

# ❧ *In Such a Sovereign Way* ❧

by *Innerslytherin*

Because passionate love breaks down walls and at first does it in such a sovereign way, we are rarely willing to admit how little that initial barrier breaking is going to count when it comes to slow, difficult, accepting of two isolated human beings who want to be joined in a lasting relationship.

- *May Sarton*

The wind was out of the west. In Remus Lupin's experience, that was never a good thing.

He sniffed carefully, turning his head in a semi-circle, surveying his surroundings. The forest was quiet, but this close to Full, he knew better than to expect safety. He was just glad he had the Easter holiday from school, unlike the last two missions he'd run for Dumbledore, which had been at bad times of the term. He tightened his grip on his wand. Moonrise wasn't for another several hours, but he was already feeling the desire to pace. He missed the Marauders. He hadn't yet readjusted to spending the full moon alone, and although he had something to help (well, Severus said it would help, though Remus knew far too little about Potions to really feel confident about it) he still knew he was in for a bad moon.

Branches rustled in the breeze and he froze, listening. Strange how much he'd learned in the past few months, how to move like a predator, how to be still for hours at a time while doing surveillance, how to think up better lies than he had as a boy. After a long silence, he decided it was only the wind. He eased his position and took a few steps across the clearing, seeking a good place to stash his clothes and, eventually, his wand.

It took less than half an hour to find a good safe spot and strip down to his boxers. It was brisk in the Wye Valley in late March, but (according to Severus) werewolf metabolism—always faster than wizard metabolism—sped up shockingly in the hours immediately preceding and following the transformation. Rather than feeling the cold, Remus lifted his head, relishing the breeze on his skin. He paced barefoot for a few minutes, then sighed and stopped.

"You can come out. I'm not here to cause trouble."

The surrounding area went even quieter than it had been, the silence taking on a listening quality. Finally the bushes in front of him parted and a girl stepped out. She couldn't be much older than his own eighteen years, but she moved with quiet weariness.

"Thou'rt no Forester."

He shook his head. "I'm from Scotland," he said, which was true enough—Hogwarts was his home now, more than his parents had ever given him.

She tipped her head to one side, her dark brown hair swinging down. "Bein't safe for vurrenerfs tonight."

"I can take care of myself, despite being a foreigner," he said. He didn't need to tell her he was a werewolf. She could smell him, just as he could smell her. He wondered if she was the Alpha female, if he would have to mate with her to gain acceptance. Dear God, he hoped not. It was so demeaning when instinct took over like that. He wasn't sure whether the worst part was that he was whoring himself out for Dumbledore, or the embarrassment of that being the only time he could work up any interest in mating with a woman.

The girl paused and studied him. "Tessa. M'the top girl here."

He nodded. "Lupin. I'm asking your hospitality, just for tonight."

She narrowed her eyes. "Thou won't make trouble."

"I just want company. Someone to run with." His shoulders were tense. The rise was close, less than an hour. He wanted to glare at the sky, where the sun still touched their shoulders.

"The villagers keep inside tonight. Don't want to know who we are, and we don't tell. Mervyn'll want to see thee." She turned away and waded back into the undergrowth. "Come, then."

He followed her, deciding to keep his wand. It was that decision that saved his life, in the end. They'd taken bare-

ly two dozen steps when she turned, her face contorted, her hands crooked into claws, and leapt at him. Caught by surprise, Remus began to lift his wand, but was too slow. The force of her leap carried him over, her face too close to his. He grunted and pushed at her, but there were snarls around them and he realized they were no longer alone.

Something hit him, sharp and burning, in the side, and Remus cried out. The female took that moment of weakness to bite his forearm, her teeth sinking easily into his flesh. He managed to get off a few sloppy hexes, then in desperation, he Disapparated.

The crack of their arrival elsewhere rolled through the air, but Remus was too busy fighting the girl off to pay attention to where he'd landed them. Hopefully he'd not splinched himself, though he didn't feel it at the moment. They tumbled across the rough ground, the girl shrieking epithets at him. Remus was paying more attention to her hands (one had just raked across his cheek under his eye) than her words, until she snarled, "The Dark Lord will have your guts, traitor!"

That was the only evidence required, and with a sickened feeling, Remus tried to call up the hatred necessary for the Killing Curse. It was a difficult thing for him; he didn't hate many people, and he usually just felt sorry for the ones he dealt with. This one called up rage, though, because they'd been so sure, damn it, that the Forest of Dean wolves weren't siding with Voldemort yet. *Damn you, Moody*, Remus thought grimly, and shoved the girl away hard enough that he heard a bone crunch. She slumped against the tree, looking dazed, for a moment, but before he could more than raise his wand, the pains hit them both.

Cursing and howling, the girl doubled over, clutching at her body as it began to twist and elongate. Remus' concentration broke entirely and the girl's last opportunity for a clean death was gone. He hunched over and howled, and then the madness took him.



"Bloody Alastor Fucking Moody," snarled a caustic voice. "That's the last time, Lupin. Why, for God's sake, didn't you use the potion I gave you?" A gentle hand was dabbing at the raw area on his right shoulder, completely at odds with the voice, though Remus knew, hazily, that they belonged to the same person. "I'm not doing this

for fun, you know. Dumbledore promised me an apprenticeship if I got this bloody potion right. If I'm to manage it, I need my test subjects to actually use it."

Remus didn't bother answering. His throat was sore.

The dabbing ceased and then the other man began chanting—almost humming, really—and Remus felt the skin of his back creeping together. The muscle under it shuddered in reflex and Remus twitched.

"Oh, good, alive, are you?" A shadow fell across Remus' face and he finally forced himself to open his eyes. Sallow skin and glittery black eyes met his gaze. "Took me half the day to find you, you imbecile."

Remus swallowed and worked his lips. Hell, that was a loose tooth. "Thanks, Severus," he slurred.

"Moody's been pacing in Dumbledore's office since I brought you back. Wants to know why you didn't *Avada* her." The thin lips twisted in a sneer.

"Too close," Remus whispered. "Timing was off."

Severus shoved his lank hair behind an ear. "And you *still* think it's somehow better to kill them with your teeth, don't you? Bloody fool." He sat up, filling Remus' line of sight with his black robes, and something cold splashed over Remus' lower back.

The haze of pain began to recede.

"Oh *fuck*," Remus groaned feelingly.

"In a few minutes I'm going to tell Pomfrey she can take over, and then you'd better clean up that mouth," Snape said. No one but Remus, and perhaps Dumbledore, would have heard the change in his voice, but the ire had faded, tinged with grudging amusement. "The Headmaster's waiting to see you, too. This was a botched job, Lupin."

"I know," Remus sighed. "Only just got away." He snuffled and then coughed, spitting blood on the sheet under him. "Uck. Where did you find me?"

"Forbidden Forest—far side from the castle, of course, since the Apparition wards wouldn't let you through. You ass, why don't you take Portkeys?"

"Have you forgotten I'm naked when I transform?" Remus asked. He managed to sound wry, which was an improvement, he thought, over pathetic.

Severus snorted. "I ought to turn your prick into a Portkey next month."

That startled Remus into a laugh, which set various things aching badly around his body and made Snape swear again, but Remus could see, when Snape left to write up his conclusions, that the acerbic seventh year's lips were quirked slightly upwards.



They were unlikely friends. Remus and Severus both knew it, though neither of them ever spoke of it. Remus thought he understood Severus, and Severus knew he would never understand Remus, and both of them were oddly satisfied with the status quo. Both of them, they would learn over and over through the years, were wrong.

It had all started after Sirius' ridiculously stupid 'prank'—an improbability in itself, but Severus had been intrigued, rather than repulsed.

*"You're a werewolf. Filthy Dark creature. Why do they still like you?"* Snape's voice came from the bed next to Remus', harsh in the dim light of the infirmary. Remus turned his head. Snape wasn't looking at him. He hadn't spoken all day.



Remus cleared his throat. *"I'm only a wolf once a month."* He could see the bandages shining in the darkness. He knew he hadn't been close enough to wound Snape, that it had been the Slytherin's struggle with James that had injured him, but it didn't make him feel any less guilty. His stomach lurched again, despite the fact that nothing remained to be emptied.

*"I'm sure they'd like to think it's a little problem you have once a month,"* Snape sneered over Remus' dry retching. *"You're a bloody great monster all the time, though, aren't you? Just keeping your real nature behind a mask designed to lure innocent people into danger."* His voice sounded as if he relished this thought.

*"I don't start rows,"* Remus said. *"That doesn't mean I'll back away from them."*

*"Bollocks. You do every day. You did **last term** when your buffoon friends attacked me after the Defence OWL."* Snape was still merely a white huddle under the blanket. *"Why do you hide?"*

*"Why would I want to be noticed?"* Remus countered, propping himself up on one elbow and wiping his forehead. *"Another minute and I'd have **killed you, Snape!** You think that makes me happy? You think I'm **pleased** about it? I could fucking kill Sirius now for what he—"* He broke off, appalled, and sank back onto the bed.

*"There, you see!"* Oddly, Snape had finally moved, his dark eyes glittering at Remus. They were less than two metres apart, yet the gulf seemed suddenly as wide and as far as east from west. Remus shivered. *"You are a monster through and through, Lupin."*

*"I can't help what I am,"* Remus said after a long silence. His voice sounded strangled to his own ears. *"But I can help what I do. You want your revenge? You want me to fag for you the rest of the term so everyone can see you've status over me? You want to curse me? I'll take whatever penance you set."*

Snape sat up in bed and swung his legs over the edge, settling his sling-wrapped arm carefully. *"You could make me what you are,"* he muttered, his voice hectic. *"You could give me that power."*

*"No!"* Remus yipped, his voice cracking. *"Any penance save that one."*

Snape's pale bare feet touched the floor. As he shuffled across the distance between their beds, he reached up and scratched at his chest hard; a line of red followed his fingernails. *"You wouldn't even have to wait until next month. I'll bet this is deep enough, and you can lick it or spit in it. I've read about that doing it."*

It was those last words that finally clicked things into place for Remus. His eyes widened. *"You knew! You knew before you came down after me!"*

*"Five points to Gryffindor,"* Severus said, his voice lowering to something that was almost seductive; it made his skin crawl. *"Took you long enough, Lupin. Any fool can count the moon phases and compare them with your attendance."*

*"That's bloody rotten of you, Snape,"* Remus said, glaring. Severus' expression was frighteningly smug. *"You like it, don't you?"*

Remus did.



"I said from the beginning that this was a mistake, and I'm not going to back down! To think that you knowingly sent one of my students into danger! Sent him to possible death! Albus, it's unthinkable!" Professor McGonagall was pacing furiously, her lips pressed so tightly together they were only a thin white line. Remus watched her from his place sitting stiffly on a settee in Dumbledore's office.

"My dear Minerva, you don't seem to realize the extent to which Tom is willing to take this." Dumbledore was relaxing in his chair, hands steepled together. "Do sit down and have a biscuit. Or a glass of sherry? Mister Lupin is in a unique position to help us, and he has been eager to do so."

"Only because the boy is convinced that he has no alternatives!" Minerva shrieked. "You made certain of that, didn't you? He can't be an Auror because Moody knows he's a werewolf! He can't do anything for the Ministry, because they would track his attendance and discover his secret! What other options have you left him?"

Remus blushed furiously and stared at the front of Dumbledore's desk. He wished she wouldn't talk about him as if he weren't sitting there.

"Remus," said Dumbledore, his voice kind, "do you feel as though I coerced you to join the Order?"

"No!" Remus said quickly. "I wanted to do something to help. Anything I could, professor."

McGonagall threw her hands in the air. "I can see there's nothing for me to say that will change things," she said waspishly. "You've managed to take all of my seventh years and enlist them in this war of yours. I imagine you think it's a fair trade for Slughorn's students joining You-Know-Who?"

"I don't indeed," Dumbledore said, just as Remus indignantly interrupted, "Snape isn't!"

The two professors looked at him, McGonagall in astonishment, Dumbledore with curiosity. He blushed deeper.

"What? He hasn't."

"My boy," said Dumbledore quietly, "You know the company he keeps. It is almost inevitable he has chosen to side with Tom. I thought you knew."

Remus shook his head, staring. No. No, that couldn't be right. Why would Severus still be working with them if

he'd taken the Mark? Why would he help them subvert his own master? "You're—you're wrong!" he blurted. "I know he's talked about it, but he didn't! He wouldn't!"

McGonagall's stricken face and Dumbledore's quiet certitude shook him. He got to his feet and stumbled away from them. "He wouldn't!"

But Remus knew, sickeningly, that Severus would. He knew Lucius Malfoy and Rodolphus LeStrange were after Severus, knew Severus was flattered by the attention of the young men who'd left school years ahead of them. He knew no matter what frightening, conflicted feelings he had for Severus, Severus was unlikely to consider him important enough to influence that decision in the end.

He didn't bother with the library or the Slytherin Dungeon. The only place Severus spent his free time these days was in Slughorn's laboratory. The other boy had been working obsessively on this potion, claiming he wanted to convince Dumbledore he was worthy of the apprenticeship, worthy to go on and earn a mastery in potions, to make himself famous for easing the pain of the monthly lycanthropic transformation.

Remus' footsteps were loud on the stone floor of the passageway. He knew James and Sirius and Peter would be waiting for him to return to the dorm, wondering what had happened with his mission two nights earlier. He didn't care. Snape—Snape couldn't have taken the Mark!

He reached the laboratory door and shoved it open, not caring who might see Lupin the Prefect acting a right git. He stormed into the laboratory, ignoring Professor Slughorn's astonished squawk, and grabbed Severus by the collar of his robes, carrying him backwards until they smashed into the wall.

"Oof! God, Lupin, get off me!" Snape was stringy and not terribly strong; he plucked ineffectually at Remus' hands.

Remus leaned in close. "Tell me you didn't take it," he growled. Behind them, he heard Slughorn bleating about something, but he didn't pay attention. "Tell me they're wrong."

Snape's expression cooled. "Finally listening to your mates about me, are you?" he asked. "I can't believe it's taken you this long, frankly." He went still, allowing himself to be manhandled with perfect aplomb. Embarrassment flashed through Remus, fuelling his anger.



"Did you?" Remus insisted.

"Why should I answer that question? If I have to tell you, there's no point in your asking."

"That's not true!" Remus screwed up his face, glaring at Severus.

"It is true," Snape replied. "If you don't trust me, you can fuck right off."

"Fine," Remus snarled.

"Good." Severus levelled a gaze at him, clearly expecting to be released.

"Fine!" Remus repeated, louder, and shoved Severus back against the wall again before letting go. Severus' expelled his breath in a surprised puff; it stirred Remus' fringe. "Have a nice life, Snape. Good luck with your little project."

He turned and strode out of the room.



"You coming, Moony?"

Remus stared at his friend's curious expression and knew he ought to say no. He ought to tell Sirius he didn't want to spend time with people who felt no qualms about mistreating others—even conniving Slytherins who gave as good as they got. He ought to tell Sirius that the sudden cold, furious silence between Remus and Severus didn't give the Marauders more leeway to mistreat Severus.

Instead he set his book aside and stood up. "Yeah, all right."

It was the last Hogsmeade visit of the year, the last Hogsmeade visit of their school career, and somehow Sirius had talked James into ditching Lily for it. Remus knew Sirius was trying to recreate something that had been slipping away for the past year, while Sirius and James were in early Auror training and Remus went on his missions as Dumbledore's ambassador. All the same, he'd been furious with Sirius over the most recent prank (some sort of powder, slipped into Severus' breakfast, that turned his skin blue for an entire day). He'd been debating whether to go or stay behind, leaving the rest of them to their own devices.

But when it came down to it, those pleading blue eyes were impossible to resist.

All the way to the village, Sirius was bouncing around them, looking more energetic than he had any right to. He was prattling on about it being just like old times when they ran into Severus—literally.

The Slytherin was coming out of the bookshop, his arms laden with a bundle of books, and a brown-paper-wrapped parcel tucked under one elbow. Sirius crashed into him with a great deal of force, and Severus' purchases went flying in all directions.

"What the fuck—" Severus began, but was cut off by Sirius' loud explosion.

"Snape! You greasy git! Watch where you're going!"

Severus bristled, one hand going to his wand. He gazed at Sirius, a snarl frozen on his face.

Remus swore under his breath and wondered if it would be possible to stop them. He stepped forward, a hand stretched out to each of them. "Come on, don't do this." Severus glared at him. "Too little, too late!" he spat, his dark eyes flashing.

"Don't!" Remus said, as Sirius drew his wand and Severus, lightning-quick, mirrored the gesture.

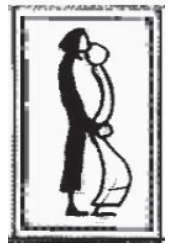
"Get out of it, Moony!" Sirius ordered, shoving him aside. Remus stumbled backwards, rubbing his side where Sirius' elbow had knocked into it, and feeling a calm sort of despair. It was going to be like this the rest of his life, wasn't it? If he and Severus ever managed to make it up, he and Sirius were always going to be butting heads over it.

"Typical of you, Lupin, letting your friends bully you around as always!" Severus snarled. "Letting your friends fight your battles for you! Why are you more afraid to stand up to your friends than you are to kill strangers?"

Remus gasped and staggered slightly, his gaze riveted on Severus' face, which was contorted with hatred. No one knew about that—no one but Severus! He hadn't even told his friends where he was going when Dumbledore sent him out!

"What?" Sirius turned to stare at Remus, who worked not to flinch. There was shock and, this was new, *doubt* in Sirius' gaze. Severus let out a crow of triumph and raised his wand.

"Sirius, watch him!" James shouted, and Sirius turned away from Remus, shooting a Jelly-Legs Jinx at Severus before he'd even turned to face him completely.



Severus blocked it and fired a Tarantallegra of his own, which Sirius deflected to hit Peter. Another hex sizzled past and Remus jerked away, staring at them both and still feeling short of breath from Severus' attack against him.

James had drawn his wand by now, though he was distracted by helping Peter, who was dancing uncontrollably. Remus backed away.

"Fuck you all," he whispered, though not nearly loud enough for any of them to hear. "I don't want this anymore," he added, still in that same low tone. Then he'd had enough, and he shouted, "Stop it, stop it, you lot! All of you, just fucking stop it!"

They ignored him.

Remus fled.



"Snape? You ever planning on telling me why you're not chumming around with my git of a brother's friend?"

Severus cuffed Regulus on the back of the head and turned the page with more violence than necessary. No, he bloody well was *not* going to explain. He didn't explain himself, not to anyone. He'd explained too much to Lupin, about too many things, and look where that had got him.

"Sorry!" Regulus rubbed at the back of his head, glowering. "Look, it's your business, but if he needs to be gotten at, all you have to do is tell Malfoy. Or if you want, my cousin would take care of it.

"Shred," Severus ordered, glaring at the boomslang skin to keep from showing Regulus just how angry and confused he was. He liked Regulus, in his way, but the other Slytherin was too clever, always half a hop ahead of Sirius, which meant not as far behind Severus as Severus would prefer. Had Regulus taken the Mark? He was impressed with Malfoy and wanted to please his parents now that his idiotic brother had failed them all. Regulus wanted the Mark, but Severus thought he would wait until leaving school, and that was still a year off for the younger boy.

"You oughtn't let Lupin and his friends bully you," Regulus said, his voice childishly reasonable.

"Fuck you, Reg," Severus said conversationally. "I had my

own reasons for putting up with Lupin, and I have my own reasons for chucking him."

"So you did chuck him?"

"I'm going to hex you." Severus didn't want Regulus to know about this, and he didn't want Lupin hurt, not by Malfoy and his friends, anyway. If Lupin was going to be hurt, Severus wanted to inflict the wounds himself, bloody and deep, the way Lupin's distrust had cut him.

"Ooh, yeah, hurt me." Regulus snickered.

Severus snorted and rolled his eyes, but he had to admit Regulus' juvenile humour and easy threats had a way of making him feel marginally better. Lupin was just a fucking idiot Gryffindor, for all that he had the advantage of being a Dark creature. Couldn't see life in shades of grey at all, just black or white, Voldemort or Dumbledore's mealy-mouthed Muggle-lovers.

Asking Severus—in front of Slughorn—if he'd taken the Mark! Demanding answers as if it were Lupin's business! As if Severus wouldn't have informed Lupin if he'd made a decision! And anyway, who said he had to make a decision right now? Malfoy and his precious political friends were still courting Severus' attention. There was no harm in listening. No harm in seeing what he was offered. Malfoy and his friends had money, after all, and Dumbledore hadn't guaranteed that apprenticeship. Severus couldn't afford to go on doing secondary work on potions unless he got some sort of grant, not with Tobias drinking his way through the dole money *and* Eileen's pay.

*None of this would matter if he hadn't had the accident.* Severus sliced at the ingredients under his knife with more viciousness than precision for a moment, thinking of his father's arm—mangled so badly it had to come off—and the infuriatingly superior hands-off attitude of the St Mungo's staff. *He's a Muggle, injured by Muggle means! Of course we can't interfere! Violate all sorts of codes! Fine!* But it wouldn't violate them to Oblivate Tobias if Eileen decided she didn't want him to know about magic anymore?

Dumbledore's group of peace-loving fools wanted to protect the Muggles, and Malfoy's group wanted the purebloods to seize power. What happened to the people in the middle—people like the Snapes or, yes, even the Lupins? What happened to good men who worked hard to provide for their family, even when their

wives had hidden their magic, even when their sons did things like blow up the telly or make things float, even when they got their arm caught in a loom and ripped off and they couldn't work anymore, couldn't hug their wives, couldn't do anything but drink to forget the pain and the shame?

"Fucking hypocrites," Severus muttered, forgetting for the moment that he had a very curious audience in Regulus. Magic was all right for some of them, but not all of them? A deserved honour from the Gryffindor Headmaster to a Slytherin had to be bought with kindness towards a werewolf? Severus shouldn't take the Mark because Lupin thought it was mean and low-minded? Fine! He'd bloody show all of them at once. He'd talk to Malfoy's friend, see what sort of offer this Voldemort would make, and then he would have the last laugh. He'd carve a place for himself between the factions that were arising, and no one would be the wiser until his end game was played.



"Mr Lupin! I thought you would have young Snape with you."

Remus looked shifty. "He—that is, I—"

"I was just running late," Severus said smoothly, torn between annoyance and amusement. If Lupin was no better a liar than that, how was he keeping from getting himself killed? Hadn't Dumbledore had the idiot trained in Occlumency? Then Severus reminded himself that he didn't give a toss what Lupin knew or didn't know. He was only here because he wanted that Potions apprenticeship.

The expression of relief on Lupin's face made him scowl. What, did the bloody imbecile think they were suddenly *friends* again? Wanker. He'd learn tomorrow, if he hadn't already figured it out by then.

"Drink," Severus ordered, shoving a beaker at him. He wasn't going to give Lupin a chance to forget again. He watched the other boy tip his head back and swallow, then recoil and shudder.

"God, that tastes *vile*," Lupin gasped.

"Live with it," he said. "How do you feel?"

Lupin shrugged. "Impatient. Anxious. Very hot."

"Usual, then." Severus frowned and noted it on his scroll.

"Wait. I—ooh. I feel chills now. Like someone dumped water on me."

Severus wrote this down. The potion was affecting Lupin's metabolism, then. He hadn't intended that. It could prove dangerous after the transformation. He'd have to find something to counter that.

"Best get you to safety, dear," Pomfrey said.

Lupin nodded. "See you tomorrow, S-Severus."

Severus met his gaze impassively, ignoring the outstretched hand. Lupin's face fell and after a moment Pomfrey urged him past Severus, her expression disapproving. As soon as they were gone, Severus regretted not taking Lupin's hand—one of these days, with their experiments, the transformation might kill him, or someone more dangerous than Severus might discover the secret—or one of those bloody missions could go completely pear-shaped—but of course Severus couldn't call him back. He had too much pride for that.

He started back to the Slytherin dungeon, but found himself standing in a window embrasure, staring at the sky. Outside the moon rose.



Remus knew as soon as he woke that it was Madam Pomfrey dabbing the astringent healing potion on his ankles. He sighed. Her hand paused and he snapped his eyes shut. He didn't want her to know he was awake. She was kind and motherly, and he didn't want her to realize he wished it was Severus touching him instead of her. After a moment she continued her ministrations and a cool relief spread slowly through his stinging skin. When she finished, she stroked a soothing hand once across his shoulders, then he heard her heels clicking away.

He was alone, and he felt lonelier than he had since the morning he'd lain in this same bed with Severus one bed over, not speaking.

The Marauders hadn't run with him last night—Dumbledore had, apparently, had a task for James and Sirius—but Peter had kept him company in the Shack and kept him from chewing his paws to bits, at least, so his hands ached, but they weren't bloody as they sometimes

were. He opened and closed them a few times, working the stiffness out. He felt sluggish and tired today, and emotionally sloppy, as if he might cry or shout or laugh at any moment for no reason.

He shifted over onto his side and tried not to watch the Infirmary door.

Why had he confronted Severus like that? He'd asked himself the same question a hundred times over the past month, and he could never understand why he'd rushed out of Dumbledore's office the way he did. What if Dumbledore had been wrong? Severus' reaction initially had seemed one of a guilty man—if he wouldn't answer Remus' question with a simple no, he must already have the Mark. But now...Remus sighed in frustration. He should have had more faith in Severus. He should have believed Severus would tell him if he were going to take the Mark. He shouldn't have flown off the handle like that.

"You look like your dog just died."

The words sent a chill down his spine—*Sirius*—but the voice made him snap his full attention to the present.

"Severus," he said softly.

"So the potion didn't kill you. How do you feel?"

He swallowed against the sudden tightness in his throat. "Vulnerable," he blurted. Then he saw Severus' eyes narrow and wondered if that had been a mistake. "It's like I'm not sure I can control my own emotions," he said haltingly.

"Stay away from your bloody friends, then," Severus muttered. He bent to look at Remus' ankles. "Chewed on yourself this month, did you?" He gave Remus a piercing look. "Why is it worse some months than others?"

Remus shrugged, his throat still feeling clogged. "More restless some months, I suppose," he said. "I—I don't remember, you know. What happens at full."

