from the knot they'd got into around his waist and left leg. He knocked his head against a box once, and stubbed his toe on the door, but nothing worse than that. When he was finally arranged, he tugged at the gold chain hanging loose around his neck, and cupped the pendants hanging from it within his hands.

"Here I am," he told them, pressing them against his cheek. "Back where it all began."

The pendants were warm against his skin, but only as warm as his chest would have made them – well, perhaps a little warmer, since he missed the Pack and the Pride more than ever tonight, and he was sure they missed him. Still, no stupefying fear rushed through him, no old terror reached out of the past to grasp his shoulder.

*There's a word for this. I know I know it, it's on the tip of my tongue... think about something else, Harry, it'll come to you...*

Harry began to recount his favorite den-night stories to himself, and the word slid into his head as the Pack's trip to America came to an end.

*Anticlimactic.*

He'd been expecting this to frighten him, maybe even in a twisted way *hoping* for it.

*As long as I can still be afraid of this, I can still be a baby.*

But there were worse things to be afraid of now.

Harry's hand closed tight around the pendants as he summoned his shield of fire to block the memories, to hold him close and keep his fears at bay. *Nothing can hurt me inside the fire. Nothing can hurt me here. Nothing bad can come here.*

*This is my place.*

The thought summoned a small laugh to Harry's lips, and the fear died away from his mind.

*This is my place now. I made it mine.*

*Why should a wolf fear his den?*

"I bid you good night and fair dreams," he murmured to his pendants, shifting his weight slightly. "May this night rest us all, and we rise in the morning stronger for it."

*So may it be*, his imagination supplied the response.

Harry's sleep that night was perhaps not entirely untroubled, but it brought him no dreams of ancient terrors, and he woke easily at the alarm clock's clamor and rose without any more trouble than anyone who had spent the night in a cramped place. As he dressed and remade his bed, he luxuriated in his quiet sense of triumph.

*A small victory is still a victory.*

And he was going to need all the victories he could get.