"You've said that before," Severus said absently. He was inspecting a long scratch up Remus' calf. "That's going to scar. He frowned, then pulled out his wand and chanted something, running his wandtip along the wound. Remus watched in astonishment as the skin crawled and draw back together. It was the same spell Severus had used last month to knit up the deep gash the female had given him across his back.

"How do you do that?" Remus whispered.

Severus glanced at him, then away. "Never mind. You don't want to know anything about my *Dark magic*, remember, Lupin?"

Lupin. Remus' throat tightened again and he tried to swallow twice before he could without choking. Severus hated him, was only using him as a Potions experiment now because he needed Remus to get what he wanted. He bowed his head. "I miss the way we used to be," he admitted in a low voice.

Severus' voice was harsh. "Too bad. You're the one who said you didn't want anything to do with a Death Eater."

Remus' gaze snapped up to Severus' arm, but it was covered by the long-sleeved uniform robe. He turned his gaze up to Severus' face.

The glittering black eyes were fixed on him. "Still don't know me, do you, Lupin?" He was silent for a moment, his lip curling. Then he said quietly, "Fuck you." He turned and walked out.

Remus laid his head back against the pillow and closed his eyes, letting the tears streak down his cheeks and wet his ears. He heard Madam Pomfrey return, heard her asking him what was wrong, and he just ignored her and wept for what he had lost.



Severus left the Hospital Wing and went straight to the Owlery. He'd be leaving school in two months.

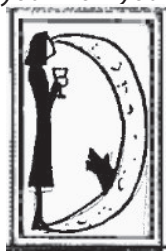
His resolve had been wavering, thanks to a letter from his mother, saying his father had got a job in a shop. She had seemed happy, writing that Tobias wasn't drinking every night now, that they were both looking forward to Severus leaving school and coming back home to live. He'd meant to wait until then, to wait until he could no longer put off a decision, but Lupin's little glance, Lupin's continued distrust—that was the final straw.

The words he wanted to say to Lupin pressed against his clenched teeth, wanting to be spat out like venom. *When will you see the way Dumbledore uses people? When*





will you realize he's just using **you**? Why can't you see that life isn't black or white, one or the other? Why don't you see that we have to carve our own place in this world? Don't you know you could have had a place with me?



His mind flinched away from the ideas he'd had, the sickeningly naïve hope that Lupin would have the courage to stand next to him. He swallowed, trying to wet his throat. He wasn't disappointed. His heart wasn't cracking.

He snatched up a piece of parchment and a quill, not even caring that they were obviously school-issue. If Malfoy and his Dark Lord were going to take Severus Snape, they would take him as the Half-Blood Prince. He would make no pretences. He wouldn't bow to their pureblood rhetoric.

*Malfoy,*

*You say this Lord Voldemort wants potions makers. If he can provide the ingredients and laboratory, and I'm given free rein in the laboratory, I'll brew for him. I take orders from no one but him, and I am allowed to pursue private studies in my own time. I'll require an allowance of ten Galleons a week.*

*Snape*

He beckoned to a school owl and attached the letter to its leg. "Lucius Malfoy only," he told it. "If his father tries to take it, shit on him and fly away."

The bird let out a hoot that he would swear sounded amused. Then it flapped away.

Severus stood at the window long after the speck had faded.



Remus was sprawled comfortably in front of the fire next to Sirius, revising for N.E.W.T.s and trying to ignore the soppy nonsense Lily and James were spouting at each other, when he heard someone yelp in shock or fear. He had already turned towards the portrait hole when it opened and a third year tumbled in. The boy looked around, then made a beeline for the Marauders.

"Lupin?"

He sat up.

"There's a Slytherin outside the Fat Lady wanting to see you. He said he'd hex me if I didn't tell you."

Severus. A flash of hope ran through Remus, chased by a flash of alarm. He closed his book and stood. "Thanks, Bell." He heard Sirius growl something and said, "No, Sirius." He managed to resist the tempting "Stay!" before crossing the common room and going out.

A soaked, gawky scarecrow of a figure was hunched tautly against the stone wall opposite the portrait. His stringy hair hung down around his lowered face. He didn't move when Remus came out, which alarmed Remus. What if Sirius had come out to hex him, instead? The other boy—no, *man*, Remus thought, embarrassed; they were men now, weren't they?—clenched his right hand around his left forearm.

Remus drew in a silent breath. "Severus," he said hoarsely.

Severus' only response was to shudder. Remus took another step closer, and another, and another, until he could lift his hands to either side of him and hesitate less than an inch from touching Severus.

"Severus," he whispered.

Severus pitched forward into his arms. Only his recently-honed reflexes allowed Remus to catch Severus, arms folding around him and holding him up. Severus made a strangled noise that was somehow more frightening to Remus than if he had screamed.

"What's happened?" Remus whispered. He held Severus for a moment, wondering what in God's name he could do. They were too far from the Hospital wing, and James' Invisibility Cloak was upstairs, but he knew he could get Severus to the Come and Go Room without any help—there were times having a werewolf's strength was an advantage. It would have to do. He set off at a pace Severus could handle, but as the Slytherin's steps faltered, Remus finally resorted to carrying Severus the last hundred feet. He paced back and forth in front of the empty wall, thinking, *I need to take care of Severus*. When the door opened, he found a bed and a chair, a fireplace, and a drinks cabinet. He hoped there were potions in there as well as alcohol.

Severus still hadn't spoken a word. Remus got him to the bed and started undressing him, wondering how badly he was hurt.

"No." Finally Severus rasped the single word. His gaze was focused on Remus' chest.

Remus huffed impatiently. "You're hurt," he said. "I can help you, Severus."

"Nothing can help," Severus said, his voice still rough. "Go away, Lupin. Shouldn't have come—" He broke off and coughed. "Go away."

"But you did, and I'm not leaving," Remus said, feeling a stubborn flare. "Shut it." He pressed Severus down against the bed, ignoring the way his blood tingled at that touch. He got Severus' robes unfastened, peeling the wet layers of cloth away. He had to see how badly Severus was hurt.

"Fuck—Lupin!" Severus gritted out.

Remus laid his palm lightly across Severus' mouth, which made the Slytherin's eyes snap open. "Stop this," Remus said, gentling his voice. "You came to me. Now you have to let me help you."

Severus glared at him, and Remus could see fear as well as pain in his eyes, but finally there was the tiniest curt nod. As suddenly as that, Remus felt Severus relax slightly. His eyes closed.

"Good," Remus breathed, lifting his hand and brushing Severus' hair away from his face. He wished he could brush away the lines of pain as easily. He carefully unbuttoned Severus' shirt and got him, unresisting, out of everything but his trousers and shoes. The trousers were too short, exposing slouching, grey socks. Remus knew when Severus had started wearing trousers under his robes—it had started after their fifth year. He unlaced the tall jackboots and eased them off, then pulled the socks, cringing slightly. He was afraid to touch the other man's trousers, but his feet were icy; Remus knew he had to get Severus warmed up. That meant first getting him out of his wet clothes.

"What happened?" he asked, to take his mind off the fact that he was undressing Severus.

There was a long silence as he worked at the zip, which was difficult with fingers that were getting chilled from the wet. He wondered if Severus had passed out. Finally, though, Severus whispered, "Stupid."

*Well, that's enlightening,* Remus thought, rolling his eyes. He tugged Severus' trousers off and decided that was

enough; the greying pants would stay in place; a drying charm would do for them. He flicked his wand with the drying spell and wrapped Severus in two of the blankets. Then he conjured the flames in the fireplace higher.

"I need something warm to drink," he muttered, opening the drinks cabinet—and there was a pitcher of chocolate steaming next to two cups. "What, I'm supposed to drink some, too?" he asked, but he took both cups and poured them full.

"Severus, can you sit up?" he asked. "I can help you."

Severus just sighed, but he didn't resist when Remus sat on the edge of the bed and slid an arm underneath him, lifting him carefully to rest against Remus' chest. His hair dripped water down the front of Remus' shirt, but Remus ignored it. Severus was leaning on him, was curling his fingers around the cup, and Remus didn't know whether to be relieved he wasn't pulling away, or worried that he didn't mind the invasion of his personal space.

Suddenly Remus realised there was blood soaking into his trousers. He looked down and saw a trail of scarlet down Severus' thigh and stomach—from where his left arm was clutched against him. Severus was shivering, his eyes slightly unfocused.

"Oh, fuck, Severus," Remus muttered, drawing Severus' arm out to look at it. "You did it."

"Thought you'd already decided I was a Death Eater two bloody months ago," Severus muttered. "Isn't that why you slammed me against a wall in front of Slughorn?"

Remus sighed. "I was wrong. I knew I was wrong once I really considered your reaction, and I'm sorry I doubted you. As you would've known if you'd just once not pushed past me on the way into the library or Transfiguration, and actually listened to me."

"Fuck you," Severus said tiredly. He leaned his head back against Remus' shoulder, his eyes closing. It scared Remus; this behaviour was too casual for Severus.

"What can I do, Severus?" Remus asked, staring at the ugly black skull that was still dripping blood. The snake in its mouth almost seemed to be crawling. Or maybe the flesh was crawling in protest of the Mark.

Severus didn't answer for so long Remus thought he'd passed out. Finally he whispered, "Stay."

Severus wasn't as cold anymore; though his body was still shivering, he suspected it was shock. He was aware of Remus' arms around him, Remus' body against his, and he knew he didn't want to lose that. He turned his head, tucking his face under Remus' chin and pretending that this comforting presence would always be his.

He went limp with relief when Remus' hand stroked his hair and the hoarse voice said, "I'm not going anywhere, Severus."

He knew, in the back of his mind, that he should be pushing Remus away. There were so many reasons he should be swearing at Remus and pulling away from his touch and hexing him. But Remus' touch was warm and unhesitant, and Severus decided anything that could arouse him, through the stunning welter of pain that radiated from his arm throughout his body, had to be a good thing.

Remus was lowering him back to the bed, easing the half-drunk cup of chocolate from his hands. "I'm going to find you a pain-relieving potion," he promised, and then that warmth was going.

Severus bit back a whimper and turned his head, slitting his eyes open to watch Remus open the drinks cabinet. The werewolf wasn't wearing his school issue robes and waistcoat. Severus could see the way Remus' muscles moved under his shirt. He turned, carrying a vial of bright blue potion, and Severus sucked in a slow breath at how Remus' white button shirt was plastered wetly against his chest.

"Here, drink this," Remus said, sliding a hand under Severus' head and holding the vial to his lips.

Severus swallowed, identifying the potion by its taste as something to rebuild blood and reknit flesh. It wouldn't help against the Mark; he had a feeling there was nothing that would erase the ugly testament to Severus' supreme idiocy. He shivered.

"Are you still cold?" Remus renewed the warming charm. "Budge up, I'll sit with you."

Severus shifted over slightly, giving the shorter boy room to pull his legs up on the bed. The overwhelming pain began to recede, carried away on a tide of peace. Severus wished he had the stones to snuggle against Remus.

"Can't tell anyone, Lupin," he muttered. "Get us both killed."

Remus touched his hair again. "I'm pretty good at keeping secrets," he said, his voice choked.

Severus' last clear thought was that he had become Remus' enemy. And damn them both, Severus wanted him anyway.

Severus woke up alone.



He wasn't surprised by it; he hadn't expected Lupin to stay. After all, Severus was a Death Eater now, the Enemy. Remus would never speak to him again, most likely.

He rolled over and something crinkled against his cheek. He sniffed—parchment. Biting back a groan, he shifted and unfolded the note.

Severus,

*I have to go back to Gryffindor Tower or Sirius and James will decide you've hexed me and go to the Headmaster. I'll be back to check on you as soon as I can. ~~We don't have to~~ We should talk—but I don't know if now is the best time. I don't want us to hate each other, Severus.*

*The full moon's still a fortnight off. Could we talk before then please?*

*I'll be back.*

Remus

Suddenly it was much easier to breathe, even though Severus suddenly felt like he was going to throw up. Remus didn't want to walk away from their friendship—but he was going to demand explanations. He was going to expect repentance. Well, he could have the repentance. Severus' left arm still throbbed angrily in reminder of how mistaken he'd been.

How could he have thought he could use Lord Voldemort for his own ends? And the Dark Lord had seen through all of that and burned away every vestige of Severus' pride, had exposed every flaw in his seeming cleverness; the Dark Lord had read his mind and laid it bare to Lucius Malfoy and Rodolphus Lestrangle.



Severus hung his head over the edge of the bed and was violently sick—not that there was anything left to come up. God, he was so humiliated! How could he ever

have thought those men respected him? How could he have ever thought he would prove himself a better wizard than any of the purebloods?

The door opened and Severus lifted his head. Remus was peering into the room. His hair stood up wildly, as if he'd just got out of bed and not bothered to comb it.

"You...look like...Potter," Severus managed between deep breaths.

Remus hurried forward, the door shutting hard behind him. "You're ill."

Severus closed his eyes. "Mostly...humiliated."

Remus' fingers were pressing against his forehead. "You must not be yourself yet," he said conversationally. "You're being far too honest with me."

Severus scowled and smacked Remus' hand away, but Remus smiled sadly down at him and stroked his fingers down Severus' cheek. "I've always known you had secrets, Severus," he said. "I just wish I'd learned sooner that I could trust your judgment."

The look in those warm brown eyes made Severus want to beg to be forgiven—or else lash out until Remus wouldn't look at him like that anymore. It wasn't right to get hard when you thought about your friends. Severus knew it wasn't natural; he'd heard Regulus' jeering remarks about the Ravenclaw poof in his History of Magic class. Severus had no illusions that his feelings about Remus—confusing and irritating though they were—would ever be reciprocated or considered proper.

"Severus?" Remus' expression was concerned now, but also just a little frightened. Good. Severus glared at him.

"Go away, Lupin. You've soothed your conscience enough."

"What? Severus, this isn't about my conscience! You're hurt! I'm not going to just leave you here."

"You ought to hate me!" Severus hissed. "Go the fuck away, Lupin. Leave me *alone!*"

Remus' expression hardened. Good. He stood up and walked away from Severus—but instead of walking towards the door, he was moving to the only chair in the room. He settled down in it and glared at the fire.

"I'm not leaving you, Severus. Perhaps you think we're enemies, but I refuse to think that."

"Then you're stupid!" Severus said, but he was glad, *glad* that Lupin was staying.

Surprisingly, Remus laughed. "Perhaps you're right. Perhaps I shouldn't have argued when the Hat wanted to put me in Hufflepuff. It did say my loyalty could be dangerous to me." He shook his head. "No, Severus. You've made me care about you, and now you can't be rid of me so easily."

"You didn't seem to care so much about loyalty after Easter hols!" Severus snapped.

Remus sobered. "No, you're right. I was angry and swayed by what people said. And no, it wasn't my friends. It was someone I thought I could trust."

"Finally learned not to trust Potter and Black, have you?"

"Sirius tried to kill you," Remus said, his voice tight. "That eroded my trust for him rather sharply."

"Nice to know *someone* cares," Severus murmured. "Bloody Dumbledore didn't even flinch. Just leapt right to your defence and told me I couldn't let the news out and had to protect you and didn't even fucking talk about the fact that Black had attempted murder by werewolf."

Remus' expression closed, and Severus wondered what he had said that was finally too much. But Remus just sighed. "Dumbledore...has been wrong. Occasionally."

Severus widened his eyes as he stared at Remus. So Dumbledore was the one who'd thought he had taken the Mark already? But why hadn't he been thrown out of school, if that were the case? Surely Dumbledore wouldn't let him keep working on the werewolf potion for Remus, if he thought Severus were a Death Eater! It made no sense.

"Severus?"

He looked up. Remus was studying him with open concern on his face, and Severus scowled. "Don't think you're entitled to be my minder just because I came to you for help while I was out of my head with pain."

Remus' expression cleared slightly. After a moment he nodded.





"I can't quite believe N.E.W.T.s are finished," Remus said, leaning his head back against the warm stone of the Astronomy Tower. The sun was just setting, and the June air was thick as stars emerged from the growing darkness over their heads.

Severus lit his cigarette with a practised flick of his wand and shrugged. "Doesn't change much, really," he lied. Of course it changed everything, but he couldn't think of the right words to explain things to Remus. He still wasn't sure he wanted to. It would be easier if they walked away from each other tonight, if Remus never looked back except in anger, if Severus could relegate Remus to yet another fantasy that would never come true.

"Full moon tomorrow," Remus said, not looking at Severus.

Severus took a long drag off his cigarette. "Dumbledore hasn't ordered me off the project."

"You told me not to tell anyone," Remus replied.

"I'm a bloody Death Eater, Lupin!" Severus snarled. "What if I'm planning to kill you this moon?"

"You don't want to kill me."

No, but Severus wasn't averse to hexing him. He sighed. "You're an idiot. Why do you trust me?"

Remus turned his head and met Severus' gaze finally. "Because you're you," he said simply, and took the cigarette from Severus' unresisting fingers to have a drag himself.

"God, sometimes I hate you so much," Severus muttered.

Remus smiled around the cigarette, his brown eyes picking up glints of gold from the setting sun. He said nothing.



"Shouldn't be doing this," Severus muttered, handing Remus a potion bottle. "If V—*fuck*—the Dark Lord found out—"

Remus' hand was rough against Severus' mouth. "Don't say that!" he hissed, fighting back a thrill of fear. "Don't mention him at all."

Severus sighed. "Where's he sending you tonight?"

"North of France," Remus said, frowning. "And I hope my French is good enough to explain why I'm there." He was worried that he would make them think he had come from Voldemort, instead of trying to dissuade them from joining Voldemort.

At Severus' prolonged silence, he looked up. "What's wrong?"

"I didn't know you spoke French."

"*Mais oui.*" Remus grinned. "But very badly. My father's mother was from France. My mother and all her stock are Scottish, though. He met her while he was working in the Ministry's Glasgow office."

"My da's Halifax born and bred," Severus replied, surprising Remus. "A Muggle."

Remus turned to stare at his friend, but the black gaze remained firmly fixed on the potion he was decanting. "What, you're a half-blood like me?"

"Did you think Slytherin was purebloods only?" Severus' voice was cool.

"Well, no, but..." Remus floundered. They hadn't had the conversation he'd requested, though not for lack of trying. On Remus' part, at least. Now that he considered it, it seemed obvious that Severus had been avoiding it. "Why would you want to join—*them*—if you're a half-blood?"

Severus sighed. "I..."

But just as he appeared to be ready to explain, the door to the infirmary opened and Dumbledore came in, followed by Alastor Moody. Severus' mouth snapped shut and he handed Remus one last vial of potion and stepped away.

"Lupin!" Moody barked, glancing him over. "You ready to Portkey? We've set it up to take you into the heart of the pack's territory. If you need to activate it for emergency withdrawal, just say 'Hogwarts' and speak your password."

"The password's the same as always?" Remus asked, though he thought it would be.

"You've shared it with no one?" Moody glanced sharply at Severus.

"I haven't," Remus agreed.

Moody nodded. "Remember, Lupin, you get in and you get out. If there's trouble with the pack, if they refuse to cooperate, kill the leader and get out of there."

"Only if he has to," Dumbledore put in. "We didn't start this to make Remus a killer."

"We do what we must, Dumbledore," Moody argued. "I don't *like* it, but they can't be allowed to fight against us."

Remus swallowed hard. It left a bad taste in his mind, the thought of killing fellow werewolves with a wizard's curse. It felt too much like an unfair advantage.

Dumbledore stepped closer and placed a hand on Remus' shoulder. "Take care of yourself, my boy," he said kindly. "If you feel your life is in any way threatened, activate the Portkey and come home. Better for you to come back safe to us. And make sure to get back to us in the morning, if you don't come sooner. I have a friend, a Potions Master, who is coming to observe Severus' work. It would be best if he could speak with you just after the Transformation back."

Remus blinked and nodded. So many possibilities were suddenly opening out in front of him, now that he was leaving school. He wanted this role as the Ministry's executioner to end. Perhaps this time, with the French werewolves, he would be able to convince someone that Voldemort was dangerous, evil. He clung to the hope of success.

Moody draped a chain around Remus' neck. "It's charmed to be unbreakable and unremovable. You'll have no trouble getting back to us in the morning, if not before. It's set to activate for the return trip twenty minutes after moonset, if you don't activate it before."

Remus nodded again.

"This one takes you to France," Moody said again. "It'll activate in ten minutes." He glanced at Severus again, then turned and stumped off.

"Be careful, Remus," Dumbledore added, and then followed Moody.

And it was Remus and Severus again, and Remus had a sudden desperate urge to grab Severus, to hug him hard, to make him understand that if Remus didn't come back, it wasn't because he didn't want to. He resisted, of course. Severus had that about him, that it was difficult to touch him. It took a great deal of courage to

do so, and though Remus had worked his way up to casual touches—the brush of fingers, the occasional hand on a shoulder—the night they had spent with Remus curled protectively around Severus in the Come-and-Go Room had rather increased the physical tension, than lessened it.

Finally Remus sighed and held out a hand. "I'll see you tomorrow, I hope," he said calmly. It was amazing how his voice didn't betray any of the fear or self-doubt or guilt that he felt every full moon.



"Of course you will, dolt," Severus replied, and placed his cool, slender fingers in Remus'. After a moment, Remus pulled, and Severus sort of fell against him. It wasn't so much an embrace as it was a running into each other, but Severus didn't tense too much, and Remus let his cheek brush Severus' hair, and that was that.

Severus was watching Remus with a curious gaze when the Portkey activated.



"I suppose you remember nothing of why you're back with a great bloody gash all down your left shoulder-blade. It's amazing the things you manage to forget, when you're a monster instead of a man." The tone was conversational, belying the anger Remus could feel radiating off his friend. "Someday, I want you to know, I will kill Alastor Moody. I may even kill Dumbledore. I hate the way they use us all. I don't blame them for using me—after all, I *am* the enemy. But you don't deserve to be used like this." Severus' voice lowered, growing speculative. "You are a good person. A good man. Are we men? It's odd, to call us men. Remus Lupin. You're a good man. I hate the way they use you. Someday I'll kill them."

Remus ought to say something. He ought to let Severus know he was awake, at least. It felt wrong, as if he were eavesdropping, for all that Severus was talking to him. But he hurt so badly, and he was facedown on the bed. He could feel a sheet draped very low over his arse, and his hair was in his face, plastered to his forehead. It was too long. He drew in a raspy breath.

"Awake? Or just getting ready for another seizure?" Severus' voice was soft, though from gentleness or fear,

Remus couldn't tell.

"Way," Remus managed. He felt thick-headed. What did Severus mean, 'another seizure'? Remus didn't like it.

"Good. I thought you'd bitten your tongue in two with the seizure. I didn't recognise it in time, and there was so much blood."

Remus made an inquiring noise.

"Two days. You can't imagine how worried your friends have been."

It was a strange way of phrasing it, was Remus' last coherent thought, so that he didn't know if Severus meant his *other* friends, or if Severus was worried too.

"It's been bloody difficult convincing Belby that I deserve the apprenticeship when my experiment is lying there in a dead faint. Dumbledore's annoyed with me. I'm sure I've made him look bad, but I can't be arsed to care about that if you're just going to die on me."



Remus cleared his throat and Severus stopped talking. "M'not dead yet," Remus joked, and as far as jokes went it was lame, but it was something.

Severus' hand smoothed down Remus' back, almost as if the other man weren't aware of the motion. "Well, good. I don't want to end up in Azkaban for something accidental."

Remus coughed. "What, you want to earn your way there?"

Severus' tone, when he spoke next, was bleak. "I think I already have."

The third time Remus woke was the time he felt strong enough to do more than drink broth and tea, shuffle to the loo with assistance, and fall asleep again. He turned onto his side and looked around for Severus. Unsurprisingly, the Slytherin was in the chair next to the hospital bed. His arms were folded across his chest, his head back at an awkward angle. Faint snores escaped from his slightly-open mouth. Remus smiled fondly.

He was content to watch Severus sleep for a long, peaceful time. He could hear Madam Pomfrey moving about beyond the curtain, and once he thought he heard her half of a Floo conversation. He closed his eyes, straining, but he felt as if he were wrapped in a cushioning charm, and nothing could get through.

When he looked back at Severus, the other boy was watching him.

"I didn't do it because I hate you. Or out of spite." Severus' voice was very quiet.

Remus watched him avidly. It was private here, safe. This was *their* place, somewhere no one else could come between them, and had been since that horrible day after the so-called prank. Of course Severus would be able to confide in him here.

"I thought...Originally I thought to do it because you didn't trust me," Severus said, looking down. "I hadn't committed to anything, you know. It drove me mad with rage, thinking you'd already decided based on what your friends said of me." He shrugged. "But I still put it off. Why make a decision before leaving school? I thought—for a while, things seemed better. But..."

Remus licked his lips, but he didn't know what to say, so he simply watched Severus.

"I thought I could use him. Dumbledore obviously doesn't trust me, doesn't believe in me—so why not see what V—*fuck*—the Dark Lord can do for me? I didn't tell Malfoy what I was planning. Malfoy and his friends seemed all right, though Rabastan's a little off in the head, I think. But...when I was standing before the Dark Lord, and he was looking at me..." Severus shook his head. "He knew. He knew everything. All of it, all my plans, all my thoughts..." He shuddered. "I—It hurt like fuck."

Remus reached out, his fingers just brushing Severus' shoulder before dropping again.

Severus looked up for a moment, then turned his gaze back to the floor. "It was stupid. I know that now." He sat up and reached over to the bedside table for a vial of potion and poured out a measure. He stared at it for a moment before holding it out to Remus. "He's—well, he's not merciful. But it amused him to know that I'd planned to use him. And it amused him not to kill me for my presumption. It amused him to have a servant who hates him." He drew back as soon as Remus took the potion. "I'm lucky."

Remus didn't think Severus sounded lucky, but he supposed that was relative. He sighed and swallowed the potion.

"I know, I got myself into a right mess," Severus said. "My mam will disown me, if she finds out. I mean, she bloody married a Muggle, didn't she, and here I am in a group that wants to suppress Muggles. And Da's been working again. She actually sounded happy in her last letter." Severus snorted. "Trust me to bugger that up."

Remus frowned, not liking the tone of Severus' voice. "So quit. Tell this Voldemort bloke that you've changed your mind."

Severus laughed bitterly. "Don't you know *anything*, Lupin? This Mark is a binding oath. I come when he calls, I serve as he commands."

"But it lets you hate him," Remus said, confused.

"Our feelings are our own. Even if our thoughts and memories aren't."

"I don't understand."

"Legilimency. Have you heard of it?"

"Of course, it's in *Hogwarts: A History*. Salazar Slytherin and Godric Gryffindor were both experts at it. It's fascinating, rea—oh. Oh, no, this Voldemort, he's a Legilimens?"

"A bloody good one," Severus elaborated. "It's how he knew my plans, how he senses lies..."

"But Occlumency counters it," Remus remembered. "Can't you just learn that?"

"From whom? My mam doesn't know it, and it isn't exactly standard coursework here."

"Dumbledore will know someone."

Severus glared. "The Dark Lord would fucking kill me if I talked to Dumbledore about him. I won't even be able to hide *this* conversation from him." Severus sighed. "Fortunately everyone knows you and I are friends—even if Malfoy is appalled I had the poor taste to befriend a Gryffindor. But that means they all know how suspicious it would look if I suddenly dropped you."

"Well. Everyone suffers lapses in judgment from time to time," Remus joked. He thought the pain potions must be kicking in.

"You're a wanker, Lupin," Severus said, but his voice sounded more normal than it had been.

"Mmm, that's the only thing you and Sirius agree on," Remus murmured. His words seemed soft on the edges.

He sank into the mattress, then reached out to clasp his fingers lightly around Severus' wrist. "We're still friends, then? You won't leave me?"

Something about that question sounded off when spoken aloud, but Remus couldn't puzzle it out. His eyes were closing on their own.

He hadn't the energy to be surprised, then, when Severus covered Remus' hand lightly with his own. "We are still friends," said the hesitant voice. "You can't be rid of me so easily."

Remus fell asleep with a smile on his face.

"You lost your job."



Remus looked up from his cup of tea, a startled expression on his face. Severus thought he looked skinnier than he had a fortnight ago. "How'd you know?"

"You've the same look on your face that you had when Slughorn said you couldn't go on in Potions seventh year. Relief mixed with guilt." Severus had to work to keep from smirking at Remus. The werewolf was ridiculously transparent.

"You must be getting better at that mind-reading magic you're studying."

Severus sighed in exasperation. "I *told* you, Lupin, it isn't—" He broke off. Of course Remus hadn't forgotten. The berk just liked winding Severus up. He knew enough about Occlumency, even if he didn't realise why the Dark Lord was instructing Severus in it.

Remus was smirking. It made Severus' fingers itch to smack it off his face, but at the same time it made that tug at Severus' stomach that it always did. He wouldn't let anyone else get away with looking at him like that; he'd hex Lucius into next Tuesday if *he* tried it. But sRemus' eyes were warm when he smirked at Severus, like he was inviting Severus to share in the joke, and not just laughing at him.

"Prat," Severus declared, and sat down at Remus' table. "Why are we meeting at Madam Puddifoot's? This place is dreadful."

"Three Broomsticks is full of people at some wizards conference up at the school," Remus said. "Anyway, this place is quieter."



"Ah, so Black and his friends are at the pub, is what you mean," Severus guessed.

Remus sighed. "You keep saying it isn't mind-reading, but—"

"Deduction, idiot," Severus said, his tone more patient than his words.

"I'm tired of arguing with them about you, is all," Remus replied.

Severus thought for a moment, staring into his teacup. "Why did you even care about staying friends?" he asked finally. He'd been wondering for weeks.

Remus had been gazing mildly across the room, but at this question he turned to look at Severus, his expression serious. "Because I like you, Severus," he said, holding Severus' gaze. "I missed you when we weren't speaking."

Severus swallowed; why was his mouth so dry? He took a sip of tea. "I don't know why you care," he muttered finally.

Remus' expression didn't change. "I like being around you. You're clever and funny and interesting." Severus felt like Remus was watching for something, but he didn't know what.

"I—you are, too," he said finally. He felt his cheeks heat. What a stupid way to give someone a compliment. Especially when he wanted to tell Remus how fit and cool he was. Spending time with Remus made Severus feel like, even if Remus didn't always understand him, he did at least appreciate him.

Remus smiled with his whole face, a rare expression for him. It gave Severus another jolt in his stomach. It was hard to breathe when Remus looked at him like that.

"Want to go for a walk?" Remus asked. "It's nice out."

Severus nodded mutely and finished his tea. He wished he'd been able to buy Remus a meal, though. He knew his friend didn't have any money to spare, even when he was working.

Remus shoved his hands in his jeans pockets and led the way out, turning south down to the High Street. Severus followed, feeling a little off-kilter, though he couldn't quite say why. Remus was acting oddly, a strange mixture of light-hearted and discouraged, and it was confusing Severus. They walked silently along the high

street past Dervish and Banges, the High Street turning into a winding lane that headed up towards the foot of the mountain. They came around a corner and climbed over a stile, and then they were suddenly in wilderness, crossing scrubby ground and out of sight of any of the cottages of the village.

"Something on your mind, Lupin?" Severus asked finally.

Remus stopped and turned to look at him, a startled expression on his face. "All right, that isn't deduction," he said finally.

Severus raised his eyebrows. "I suppose I know you better than I thought," he said. "I don't know how many times I have to tell you that Legilimency doesn't work like that. I'm not reading your mind. And anyway, I still have to hold eye contact to make it work. Maybe someday I'll get better at it."

Remus sighed and looked around, then went over to a rock outcropping to sit. He pulled out a fag and lit it, leaning back and gazing across at the castle. "Dumbledore's sending me to Africa in a fortnight. Not sure how long I'll be gone."

"Africa? The fuck?" Severus stared at him, then went over and stole Remus' fag to get a drag himself. When had Remus started carrying fags about, anyway? Severus was the one who smoked.

Remus shrugged. "There are werewolves in danger there, and he thinks I can help them."

"How? You're not exactly safe yourself!" Severus felt a hot anger building inside him. He was trapped here in England, doing research for Belby, but if Remus was doing work involving werewolves, it concerned Severus and Belby, too! "Was Dumbledore going to say anything to us? You're our werewolf! We haven't got any other test subjects yet!"

"Your werewolf?" Remus asked, glancing at him with an odd smile lingering about his lips. "That's why I'm telling you now, Severus. I wondered if you could give me enough for the other wolves. I'm not sure how many—a pack of them, but I don't know what that means. I've always been a lone wolf, myself."

Severus rolled his eyes at the joke. "We have a fortnight to do it?" he asked, calculating. "Yes, I think we could brew enough for, say, a dozen. Perhaps more, but I'd have to ask Belby."

"He's a good bloke, working on potions for werewolves," Remus said. "Did you ever find out why?"

"Had a nephew or cousin or something that got bit," Severus said dismissively. He didn't know Belby very well, and he wasn't overly inclined to get to know him. Belby was a jolly sort, too much like Dumbledore for Severus' liking, though not as calculating as the Headmaster.

"You'll be by to pick up the potion before you go, then?"

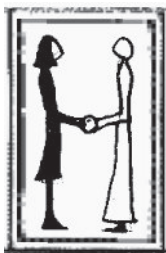
"Yeah, August 13," Remus said. "If that's all right with you."

"When will you get it through your head that I'm just the apprentice?" Severus snapped. "I have to do what Belby says. It was only through his sufferance that I got today off to meet you."

Remus snorted. "I know very well that he doesn't keep you slaving away twenty hours a day," he said. "Anyway, owl me if that day doesn't work. I'll have to get Dumbledore to adjust the Portkey if I have to stay longer."

Severus took a long drag off the cigarette and held it out to Remus again. Remus took it, his fingers brushing Severus', and finished it off, seemingly oblivious to the way Severus' stomach had jumped when they touched.

They sat there for a long time, staring across the hot summer sky and not speaking. Severus found himself feeling oddly content. After a while he realised Remus was leaning against him, ever so slightly, a small smile on his lips.



Severus wanted to lean over and press his lips against Remus', to slide his fingers into the soft brown hair that fell into Remus' eyes and hung into his collar. In the months since he took the Mark, since he'd gone to Remus for help, he hadn't forgotten the feeling of Remus' strong arms around him, holding him together. He hadn't forgotten—

He stood up, so abruptly Remus nearly fell over. "Severus?"

Severus cleared his throat and paced to the opposite side of the path and looked back at Remus. "Let's go get some supper," he said finally. "I have to get back soon."



Remus' trip to Zimbabwe was planned to include the full moon, but when the third quarter arrived and Remus still hadn't returned, Severus began to fret. There was no other word for it, he was fretting as if someone had appointed him Lupin's minder. The worst part about it was that Severus couldn't bring himself to be embarrassed about being worried.

Everyone was worried these days.

Belby spent a lot of time chewing his moustache, a sure indication that he was worried. Belby was friends with Dumbledore, and though Severus wasn't sure if his teaching master helped the Headmaster with his secret missions, Dumbledore certainly would have consulted him about this particular one, since it involved werewolves.

"Snape, that friend of yours—"

"Lupin?" He blurted it before Belby was even finished speaking, then looked away and cleared his throat.

"Yes, Lupin. He should have been back by now, shouldn't he? We're at the new moon, and I'd hoped to begin our study on whether the lunar cycle affects how potions work on werewolves."

Severus bit the inside of his cheek and shrugged. "I'm not his minder," he said. His voice sounded sullen even to his own ears. He could see Belby's exasperation building.

"Yes, well, I want you to go see Dumbledore and find out if we're going to have another test subject in time for the new moon, or if we're going to have to postpone our experiment for a month."

Severus heaved a put-upon sigh, but inwardly he was pleased. Dumbledore *must* have news, and if Severus were there on behalf of his teaching master, the Headmaster could hardly be all cryptic and refuse to answer.

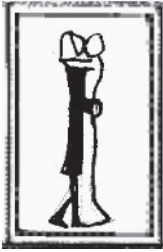
It had been a mistake to go to Africa. Remus wasn't quite willing to question Dumbledore's judgment, but it was very clear that the African wolves were very different to European wolves—and an Englishman werewolf was another thing yet.

He took another half-dozen halting steps through the dark night, hoping he was at least close. He tried to ignore the pounding in his head, but with the regrets and doubts and self-recriminations all swirling into a dizzying cycle, the pain in his head was only getting worse.

The last days of his captivity by the Zimbabwe Werewolf Pack had become a sweltering blur of pain and fear. He knew they had beaten him, and they had forced him to fight at the full—there had been bets made over him while he was muzzled and tied like a dog, just before the transformation—and that they had expected the Englishman to die.

Then again, they hadn't expected their benevolence ambassador to be an assassin in his spare time.

Remus bit back a groan and stumbled over the kerb. He staggered to a halt and stared up at the buildings around him. Would Severus really live in a dirty Muggle neighbourhood like this? He didn't care. This was where the tracking spell had led him, and it was better than going to Dumbledore. Dumbledore would want a report, and Remus didn't think he could give that until he was sure he wouldn't fall apart while giving it.



The spell tugged him to a first floor door. He stared at it, his wolfish senses telling him that yes, this was where Severus lived. (Since when, he wondered, had he come to feel so comforted by Severus' scent?) He leaned on the door frame, tears of exhaustion and relief welling up in his eyes. *Home*, he thought.

He lifted his hand to knock and the door flew open, a wand pointed at his face. Remus stared stupidly at it, then looked up to Severus' face.

He didn't miss the wash of emotions across the other man's face, though he couldn't interpret them. Then Severus was reaching out to him and Remus just let himself fall into Severus' arms, fighting against sobs.

There was another long blur of time, and then Remus was naked and clean, and Severus was tucking him into a bed, Severus' scent rising up all around him. Cool glass touched his lips, and Remus swallowed automatically, the foul taste of healing potion making him shudder. He whimpered, and Severus' hand brushed hair back from his face.

"Rest," Severus told him. "It's all right. You're safe."

Remus' hand caught at Severus' wrist with all the strength he had left to grip. "Stay." He heard Severus' swift intake of breath, but he didn't care. "Stay," he pleaded, tugging.

"Wait." Severus pulled out of his grip, but before Remus could protest, he realised Severus was only shrugging

out of his shirt and shucking his trousers. Then Severus climbed under the covers with him, and he wrapped his arms around Remus, and yes, the world was pushed at arm's length suddenly, as Remus relaxed into his friend's embrace.

He woke thrashing and shouting. The room was dark and warm, but not hot. Someone was talking, speaking his name. Then there were wiry arms wrapped around him, forcing him still, holding him tightly.

"Remus!"

He went still.

"Remus, it's me! You're safe! Whatever it was, you're safe now!" Severus' voice was low and anxious in his ear.

Remus let out an involuntary noise and melted against Severus, shivering. "So much blood," he gasped.

He felt Severus tense at that, but his friend said nothing. A hand stroked his tangled hair, working through the knots. "You're safe with me," Severus murmured.

Remus lifted his head and kissed him.

It wasn't anything he'd planned, though he'd wanted to for ages. His nose smashed against Severus' and Severus' teeth cut his lower lip, but God, it sent a thrill through his entire body, and it provoked a groan from Severus. Remus snaked his arms around Severus' waist and held on to him, and Severus groaned again and bore him down against the mattress, still kissing.

Little flashes of heat were playing across Remus' body, following Severus' hand down his side. Severus' other hand was still curled in his hair, tugging gently. He slid a palm down Severus' back, encountering the elastic of the other boy's pants, and worked his hand underneath to stroke the forbidden curve of arse.

"Remus—" Severus gasped, pulling away just enough to peer down at him through the darkness.

"Want you," Remus murmured. "Love you. Have for ages." He heard Severus' ragged exhalation but wasn't sure what it meant until Severus shivered and kissed his neck. "Yes," Severus murmured, so softly Remus barely heard it. Then Severus' lips were running down his neck and chest, and Severus' tongue flickered out, leaving a wet trail that he blew across. Remus gasped and arched slightly, and a sore muscle twinged. He whimpered, and Severus looked up, the whites of his eyes flashing in the dimness.

"I hurt you."

Remus shook his head, but Severus pulled away a little, studying him.

"I—I've never done this," Severus said hesitantly, stroking one hand down to Remus' cock, which was achingly hard. Then he leaned down and put his mouth awkwardly in place of his hand.

Remus gasped and whimpered.

Severus pulled back, a smirk spreading slowly across his lips. "I suppose that means it's all right?"

"Merlin, yes!" Remus managed, reaching down to touch Severus' face and hair.

Severus' lips ghosted across his cock, then wet heat engulfed him and Severus was sucking, oh God, Remus had never felt anything like that before! He made a strangled noise in his throat and squeezed his eyes shut.

Severus was bobbing his head up and down, one hand circling the part he couldn't take into his mouth, and it was brilliant, just brilliant, even though it was clumsy. Then Severus' teeth scraped Remus' cock and he let out a strangled yelp, but that had sent a shock all the way through him, and he tensed, making sore muscles shriek at him, but who cared, because he was coming so fucking hard, and "Oh my God, Severus!"

Severus made a choked noise and pulled back off his cock, but he sounded pleased all the same. Remus tugged Severus closer.

Severus wrapped his arms around Remus and pressed his face against Remus' shoulder, which hurt a little, but Remus didn't want to mention that. Severus was breathing heavily, and Remus worked his hand down between them to curl around his cock. It surprised a groan out of Severus and made Remus smirk. He stroked Severus like he would himself, except backwards. It was strange, to be touching someone else's cock. But he liked the grunts and sighs that Severus was making, and the way Severus' arms tightened around him. He stroked as energetically as he could, ignoring it when his arm tired. Before too long, Severus' climax flooded over him as Severus gasped out Remus' name.

Merlin, was this real? Remus peered through the darkness as Severus whispered a cleaning charm. Then Severus moved closer, his arms wrapped securely around

Remus. It made Remus feel safe. He relaxed, turning his head to tuck his forehead against Severus' skin.

They slept.



When Severus woke up, he was warm and happy. He inhaled deeply and snuggled against Remus. Then he realised he was *snuggling against Remus*, and they were naked. Well, Remus was naked. Severus still had his shorts on. And they'd—oh, Merlin, what they'd done last night!

His face burned with the embarrassment of remembering. It had felt so good, but what if Remus didn't mean it now?

Remus grunted and turned to burrow against Severus, one arm curving around his waist.

All right, perhaps he would mean it.

Severus stared at Remus' face from the corner of his eye, wondering what he was supposed to do now. Should they talk about this today? Well, he was pretty sure they should. Only he didn't know what to say, or how to say any of it.

He pressed his lips against Remus' bare shoulder and wondered if he should say something.

"Sev'rus," Remus slurred, and there was happiness in his voice, happiness that Severus hadn't heard in what seemed like a long time. He wondered how it could be possible that he had caused that happiness.

"Don't ever scare me like that again," Severus ordered. It was nothing close to what he'd meant to say. "I thought you were dead."

Remus let out a sleepy noise and then muttered, "Thought I was, too. But I'm an assassin. They didn't know that."

They'd never said it in such bald terms before. Severus' eyes widened. It was true. Remus was killing for Dumbledore. What was that but assassination? All the same, Severus didn't like it. He tightened his arms around Remus.

"I'm—glad you came to me," he said.

Remus sighed. "You're safe."

Severus snorted. "You don't really believe that."



"You said we'd stay friends," Remus murmured. "You said you wouldn't leave me." He nuzzled against Severus. "I trust you."

God, if words could kill, those would be the ones, Severus thought. He squeezed his eyes shut tightly and took a long, deep breath. Remus would be the death of him.

Much later, Severus actually got out of bed and made breakfast. Well. He fixed them both Weetabix and toast and pumpkin juice. That was as good as breakfast got, when he was making it. He carried the tray back to bed and studied Remus.



He looked exhausted. His mouth was slightly open as he slept, and there were dark circles under his eyes. He had bruises down his torso, and an inflamed cut across one cheekbone. Severus reached down and brushed Remus' hair out of his face. Severus didn't like the way Dumbledore used him. He didn't like

that Remus felt he had no choice but to go out and be the Order's assassin. Not that Severus had any right to talk. He'd joined the bloody Death Eaters, after all.

Remus snorted and woke up, a confused expression settling on his face. He stared up at Severus, then smiled. "Hi."

"Hi." Severus felt a rush of warmth at that smile on Remus' face. It wasn't the sort of smile you gave your mates. It was a private smile, a smile that acknowledged secrets shared. He leaned down and kissed Remus, his mouth slightly open so their tongues touched. It sent a thrill all the way through him.

"God, Severus," Remus murmured, groping an arm around his waist. "You're so...God!"

For once in his life Severus felt no desire to make a smart aleck comment. He felt as stunned and awed as Remus did. "Yeah," he whispered, and kissed Remus again, liking the soft wetness of Remus' mouth.

After a while he remembered the tray. "Oh. I made breakfast."

Remus detached himself from Severus, seeming reluctant. They ate with shoulders and hips touching, and when Remus was finished he shifted onto his hip to turn towards Severus, watching his face avidly.

"You—you really want this?" Severus smoothed a hand down Remus' side. "I—you're not just being kind?"

Remus gave him a look. "I've been going mad with wanting you. I gave up fighting it the night you took the Mark. I just never thought you might want the same."

"You're so beautiful..." Severus touched his cheek. "How could I not want you?"

Remus looked self-conscious. "I'm not as clever as you are. And I'm utter crap at potions."

Severus snorted. "Good thing you have me, then. Don't be daft, Lupin."

Remus beamed at him. The expression made Severus feel warm all over. He shifted up against Remus again.

"We won't just go back to how we were, right?" Remus paused. "I mean—well, we're...together now?"

Severus smirked. "Yeah, you're my boyfriend now." He kissed Remus' ear and felt him shiver.

"That's—it's a great word."

Severus was inclined to agree, though he would never admit it. He smiled, laid his head against Remus', and closed his eyes.



"I have to go to Dumbledore." Remus' voice was heavy with the dread that was making his stomach roil. Severus looked up from the potions book he was scribbling in. "I've been putting it off long enough." Remus didn't want to tell Dumbledore what had happened. He wasn't entirely sure he even wanted to tell Severus. He'd failed. He'd gone to help the werewolves and had ended up tricked into captivity. And then what he'd done to escape—

He shuddered.

They had been lying in bed all day, Severus reading and snorting and making notes and occasionally making incomprehensible declarations like "The idiot thinks frogwort makes a better float media than glyffinnis paste", while Remus drifted in and out of a doze and occasionally reached out to stroke a fingertip against Severus' naked hip.

Severus didn't speak, but his long fingers were suddenly resting on Remus' hair. It was a gesture unlike anything he had ever made, but it was comforting, possessive, and somehow familiar to Remus. He sighed and turned his head slightly so his cheek grazed Severus' skin.

"It was the tribe of werewolves, in Zimbabwe. They pretended to be in danger of starvation, under persecution. Dumbledore sent me to help them. Neither of us knew it was an elaborate ruse to lure in fresh meat."

Remus felt Severus tense, but he didn't speak.

"I took the bait completely. I went in with those potions you gave me, and food, and clothes. And they jumped me and shoved me in a cage." Remus shivered. "I thought they were going to kill me, but soon I realised they were going to fight me at the full, instead. They taunted me and beat me. I didn't know what was going on half the time." He licked his lips and swallowed. "The sun was so hot. I couldn't breathe properly. I was—I thought I'd die."

Severus turned his head slowly to look at him.

"They said if I fought, I could win my freedom." Remus' voice lowered. "So I fought. Fought them all. There was so much blood." He trailed off, staring blankly across the room.

"You're safe now." Severus' voice was angry, but Remus knew it was what had been done to him, not for what he said. "Stay here."

"I will," Remus murmured. "I want to." He buried his face against Severus' stomach and felt a wiry arm reach around him and pull him close. He would go to Dumbledore soon, and tell him the whole story, but for now, he just wanted Severus to keep him safe.



"I lied to the Dark Lord today."

Remus looked up from his book at the odd triumphant expression on Severus' face. A moment later the words registered and he stared. "You what?"

Severus sat down across from him, his features working as if he were trying to hide his excitement. He was failing badly, if that were the case. "Perhaps 'lie' is an exaggeration, but I hid from him the fact that we slept together."

Remus blinked rapidly. He hadn't even thought about the possible consequences if Voldemort learned of their new relationship. Some Order operative he was. "You—you *lied* to Voldemort."

Severus winced at the name and Remus felt a twinge of guilt. He had to learn to call him the Dark Lord around Severus. He wanted to spare Severus the twinge of pain that flared in the Mark at the sound of Voldemort's name.

"Sorry!" Remus said.

Severus waved a hand. "This is the day I've waited for, Remus. And the Dark Lord handed it to me himself by teaching me to keep his secrets from other Legilimens."

Remus knew suddenly where this was leading. He opened his mouth and stared at Severus.

Severus leaned across the table and gripped Remus' hands. "Remus, I want you to take me to Dumbledore."



"I confess, I was surprised to see Remus again so soon, Mr Snape," Dumbledore said. His voice was mild as he poured tea for them both. "Perhaps you would be so kind as to explain to me why you are here. He merely told me that it was imperative I make time to see you."

Severus watched the arc of tea into the cup and tried not to hate Dumbledore. "I'm here to put right the mistake I made," he said in a low voice. *The mistake I wouldn't have made if you hadn't convinced Remus I couldn't be trusted.* Oh, he didn't know for certain that it was Dumbledore who had made Remus believe Severus was a Death Eater already. But it had been someone Remus had trusted beyond measure, someone who wasn't one of the Marauders. There were few choices.

"What mistake would that be?"

Severus' eyes snapped up to meet Dumbledore's. *You know, you manipulative bastard.* "I entered the Dark Lord's service earlier this year. It is the most idiotic thing I have ever done."

Dumbledore raised his eyebrows and pointedly didn't disagree. "What do you propose, Mr Snape?"

"The Dark Lord is an accomplished Legilimens," Severus said. "Which you might know." He sipped at his tea. "He's been teaching me. He wanted me to be able to lie to a Legilimens. I don't know yet how he plans to use me, but I thought you might be interested in knowing as much as I do know."

"Why should I believe you?" Dumbledore's calm question shocked Severus, though he couldn't say why.

"Because—because I know what I did was stupid. Because I bloody hate him. Because Remus is my friend." He paused. So much more than friend. Remus was his everything, and had been longer than Severus had suspected. "I have to keep him safe. I have to make up for this."

Dumbledore steeped his finger together and studied Severus' face. Severus felt the first probe of Legilimency from the Headmaster, and at first he countered it, showing off his strength. Then he gave way, showing Dumbledore that he was willing to deliberately abase himself if it would aid him in keeping Remus safe.

Fortunately Dumbledore didn't seek out any thoughts—he merely tested the truth of what Severus had told him. He tasted just enough to satisfy his need for knowledge, then nodded and withdrew. "You are perfectly positioned, then, to pass information along to the Order. It will be dangerous."

"I'm not afraid."

"It will be difficult."

"Life is difficult."

Dumbledore nodded. "I shall do everything in my power, of course, to protect you." He reached across his massive desk to clasp Severus' hand. "Thank you, Severus. Welcome back."



"So you're a double agent now," Remus murmured, liking the way Severus leaned against him. He still couldn't believe that only two days ago he'd been hoping he could stay on his feet long enough to reach his friend's house...and now he was here, staying in Severus' flat, pressed together on the sofa, and for the first time not feeling self-conscious about the fact that he got hard whenever he and Severus touched.

"Mm-hmm, regular James Bond," Severus replied. His head was on Remus' shoulder, his fingers twined with Remus'.

Remus laughed. "Well, Bond," he teased, "Would you like to be shaken, or stirred?"

Severus made a noise in his throat and lifted his head to kiss Remus. It was still sort of a surprise to be kissed like that, but Remus didn't have any trouble returning it. He turned his head to meet Severus properly, his mouth open. Their tongues touched, the wet warmth sending waves of heat and desire straight through him.

"God," Remus gasped, and Severus chuckled.

"Not exactly," he murmured. He shifted and got up on his knees, framing Remus' face with his hands. He held

Remus there and kissed him again, with more concentration this time. Remus clutched at Severus, his hands pressing against Severus' sides. This was brilliant.

"How're you feeling?" Severus muttered.

"Like I've never been happy before now," Remus replied, his voice quiet.

"You're so wet," Severus said. "What I meant is how are you feeling physically?"

"Horny," Remus said, and laughed. After a moment, Severus laughed with him.

"Fine, if you won't give me a real answer." He kissed Remus again, his mouth more demanding, giving Remus a taste of passion and drawing out his own at the same time. When Severus pulled away again, Remus was gasping with desire.

"Have you ever done—shagged a bloke?" Remus asked softly.

Severus drew back and glared at him. "What do you think?" he demanded.

Remus considered that for a moment. He wanted the answer to be no. He wanted to be the first Severus ever had. He didn't know if it was likely, though. "I think...no, I think you never have."

Severus didn't reply for a moment that drew out, making Remus nervous. Then Severus shook his head. "Never." His voice was quiet. "What about you?"

"Of course not," Remus said. He shrugged awkwardly. "I always just wanted you."

Severus let out a small moan and captured Remus' mouth again, his hands sliding down to work at Remus' buttons. Remus clutched at Severus' arms, already excited about what they were doing. When Severus' fingers skated down Remus' stomach to the top of his jeans, though, he grasped Severus' hand and held him still.

"Wait! Not here, all right?"

"Bed?" Severus murmured, and Remus nodded. Severus smiled, an expression rare enough that it still sent a thrill through Remus every time he saw it.

They got up and managed to stumble to the bed, still kissing and touching and fumbling each other's clothes off. Remus' heart was pounding in his chest, only partly from arousal. He wondered anxiously what it would be

like, if Severus would want to be in control, or if he would let Remus, if it would feel as good as rubbing their cocks together, if he would be any good at this.

"Merlin, this is brilliant," Severus whispered, stroking his fingers down Remus' bare sides. He nuzzled Remus' cheek and kissed his way down his jaw.

Remus moaned in answer and arched his hips, wanting more pressure for his cock. He hooked a hand behind Severus' neck, rubbing the back of his head.

"Do you, ah, know any spells for, for what's needed?"

Remus smiled at the hesitation in Severus' voice. "Um. Not really. There's—well, there's a spell I know for wanking. It gives you, you know, lubrication." He stifled a giggle at the word.

"That would be good," Severus said. He'd wriggled out of his trousers and had his arousal pressed against Remus' leg.

Remus nodded and fumbled around for his wand; he'd dropped it when Severus' hand closed around his cock. "Right. Um...*lubricatio!*"

Severus stroked him experimentally and Remus let out a groan. "We ought to try this on your arse," Severus pointed out, his hand moving lazily along Remus' shaft.

Remus gasped out the spell again, twitching as he felt something cool and slick inside his arse. That was really weird. "Yeah, that worked—God!"

Severus chuckled, making Remus wonder if he were really as into this as he was acting. But as he peered narrowly at Severus, a hard cock nudged his arse and Severus sucked in his breath. "Fuck, Remus, you—relax a little, will you?"

*Relax?* Remus wanted to say. *How can I relax when you're about to fuck me?* But he just let out a long breath and tried to relax. Severus nudged him again, then swore.

"Hold on."

Remus wondered, inanely, if he should have looked for a book about how to have sex. It seemed like an absurd idea, but they obviously hadn't the slightest idea what they were doing. Then a feather-light touch stroked around his opening and he gasped at the unexpected pleasure that sent through him. "What—what're you—" "Shh." Severus had that tone that said he was concentrating. Remus lifted his head and craned to see Severus

peering at his arse and petting him with a gentle finger. As Remus watched, Severus looked up and saw him watching, then gave him a decidedly wicked little grin. He leaned down and *licked* Remus there, oh God! Remus moaned, so loudly he even startled himself.

Severus lifted his head to smirk at him, then licked again. "All right, we'll relax you this way," he murmured, and kissed Remus' inner thigh. "You really ought to trust me more."

"It's—oh *God*, Severus—not a matter of—unh—trust. It's—it's just—this is different!" Remus writhed and arched, wanting Severus to give him more.

Severus hummed and slid a finger inside, making Remus yelp. Merlin, that was *quite* different. But when he looked at Severus' face, he was floored by the expression of awe that had suffused the other man's sharp features. "This is..." Severus whispered, but he trailed off without finishing and lifted his head to kiss Remus' mouth possessively.



Remus groaned and wrapped an arm around Severus, pulling him closer. As they kissed, Severus worked his finger around inside Remus, sliding it in and out, then wiggling. Something he did hit a spot that had to be magically charged. Remus cried out in shock as a jolt of pleasure gave him a full-body twitch.

"Oh my God, do that again!" he ordered, clutching at Severus.

Severus smirked and worked his finger around again for a minute, then made a noise of delight as Remus twitched and gasped again.

"What the fuck is that?"

"No idea, but I like what it does to you," Severus said, his expression softening into a slight smile. He shifted, stroking Remus' thigh with his free hand. "Can I try again? To do this right, I mean?"

"Yes, yes!" Remus babbled, staring hungrily at Severus.

A moment later Severus' cock was nudging at his arse again, but this time Severus' movements were more insistent. Remus panted and tried to focus on staying relaxed as the blunt head of Severus' cock slowly pushed inside. He felt himself stretching, stretching, until it felt like he was going to split open. He whimpered and



Severus stopped pushing forward, but didn't pull away.

"All right there?" Severus murmured, one hand brushing at Remus' cheek.

Remus told himself to breathe out, breathe in, breathe out. "Yeah, I think," he grunted. "Needed a moment there. Go again."

Severus obeyed, pushing in as he stroked Remus' face. "You're beautiful, you know that?" he muttered. "This is brilliant."

Remus just groaned and panted, but he looked up and caught Severus' gaze. Dear Merlin, Severus was fucking him!

Finally Severus was fully seated inside and Remus was breathing deeply, trying to adjust. They clung to each other for a little, Severus leaning most of his weight on Remus, and kissed. The kissing, more than anything else, helped Remus relax. Soon he was arching against Severus, who groaned, hips jerking. Remus gasped and slid a hand down to clutch at Severus' hip. That was all the encouragement Severus needed to begin thrusting, moving hesitantly at first, then with increasing speed and force as Remus' noises of pleasure grew louder.

Severus tensed suddenly and groaned, and Remus gasped as heat flooded his passage. He stared at Severus, whose eyes were nearly closed; the faintest glitter betrayed that they were fixed on Remus' face. Severus leaned down and kissed him tenderly. All the same, Remus felt a little disappointed. It felt good, but what was he supposed to do now that Severus had come?

Before he could wonder too long, Severus had closed his hand around Remus' cock again and was stroking, fast and hard. "That felt fucking amazing," he told Remus, leaning in to run his tongue along Remus' ear. "I'm definitely going to keep fucking you."

"I—ohh—I want a go, too!" Remus protested.

Severus hummed in his ear and licked it. "Course you do." He twisted his hand and flicked his thumb over the head of Remus' cock, and suddenly Remus felt himself launched over the edge, crying out and spurting over Severus' hand and their stomachs.

After they'd been lying in a heap for a minute or two, Severus sighed and shifted. "Need out," he explained, and then rolled over onto his back, pulling Remus along so he was curled against Severus' side.

"That was bloody wonderful," Remus said.

Severus snorted. "It was horrid. We didn't know what we were doing."

"Well, yeah, but we will," Remus replied. "And that was just the first time. I mean, we'll get to do this forever."

He wondered if he'd said too much when Severus lifted his head slightly to peer at Remus. "You think you're going to want me forever?"

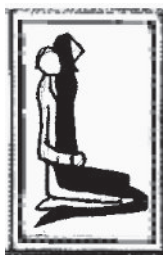
Remus smiled and wrapped his arms firmly around Severus. "Oh, yes."



"I can't do it anymore. It's too much, too much destroyed. I didn't know what it would cost."

Severus stared at Regulus, surprised at the way his friend was acting. "What are you on about, Reg?" he demanded. He was perplexed by the whole day, when it came down to it. Regulus had sent an owl out of the blue, saying he was spending the day in Diagon Alley by himself to buy his seventh year books, and asking Severus to meet him for lunch.

Regulus stared at him. "They wanted me to do it! I knew I had to! Sirius fucking abandoned the family, and I had to do *something* to uphold our honour! I had to make my parents proud!"



"Oh, fucking hell, Reg, you didn't—" But Severus knew, suddenly. He reached out and seized Regulus' left forearm in a tight grip. The younger boy flinched and tried to pull away, but Severus squeezed harder and pushed the sleeve back, staring at the bloodied Mark burned into Regulus' porcelain-pale skin. "You fucking idiot," Severus said.

"I didn't know how hard it would be," Regulus whispered. He pulled his arm out of Severus' grasp and put his sleeve back down, glancing about to make certain no one had seen. "I didn't know how much he would demand."

Severus sighed. "I should have told you," he muttered. "I should have warned you."

"You—" Regulus stared at him. "Did you—"

"Yes." Severus' voice was curt. "It was the stupidest thing I've done in my life."

"But that's better!" Regulus said. "You can help me get out!"

"I *can't* help you, Regulus!" Severus said sharply. "No one can help you. You serve him until you die."

Regulus made a little gasping noise and stared at Severus, his dark eyes burning with desperation. "I can't! Severus, you don't understand—"

Severus leaned forward, his voice a harsh whisper. "I *do* understand!" he exclaimed. "I of all people understand. I hate him, Regulus, hate him more than I have ever hated anything. I despise myself under his rule. I despise what he requires of me. I loathe his followers—those who were once my friends. I revile the depravity to which we have all sunk." He grabbed Regulus' wrist again, in a tight grip, and pulled him so close their faces were mere inches apart. "But *I cannot escape*. I have made my death-bed, and now I must lie in it. As must you."

He sat back, staring at Regulus, willing him to be convinced. If Regulus didn't believe him, if Regulus tried to defect from the Dark Lord's service, Severus would be ordered to kill him. And Severus knew he would obey.

He would commit any sin and sacrifice anyone if it meant staying alive, or keeping Remus alive.



"God, it's bloody awful, Remus! He wants out, but what am I supposed to do? If I help him, they could discover our secret. The Dark Lord would have you killed and he would kill me himself. If I don't help him—blast it, he's one of my friends!" Severus heaved a mighty sigh and clenched his fist around the sheet.

Remus kissed his chest. They were sprawled naked on his bed in Severus' flat. Remus had given up his own flat, because he'd been spending nearly every night at Severus', anyway—they were getting the hang of this shagging thing, though Severus liked to joke that a bit of practice wouldn't hurt.

"I liked Regulus all right," Remus said. "I mean, he was a little toerag around Sirius, but at school, we got on all right."

Not really, Severus thought, but he didn't see any reason to correct Remus on that point. Regulus had never liked Remus much; he'd been jealous of the werewolf's friendship first with his brother and then, Severus sus-

pected, with Severus himself. But if Remus felt kindly towards Regulus...

"I just wish I could think of a way to get him away from the Dark Lord without telling him first. Perhaps we should kidnap him."

Remus laughed, but then lapsed into what Severus knew was a thinking silence. "Well. We'd have to have a safe house to put him in. I could get James' Invisibility Cloak—"

"Ha!" Severus crowed, making Remus jump. "An Invisibility Cloak! No wonder he could sneak around the school like that! Bloody bastard."

Remus made an apologetic noise. "Well, but it is handy," he said. "We could use it to sneak up on Regulus and Stun him. Then we take him to the safe place."

"And what about when the Dark Lord summons him?" Severus said, though he wished to God they could do as Remus said. "The Mark may be only a one-way link as far as Apparating goes—though I'm not sure even about that—but the Dark Lord can certainly use it to cause pain." He rubbed his forearm lightly against Remus' side, trying to brush away the memories of times the Dark Lord had done just that.

"Fuck." Remus sighed,

"Quite."

They lapsed into silence. Severus had been turning the problem over in his head for hours already, and no solution had presented itself. He could go to Dumbledore, he knew, but Regulus didn't want to defect to Dumbledore, he just didn't want to kill anyone else. There was a difference between leaving and betraying your friends. *I did the latter, and look where it's got me*, he thought.

"We'll think of something," Remus whispered finally. "We have to."

Yes, they had to. Otherwise Regulus was going to get himself killed.



"Severus, how good to see you after so long."

Rodolphus Lestrangle lit a cigarette and studied Severus, his gaze challenging. Severus knew Rodolphus found him wanting. He wasn't a pureblood, he hadn't found a pureblood girl to marry, and he refused to be cowed

by the purebloods among the Dark Lord's servants. Severus didn't care what Rodolphus thought of him. He knew he was more than equal to any of the purebloods.

There were even theories, he had read, which argued that wizards of mixed blood were more powerful and more versatile than purebloods. He knew that certainly they were less inbred.

"I come and go at my master's will, not yours, Lestrangle," Severus retorted. "I've been summoned. Tell him I'm here."

"Tell him yourself, Severus," said a thin, cold voice.

Severus stiffened, then went down on his knees, waiting until he was kneeling before he turned. "My lord," he said formally. "I did not realise I was in your presence. I apologise for my impertinence."

Voldemort studied him with a glittering red gaze, his face impassive. There was a silence that lasted long enough for Severus to break into a cold sweat, but Severus pushed his emotions behind a wall of Occlumency and kept his own gaze focused on the Dark Lord's collarbone. It was respectful, but it would give him a moment's warning if Voldemort moved.

Finally Voldemort laughed, high and thin. "Your bold nature pleases me, Severus. Come into my sanctum. We must speak frankly where none may hear."

He turned, and Severus rose smoothly to his feet again. He wanted to send a mocking look at Rodolphus, but he decided that ignoring the man entirely would be a bigger insult. He followed the Dark Lord into his study.

The room was dark, deep red curtains drawn across the windows so that what light did filter in was tinted an ominous blood red. Voldemort strode to his chair and settled gracefully into it, indicating that Severus should kneel at his feet. It was a position Severus particularly hated, which was why, of course, the Dark Lord chose it.

"Severus, there is a traitor among us."

The words made him freeze with fear, but he knew, he knew, the Dark Lord could not be speaking of him. He had worked so very hard to hide his meeting with Dumbledore, to provide the Dark Lord with memories of yet another row between Severus and Remus, about Severus' loyalties. The Dark Lord could *not* know Severus was passing his secrets along to the Order. "My lord, how could anyone betray you?"

Voldemort laughed again. "You speak lies so easily, my Severus," he said. "And yet I see through them to the truth. You would betray me, did you not fear me more than you hate me."

"My lord," Severus said, "I have always been faithful. I will always be faithful."

Voldemort's smile was hard. "I know. That is why you have been chosen, Severus. You are my potions expert. You will brew for me a poison that is excruciatingly painful and slow-acting—and irreversible."

Severus swallowed his horror. "My lord, I do not know if such a thing even exists. There are antidotes to every poison."

"You will invent one, Severus. One that cannot be broken. One that cannot be defeated."

"What...what if I am not able, my lord?" Severus worked to inject fear into his voice.

"You will not fail." Voldemort's tone said very clearly what would happen if he did.

Severus bowed his head. "My lord, may I know for whom this poison is intended?"

"No, you have no need of that knowledge."

"As my lord commands." Fuck.

"You will bring me the poison in two weeks' time. Until then you will not be summoned."

"Yes, my lord." Severus waited several heartbeats, then stood, keeping his head bowed and his torso inclined. "I will attend you in two weeks."

Voldemort made a gesture of dismissal, and Severus left quickly. He closed the door to the sanctum and was unsurprised to feel a hex sting past him. He dodged and sent one back, pleased to hear Rodolphus swear.

"You think you're so much better than the rest of us, Snape," he snarled. "You aren't even fit to lick the Dark Lord's arse."

"I would not speak of the Dark Lord's arse, if I were you," Severus replied, and sent another hex back at him.

"Mudblood filth!"

Severus set up a shield and decided to ignore Rodolphus' raging. He was impassive as his parents

were insulted, his clothing was insulted, his nose and hair were mocked. It wasn't until Rodolphus exclaimed, "Why should someone such as you be honoured with Black's execution?"

A chill ran through Severus' entire body. "Black?" No matter how much Severus would enjoy it, Remus wouldn't like it if he killed his best friend.

"You get to execute the traitor."

No. Not Sirius. *Regulus*. Of course. Severus clenched his jaw. "He's only a boy," he said.

"He's a traitor!" Rodolphus cried. "And he will be killed like a dog!"

Severus raised an eyebrow and gazed impassively at Rodolphus. The staring match went on for several minutes before Rodolphus finally lowered his gaze.

"He will be killed as I see fit," Severus said then. He hoped his voice was cold enough, haughty enough. He hoped Rodolphus would forget his brief slip.



Remus was early; the Order meeting was set to begin in twenty minutes. He had waved to the Headmaster's brother and climbed the stairs in the Hog's Head, heading for the room where they always met. He had just reached the top of the stairs when he was seized from behind and dragged out of the passageway. He struggled, but didn't have time to cry out. The hands on his shoulders were strong, biting into his skin.

He was shoved against the wall, his cheek pressed against it, a lean body pushing at his back. Hot breath fluttered across his cheek.

Then the person behind him chuckled.

"You should be more alert," Severus murmured, his lips just brushing Remus' cheek. "I could've been anyone grabbing you like that."

"Prat!" Remus gasped. His heart was still pounding from the shock, and he could feel the little pings and surges of adrenaline in his blood.

"Slytherin." He could hear the smirk in Severus' voice, and he felt himself getting hard. God, it took so little these days, just a look or a word from Severus and his body was raging with want.

He pressed back against Severus, unsurprised to feel his lover's cock hard against his arse. "You'd better be a Slytherin who takes what he wants," Remus panted, twisting an arm out of Severus' grip so he could grope his arse.

That got a tensing and a slight moan. Remus smiled to himself and ground his arse against Severus' groin. "You want me, don't you?" he asked, only slightly breathless.

"You know I do," Severus bit out.

"Then take what you want," Remus urged.

Severus groaned softly and rubbed his trouser-clad cock against Remus' arse, his fingers already working at the zip of Remus' jeans. "Want you," he murmured. "Need you."

"Yes, yes, Severus," Remus panted. He knew it was foolish, if Severus hadn't locked the door—they could be caught! But he needed Severus, needed to be reminded that this was real, that what they had wasn't going to fade away. The danger just added to the desire.

The quick, frantic nature of the fuck didn't detract from the pleasure at all.

Afterwards, as Severus slumped against his back, trapping him, Remus tilted his head to kiss Severus' neck. "What are you doing here?" he murmured.

"Just got done meeting with Dumbledore," Severus replied, and darted to capture Remus' mouth with his own. After a minute he added, "He doesn't want the others to know about me, yet."

"S'a good idea," Remus muttered. "Don't know who the spy is."

Severus hummed and kissed Remus again.

"Black will kill us," he whispered. "If he ever finds out about this."

Remus felt a cold chill at the first words, and even after Severus had elaborated, he wondered why Severus had moved on from the subject of the spy to the subject of Sirius. "It's not his business, is it?" he retorted. "Whoever I want to be with—"



"Isn't going to be a Death Eater and a 'greasy git' like me," Severus interrupted, "and probably *oughtn't* be a bloke at all, if you really want Black's approval."



"I don't tell him who he can go out with," Remus snapped. "Shut up, Severus! This isn't about him, it's about you and me."

"Then you'd tell him, if I demanded it?"

"Tell him? Why the fuck would I tell him?" Remus stared at him. "He already doesn't trust me as much as he used to! I can't tell him I'm shagging a Death Eater!"

Severus snorted. "Exactly."

Remus' back turned cold as Severus pulled away and did up his zip. Remus started to turn, frowning, but Severus pushed him away. There was a tense moment of silence, then Severus left, the quiet snick of the door behind him echoing more in Remus' mind than any slam.



"I'm sorry."

Severus didn't look up. He wasn't really interested in Remus' apologies right now, even if they were well-deserved. He wanted to read his book and pretend he hadn't just given the Dark Lord the poison that would kill Regulus Black. He was murdering his friend, and because of the Dark Lord's Legilimency and the dangerous nature of Severus' position, he didn't dare do anything to keep Regulus alive.

"I know I was an ass." Remus shifted from one foot to the other. "I shouldn't have—I'll tell Sirius if you want."

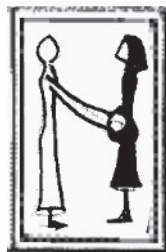
Severus scowled at his book. Of course Remus wouldn't tell Black. He'd be a fool to tell Black, and they both knew it. It just rankled that they had to keep quiet about this. Not that he really wanted to tell people he was queer, but it would be so bloody satisfying to see the look on Black's face when Remus told him.

"Look, I *will*. I'll Floo him and tell him now."

But he wouldn't. They both knew he wouldn't. Severus sighed. "Shut up, Remus. Just—look, just sit down and...and...sit down."

Remus sank down slowly, his gaze fixed on Severus' face. Severus steadfastly refused to look up, though he felt his cheeks get hot. Finally he snapped, "What?"

"Are you all right?" Remus asked.



"I just want to read," Severus said irritably.

"All right, sorry." Remus shifted so he was leaning back in the sofa, staring across the room. Severus pretended to read, but he was all too aware of Remus next to him. He knew when Remus drew in a deep breath and closed his eyes.

He wanted a very strong drink. He thought about getting out the Firewhiskey he knew was in the cabinet. He thought about brewing himself a Dreamless Sleep potion and just going to bed. Instead he shifted and closed his book.

"Regulus—" he began, and cleared his throat. "The Dark Lord is going to kill Regulus. I can't stop it."

Remus didn't answer at first, and for a moment Severus wondered if he'd gone to sleep. Then he breathed, "Oh, Severus." He didn't open his eyes, but he did fumble his hand over until his fingers closed on Severus'. It made Severus feel absurdly grateful, that Remus wasn't staring at him.

"I'm so tired of this war. I'm tired of the whole bloody thing. I hate the Dark Lord. I hate most of my old friends. I hate your friends, too. I just—I just want to leave the country and never come back."

Remus turned and opened his eyes just long enough to wrap his arms around Severus. It didn't fix anything, but it made it just a tiny bit more bearable.



Remus and Severus were sitting on the sofa, reading, when the distress call came. The huge silvery stallion galloped through the wall, reared, and whinnied shrilly. A barrage of images hit Remus—approaching figures, white masks, flashes of hexlight—and Gideon was screaming, screaming, he'd been hit! Remus ducked away and yelped, his book dropping forgotten to the floor.

At the same time Severus hissed and clutched at his arm. "I'm Summoned."

Their eyes met. "The Prewetts," Remus said. "I have to go."

Severus' lips quirked in a bitter smile. "See you on the battlefield," he murmured, only half joking. They kissed briefly, then pulled away and Disapparated, each to his side.

Remus arrived at the battle and immediately stumbled over a body. He glanced down, saw the Death Eater mask, and told himself Severus hadn't had time to be killed yet. He looked around; he was standing in an alley of some English village, that was all he could tell.

"Lupin!" He glanced around and saw Dedalus Diggle gesturing frantically from behind a skip. Remus ran over, sucking in a breath as a hex sizzled past his ear.

"What happened?" he demanded.

Dedalus shook his head. "I don't know any more than you. The Patronus message called me here and the Death Eaters are entrenched."

"Where's the rest of the Order?"

Dedalus shrugged. There was the *Crack!* of someone Apparating, Remus spun in a circle, scanning the area. Another hex flew, and he aimed a curse blazing in the direction, hoping it wasn't Severus he was firing at.

There was an explosion of swearing and Remus relaxed; *That* didn't sound like Severus, at least. Someone else swore, and then James ducked behind the tip with them. "What the fuck's going on?" he demanded. "Where are the Prewetts?" he asked.

Remus shrugged. "We got here, there were bodies all over. The Death Eaters are entrenched and firing hexes. No idea where the Prewetts are."

"Fuck." James looked around, wand raised. "Okay. Moony—you can find the Prewetts. Diggle and I will hold the Skullheads off while you do that, keep you from getting your arse hexed."

Remus nodded and did a locating spell, though he was relying as much on his preternatural senses as he was magic. He studied each body, making sure they were Death Eaters. He could see three from where he was.

"All right. Cover me." He dashed out from behind the skip and headed down the street in the direction he felt his spell tugging him. A few stray hexes whizzed past him but were deflected by his shield. Then he heard James firing them back. He grinned; James was good at countering curses.

He found Gideon Prewett at the mouth of the street. Remus stared at him, feeling bile rise in his throat. "Fuck," he whispered, "fuck." He dropped to his knees, checking for a pulse. Nothing. He made a noise and got up again,

scanning the area for Fabian.

He stumbled over another Death Eater and went sprawling headlong on the cobblestones, skinning his palms. The Death Eater didn't react. Another dead one, then. Remus got to his hands and knees, then pushed himself back to his feet. *Fabian. Where's Fabian?*

The street down here was thick with smoke; he wondered if the battle had set something on fire. He stumbled around a corner and found Fabian sitting propped against a wall. A fifth Death Eater was crumpled near Fabian's feet in a pool of blood. Remus knelt and reached up to check Fabian. A moment later a wand was digging into his throat.

"I've taken five of your mates," Fabian rasped. "What makes you think you'll finish me?"

Remus cleared his throat. "Fabe," he murmured, holding his hands at his side. "Fabian, it's Remus."

"Lupin?" Fabian coughed and blood trickled from his full lips. Remus watched in sick fascination as it spilled down his chin.

"What happened, Fabian?"

"Followed them here...knew they were out to cause trouble..." He coughed again. "Gid said we should stop them." His eyes opened. "Where's Gideon? I lost him in the chase."

Remus looked down at the gaping wound across Fabian's stomach and swallowed hard. "He's with James and Dedalus. He—he sent me to find you."

He tried to summon enough of a happy thought to conjure his Patronus. The silvery wolf loped off in the way he had come. They wouldn't get here in time, Remus thought.

"You're hurt," he murmured. "Let me—I know a few Healing spells. I..." But he didn't know how to deal with anything this serious. If he were injured like this, his body would send him into unconsciousness and heal itself. He didn't know how to help someone else injured this badly.

Fabian shook his head. "I'm all right, Remus. Tell Dumbledore—five Death Eaters won't torture...any more Muggles."

"Fabian—"

"I'm all right. I'm all right." Fabian breathed out slowly and didn't breathe in again. His head slid slowly to one side. Remus caught him, not caring that he was getting his friend's blood all over him. Shaking with anger and grief, he cradled Fabian's body until the others arrived.



Severus, for obvious reasons, didn't go to Gideon and Fabian's funeral. He decided to spend the afternoon brewing in the lab the Dark Lord had provided at headquarters, instead. He missed the way Regulus used to interrupt his brewing with constant questions about why he was doing things differently to how the books said it should be. He missed the way Lucius used to talk about things other than his beautiful, conceited wife and the impending birth of what would undoubtedly be a beautiful, conceited baby.

When he arrived at Death Eater headquarters, Rodolphus, Rabastan, Bellatrix, and Antonin were toasting each other with what was probably very expensive champagne. Roddy was smoking a thick, reeking cigar, leaning back in his chair. Rabastan, the bright, clever one with an emotive face, was telling a story to an attentive audience.

"And then—" He gestured as if he were brandishing a wand.—"the idiot tried to hit me with a Confundus! As if that would stop the Cruciatus I'd already placed on him!" He cackled, his laughter a lower-pitched imitation of the Dark Lord's.

"What happened then?" Antonin asked. "I didn't see. I was too busy pulling his brother's guts out."

Severus' stomach turned. He wasn't surprised they had been involved in the battle with the Prewetts, but he didn't want to hear about it. His own Summons had called him back to help heal the ones who had been injured in the battle.

"My impression was that the Prewetts gave a decent accounting for themselves," he said, his tone snide. He had always enjoyed provoking the Lestranges, though he was aware that there were people who thought him mad for that.

"A decent accounting?" Bellatrix repeated, her voice falsely childish. "Where did you hear that, ickle Severus?"

He clenched his jaw, but maintained his smirk. "I had several injured wizards to patch up, though I'm told you four were able to seek treatment at St Mungo's. Something about a potion experiment that reportedly blew up in your faces?" He shook his head. "Tsk. Are you afraid to subject yourselves to my tender mercies?"

"We're just rich enough to bribe the Healers we want," Lucius said, coming in and accepting a glass of champagne from Rabastan. "Pureblooded and rich, Severus—everything you aren't."

"Ah, but I'm powerful and clever, Lucius, and you'll never be able to claim those two things," Severus retorted. There was a burst of laughter at that. All the same, he was tired of the banter already. He was tired of the Death Eaters, tired of all of it.

He waved off the glass Rabastan held out towards him. "I am here to do our Lord's work," he said, gently emphasizing the last word. "I prefer to brew with a clear head."

"I don't think ickle Severus likes us any more, brothers," Bellatrix said, still in her ridiculous mock-childish voice.

"What makes you think I ever did?" Severus said coolly. He turned and stalked away.



"Ahh, Severus, very good."

He looked up from his cauldron in startlement. As he frequently did, he had become so wrapped up in his brewing that he had failed to notice when the door to his laboratory opened. A moment later, he dropped to his knees.

"My Lord!"

An ungentle hand rested on his head, the fingers curling around his skull until he felt as if the Dark Lord were trying to lift the top of the bone off like a lid. "Rise, my servant. I am pleased with you."

Severus stood, watching Voldemort warily and wondering what he had done to please him. "It warms my heart to hear that, my Lord."

Voldemort chuckled, a sound like the crawling of fingernails across blackboard. "I am quite certain it does. Severus, I have need of a spy."

His eyebrows went up. "My Lord." They'd thought he already had one.

"Of course I already have one, Severus." Voldemort looked amused. "I wish to have two spies. You will not know the identity of the other spy. I wish you to go to Dumbledore and apply for a teaching position."

*Oh God. I hate children.* Severus blinked but bowed his head slightly. "My Lord, will he not suspect me? You know Lupin is aware of my loyalties."

Voldemort chuckled again. "Of course he will suspect you. That is the beauty of my plan, Severus. You will go to him, pretending to be repentant about your decisions. You will offer to give him information, to spill all my secrets to help him defeat me. Then you will tell him everything—everything that I wish him to know."

Severus nodded, letting realisation dawn on his face. "Then he would think me *his* spy, while in reality I am your spy. It is pure genius, my lord." And ideal, though he pushed his triumph behind a thick wall of Occluding.

"Yes, of course." Voldemort smiled, which was a ghastly sight. "You are clever and inventive. I am certain you are the best choice for this task. Not to mention you will be able to use your friendship with that mutt of a werewolf as your reason for the change in loyalties."

Severus nodded quickly. "Of course. They are such naïve fools, they will believe it."

"Ah, Severus, you are truly one of my most valuable children. Despite your resentment, you serve me so faithfully, so diligently. It is a shame you are so wilful in your emotions. I could make so much of you."

Severus bowed his head, letting his resentment come to the forefront. "Forgive me, my Lord," he murmured.

"You don't mean that." Voldemort's voice was indulgent. "It so amuses me to watch you hate me. Some day, though, you will realise that hatred is a much more effective tool than love."

"I know that already, my Lord," Severus lied.

Voldemort laughed.

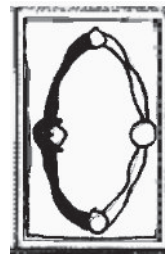


"You heard everything?" Dumbledore held Severus' gaze, perhaps trying to gauge how well he could trust a man who could, when suitably motivated, lie even to the Headmaster.

Severus nodded. "Are we going to be fighting this bloody war until the brat grows up?" he asked.

Dumbledore shook his head. "I don't know, Severus. I was poorly prepared for this, though I saw the hunger in Tom." He sighed. "Born as the seventh month dies... could it be one of ours? The Longbottoms and the Potters are both expecting a child this summer." He was silent a moment. "I think, Severus, that there are parts of this prophecy that Tom must not hear. We shall tell him only this: The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches ... Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies..." He steepled his fingers and nodded slowly. "It will be enough to force Tom's hand. He will take quick action, and he will mark the child as his nemesis."

Severus stared. "Are you mad? Tell Vo—fuck—the Dark Lord who his nemesis is? Would we rather keep the person as a secret weapon?"



Dumbledore chuckled. "Ah, Severus. You alone among all my acquaintances are never afraid to speak your mind to me. It is always refreshing. But you see, Tom must identify this child for us. The child will need preparing, cultivating, if you will."

"What if he just kills him?" Severus asked flatly.

"I think he would rather corrupt him, if possible," Dumbledore said. "Though it is a valid question."

Severus frowned. "It didn't actually say that the chosen one was about to be born, did it? It just said that he is approaching. What if there's already someone who was born at the end of July whose family has defied the Dark Lord?"

Dumbledore raised his eyebrows. "Can you think of anyone who has already defied Tom three times?" he asked.

"Well, not just now, but that doesn't mean it isn't possible!"

Dumbledore nodded slowly. "It is a possibility we must consider. Thank you, Severus. I would ask you to return to Tom quickly. Tell him you were not offered a position, but that you did overhear something that is much more valuable. Tell him I have invited you to apply for the Defence position again next year, when you have gained more experience."

Severus nodded.



"Horace has been making noises about retirement, particularly since this business with Tom has grown more serious. He was Tom's Head of House, you realise. He feels it keenly."

Severus nodded again.

"I shall hire you next year, Severus, to teach potions. Belby has been impressed with your work, and I know you will do admirably."

"You know I don't want to teach at all," Severus pointed out. "I bloody hate children."

"Yes, yes, but you are brilliant at your craft," Dumbledore said, beaming. "What an honour, to impart some of that brilliance on to the next generation."

Severus was barely older than some of that 'next generation', but he decided not to argue further. He merely nodded and left.



"They've had a boy!" Remus looked up from his letter and grinned at Severus, who looked sour.

"Wonderful, Potter is reproducing. I shudder to think what a horrid child it will turn out to be."

"Oh bosh, he'll have Lily for a mother, you can't think she'll let him get away with anything."

Severus tilted his head to one side. "You may have a small point. But the poor thing will probably be ugly."

Remus shook his head. "You're always determined to look on the bright side, aren't you?" he teased. "Look, I'm going to stop round to visit after work, so don't wait tea, all right?"

Severus gave him an appalled look. "As long as you don't insist I accompany you."

"I wouldn't dream of it. You might've had Advanced Potions with Lily, but I know you never considered her a friend."

Severus shrugged. "Anyone who thought so highly of Potter..."

"What about me? James is my mate." Remus lifted an eyebrow in challenge.

"Yes, well, you're daft, but I can understand a Dark Creature being desperate for friends. Evans was pretty, clever, and popular. Why should she care whether Potter liked her or not?"

Remus shook his head. "I don't know whether to be more insulted or amused," he remarked. He finished his toast and left for work.



"Isn't he the most darling thing?" Lily said, smoothing her hand over the head of thick, wild black hair.

"He looks a bit too like James to be handsome," Remus joked.

Lily looked up, eyes flashing. "Remus Lupin, you—oh. You're teasing."

"Of course I am. He's lovely. And probably the closest I'll ever have to having a son, myself." Remus smiled. "May I hold him?"

Lily placed baby Harry carefully in Remus' arms. "Don't give up hope, Remus. I'm sure you'll meet a nice girl, someday. Someone who won't care about your furry little problem. After all, it doesn't bother me."

"Yes, but you had the poor judgment to marry James," Remus said, smiling. He cradled Harry carefully. "He feels so fragile." He wasn't a big baby, and for someone like Remus, who had to be hyperaware of his own strength, it was intimidating. It seemed absurd that the weight of the prophecy could be hung on the shoulders of this tiny person. He'd been searching the Hogwarts rolls for Dumbledore, looking for adults born near the end of July or the beginning of August, but tracking them down and learning whether they'd ever defied Voldemort was a time-consuming task.

"Yes, but he's a magic baby, so of course he isn't as fragile as he seems."

Remus dragged his attention back to the conversation. "How do you know?" he asked. "Couldn't he be a Squib?"

"Bite your tongue," Lily ordered. "Of course he won't be." She frowned. "Not that I would love him any less if he were," she said. "But I...oh, I just know. He isn't a Squib. I hope his brothers and sisters all turn out as perfect and wonderful as he is."

"Just make sure you teach him to hate bullies," Remus said, smiling down at Harry. "We'd all have been better off if James had learned that."

"Yes," Lily said, her voice absent. "Remus, I hope it won't hurt your feelings...James is insisting on Sirius for Harry's

godfather. But I promise," she added hastily, "that when little Gloria or David is born, you'll be the next."

Remus shrugged. It didn't surprise him, nor did it upset him. "Sirius and James have always been like brothers," he said. "I'm not bothered."

"Oh good." Lily gave him a relieved smile. "I should hate to think we'd offended you. Then again, you're too sensible to take offence at such a thing."

Too sensible, Remus thought in amusement later, when Severus' tongue was in his mouth and Severus' body pressed him against the wall of the bedroom. He wasn't too sensible for anything. He was just used to being shunted off to the side. It didn't bother him anymore.



"Dumbledore's accepted me as the Potions Master at Hogwarts," Severus said. He dragged a kitchen chair over to the fire and spread his cloak over it to dry.

Turning from the soup he had simmering on the cooktop, Remus laughed. "Don't sound so glum, Severus! You're brilliant at Potions."

"I hate children."

"Point."

"But the Dark Lord will be pleased. He will have a spy inside the school."

Remus nodded.

Severus sighed. "I hate this," he confessed. "I am so bloody tired of always pretending, always acting like someone I'm not. The only time I can be real is when I'm with you."

Remus felt a pang of sympathy. "I wish I could help," he said. He dished out a bowl of soup for each of them and carried them to the table. Then he went and wrapped his arms around Severus, ignoring the fact that he was cold.

Severus clung to him, resting his head on Remus' shoulder. "And now I won't even have that anymore. I have to move out."

"What?"

"I'll be teaching at Hogwarts," Severus reminded him. "The teachers all live at the school."

"Dumbledore won't make some sort of allowance for us?" Remus asked.



"What us? There is no us, as far as Dumbledore is concerned." Severus sighed. "Unless you want to tell him."

Remus swallowed. He didn't think people needed to know their business. "Do you think he'll make exceptions for us?"

"Probably not."

Remus sighed and kissed Severus' ear. "I wish...I wish this war was over. I wish we could be together without the war and the secrecy getting in the way."

"Dumbledore's pretty certain the prophecy is talking about either the Potter baby or the Longbottom baby." Severus sighed. "Another fifteen or twenty years of this, Merlin."

"He still has me searching the Hogwarts rolls for adults," Remus said. "Perhaps I'll find someone."

"Where are you now?" Severus asked dryly. He pulled away, the desperate look faded from his eyes again.

"Nineteen-thirty-four," Remus sighed.

Severus snickered. "When was Moody born?"

"April," Remus replied, "and several years earlier."

"Ah," Severus said in mock regret. He sat at the table across from Remus. "I'm going to miss this. I'll visit every weekend that I can. Well, every weekend I'm not supervising detentions." He smirked.

"Detentions? Severus—"

"I intend to have their fear if I cannot have their respect."

"Why wouldn't you have their respect? You're a teacher!"

"I'm a teacher who was at school with some of them. I'm a teacher who, if you'll recall, was de-pantsed in front of more than half the school a mere four years ago." Severus' eyes glittered.

"Five," Remus corrected. "It was five."

"Whatever it was, some of them saw that!" Severus snapped. "And the first time I hear anything about it will be the last."

Remus sighed. "You know, you catch more billywigs with honey than vinegar."

"Yes, well, spraying a tincture of luminous lemongrass and wormwood catches more billywigs than either," Severus retorted.

Remus rolled his eyes and continued eating.



Severus loathed children. He loathed the small simpering children who arrived as first years, and he loathed the smug seventh years who left Hogwarts. He detested the swotty ones who sucked up and the lazy ones who made no attempt to learn.

In short, he hated his job.

Day in, day out, he was forced to attempt to drum potions knowledge into minds that were simply nonreceptive. He took little satisfaction from the job. He was more skilled as a researcher than as a teacher. Why had the Dark Lord ever thought he would be a good person to put into position at the school?

Because you can bloody lie to anyone, he reminded himself. He had the mental control to hide his thoughts and emotions from Dumbledore as well as from Voldemort—and yet Remus could undo him with a mere glance or touch.

He sighed and finished marking the last of the third-year papers, then stood up and stalked to the window of the staff room. He had taken to sitting in the staff room to mark papers simply because he was lonely. When had that ever happened? He gazed at the distant lights of Hogsmeade, wondering if one of those lights he saw was Remus'. He'd grown soft, living with Remus like that. He'd grown accustomed to having someone else around, even if they were working in separate rooms for hours at a time.

The staff room door opened and Minerva walked in. She seemed unsurprised to see him there. "Severus, Professor Galli is requesting a bit of assistance with the Slytherins. I told him I would find you."

"He's Head of House. Can't he manage them?" Of course he couldn't manage them. Someone who taught Muggle Studies would never be respected by the Slytherins, even if he had been a Slytherin Prefect during his own days at Hogwarts.

"Severus, please," Minerva said. "You know you handle them better than he does."

"They're more afraid of me, you mean," Severus muttered, but he left his papers and followed her down to the dungeons.

Galli was a small, dark-haired man with bright eyes and a talent for annoying Severus. Perhaps it was merely because Severus felt Galli unfit to be Head of House. "Ah, Professor Snape! I'm very glad to see you! The Slytherins have, ah, blocked me from the common room."

Severus snorted and stalked past Galli, raising his wand. "Abritaportus," he ordered, flicking the wand in a shooing motion.

The door swung open and Severus glided into the common room. Crowds of Slytherins, who had undoubtedly been snickering only moments before, watching him warily.

"Ten points to Slytherin for creative use of a blocking spell," Severus announced. "And a week of detention for all of you unless you tell me whose idea this was."

Slytherin was truly a beautiful house, Severus thought, as every student took a step away from Travis Avery, who glared at his housemates. "Avery!" he barked. "Detention for a week. Be in my office after dinner tomorrow." He moved closer, using the gliding gait he had been perfecting. He'd discovered it intimidated people. "Your brother," he murmured, "would be disappointed."



He pulled away, satisfied by the glimmer of fear that produced in Avery's eyes. He turned and stalked out, ignoring Galli entirely and giving McGonagall a curt nod.

He would be Head of House before he was twenty-five, he vowed.



"Meeting with Fenrir Greyback at the Full Moon was a spectacularly bad idea," Severus said. He dabbed the healing ointments on with a careful hand, despite the way his voice was shaking with fury. "I don't care what Dumbledore says about the full moon project, Greyback is a Death Eater and a pack leader! You were an idiot!"

Remus sighed. "It's just a broken arm. It could be worse."

"Just a broken arm! It's an arm that's broken in four bloody places!" Severus' voice rose in pitch as well as

volume. "You're bloody lucky it wasn't your neck, you fucking idiot! What would I have done if he'd killed you?"

"I'm sorry." Remus closed his eyes. "I should have told Dumbledore I couldn't, this moon. I just..." The Marauders had wanted to run with him, one last time before James took his family into hiding. Remus had convinced them it would be a bad idea. He said they never knew who might be watching him, to use him to get to them.

Instead of running with his friends, he'd gone to meet with Greyback. Dumbledore had hoped Remus would be able to earn a place among Greyback's pack so the Order would have two spies within Voldemort's ranks. What happened wasn't exactly as they had planned..



"What exactly is it yer lookin' for here, lad? Acceptance? Absolution? There's neither here for you. Killer. Traitor. We know what you've done. You kill your own kind." Greyback glanced over Remus' shoulder, and before he could turn, he'd been seized by two burly werewolves.

"Tonight, your own kind will bring justice on you."

A flash of heat went through him. It was near enough to moonrise that he could feel his skin shivering. They were going to kill him! He struggled and used a nonverbal spell to slick their hands, breaking their grip on him. He pulled away and darted off, the pack behind him. They were still wearing their human bodies, but their voices were howls and yips and barks.

"Run, laddie!" Greyback roared, laughing as he chased Remus. "Run! We'll find you!"

He did run, twisting and turning through the underbrush. He thought he could hear water over the noise of pursuit, but he didn't care—if he came to a river, he would levitate himself across and leave the werewolves behind. It was too bad he'd never Apparated while in motion—if he'd had practice, he might have been able to Apparate away. But he didn't dare stop running, or they would be on him.

Suddenly his pursuers dropped back. He glanced over his shoulder, wondering why. They were watching him, ranged in a half circle behind him. He turned again and nearly screamed aloud. An Acromantula the size of the Knight Bus was poised above him, drawn perhaps by their shouts.

"Oh, God, I'm going to die," Remus muttered. He hexed the giant spider and darted away, hoping it would be too stunned to cast web after him. The werewolves were another matter. One of them caught his shoulder as he passed.

Remus spun, snarling, and slammed the man into a rock outcropping. A shudder rippled through his body and he groaned. The others doubled over, but their gazes were on him. He let out a howl as his body twisted against his will. His heart was slamming against his ribs. He knew as soon as they were transformed, they would be on him—and five to one, there was no question but that he would lose.

He only had one choice. In the last moments before the insanity overwhelmed him, he Apparated. He was aware of a sensation of falling, falling, and then horrific pain.

"I've already told Dumbledore you won't be doing any more raids," Severus said. "Your ankle is broken, too, though you probably didn't notice that after the arm."

Remus sighed. "It was—there was a...I fell," he said finally, giving up on trying to remember anything after the pain. "Trying to get away from them."

"You must have actually got away from them, or you wouldn't be alive right now," Severus said. "What happened, Remus?"

"Greyback knew. He knew I was the assassin." Remus sighed and let his eyes close. The pain potions were kicking in now, spreading their haze across his mind and body. "I'm sorry, Sev'rus."

Severus' hand stilled, then rested in Remus' hair. "You're bloody lucky I'm a spy. That's the only way I found you. Greyback came to the Dark Lord, boasting that he'd found and killed a rogue wolf. He described you, and I knew..." He sighed. "I reported it to Dumbledore, and Dumbledore's had us out searching for the past two days. I know the general territory Greyback's pack keeps, though, so I found you first."

"He told the others about you?" Remus asked, his eyes opening in alarm.

"They might as well know," Severus said. "The Dark Lord set me as a spy on Dumbledore. I told him I had been accepted as a double-agent into the Order. The spy, whomever it is, won't be able to convince the Dark Lord I am doing anything other than his bidding."



That sent Remus' mind jumping in another unpleasant direction. The spy. They'd known of the spy for nearly a year now, but so far Dumbledore had been unable to identify him—or her. Severus didn't know the identity of the spy, but he said that wasn't unusual; the Dark Lord was notoriously paranoid.

Remus' eyelids felt too heavy to open them again. "You stay with me?" he slurred.

Severus' hand found his hair again. "Of course I will, idiot."



The farewells had all been said. The Potters were gone, as if they had never existed. Sirius was in hiding. Remus was trying to convince himself that life would go on as usual instead of falling apart around them. The Fidelius felt like a defeat, somehow. It felt as though the Order had failed entirely, because they could not protect something that was good and precious and right. He went to work every morning as usual, missing Severus and missing Sirius and missing the Potters and wondering where Peter was these days. Nothing was normal.

He managed to spend part of the weekend with Severus, at least. They'd spent hours just lying in bed, alternating between shagging and talking. Severus said Voldemort had big plans for Halloween, so he wouldn't be able to come back the following weekend.

"That's all right, I'll just dress up as a werewolf and scare away any children here to do mischief," Remus joked.

Severus laughed and kissed him and went back to the school.



The cottage door crashed open, rattling the windows. "Remus!" Severus' voice was desperate. "Remus! God! Where are you?"

Remus set his book aside and stood up. "Here, in the sitting room," he called, shuffling in his socks towards the door.

Severus burst in, his Death Eater robes billowing around him, and threw himself on Remus. "Thank God you're all right!" he gasped, squeezing Remus tightly.

Bewildered, Remus hugged him back. "Severus, what's—

"I can't stay," Severus panted. "I shouldn't have left my lord's side. He has plans for multiple attacks on the Order members tonight. He also says he knows where the Potters are. Your friend Black betrayed them! Find Dumbledore, tell him he has to warn them somehow."

"But—"

Too late. Severus Disappeared.

Remus shoved his boots on and flung a cloak around his shoulders, then rushed up to the castle. He was strong and fit, and his stamina was better than a human's, but all the same he was gasping and staggering by the time he reached the school. He stumbled into the Entrance Hall and nearly collided with Hagrid.

"Dumbledore! I need Dumbledore!"

Hagrid stared at him for a moment, then said, "He's in the feast with the children. I'll take yeh—"

"No! Go in and get him! I can't be seen here."

He bent at the waist and propped one hand against the wall, panting for breath, as he waited for the Headmaster to appear. It seemed like ages before the door creaked open and Dumbledore's voice reached his ears.

"Remus, my boy, are you all right?"

"Voldemort is going after Lily and James!" Remus gasped. "Severus says he knows where they are." A voice in his heart was wailing that Sirius couldn't have betrayed them, but there would be time for that later. Now he needed to save his friends.

"No..." Dumbledore whispered. A look of distress crossed his face. "I don't know where they are, Remus. I can only send an owl."

"Patronuses?" Remus gasped. "Will a Patronus work?"

Dumbledore nodded and flicked his wand, sending a silvery phoenix shooting away from them. Then he seized Remus' arm and hustled him towards the Headmaster's office. "Come, we'll send an owl and wait for news." Then he paused. "Wait. Hagrid!"

The half-giant hadn't got far. He turned and hastened back to them. "Yes, Headmaster?"

"Tell Minerva I should like for her to go to Lily's sister. She'll know what I mean."

Remus stared from one to the other, confused. Lily's sister was a right pill. Why would Dumbledore want to send someone to her.

Dumbledore glanced at Remus. "She may be in danger," he explained. "Come."



The night went slowly, so slowly. Remus paced the edges of the office, then sat long enough to drink a few sips of tea, only to jump up and pace again. Dumbledore stood at the window, staring out pensively. He broke the silence only once, to explain he could not leave the school defenceless.

"You don't know where they are, anyway," Remus pointed out.

"That is true, but I suspect," Dumbledore said.

As the eastern sky was paling, he summoned Hagrid to his office.

"Go to Godric's Hollow," he said. "Tell me what you find there."

Remus would have followed, but Dumbledore shook his head. "Severus will need you, Remus," he murmured. "I think this has been a very difficult night."

Remus wondered if Dumbledore somehow knew—but then Dumbledore sighed. "Peter will need you, too, but I fear he is unlikely to come out of hiding until tomorrow, if what I suspect is true."



Severus arrived some time later. Remus wondered if he had missed Severus' arrival, or if Dumbledore had just been guessing. His lover was bloody and dirty and exhausted, but he was alive. Remus moved to help support him until they got to a chair.

Severus didn't speak. He just held out his left arm, bared to the elbow. It was pure, smooth skin.

"The Mark!" Remus gasped. Dumbledore said nothing.

"The Dark Lord is gone." Severus said finally. "We're all the same. No one has their Mark anymore."

Dumbledore nodded. "And the Longbottoms?"

"Unharmful. We were sent there, but I subdued the others sent with me, then Obliviated them. Frank and Alice were to turn them over to the Aurors after I left."

Dumbledore sighed. "Then it was the Potters."

Remus' throat tightened. "What?"

"He chose Harry."

Severus reached out and grasped Remus' hand.

"Remus, take Severus to Poppy. I...there are arrangements to be made."

"Yes, sir."

They made their way slowly to the hospital wing, Severus leaning on Remus with every step. "I'm sorry," Severus whispered.

"They're dead, aren't they?"

Severus didn't speak. He just leaned more on Remus.



Remus was glad Sirius had been sent to Azkaban without a trial. He hated himself for still loving Sirius, for still finding it difficult to believe that his friend, his laughing, exuberant friend, had been responsible for killing Lily and James and Peter and so many Muggles. He hated Severus for feeling responsible, because he hadn't known the spy was Black. He hated Dumbledore for using them all and then letting Voldemort kill the most beautiful of them.

But mostly he hated Sirius.

He wanted Sirius to be given the Kiss. It had been discussed, but violence, the Ministry had discovered, was easiest committed in the heat of passion. When they had time to consider the effects of the Kiss, the cost of maintaining a live but soulless body after the Kiss was administered, they had changed their minds.

At least Severus had stopped making snide remarks about Sirius, once the target became unable to defend himself. For that much, at least, Remus was grateful. He found a new job, working as a delivery boy in Muggle London. He didn't enjoy it, but at least it was a job. Severus' teacher salary was enough to keep them comfortable for a month or so. They started taking the Evening Prophet as well as the Daily.

Remus told himself life was normal. In reality, normal returned to Remus.



RESURGENT DEATH EATERS ATTACK AURORS

Rita Skeeter reporting

Nearly a year of freedom from You-Know-Who's campaign of terror ended yesterday. Frank and Alice Longbottom are in St Mungo's Extended Care Ward after being attacked and tortured by Death Eaters. Little is known about the purpose of the attack, or why the Longbottoms were targeted; however the Death Eaters involved have been taken into custody. Bellatrix Lestrange, Rodolphus Lestrange, Rabastan Lestrange, and Bartemius Crouch, Jr., were arrested early this morning and are being held in a secure location. This reporter wonders if Barty Crouch will be mysteriously acquitted of all charges despite eyewitness testimony that places him at the scene.

The Longbottoms had a young son, Neville, who has been placed in the care of his paternal grandmother, Augusta Longbottom.

"This is my fault," Severus said. He dropped his head into his hands and heaved a deep sigh.

"You couldn't have known," Remus protested.

"I could have, and I should have!" Severus snapped. "I know Bellatrix! She's her master's devoted bitch. I should have known she would try to find him."

"Why only those four?" Remus asked.

"Because no one else is stupid enough to bloody want him back," Severus muttered. "God, Remus. Tortured. Bellatrix would drive them to madness. She knows no mercy. She wouldn't stop until she got what she wanted."

Remus leaned against Severus and put his arms around him. "It isn't your fault."

"I still feel like it is."

"Have you talked to Dumbledore?"

"I don't care if Dumbledore agrees with you, Remus, I still feel guilty."

"Then you did talk to Dumbledore."

"Yes, yes, I talked to him." Severus sighed. "He says Frank and Alice will live. He also says that when they were awake they didn't recognise him, or Augusta, or even their son."

Remus sighed, too. "I'll go to St Mungo's tomorrow."

"I'm going to tell my parents."

They were eating breakfast, sitting at the small wooden table in Remus' kitchen. Severus still thought of it as Remus' kitchen, despite the fact that he lived here three months out of every year, plus holidays. It was July, not quite a month into the summer holiday, and Severus was feeling unsettled.

Remus put down the paper. "What?"

"I'm going to tell my parents," Severus repeated. "My mum keeps asking if there's someone in my life. I'm tired of lying to her. I'm going to tell her."

He felt as much as saw Remus tense. "Severus, she wouldn't understand. None of them would."

Severus clenched his jaw. "They're my parents. They deserve to know."

"Why? What have they done that makes them deserving?"



Severus sighed through his nose and pressed fingertips against his temple. "They had me. They raised me. They scrimped and saved to put me through Hogwarts, even after Da lost his arm. They fucking love me, Remus! They deserve to know!"

Remus sat back in his chair and stared at Severus, his expression hooded. "Don't expect me to tell mine," he said.

It hurt, but Severus wasn't about to admit that. "Don't worry, I'd never ask you to grow a bloody spine." He stood up and carried his bowl to the sink, imagining he could taste the acid of his words.

Remus didn't say anything. Severus could feel another passive-aggressive sulk coming on, and he wasn't going to sit through it. He ran water in his bowl and then folded his arms across his chest.

"I imagine it would be too much to ask you to come with me."

Remus looked down at the tabletop. Please, please, Severus thought. He didn't want to go through it alone. He knew they wouldn't like it. They'd ask where they went wrong, they'd probably shout and blame each other. But it would be easier if Remus would go and stand by him as he told them. He couldn't fully explain,

even to himself, why it was so important to come clean with them. Perhaps it was because he'd lived so many lies for so many years now. Perhaps it was just because he was proud of Remus, no matter how it might look, and he just wanted to tell someone that he was loved. Even if it was just his parents.

After a few minutes, Remus sighed. "I don't like it," he said finally. "But I'll come with you."

Severus nodded. "Thank you."

Remus shook his head and held out his hand. Severus gripped it.



The experience itself was both easier and exponentially more difficult than he'd expected.

They'd seen Remus at Kings Cross Station a few times, and they knew Remus was a friend. He didn't know what they would think of Severus owling them and asking if he could invite Remus to Halifax for tea. He'd never had anyone for tea before, not even Regulus. From the moment he sent the owl, he felt on edge, as if they would guess his secret before he had a chance to tell them outright. That would be worse, somehow, for them to guess.

But he and Remus arrived at the house on Spinner's End for tea on Thursday. Remus was in brown cords and a plaid shirt, Severus in jeans and a button-down shirt. His freshly-washed hair was tucked behind his ears, and Remus kept smoothing a hand over his own hair, which was beginning to curl inside his collar.

Tobias answered the door, sober and clean, to Severus' relief. He still worried about the drinking, even though Tobias had cut back his drinking since getting hired on at the printing shop.

"Sev." Tobias pulled him into the one-armed hug that no longer seemed strange. Severus embraced his father fiercely, mentally daring Remus to ever call him Sev. Only his dad got away with calling him that. Tobias' thin lips curved in a smile. "You must be Remus."

"Yes, sir," Remus said, extending his left hand as if he routinely used that hand to shake. Severus felt something between his shoulders relax just a bit.

Tobias held Remus' hand for a long moment, obviously testing his grip. Then he nodded. "Good to meet you.

Any friend of Sev's is welcome here."

Remus smiled. "Thank you, Mr Snape."

An eloquent hand wave. "Call me Tobias. I know you boys age slower than I do, but there's no need to age me prematurely."

Remus laughed. That something between Severus' shoulder blades relaxed further.

Eileen came from the kitchen then. "Severus. This is Remus, then?"

"Yes, mother." He dropped a kiss on her dry cheekbone.

"Your hair is longer."

Severus shrugged.

"Tea is nearly ready. Would you like to come sit down?"

It wasn't a question, it was an order. They followed her to the table. Tobias settled into a chair. "What do you do, Remus?"

"I work at a shop in Hogsmeade."

"Is that where you live?" Eileen asked. "Are you part of the school?"

"No, though I did attend school there, the same time Severus did. I don't teach like he does."

Tobias glanced at Severus. "You're teaching, chemistry, I think your mother said."

"Sort of," Severus agreed. It was easier than explaining.

"Sort of." Tobias snorted and looked at Remus. "That's Severus-speak for 'It's too complicated to explain, Dad.' Didn't take long to learn that."

Remus looked as if he weren't certain whether to laugh or not. He shrugged. "Chemists are those people you buy paracetamol from and that, yeah?"

Tobias gave his sharp laugh. "Sort of."

Remus did laugh, then, and it was laughing at himself rather than at Tobias. Severus' shoulders relaxed entirely. At least Remus and Tobias were going to get on. That was what he'd worried about the most. Tobias was a good man, he was, but he was hard to understand, sometimes. Well, most of the time.

"And how is the teaching going, Severus?" Eileen asked. "Are the students all still dunderheads and idiots?"



"Mostly," Severus said. "There's one, Bill Weasley, who may have a bit of promise. He's a bit of a smart-aleck, but he has a decent grasp of potions."

"Weasley - that would be Molly Prewett's oldest boy, then?"

"Yeah. He's actually got the Gryffindors in his year mostly caught up with the rest of the students."

Remus frowned. "Hey, not all Gryffindors are idiots."

"No, only most of them," Severus said, glancing at him.

Eileen's eyebrows rose. "You were a Gryffindor, then, Remus?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Then you knew the Potters, I imagine. They were in Severus' year, weren't they?"

Severus tensed again. Blast. He hadn't counted on his mother mucking things up. He glanced at Remus, who hadn't spoken yet. He looked as if he'd swallowed something wrong.

"Yes, ma'am. James was in my dorm." He frowned. "We—we don't talk about them. Not to be rude, that is, but—"

"No, of course not." Eileen waved a hand. "How insensitive of me."

"No, really—"

"Yes, it was. We shan't speak of it further."

Remus apparently recognise the finality of Eileen's statement, because he turned his attention back to his plate with no further protest. Severus relaxed a bit again.

The meal itself went fairly smoothly from that point. Severus could sense his mother's simmering impatience, but he didn't care. He focused on his father's good-natured talk about how Halifax was going downhill and something or other Maggie Thatcher had done. Remus paid more attention than Severus did and got Tobias involved in explaining how the textile mills really worked. It wasn't anything Severus hadn't heard before, and he concentrated on eating and avoiding his mother's gimlet stare.

Finally, when pudding had been served and Eileen had finished pouring tea for them all, she sat back in her chair. "Well, Severus, you said you had something important to discuss with us."

Severus cleared his throat and considered chickening out. He rejected a half-dozen lies before he noticed Remus' gaze on him. That got his back up. He nodded. "Yes."

Then all ability to speak seemed to abandon him.

"Well, son, what is it?" Tobias asked finally. "It can't be any worse than this spying business you did during that war you wizards fought."

Eileen thinned her lips and glanced away; she'd not approved of Severus' involvement in the war. She hadn't understood why he'd allowed himself to be drawn into the Dark Lord's nets.

Severus could hear a distant roaring in his ears and wondered if perhaps he were going to be saved by a tidal wave from the River Calder. Then he realised it was his blood rushing through his veins. Merlin, he was panicking, wasn't he?

At that moment he felt Remus' hand close on his, under the table.

Severus squeezed Remus' hand hard and took a deep breath. "Yes. I thought it time I tell you that I'm queer."

There, that hadn't been too difficult.

Remus' hand tightened on his. Severus swallowed.

Tobias looked as if he'd been hit with a board right between the eyes. Eileen stood up and walked away from the table. Severus' breathing sped up.

From the kitchen came a distant crash. Severus' shoulders tightened again. Tobias finally moved, glancing towards the kitchen door with a frown. Then he cleared his throat and shifted in his chair. "Was it something I did wrong, son? Was it the drinking?"

Severus heard Remus' sharp intake of breath, but he didn't look at him. "You didn't do anything wrong, Da. I've always—it's just the way I am."

"I shouldn't have taken it out on you and your mam. I should have done more."



"It isn't anything to do with you, Da!" Severus said. He felt a sudden desperation that his father not hate him for this, and he wondered why he'd ever thought it was a good idea to tell his parents the truth.

Tobias leaned forward and rubbed his hand over his face. "So you and Remus, you're both poofs, then."

Severus felt something bridle inside him at hearing Remus called names. "Yeah, we're gay. He's my lover. Has been since we left school."

"What, all this time? And we never knew? Did someone do something to you? Was it someone at that school?" Tobias looked up, his face going red. "It was that Slughorn bloke, wasn't it? I always thought he looked dodgy. If he—"

"No, Da!" Severus shouted. It shocked them all. He didn't usually raise his voice to Tobias. "Look, Sluggy's not queer, no one did anything to me. If I'm a pervert, it happened all on my own, all right? I just—I felt like you deserved to know, that's all." He pushed away from the table, not letting go of Remus' hand. "We'll go."

Belatedly Remus stood, too, letting Severus drag him away from the table. There was a scrape of wood on wood and then Tobias' strong hand was closing around Severus' arm.

"No, son. Don't—don't go away like this."

Severus jerked out of his grip and Tobias let his hand fall to his side. They stared at each other for a long time. Severus could feel Remus' burning desire to say something, and he was grateful his lover kept silent.

Finally Tobias sighed. "You're—you're not going to start listening to Barbra Streisand and nancing off to the ballet, are you?"

Severus stared at him.

"Right, stupid question, eh?" Tobias gave a gruff, uncomfortable chuckle. "Have a bit of pity on your old da, Sev. I—bloody hell, this is a pisser of a thing to take in. I'm trying here, all right?"

A cupboard door slammed in the kitchen. They all turned to look this time.

"You've upset your mam. Not that—I mean..." Tobias sighed. "Look, you're still my son. This will take a bit of time to get used to, but I'm not about to shout at you or disown you or anything." He shook his head. "I'd better go talk to Eileen." He pulled Severus into another hug, which served better than any words to make Severus feel better. Then he turned and, stiffly, hugged Remus, too. "If you make my son happy, well..."

He shrugged and went into the kitchen. Severus and Remus stood in the living room for a minute, during which they could hear Eileen's stringent voice rising and falling. "Unnatural! It isn't...don't give a toss what you think...if they're going to...grandchildren!"

"Come on," Severus muttered. "They'll be at it for hours. They argue a lot."

They Disappeared.



The summer of 1983 passed too quickly. It was the first summer not spent fighting the war or rounding up rogue Death Eaters, and though Remus was working a lot, he and Severus still had evenings together, and the nights—

Oh, the nights were good.

The cottage Remus lived in was small, and the cooling charms were faulty, so summer nights were hot and sultry, but that just made Severus want to touch Remus more. He liked the sweat-slicked sex, the wide-flung windows that let in a breeze but were shielded by silencing spells so they could be as loud as they wanted. He liked it when Remus came to the potting shed in the back garden, which Severus had converted into a potions laboratory, and interrupted Severus' research with a small, polite cough, only to be standing in the doorway completely starkers, with a smirk on his face that said he knew Severus wouldn't be able to resist.

Severus never was.

They had nights of hard shagging, nights of slow, tender love-making, nights of impatient, frantic fucks. They spent hours lying awake in the humid darkness, touching, talking. Severus had never felt so whole. He had not, before Remus, been aware of great gaping holes in his life; but somehow his life, with Remus, felt more complete, more real.

But the summer nights were trickling away from them; Severus could feel the tide coming back in, and soon he would have to return to Hogwarts and the wretched little brats who refused to learn and passed the time by lobbing dungbombs into boiling cauldrons. He dreaded the end of the summer. Despite the fact that his masterwork was nearly finished, he spent less time in the potions laboratory and more time in Remus' bed, clinging

to his happiness. His one consolation was that Remus obviously felt the same. They never talked about it, but Remus never complained about the nights spent without sleeping at all as August drew on.

Their last night at Number Eight Goldenrod Lane, Severus stripped and climbed in bed with Remus, holding his naked lover close. They spoke only in murmurs and touches, and they didn't make love. Severus' throat was tight, and he kept feeling as though he might throw up. Why it was harder this year than the two years he'd already been teaching, he didn't know—perhaps because this was their first summer of reality.

As the window began to show the paling sky, Severus rolled fiercely against Remus.

"Promise me you'll still be here when I come back."

Remus didn't smile. He looked as though he were clenching his jaw. "I'll wait right here for you. Come home on the weekends, if you can."

"Every weekend," Severus promised. He kissed Remus with lips and teeth and tongue. For a while they concentrated on that, and the looming reality of September First slipped away.

But that was the year Dumbledore asked Severus to take over as Head of Slytherin House, and suddenly he found himself needed in the Slytherin dorm at all hours, to deal with homesick first years or mischievous third years or amorous sixth years. He spent less and less time visiting the house on Goldenrod Lane and more time writing notes to Remus, inviting him to the castle for the night or promising they'd have an uninterrupted night soon.

That was the year Dumbledore asked a wizard by the name of Herodotus LeFlange to teach Defence Against the Dark Arts. Severus didn't like the smelly little Frenchman, and he complained frequently to Remus that he ought to apply to Dumbledore to teach, because a werewolf would be a better teacher of Defence than a man who had never battled anything Darker than a pixie. Remus always laughed and said he was happy with his job at the junk shop. Severus didn't see how that could be possible, but he didn't bother arguing.

That was also the year that Severus began suffering heart-stopping nightmares of the Dark Lord. At first it was just the soft, sibilant voice, high-pitched in the dark-

ness. Then it was the red glow of slitted eyes as the Dark Lord's voice expressed his disappointment in Severus. Often there was torture. After the third time Severus woke Remus up—this time by hitting him in the eye as he flailed—he stopped going to Goldenrod Lane for the weekends.

The nightmares worried Dumbledore (and Remus, Severus knew, though Remus never said, just watched him with slightly narrowed eyes), but they didn't interfere with Severus' finishing his masterwork for the European Potioners Institute. His refinements on the Dreamless Sleep potion were enough to earn him his mastery.

Belby claimed to be proud of him, though Severus suspected it was more relief to be rid of him. Dumbledore, he believed, truly was proud, if his joke about Severus being "twice a master—once at Hogwarts and once in potions" was anything to judge by. But Remus gave him the best congratulations. When Severus turned up at the cottage, his letter and certificate in hand, Remus said, "Congratulations. I always knew you would become the youngest potions master in England." He'd served a very nice meal and they had celebrated with enthusiastic sex. Later that night, Severus had dreamed of Voldemort again, but Remus just wrapped strong arms around Severus and refused to let him leave.

Then it was June again, and the school term was ending, and Severus could finally return home to Remus for the summer.



"Remus, you are the best person I have for this job. None of our recent Defence Professors are skilled enough to track down the rumours and remain above suspicion themselves. But you—I have heard from many sources how tenacious and subtle you are. You have never failed me—"

"Never?" Remus burst in. "I couldn't stop Sirius from betraying us! I got myself captured by the werewolves! How can you say I never failed you?"

Dumbledore sighed and placed a hand gently on Remus' shoulder. "My boy, you always put your best effort into everything you do. That is all anyone can ask."

"If I'd just got to Peter after the attack, if we'd gone after Sirius together—" Remus broke off.

"Life cannot be lived through 'if only', Remus."

He shook his head and sighed. "What do you need me to do, Headmaster?"

Dumbledore poured them both more tea. "I don't know if Severus has mentioned to you that he still suffers nightmares about Voldemort."

Remus nodded. As if Severus had needed to tell him; he woke Remus with his thrashing sometimes. "He says Voldemort isn't dead. He says Voldemort will be back."



Dumbledore sighed. "I very much fear that he is correct. It is entirely possible that he destroyed himself, of course—but I have been hearing things that distress me, of a new monster walking the steppes. My friend Yvgenie, the Headmaster of Irkutsk School of Magic, has written to me, and I feel it only right to send someone to investigate."

Remus thought about the three weeks left in August, of Severus sleeping alone in their bed. It wasn't fair! They were physically apart so much of the year! He nodded and smiled pleasantly at Dumbledore. "Should I leave right away, sir?"

"Oh, no, I think that won't be necessary. You will need to arrange an absence from your current job, to prepare your house....let us say September, I think."

Remus had been made redundant at the last full, but if Dumbledore didn't know, Remus wasn't going to correct him. "That sounds good."

Dumbledore nodded, smiling. "Very well. Thank you, Remus." He stood and clasped Remus' hand. "I know I can depend on you."



1 September 1984

The Orient Express

Dear Severus,

I miss you. I have a feeling I'm going to start every letter to you that way. It doesn't feel right, being away from you. It's different, knowing you're in England and I'm...well, wherever I currently am. I wish you were with me. You would find fault with the service, of course, and you wouldn't like the little

carriage I have, but you would amuse me with your piss and vinegar remarks.

I'll write more when I have more to say.

Love,

Remus

17 September 1984

A Backwater village in China

Dear Severus,

Are my letters boring you? The same thing every night, I love you, I miss you, I wish you were here. I'm afraid I've little else to say. I'm reporting all the rumours I come across to Dumbledore, and he said he would keep you apprised, since you are our resident expert on Voldemort, so I shan't spend any time copying what I've already written to him.

You can address your letters to me here, for the time being. If you're writing. If you miss me. Do you miss me? (Just kidding, I know you do. All the same, it would be nice to have you reassure me of that.)

Love,

Remus

10 October 1984

Still in the Chinese Backwaters

Dear Severus,

I had an encounter with what I think must have been a lethifold yesterday. I didn't see it, of course, but I could sense something nearby, and hear movements. I was listening to an old woman talk about the monster that has been eating poultry and stealing milk. There were three children playing in the room, and behind us a small girl was napping. I had a vague sense of unease, and then something made a small shuffling noise. It was very strange. I cast spells to detect Dark magic and protect us, and something near the sleeping child disturbed my magic, though we saw nothing.



Shortly after, the girl awoke and said she'd dreamed she couldn't breathe.

The old grandmother was frightened enough to throw me out of the house without answering any more questions. She said the monster must have known she was talking about it, and decided to punish her for speaking.

I can't agree with her; I do think it was a lethifold rather than anything more sinister, but all the same, I've cast a few wards around her house, to keep her safe.

I love you.

Remus

24 October 1984

Another Chinese Backwater village

Dear Severus,

It looks as though I shan't be home for Halloween. I've some leads, but I've been on the move tracing them for several days. I have a local guide, a boy of about twelve or thirteen named Xiao, who tells me we are getting close to dangerous territory. He doesn't seem to be afraid, though. His family sends him out hunting in this territory all the time.

It's startling how different life is here. There is little formal schooling, and boys become men much earlier than we do in England. The Magical villages in China have escaped the regime, which means families aren't limited to one child, and girls are still valued here. It's a relief, I admit, because I was highly uncomfortable during the week I spent in Muggle Beijing.

I miss you, and I love you.

Remus

2 November 1984

I'm not sure where I am right now.

Dear Severus,

I miss you. I continue to be frustrated in my search for rumours about Voldemort. It seems that he isn't lingering long in any one area, though I have been following tales of blood-drinkers for the past fortnight. I can't say I really want to encounter him, even if he is, as you and Dumbledore suspect, currently lacking a body. If all he needs is a body, who is to say he won't simply pick one that suits his purposes, possess it for a time, and then release it? And then I might find myself in the position of killing an innocent person.

It is bitterly cold here, and I am told it will grow colder yet. I wish I could return to England. I have seen enough snow to last a lifetime.

Love,

Remus

18 November 1984

The arse-end of nowhere

Dear Severus,

I miss you. I'm bloody cold. Still alive, still found nothing. Too fucking freezing to write more.

Love,

Remus

29 November 1984

Yep Infirmary

Dear Severus,

I miss you. I have been sdown for the past week with a nasty illness of some sort. I've no idea what it is, but it's got into my lungs and

made breathing difficult. I spend a great deal of time coughing and gasping for breath.

Don't worry, I'm fine. The Healers here at Yep Infirmary are skilled and very well versed in non-traditional methods, which means I've been taking a lot of foul-tasting potions, but they work less invasively than some of our own. I really must buy you a few books on Chinese Potions before I come home.

I'll write to you again when I'm better.

Love,  
Remus

6 December 1984

Travelling again

Dear Severus,

Thank you for writing to me while I was in hospital. I am feeling much better. I miss you desperately, of course. I can't believe it's been over three months since I last saw you and held you in my arms. I wish this were over so I could come home to you.

Love,  
Remus



The third year Hufflepuff girl was in tears, and Severus' voice was a low deadly hiss. He was just getting warmed up.

"—And if you cannot brew this potion adequately by the end of this class, you will come to the front of the room and read the note aloud, so we all will know what is so much more entertaining than learning about Shrinking Solutions. Is that understood?"

"Professor Snape?"

He whipped around to face the door, enraged at the interruption. A Ravenclaw prefect stood there, shifting her weight nervously from one foot to the other as she watched him.

"What?" he demanded, and everyone in the classroom flinched.

"The Headmaster asked me to come fetch you. He says it's urgent, sir."

Severus glared at her for a long moment, then swept his glare across the class. "Finish the Shrinking Solution. Applesby, report to your Head of House for a detention and be glad you have been spared my punishment." He slammed his book shut and activated the spell that would shriek aloud if any of the students tried to cheat.

Then he swept out of the room and past the Ravenclaw girl.

"Sir," she said, much more timidly than she originally had. "Sir, the Headmaster is in the hospital wing."

What the deuce was he doing there? Severus nodded curtly. "Get back to your class now," he ordered. He could find the bloody hospital on his own.



Why would Dumbledore be sending for him? Had one of his Slytherins been injured? Severus hoped it was one of the older ones. He couldn't help but feel a bit responsible for his younger ones. The ones who had been students here before he began teaching, though—he didn't care about them at all. They had tested and tried him every day since he came back, perhaps remembering the time Potter de-pantsed him in front of the school, or having older siblings who remembered he had been called Snivellus. He loathed the ones who dared be any reminder of what he had been—and he made them pay.

But when he flung open the door to the school infirmary, Pomfrey, Dumbledore, and McGonagall were all there—and there were no students in sight. Severus glowered at them. "You felt the need to interrupt my class for some reason?"

They turned to look at him, and Dumbledore's expression was grave. McGonagall looked angry.

"Severus..." Dumbledore folded his hands and sighed. "I am concerned, because I have heard nothing from Remus for several days. I would not have interrupted your class, but we received word of possible dragon unrest in the area he is visiting."

Severus' nightmare of the previous night suddenly returned to him—red glowing eyes and cold, high-pitched laughter, and flames. He was no Seer, but perhaps his Occlumency lessons with the Dark Lord had established some level of vulnerability, at least in his subconscious mind.

"You think something has happened to Remus."

Dumbledore held his hands to either side, palms up. "I can say nothing for certain. But I feel a lingering unease in my mind. He had been owling me a brief note every evening, as I requested, and now—there has been no word for six days."

"You shouldn't have sent him," Severus said, clenching his jaw. "He hasn't been your kept assassin for years. He works in a bookshop. You shouldn't send him into danger."

McGonagall and Pomfrey stared openly at him, their expressions appalled that he would dare to criticise the Headmaster. Dumbledore simply looked steadily back at him, unfazed.

"Don't look at me as if I were a stupid child!" Severus bit out. "And don't act like you don't know anything about it. I need him! You know I need him! And you sent him to chase down rumours involving Vol—FUCK! the Dark Lord!" He was nearly shouting.

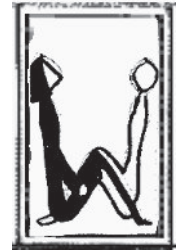
McGonagall gasped and he turned on her. "Shut up!" he spat. "You let him do it. You let him pull Remus in, turn Remus into a killer. My Remus, innocent, gentle Remus, who disliked conflict so much he wouldn't even stand up to his mates. You both always told him he wasn't controlled by the werewolf inside him, but you made him a monster—"

Severus realised suddenly that he was ranting, and he was spouting off about things they had no business knowing. He clamped his teeth together, glared at them for a moment, then stalked away.



His Portkey took him to Beijing, where he had to register his visit with the Chinese Ministry. He was met by a pretty witch named Su Li, who issued him papers and permits. He explained to her that he was looking for a colleague, who had been here collecting old wives' wisdom—it wouldn't do, after all, to tell her the truth, that they thought a mad spirit who had once been the Dark Lord was flitting about corrupting people.

Su Li pointed him in the direction of several helpful wizards, two of which were names Severus recognised from the messages Remus had sent to Dumbledore. By good fortune, the first man, a folklore and Dark Arts scholar, was very excited to see Severus.



"It's good you have come," he said. "Your friend is injured. The dragons came several nights ago and attacked the village. He fought very valiantly—thanks to him, two children and their mother are still alive. But he was injured. Come, he'll be glad to see you."

Severus followed the man, nearly treading on his heels in his impatience. He led him to a long, squat building made of stone. It was full of beds, most of which had people in them. The man pointed, and in one of the beds was a bandaged white man.

Severus pushed past his guide and the rest of the beds, dropping to his knees next to the Englishman. "Remus?" he murmured. The nose looked familiar, and the lips, but the rest of his face was swathed in white gauze.

The man shifted and moaned, then sighed. After a moment, his eyes flickered open, and Severus felt a jolt of relief hit him in the gut. He knew these eyes that stared at him and filled with tears.

"Yes, I'm here," Severus whispered. "Dumbledore sent me to fetch you home."

"Thought...I was going to...to die alone."

"You're not dying at all!" Severus ordered him. He lifted a hand and rested it gently on Remus'. "I have Portkeys. Pomfrey's waiting for us."

Remus smiled faintly. "Yes, take me home."

Severus bent over him, letting his breath hit Remus' face. "I kept all your letters," he whispered. "I missed you so bloody much."

"I didn't find anything," Remus said. His eyes were fluttering closed again. "Rumours, but no proof. Never any proof."

"Nevermind," Severus said. He wanted to kiss Remus, but there were too many people about. He just shifted until he could get an arm around him. "I'm going to key it in a moment. Hold on, Remus."

And then they both felt the jerk behind the navel, the whirling confusion, that went along with a Portkey. Severus had time to hope it wouldn't make Remus' condition worse—and then they were in the hospital at Hogwarts, and Pomfrey was hurrying towards them.

Severus didn't want to let go. He'd nearly lost Remus. He waited until Poppy's cold fingers clutched at his wrist, then settled Remus onto a bed. Poppy shooed him away from the bed, and he settled in to wait.



Dumbledore arrived soon after they did, and Severus eavesdropped openly on Remus' report, such as it was. Nothing but smoke and rumours, no matter where Remus went. Mysterious deaths, but nothing that really pointed to foul play. And fear—thick, choking fear.

"But nothing I can prove, nothing I could touch," Remus sighed. The bandages on his face had come off, and Poppy had his burns nearly healed. There was still the broken ribs and wrist to deal with, but those would be healed by the end of the evening. Severus had edged closer until Remus reached out and clutched his hand, and they were sitting like that.

Dumbledore shook his head. "I am sorry you were injured, Remus," he said softly. "But I do appreciate your work. Your information is invaluable to me." He studied their hands for a moment. "Severus has informed me that the two of you are in a relationship."

Severus managed not to flinch at the look Remus gave him, but then he realised it was mostly surprise, mingled with relief. "Yes," Remus murmured. "We've been in love for three years now."

Dumbledore nodded. "I fear there would be little support for such a relationship, were it to become public," he said, "but I am always glad to find a little more love in the world. I shall attempt to make more accommodation for the relationship in regards to Severus' duties."

Remus didn't say anything, just closed his eyes. But Severus could tell he was smiling.



Still drying his hair, Remus came out of the bath—and who knew Hogwarts professors had en suite baths, anyway? He hadn't until he'd started visiting on the week-

ends. He expected Severus to have got a breakfast tray from the house-elves already, so he was surprised to find him sitting where Remus had left him. The post had fallen to the floor, scattered around Severus' feet. Remus went over to sit next to him.

"Let me guess, you've inherited a million Galleons and you're trying to figure out how to tell me you want someone younger and prettier," he teased.

Severus looked up slowly. "It's from my dad." His voice was hollow. "He's in hospital."

Remus sat up. "What?"

"He—his liver is shutting down."

"Oh, fuck, Severus. I'm sorry." Remus put his arms around his lover, holding him even though Severus was tense and stiff. Severus didn't like emotions, but Remus always forced him to acknowledge them. It was better that way, in the long run, Remus thought.

Severus sighed and leaned into Remus. They didn't speak for a long time. Remus could feel Severus gathering his control.

"What hospital?"

"Halifax Royal Infirmary." Severus swore. "I have a detention to supervise today. I can't go."

"Dumbledore would let you."

Severus sat up and pulled out of Remus' grasp. "No. I'm not going to ask. It can wait until tomorrow."

Remus stared at him. "Severus, this is your father—"

"He'll still be dying tomorrow!" Severus snapped. He stood up and strode out of his quarters.

Remus stayed where he was for a few minutes, trying to comprehend and imagine how he would feel if it were his father dying. He didn't know. It was beyond his grasp.

Finally he stood and walked over to the window, staring out at the dreary December day. He had been looking forward to this weekend; it was the first they'd been able to spend together since Halloween. Dumbledore's accommodation for Severus' relationship was no more lenient than the accommodation given for Sinistra's marriage, or Flitwick's. Remus appreciated that at least the Headmaster was supportive, but he would feel more grateful if that support extended to inviting Remus to live in the castle, for instance.



He sighed and shook his head. There was little he could do to help Severus through this, but he would do whatever he could.



Every time Severus looked at the pickled mandrakes he thought of his father. The rat spleens were smaller and didn't bother him as much. But the mandrakes—they made him think of pickled livers.

Someone knocked timidly on the laboratory door. He spun away from his contemplation of the jars. "What?" he snapped.

It was Vance, a fifth year, looking apprehensive. "Professor Snape, could I ask you some questions about the Draught of Peace?"

"Don't you own a textbook, you stupid girl?" he demanded.

"Y-yes..." she faltered. Probably wasn't used to being snarled at; the Ravenclaws so rarely received a teacher's ire.

"Then use it and stop annoying me!" He glared at her until she turned and left the room. He could hear her first sobs before she got out of range. Good. At least he was still capable of making other people hurt as much as he did.

His father wasn't the man he had been.

Severus had been assigning fewer detentions over the past month, simply to give himself more time to spend in Halifax. He Flooed to his parents' home, then Apparated to an alley behind the hospital. Bloody St Mungo's still refused to lift a wand to save a Muggle, even one married to a witch. So here Tobias sat, in a ward full of terminal patients, his skin yellow with jaundice, his once-sharp features bloated.

Eileen visited in the evenings, too, but she usually didn't arrive until later, when the pain medications were kicking in. Severus, at least, had time to talk.

"You're happy with your bloke, then?" Tobias asked that evening. His eyes were fixed on the football scores, which Severus had picked up at a corner shop. It was appropriate. Snape men didn't discuss emotions.

"Yeah," Severus said. He slouched back in his chair, arms folded over his chest. "He—makes me like myself more."

Surprise flitted across Tobias' face. "Why wouldn't you like yourself? You're a teacher, a good respectable job. Not working in the mills like your old man, are you? Took honours in your field, Remus says, and from the way yer mam talks, you're a war hero in that Voldething war."

Severus stared at his father, shocked. "I didn't know you thought that," he managed finally.

"How would you?" Tobias agreed. "But this is it for me, Sev. You ought to know now. I'm glad to see you happy. I'm proud of you."

Severus swallowed several times, trying to dislodge the choking sensation he felt. His father was proud of him. Finally he ducked his head in a jerky nod.

Some time later, as he was preparing to leave, he paused and looked full into his father's face. "I love you, Dad," he forced out. It was difficult to say, not because it was untrue, but because Severus wouldn't have said it at all unless his father were dying.



Remus' shoulders still ached from the weight of the coffin, though he'd shared it with seven other men. Tobias Snape had been a tall, heavy man, and popular. The funeral had been well-attended by men he'd worked with, families from Spinner's End and the surrounding streets, and Tobias' drinking mates. Remus glanced across the pub at Severus, who looked inappropriately ravishable in a well-cut black suit. Severus had an arm around his mother, who was wearing an emerald green backless dress, because "he always liked me in this dress". She was leaning against him, and his head was bent down towards her; from this distance it looked like he was speaking, but the noise of various people drinking to Tobias' memory made it impossible to hear.

Remus hadn't been to a funeral since his granddad died eight years ago. Tobias' funeral was worse, largely because Severus hadn't spoken more than ten words at a time to Remus since he came home from the hospital three days ago and announced his father was dead. His skin seemed paler, his eyes burned more fiercely, and there were dark smudges under his eyes, which made his nose stand out more proudly than usual. There was an almost-frightening intensity to Severus' grief, and it made Remus feel unable to touch him.



Remus had had to go to Marks and Spencer for a suit, because he'd never had need of one before. He knew he didn't really look good in black, not the way Severus did, but he'd overheard at least two people speculating about "that handsome young man with Severus." He wondered if they knew he was Severus' lover, if people were questioning his right to be one of the pallbearers, if they thought him a distant relation.

His thoughts kept returning to the wake. There were no lights, just the flickering candles around Tobias, laid out in his coffin. Remus' granddad had looked smaller in death, to a fifteen-year-old boy, but Tobias just looked like himself, dead. It was frightening. Severus shouldn't lose his father when he was twenty-five. It just shouldn't happen. The priest had led them in the Glorious Mysteries for the soul of the departed (the departed, the priest kept saying, as if he hadn't shared a drink with Tobias every Thursday). And they had added, at the end of every decade, *Réquiem ætérnam dona ei Dómine; et lux perpétua lúceat ei. Requiéscat in pace. Amen.* The mirrors had been shrouded, he remembered.

Catholics, he thought, were much closer to wizards than either party realised.

"Are you Severus' bloke, then?"

The question caught him off-guard, and he turned slowly to regard the man who had spoken. He was tall, with a craggy face and a crooked nose, and black hair that was cut short. The nose was familiar.

"Bernard Snape," the man explained. "Toby's brother. He told me about Severus, and I've been through the lists, and you're the only one I can't place. You must be Severus' bloke."

"Yeah," Remus said cautiously, wondering if he were about to be thrown out of the pub.

Bernard nodded. "Call me Ben. What're you drinking?"

"I—I've been drinking orange juice," Remus admitted, looking down at his empty glass. "I wasn't sure...I mean, Severus..." He trailed off, but Ben was nodding, an understanding look on his face.

"Have one glass of whiskey, for Toby's sake," he suggested, "and I'll buy you a glass of orange juice, for after."

"Thank you, sir."

Ben pressed a glass into Remus' hand. "To Toby, a man who loved his family and did right by his friends."

Remus wondered if he were meant to add to that. And who always treated me like another son, once he'd got used to us, he thought, and drank.

Ben clapped him on the shoulder and ambled off. When Remus looked across the room to where his lover stood, Severus was watching him. His eyes seemed to beckon Remus, so Remus made his way across the crowded room, murmuring polite apologies to those he passed.

"Take me home," Severus breathed, once Remus had a hand on his elbow and they were standing close.

Remus nodded and touched Eileen Snape's shoulder, very lightly.

She turned and looked at him for a moment, then offered him a small smile. It ought to feel more like a triumph, if it hadn't taken Tobias' death to make her truly accept Remus. He nodded gravely back.

Severus skated his lips across his mother's cheek. "I'll see you tomorrow, Mum."

Then they were making their way out of the pub, away from the prying eyes and the boisterous tributes. Remus guided Severus into an alley, looped his arm around Severus' waist, and they Apparated.

The cottage was dark, but neither of them moved to light it. Instead they undressed each other by touch, dropping clothes were they stood, and fell into bed together. Remus wrapped his arms around Severus, who went very still.

It was a long time before either of them slept.



Remus groaned and rolled away from Severus, breathing heavily and still shivering from orgasm. Severus shifted onto his side and pressed against Remus' back, snaking one arm around his middle. Remus smiled, though Severus couldn't see. He liked how physically close Severus always wanted to be, after sex. Since Tobias' death, Severus had needed more snuggling than usual. Remus could understand that. He'd been thinking more and more about his own relationship with his father, since Severus lost his. It had been nearly a year since Tobias died, and Severus still, sometimes, talked as if Tobias were still alive, then caught himself.

Remus covered Severus' arm with his own. "What would you think of my telling my parents about us?" he asked.

Severus' response was slow in coming. Finally he said, "You know I've wanted you to for years." He paused, his breath hitting the back of Remus' neck. "Why now?"

Remus gave a little sigh. "I've been thinking a lot about it, since your dad."

Silence from Severus, but he hadn't tensed up, so Remus took that as a good sign.

"I reckon my dad ought to know the real me, that's all," Remus said.

"Yeah, I think so." Severus' voice was quiet, but fortunately empty of any resentment or hurt. Another pause. "You going to just tell him at work some day?"

Remus blinked, startled at the thought. He had been working for his father over the past year, doing odd carpentry jobs and projects that could be worked around the full moon. "I'll tell him and Mum at the same time," Remus said decisively. "D'you want to come?"

"Mm, just did." Lips made themselves known on Remus' upper back. Remus shivered and laughed.

"I meant, do you want to be there when I, you know, tell them?"

"I suppose it might seem more believable to them if you show up with me. Then again, I don't think your dad has ever liked me much."

"He found out about that time in the Shack, you know? Once he got that I'd nearly killed someone, he wouldn't rest until he'd learned who." Remus stretched and rolled onto his back, pulling Severus close.

"What, so you just told him?" Severus scowled a little but pressed against him anyway.

"He got it out of Dumbledore. I had a lecture off him that was strong enough to strip the skin." Remus began to sigh, then turned it into a laugh. "But I wouldn't speak to Sirius for weeks after, or let the Marauders help me at full moon any more."

"Help you?"

Remus sighed for real. He ought to tell Severus the truth. What did it matter now, that they'd never registered? After all, Sirius was in prison already and the others were dead. But that had always been Their Secret. He couldn't say the words. You didn't give up a secret just because you were the only one left living and free.

"You know, how they always used to help me get ready and that."

Severus sniffed. "Pretentious wankers."

Remus wasn't sure what Severus was referring to specifically, but it was true, they had been pretentious wankers, all of them. He pulled Severus in for a kiss.

"I don't recommend telling them the way I told my parents," Severus said dryly after a while. "Perhaps your dad won't be as bigoted as my mum. Wouldn't count on it, though; I reckon it's a trait most purebloods share."

Remus nodded. If he were completely honest, he wasn't certain how he was going to tell them. He wasn't even sure he wanted to tell them, but he was bloody tired of lying. He had enough lies in his life as it was.

Severus traced a finger down Remus' cheek. When Remus looked at him in surprise, Severus' expression was thoughtful. "You don't have to tell them. I don't mind being a secret."

It startled Remus. "I'm not ashamed of you!" he exclaimed. He stared at Severus. "You know that, right?" It occurred to him suddenly that it probably looked like he was, like he wanted to keep Severus hidden.

"It's just because we're queer, then?" Severus didn't look away from Remus' face. Remus hoped he looked as sincere as he was.

"I don't really want people knowing I fancy blokes. It doesn't make life any easier, does it? But I'm not ashamed of being with you." The odd, half-hopeful expression on his lover's face both strengthened his resolve and broke his heart. Why hadn't he thought sooner about what Severus might think? "I'll tell them. Tomorrow, after Dad and I close the shop. I want them to know how important you really are to me."

Severus kissed him hard, wrapping wiry but strong arms around him. Remus' body sprang awake again at that. He pulled Severus close, growling low in his throat and sliding a hand down to the hardness he knew he would find.



Severus wasn't surprised at how late Remus was in coming home the next day. What did surprise him was that, when Remus came home, he was carrying a large box in his arms.

"Fucking wanker!" Remus exploded the minute he got in the door. "Bloody bastard!" He slammed his box down on the table and Severus could see it contained an assortment of junk—old comic books, a prefect badge, a Gryffindor tie, three books, and various other oddments of the sort he had left at the house on Spinner's End years ago.

"Remus?" Severus wasn't sure whether to put his arms around Remus or pour him a glass of Firewhiskey and let him rant.



"The bigoted wanker told me he didn't want any fucking homos hanging about his shop. People might get the wrong impression. Might think he'd not raised his son right. He won't have you back, ever. I told him he could go fuck himself, then, and find some straight boy to help

in his shop."

Severus stared at him. "You—what?"

"I told him to sod off," Remus snarled. "And I told mum her crying and begging wasn't going to do any good, I wasn't coming back. They can just go hang, for all I care."

"Remus—"

"No! You're part of who I am. From now on, that's what matters most. If people don't like that I'm in love with you, then I don't have any use for them. That's final."

Severus had a feeling he ought to be feeling grateful that Remus' attitude had changed so drastically towards him, considering the way he'd acted in school. Instead he found himself mildly distressed that Remus would be willing to walk away from his parents. It shouldn't be that easy, should it?

He opened his mouth, then hesitated. "Remus, I..." He trailed off, not sure what to say.

Remus grabbed his shoulders. "Don't you understand you're more important to me than anyone?" He kissed Severus hard and Severus found himself completely unable to argue. How could one argue against a love like that? He pressed against Remus, forcing him back against the wall, where Severus rubbed his hips against Remus', making him groan.

"I'll stay with you forever," Severus promised, knowing he might not be able to keep the promise, but planning to do anything in his power to try. "I'll always love you."

Remus moaned and clutched at Severus, feeling sort of limp against him. "I need you," he admitted. "Don't know what I'd do without you."

"Good," Severus murmured. "I don't want you to do without me." He pressed hot, open-mouthed kisses down Remus' neck, sucking and licking. "Want you to always need me." As much as I need you. More than I need you. He slid a hand inside the back of Remus' trousers, massaging his arse. They'd been together six years now, and sometimes it seemed like a lifetime. But other times, like now, it seemed like they hadn't had much time together at all, and that perhaps someday Remus would tire of him. He bit Remus' neck, feeling possessive.

Remus let out another strangled noise of pleasure and hooked one leg around Severus'. "Need you," he gasped. "Please, now."

Severus didn't believe in waiting for a second invitation. He divested Remus of his trousers and pants, leaving his shirt on as he began circling his pucker with a questing finger. Remus' needy noises were driving Severus mad with desire. He managed to get his own trousers shoved down, and by the time he'd done the preparation spells and pressed a finger inside Remus, he was practically whimpering himself.

He pressed inside Remus slowly but steadily, eliciting a long groan from Remus and letting out a hiss of breath himself. God, but it was good to shag Remus. It was good to feel as though Remus belonged to him. Severus loved it. And more surprising, he loved the flip side, the feeling of belonging to Remus. Remus ruled his heart, but he did it so much more gently and simply than Severus had ever imagined possible.

Urgency was building quickly for both of them. Remus had a leg wrapped around him and was urging him on, so Severus began thrusting, hard and fast, wanting Remus to know and feel just how desired he was. Soon they were both crying out with each thrust of Severus' hips, his cock buried deep inside and wringing pleasure out of both of them. When the tide of sensation became too much for him, he lost control entirely and thrust with abandon until he came hard, kissing Remus and stroking his cock.

Soon after Remus let out a sharp cry and tensed, then shot over Severus' hand. His muscle contractions massaged the last of the hardness from Severus' cock, making Severus whimper. They fell against the wall, holding each other up, panting and sweating.



"Merlin," Remus breathed after a while. "I don't need anyone but you, anyway. Not ever." He ran his fingers through Severus' hair and kissed him.

"Good." Severus wrapped his arms more tightly around Remus and guided them to the sofa, where they draped together. "I love you, Remus."

Remus smiled, letting his eyes droop almost closed. "I love you, too."



Remus seemed excited the day he came home and said he was going to be working as a bailiff and magical fugitive retriever for the Ministry.

"Mad-Eye put in a good word for me with Amelia Bones. She's the one who handles all that." Remus grinned. "She hired me. She said my test results were impressive."

"What sort of tests do you have to take to recover property and criminals?" Severus wanted to know.

"Mostly you have to be quick at dodging hexes and punches, and know a lot of shielding spells."

Severus frowned. "It sounds dangerous."

Remus snorted. "I was a trained assassin for the Order. Fugitive retrieval can't be more dangerous than that."

"You thought that about China, too."

"Yes, well, dragons are a different story entirely."

Severus shook his head. "Idiot Gryffindor."

Remus grinned.



A few weeks later he wasn't as glib about the job, but he could boast a ninety-four percent retrieval rate, which he said was better than the other, fully human, bailiffs. Severus had to admit, the pay was decent, and Remus seemed content. He'd also dropped several pounds off his stomach, and his muscles were more impressive. Severus was noticing that this job had benefits to him, as well—Remus was more focused and intense in bed these days. It made Severus wonder what it would have been like to shag Remus-the-Assassin.

"God, yeah, like that!" he would gasp, and Remus' eyes would glint with the golden light they gained around

the full, and Remus would thrust like that again and again, his expression concentrated as he watched Severus' face. It was wonderful and maddening and Severus had more powerful orgasms than he had in ages. Not that the sex had ever been bad, of course, but now...now it was just bloody perfect.

He wasn't quite so pleased about it the day Remus came home with an eyebrow and his fringe singed off and two black welts across one cheek. He looked up from his work in time to watch Remus limp across the kitchen, pour himself two fingers of Firewhiskey, and bolt it back.

"Fuck," Severus said, and quit dicing mandrake root in order to find a healing potion. "What happened?"

"Oliveras Flatley was supposed to stand trial before the Wizengamot for Assault with a Dark Artefact and Concealed Carrying of Cursed Items, with Intent to Sell." Remus hissed as Severus dabbed some potion on his cheek. "Bones sent me to retrieve him. He didn't exactly want to be retrieved."

"No wonder they had you tested on your reflexes and shields." Severus frowned. "There's not much to be done about the eyebrow, but I expect it'll grow back after the full."

"Fuck off," Remus said tiredly, but there was no heat in it.

Severus grinned and kissed him, because it was always easy to distract Remus with sex, and the way Remus had been lately, Severus was always horny. For that matter, Severus just needed to look at Remus, dressed in dangerous black, with his wand in a wrist holster and magical restraints looped over his belt, in order to get hard.

Remus growled and wrapped an arm around Severus' waist, and Severus found himself being fucked over the kitchen table.

Things like that made it all worthwhile.



"It's so big!"

Severus snickered, but Remus just kept staring in awe at the Sphinx.

"I just...I never imagined it would be like this. It's so grand."

"And the ten thousand Galleon question is, did they use magic to build it?" Their guide looked pleased at how impressed Remus was.

"How could they not have?" Severus said. "They didn't have all the techno-whatsit to lift heavy stone like that, not back then. It had to have been magic."

"They had levers and pulleys and ramps," Remus objected. "If there's one thing I learned from working in my dad's shop, it's that you can do loads of unexpected things with Muggle tools."

Severus snorted.



"Do not be so quick to scoff," said their guide. "There are many things the Muggles have done better than we wizards. For instance indoor plumbing. We have adopted the use of water closets, have we not? It is because Muggles can be ingenious in order to cope with their lack of magic."

Remus grinned at the guide and turned to Severus with a triumphant expression. Severus folded his arms across his chest and shook his head.

"I maintain it must have been magic," he said. "Egyptian potion-makers were incredibly advanced and Egyptian curses are much more difficult and deadly. Their wizards must have been taking a hand in the advancement of Egyptian society."

"Ah, it is true that Egyptian curses are the best in the world," their guide agreed. "Hassan ibn Nazir is our most powerful curse-breaker, and even sometimes he cannot lift the curses without help. It is dangerous to travel here alone."

"But safe enough for you to guide loads of tours every day?" Severus asked, not bothering to hide his cynicism.

"But of course!" the guide agreed. "For I have learned the placement and the conditions for each curse. I am able to lead you through this dangerous area."

Severus snorted again and shook his head. "Potions are more impressive than curses. Potions are silent, insidious, deadly—curses announce themselves. There are defences against curses."

The guide shrugged his shoulders. "You are entitled to believe what you want, English. But you are foolish if

you write off Hassan ibn Nazir's talent. He would be able to teach you some tricks."

Remus must have seen that Severus was about to dig in his heels and argue back, because he grabbed Severus' arm. "Yes, well, that's very interesting. But I think we shall say Severus was impressed with your claims and bid you farewell."

That evening an owl swooped in through the open window and dropped an envelope on Remus' lap while they were sitting together and enjoying the evening breeze from the gardens. Remus exclaimed and sat up straight, Severus' arm falling down around his waist instead of his shoulders.

"What is it?" Severus asked lazily. Between a frighteningly delicious dessert and whatever they'd been smoking earlier, he was feeling very relaxed.

Remus unrolled the scroll and read it over twice. "It's a note from this Hassan ibn Nazir. It would appear that our guide ratted on us."

Severus sniggered, then peered at Remus. "Wait, what?"

"Our guide, from earlier. He told ibn Nazir that there were two English gentlemen wanting to meet him, staying at the Hotel Abbat."

"Bugger," Severus said.

"Oh, I don't know, he seems quite polite. He invites us to lunch with him tomorrow, at Shepheard's—apparently some bloke has made a restaurant themed around the old British hotel. Anyway, he says he's looking forward to meeting two esteemed colleagues."

"Esteemed colleagues?" Severus snorted.

"Well, perhaps he knows Dumbledore."

Severus shrugged. "Doesn't matter," he decided. He tightened his arm around Remus' waist and pulled him down for a kiss. Remus let out a little moan against his mouth that got the attention of Severus' cock. Severus wrapped both arms around Remus, rolling them over so Remus was trapped under him. "God, you're fucking sexy," he murmured, and kissed Remus again. Remus' mouth was hot and wet against his, his body rising against Severus'.

Hassan ibn Nazir was forgotten for the night.



Hassan ibn Nazir was a tall, lean man with dark skin and a hawk nose. His dark eyes glittered. He reminded Remus of a combination of Severus and Dumbledore. He sat calmly at the table with them, eating with small, precise motions. When he spoke, he gestured with his hands, but not with too much energy. It fascinated Remus, how much like Severus he was. And yet he had an aura of calm, of peace, that was very much at odds with Severus.

Severus seemed intrigued by him, particularly when he began talking about the methods Egyptian wizards had used to prolong their lives. He touched on the Philosopher's Stone and Nicholas Flamel and seemed delighted when he realised they were friends with Flamel's alchemical partner. His discussion of Horcruxes and Daging Potions was completely derailed by his effusive praise of Albus Dumbledore and his accomplishments.

"We fought together against Grindelwald, half a century ago," ibn Nazir said, smiling fondly. "I was here in the desert, of course, while Dumbledore was working with Churchill, but it was a great partnership. We used Patronuses to communicate, when necessary. He has taught you that, yes?"

Remus grinned. "Yeah, we've used Patronuses, too."

"And you fought with him against this upstart, Voldemort? You helped bring an end to his reign of terror?"

"We did." Severus' voice was curt.

Ibn Nazir didn't seem put off. "I am beyond pleased that Shahoub told me about your visit here! You must come to my home. I will show you my potions laboratory and my garden. Please, I ask that you give up your room here and join me at my home."

"Oh, we wouldn't want to be an imposition," Remus began, but ibn Nazir laughed and shook his head.

"You will be no imposition. Please, Mr Lupin, Mr Snape, it would be my honour to host two friends of Albus Dumbledore. I will tell you more of Dumbledore's actions in the great war against Grindelwald, and you will tell me about the Voldemort uprising. I will take you to the Valley of the Kings, and we shall visit the source of the Nile. You are in Egypt for how much longer?"

"Another fortnight," Severus said. He looked torn between suspicion and enthusiasm. Remus suspected it was the mention of the potions laboratory that had caught his attention.

"Yes, then it is settled!" Ibn Nazir clapped his hands. "You shall come and be my guests."



It was both a relaxing trip and a whirlwind tour at once. Remus and Severus saw many more things than they could have taken in, had they continued travelling on their own. Ibn Nazir was a knowledgeable and enthusiastic guide, and he enjoyed imparting his fascination with all aspects of his country's history. He and Severus discussed potions, and Remus joined in during discussions of the Dark Arts and how to defend against them.

At the end of their fortnight with ibn Nazir, Remus and Severus left Egypt with a fast friend.

"I'd envisioned a month of shagging and sightseeing," Remus confessed, as they stood in the lobby of the International Floo Hub. "But I must say, I've enjoyed the past fortnight much more than I'd expected, when we were interrupted by this so-called Dark Arts expert."

Severus gave a low laugh. "And sneaking in shags in ibn Nazir's courtyard and the baths at Luxor had nothing to do with that," he murmured.

Remus grinned at him. His lover had lost the dungeon pallor, his skin deepening to a healthy olive. His hair had been dried out some by the desert heat, and he was wearing it pulled back in a queue. Remus found it irresistible; he had a hard time keeping his hands off Severus.

"It's agreed with you," Severus said, glancing down at him. "You're looking fit and relaxed again."

Remus cocked his head. "Was I not, before?"

"You were just...on edge, always. Focused. Intense."

"You didn't like it?"

"I liked it in the bedroom very much," Severus allowed. "But I worried that you were too close to what you'd been doing during the war. I want you to be happy."

"I'm happy if I'm with you," Remus murmured. He skated a hand down Severus' arm, smiling at him.

"You're so wet." Severus smiled, too.

"London!" called the announcer. "London! Floo to London opens in two minutes!"

Remus' smile was tinged with sadness. "I hope we can come back someday."

"We will," Severus promised.



"Professor, could I ask you a question?"

Severus looked up, surprised that anyone had dared approach him. Oh, it was the Weasley boy. Well, that wasn't so unusual, he supposed. At least Bill Weasley could brew potions adequately, and he kept the Gryffindors in line better than the last few Head Boys had.

"What is it, Weasley?" he demanded. Just because he didn't mind, that was no reason to be kind about the interruption. It might encourage other students to pester him.

"Sir, I was just at my final Careers Advice meeting with Professor McGonagall, and she said you've been to Egypt."

Severus' brow creased slightly, but he nodded curtly. "I was there this past summer."

"Professor McGonagall said you might know someone who could take on an apprentice. Or perhaps help me find a job there, somewhere."

"In Egypt?" Merlin, Severus had seen Molly Weasley; she would have his guts if he helped her eldest boy move to Egypt. She had always struck him as the sort of fussy, clingy mother that he would have been tempted to murder, were she his own mother.

"I've read about it, and all the curses and amazing potion work they do there. I'd love to work there for a while."

Severus hated doing Careers Advice. He was always seized with an unholy desire to say, When I was your age, I decided to dedicate myself to the service of a psychotic Dark Lord. Instead he studied Bill for a moment, then said, "How well have you thought this through?"

"Well, sir, I have about fifty Galleons saved up. I know it isn't a lot, but it's the best I could do over the past three years. My parents have a few other children to worry about, after all. I know there are work visas and permits required, but McGonagall says she and Dumbledore can arrange those. I know the areas it would be best to live in, considering my age and nationality. All I need is a job. I'm willing to be a street sweeper or rubbish collector if necessary, but I'd far rather use my skills."

Severus cocked an eyebrow at the boy. That was pure bull-headed Gryffindor stubbornness; he recognise it

well. All the same, it frequently served well enough, in situations like this. "I have a friend named Hassan ibn Nazir. He is a curse breaker, and extremely talented in potions. I have no idea if he needs an apprentice, but I will write to him and mention you."

Weasley's face lit up. "Thank you, sir! I don't know how to—"

"Don't thank me, Weasley. You've worked hard enough to earn decent marks in potions, so you merit it. That will be all."

Bill was smart enough to recognise a dismissal when he heard it. "Yes, sir!" He went.

Severus shook his head. He was getting soft. Just because Bill worked harder at potions than most Gryffindors did, he had agreed to trouble his friend for a position. And where did McGonagall get off thinking she could suggest such a thing? The interfering old bidy. He shook his head and shoved his work into his desk. It could all wait. He wanted Remus.



"I don't know why you won't just listen—"

Remus glared at his lover and snapped the sheet up over the mattress. "Because I said years ago I was shut of him, and I'm not going to change my mind!"

Severus let out a sigh that Remus imagined was meant to make him feel guilty. "You said that years ago, yes—but why not change your mind? He's your bloody father, Remus! Doesn't that mean anything to you?"

Remus turned away. Of course it did—but his father had shown, three years ago, where he stood on the issue of his queer son, and Remus wasn't going to back down before John did. Backing down, seeking peace, would feel like a betrayal of Severus.

"You're so sodding stubborn!" Severus shouted. Remus heard a pillow being thumped down on the bed. He ought to help Severus finish making up the bed, but it was difficult to do when you were arguing. He went to lean against the window.

"I won't have him treating you like you don't matter. I won't have him acting as if you're just a mate, or some bloke I share a house with for economy. You're my lover. You're my other half. You're the person who partners me in everything." Remus sighed. "I won't let him take that away."



"How the bloody fuck can he take it away?" Severus demanded, his voice quieter but no less intense. "You twat, I know you're committed to me. I know your father's opinion isn't going to make you chuck me. Making peace with your dad isn't going to somehow destroy what we have together."

Remus was marginally surprised to hear Severus attempting to talk sense into him. Usually it was Severus who was judgmental, hasty, and harsh in his opinions. It seemed odd that Severus wasn't still gloating over the fact that Remus had chosen him over John and Maggie Lupin.

"It would feel that way to me."

A strong hand grasped his shoulder. "Do you care so little about me? Is your love that weak? Bloody Gryffindor, you give up too easily."

That stung. Remus lifted his head and glared at Severus. "Oi. Of course that isn't it. I've never—"

Severus shut him up by pressing his mouth against Remus'. Ordinarily Remus hated to be shut up like that, as if a bit of arse would make him abandon serious issues, but today his cock sprang to life at the hard heat of Severus' mouth. Why were they rowing when they could be shagging instead? On the bed they'd just finished making up, even.

He wrapped his arms around Severus.

"You're the most stubborn, pig-headed, idiotic, sentimental man I've ever known," Severus whispered between kisses. The tone, if not the words, made Remus feel warm. "I love you madly."

"Mmm, love you, Severus," Remus murmured. He slid a hand down to grope Severus' arse. Why had they been arguing, anyway?

"I'll go with you to visit them," Severus offered, and Remus sighed. Oh yes. That. Making peace with his parents.

"You don't have to," he said uneasily. "I'll just..." He trailed off. He wasn't sure how best to broach the topic with his father. Or that matter, he had no idea what had been going on in the lives of John and Maggie Lupin. He should have been visiting more with them than he did. "I'll write him a letter first."

"Better to visit," Severus advised. "That way he'll have to throw you out, if he doesn't want to reconcile. That's much better than just having your letter ignored."

Remus kissed him. "You have a funny way of looking at things."

"You're just now noticing this?" Severus smirked and pressed his groin against Remus', sliding a hand down to pull Remus closer.

"Mmm, no, just observing it again." Remus rubbed against Severus and grinned.

"You're a sex fiend," Severus said. "And no, I'm not just now noticing that, either."

"You like it."

Severus groped his arse. "I do."

Remus grinned wickedly and silenced him with a heated kiss.



Remus paused at the doorway to the carpentry shop. His father looked older. There was more grey in his hair, and his forehead was scrunched in concentration as he planed a board. Several unfinished projects stood around the shop. Remus wondered if his father wasn't doing well enough to afford an assistant. He watched for a moment, observing the way John's muscles moved as he pushed the plane along the board. He still seemed strong and healthy, at least. Remus remembered how, when he was young, John had shown him how to use a plane, standing behind him, his arms curving around his son and guiding the instrument. He had done that with every tool, showing Remus how to use it, then helping Remus use it, and finally letting his son try it on his own.

John lifted an arm to wipe sweat off his forehead...and saw Remus. He went still, staring at him. Remus stared back, unsure what he should say.

"Is that...really my boy?" John asked at last.

Remus swallowed. "Yeah, Dad," he muttered. "I..."

No further words were needed. John Lupin dropped his plane—he never dropped his tools—and strode across the room to fold Remus into his arms. "My son," he whispered. "My son."

Remus clutched at the back of his father's shirt, just as if he were still a boy. He didn't know what to say. He hoped his father didn't think he was suddenly fixed of being queer. He breathed in the smell of sweet pipe tobacco

and swallowed hard again. His father was shaking. He didn't understand until he felt the first drop of moisture against his neck. God, he'd made his father cry! Remus tensed slightly, ready to pull away, but John held him more tightly.

Remus wasn't sure how long they stood like that. When they finally drew apart, John's nose was running, and Remus' eyes stung.

"I'm sorry," Remus whispered.

"Oh, my dear, dear boy," John said. "I'm the one who should be sorry. I thought you would never speak to me again."

"It was Severus' idea for me to come," Remus admitted. "I missed you so much."

"Severus." John went still and looked at Remus. "He's... you—you're still...you and he..."

Remus had always wanted to hear his father say the word, but now he found it wasn't necessary. "Yeah," he said, nodding. "For all our lives, Dad."

John nodded finally. "Your mother," he said. "Your mother will wonder..."

"I'll come home with you," Remus offered. "I don't know anything about the past few years, for you."

"Yes. Yes, come home." John turned and picked up the plane, placing it carefully on the work bench. Then he picked up his jacket and locked the front door.

Remus didn't remember ever seeing his father close up shop early, except for the night of the full moon. He swallowed hard again and followed his father out the back door towards the house.

Maggie Lupin was fixing tea, her dark auburn hair caught up in a plait down her back. From behind she didn't look much different—perhaps a tad plumper, that was all.

"Maggie!" John said, and she turned.

Her hazel eyes were as sad as always, but Remus was surprised at the lines beside her eyes and mouth, the way her expression was no longer automatically smiling. He watched her anxiously. When she saw him, her eyes lit and she dropped the saucer she was holding. He seemed to make people drop things a lot, he reflected.

"Remus," she whispered. "Oh, my baby, my baby, Remus." She, too, crossed the room to put her arms around his

waist. Remus bent slightly to enfold her, and he realised he was taller than his mum. When had that happened? Had it been seventh year, or in the years following? He buried his face in her neck and held her as she cried.

It was late that night when Remus finally parted with his parents again. "I want to bring Severus next time I visit," he said, part in warning and part in promise. "He should meet you."

"We have met, at King's Cross," Maggie said, but she was smiling. "I look forward to seeing him again."

Remus glanced at his father, but John's face was inscrutable. Perhaps he had realised that to have one, he had to take the other. Perhaps he had truly resigned himself to it. Remus didn't really care, as long as his parents weren't horrible to them. That was all that mattered.

"Bring Severus," John said finally. "Does he watch Quidditch?"

Not unless football counted, Remus reflected. There were still times when Severus displayed a Muggle mannerism or habit that surprised Remus. Cheering for Manchester United was one of those times. Remus shrugged. "He keeps up with team scores," he said. "He's good at brewing. Had an apprenticeship with Damocles Belby."

"Ah, Belby. Good man. Had a nephew got bit, I think it was." John nodded.

It was sad that it took a werewolf bite to make his father approve, these days. Remus nodded and bade his parents farewell.

Severus was still waiting up when Remus got home. The lights were low in the front room, but Severus was sitting in the wing chair, his feet up. He had a glass of brandy in one hand.

"How did it go?" he asked, and it was obvious he was braced for the worst.

Remus smiled and went over to sit in Severus' lap. "I think it went very well. We caught up on the past four years, and you're invited to go with me next time."

"I don't really want to go," Severus offered.

"You don't have much of a choice," Remus said. He gave Severus an apologetic smile. "I've finally got them to accept us, so you have to go with me. But I promise I'll make it up to you."

"In sexual favours, I hope." Severus leaned back enough to display the bulge in his trousers.

Remus grinned. "I already give you sexual favours. You're not being too creative."

Severus snickered. "Well then, why don't you give me some ideas? I'm open to suggestion."

Leaning over to whisper in Severus' ear, Remus slid a hand down between them to massage Severus' cock through his trousers. "Let me do something about this," he suggested. "And we'll think of something to make up for your visiting my parents later."

He knew Severus wouldn't argue.



Remus groaned.

Severus' hand stilled as he dabbed pain potion on another gash. "I suppose I don't need to ask how you feel, then."

"Bloody awful," Remus muttered. "Someone used my head as a Bludger last night."

Severus frowned. If there were anything he disliked about their relationship, it was that every month he had to watch Remus suffer through this. And Severus was unable to do anything for him except brew him pain potions and healing potions and tea. It wasn't that Remus complained, because, except for his first few unguarded moments, he bore it with quiet stoicism. But Severus hated seeing his lover in pain.

He finished with the healing potions and brushed Remus' hair away from his face. He needed to get it cut; he never wore it this long. Remus sighed and turned to nuzzle Severus' hand. He would sleep again.

Severus went over to his desk and wrote up his notes on Remus' condition. The gashes weren't as bad this month, but Remus had a severe headache, which wasn't usual. When Remus was more alert, Severus would ask if he remembered any of last night.

Every month Belby adjusted their test recipe just a bit and Severus sent his observations and results. Sometimes it felt like they were no closer to a cure than when they had begun.

He fixed a breakfast of beans, eggs, toast, sausages, and potatoes, then woke Remus to make him eat. They

ate in quiet companionship, Remus sitting up in bed, Severus in the chair next to the bed. Once their plates were empty Remus settled back down into the bed. Severus crossed his legs and opened a book.

"I found one to amuse you," he told Remus. "Wanderings With Werewolves, by Gilderoy Lockhart."

"Really? He wrote a book on werewolves?"

"How can one bloke do all that?" Severus said. "Gilderoy Lockhart is probably a code name for a team of people."

"Still—werewolves. Read to me."

Severus obliged, reading until the pain potions made Remus sleep again. By that time he was fascinated, so he read on by himself to learn what happened.

When Remus woke again, Severus had nearly finished the book.

"What'd I miss?" Remus asked, his voice gravelly from sleep. Severus put a finger in his place and leaned over to kiss him, because it was utterly impossible to not kiss Remus when he sounded like that.

"Lockhart traced a load of sheep killings to a town called Wagga Wagga, where all the residents were dodgy and nervous. They were obviously covering a secret, so he dug a little deeper and found out the mayor's son was a werewolf. The whole town was conspiring to hide him, because he was a decent enough bloke twenty-seven days out of twenty-eight."

Remus snorted and poured himself a cup of tea.

"Anyway, he tracked the werewolf to where he was hiding, and he's about to confront him."

"Read out loud," Remus ordered. He was sitting up against the headboard, the blankets bunched up around him. He sipped at his tea.

Severus cleared his throat. "It was obvious from the way the werewolf hunched over that he was guarding a kill. Regretful that I hadn't been given the chance to help him before the moon rose, I nonetheless raised my wand. Something had to be done, and I was the only one who could do it.

"Prepare yourself,' I warned the werewolf, though the poor soul was obviously beyond understanding. 'This may sting a bit.' And I began chanting the incantation of the Homorphus Charm. An incredibly complex piece

of magic, it is designed to return any cursed human to his original shape. There are, as always, some drawbacks: if an individual has cast beautification spells on himself, for example, the Homorphus Charm will reverse them, as I learned to my chagrin when I tested it on myself and my hairstyle fell down. Nonetheless, a man is never afraid to make sacrifices in the effort to better the lives of his fellow wizards. What mattered most to me was that I knew I would be able to change his unfortunate soul's life for the better forever.

"The werewolf hunched over further, then threw his head back and howled, fighting the return of his humanity. The sad truth is that werewolves, though under a curse, grow to enjoy the power and carnage that their condition brings."

Remus snorted derisively and set his teacup violently on the bedside table. "Keep reading," he said.

Severus shook his head but continued. "The werewolf's body bucked and twisted; I could hear the snapping of bones and popping of ligaments. I felt for the poor bloke, but there was no room for mercy, if I were to truly help him; true kindness required that I not relent. I chanted the incantation again, more loudly. The words seemed to echo in the air around me— Oh, God, Remus, this is utter rubbish. Don't make me read this."

Remus gestured for Severus to go on. Severus sighed and skipped ahead. "When the last of his contortions ended, a young man with red hair that was greying prematurely lay naked and sweating before me. He was panting from the exertions of his transformation, his fingers twitching feebly. I conjured for him a flask of water and a blanket; the latter I settled onto his shoulders. He accepted the flask and downed it in one long swallow, then stood slowly, pulling the blanket around him.

"Thank you, Gilderoy," he said, knowing me again now that he was free of his curse. "Thank you for my freedom."

"And then he turned to the mouth of the cave to stare up at the still-full moon. Tears streamed from his eyes." Severus let out a loud noise of disgust and threw the book across the room. It thudded against the wall with a satisfying noise.

Remus frowned. "Perhaps the Australians know something we don't."

Severus stared at him. "There's no possible way this could be true."

"Have you ever heard of the Homorphus Charm?" Remus asked.

"No, but that doesn't mean it's at all possible," Severus said. "It probably just makes things look like humans."

"But we don't know for certain," Remus persisted. "Where was it he went? Wagga Wagga? We could go there. We could see if it's true."

"You want to go to Australia," Severus said in disbelief. "Remus, this is ridiculous. Why are you getting your hopes up like this?"

Remus frowned. "Why not? It's possible, isn't it? Anything's possible. I'd be stupid if I didn't at least look into it."

Severus sighed and didn't reply.



The sun was hot, but Severus didn't mind that as much as the dust that coated him. Even his teeth felt like they had a fine layer of grit on them. He licked his teeth and wished he could spit somewhere.

"Thank you, I'm sure we'll be able to find it," Remus said, smiling at the leathery-skinned woman behind the counter. They had train tickets, they had provisions, and they had reservations at some hotel in Wagga Wagga. Severus still couldn't believe they were in Australia. Less than a month and a half after reading that farcical book, they were three continents away from home and looking for a werewolf who had supposedly been cured. Why had he agreed to this?

Remus turned to Severus and gave him a brilliant smile. Oh, yes, that was why. Severus sighed and offered him a slight smile in return. "D'you have any fags left?" he asked.

Remus shook two out of the box and lit both, then passed one to Severus. He was still watching Severus warmly, and that, combined with the cigarette, worked to mellow Severus' annoyance. Remus jingled the keys to the Range Rover and led the way out to await their train. Melbourne was a real city, with a Wizarding High Street and a shops where Severus could buy potions ingredients. He wasn't sure if he could really sustain such high hopes for Wagga.

All in all, Wagga Wagga ended up surprising him. They were staying in the Wizarding quarter of town, where



two out of three dogs lying on the side of the road had two tails; a brown shingle hanging beside a door had a goblet surrounded by a golden circle—the League of Potioners symbol; and several broomsticks were mounted horizontally on walls instead of being propped on the tail straws.

They traced the Wagga Wagga werewolf to an area south of the Murrumbidgee River; as it turned out, he was one of the Wiradjuri people. Several of the people they talked to had heard of Gilderoy Lockhart, though he didn't seem well-liked. There were mutterings, but no actual complaints.

"Not exactly friendly, these Outback types, are they?" Severus muttered.

Remus frowned. "Lockhart did say they were rather protective of their werewolf. Perhaps they're worried we'll cause trouble."

Severus snorted.



*Belby,*

*You bastard, why are you still sending me these ridiculously conservative draughts? Can't you think of anything better than extract of chamomile to add to this brew? I have a werewolf who is volunteering his time as a test subject, and your pathetic attempts at formulae are dashing his hopes every month. He even went down to Australia to see if there was any truth to that charlatan Lockhart's claims. Needless to say his hopes were dashed and I had to waste a great deal of time assuring him that we would do better. Give me something worth brewing this month.*

*Snape*

My dear Severus,

I appreciate your enthusiasm for the werewolf draught. I am certain your werewolf finds it admirable. However, we are potioners. We don't run about tossing in ingredients willy-nilly.

There is a proper process, and we must follow it in order to achieve the proper results. I have included the latest revision to the draught.

Best of luck.

D. Belby

*Belby, you are an ass. A dull, unimaginative, incompetent ass. What good is a potioner skilled only at brewing who is unable to create new potions? You've done nothing to be proud of; you've merely messed about with a bog-standard pain potion and tossed in some things you think will help. I used to invent spells and potions for fun as a schoolboy. Why aren't we seeing further progress on this?*

*Snape*

My dear Severus,

Perhaps your brain has been added by your werewolf. I realise he is a special friend of yours, but he cannot be thinking clearly if he sought a cure in Wagga Wagga. Whatever became of the werewolf Lockhart exploited, by the by? If he is interested, I am certain he could find a proper brewer in Australia.

Belby

*The Wagga Wagga werewolf was a con. Whoever it was pretending to be a werewolf, he certainly couldn't have been a real one. The Homorphus Charm has no incantation that we were able to locate. I've written Lockhart a number of times attempting to learn it and he has answered none of my letters. As for my werewolf friend, I can't believe you would think I could be influenced by his emotions. You tit, have you ever thought of using Monkshood in the werewolf draught?*

*Snape*

Monkshood? Severus, are you out of your mind? Using Monkshood would only serve to poison the werewolves we are attempting to cure. Enclosed please find the most recent recipe for the potion.

Belby

*Yes, Monkshood! We use digitalis in potions to treat heart problems, though it is a poison. You of all people should know that small dosages of poisons can sometimes be the best treatment. My God, Belby, were you dropped on your head as a child?*

Severus,

Your letters continue to grow increasingly more insulting. Perhaps you do not respect me, but at least you should respect my rank. I have attempted a brew with Monkshood. Perhaps you will deign to look over it and offer your input.

*Congratulations, Belby. My werewolf was nearly uninjured this morning, and he remembered everything that happened last night. He was not precisely calm, but he was able to keep from injuring himself. I consider this a great improvement.*

My dear Severus!

You are truly an inspired young man. I shall be testing a refined recipe for the draught this coming month.

Belby,

HOWLER from Severus Snape to Damocles Belby

**BELBY, YOU SODDING BASTARD! I SPENT TWELVE YEARS WORKING ON THIS POTION WITH YOU, AND YOU FUCKING PUBLISH IT WITHOUT TELLING ME! ISN'T IT ODD HOW I READ THE ENTIRE PAPER THROUGH FOUR TIMES AND FOUND ABSOLUTELY NO MENTION OF MY NAME OR OF THE LONGSUFFERING PATIENCE OF MY WEREWOLF COLLEAGUE. YOU THIEVING TWAT!**



“Bloody fucking hell!”

Remus jolted upright in bed at the sound of Severus’ voice and the crash that followed. It was less than a week before the school term would start, and Remus had just been moping, anyway. He tugged on a pair of shorts and clattered out to the kitchen. Severus was glaring at the Daily Prophet, his morning coffee dripping down the far wall to puddle around the shards of his mug.

“Wha—” Remus got out, and then Severus saw him.

“Fucking bastard! Fucking backstabbing traitor! Twelve years I give him, and you sodding volunteer your time and misery, and this is how he repays us? Bloody cunt! I worked like a bloody house-elf for him during my apprenticeship! Even after I achieved journeyman I helped him with that potion! And it credits him with the idea to put the Monkshood in it! Graaah!” Severus threw the paper across the room. It came apart midair, the pages fluttering down in a shuffle of newspaper.

Remus stared from his ranting lover to the Daily Prophet and back. Obviously it had something to do with the potion they’d been working on since before they left school, but he was buggered if he understood.

“Wha—” Remus started again.

“Damocles Fucking Belby!” Severus shouted. He waved his arms and stomped around the kitchen table to glare at the mess he’d made of his coffee. “That bloody cunt took my suggestion and passed it off as his own! He fucking published! Without even telling me he was about to! Without asking for any input on the article! And I had to learn about it from Rita Bloody Skeeter!”

Remus gingerly picked up the paper. Nothing on the front page looked suspect, so he glanced over the rest of that section, then reached for another.

Severus watched him for a moment, then bent and picked up another page and stalked over, flourishing it in Remus’ face. “There!”

## NEW HOPE FOR WEREWOLVES

Damocles Belby is a Master Potioneer with little to distinguish him physically from others. He has a crown of white hair, and a white moustache he chews when he is nervous. His green eyes are friendly but unremarkable, and his style of dress is rather more 1950 than 1990 (tailcoats, I wish to tell him, are

out). But despite the unimposing image he presents, Damocles Belby has single-handedly done what no one else has ever done:

Damocles Belby has nearly cured lycanthropy.

He is quick to tell me that isn't true, but his new potion, called the Wolfsbane Potion, is the first to ever allow a transformed werewolf to keep his human mind. This may not mean much to werewolves who are so deep in the grips of their curse that their minds have degraded, but to newly bitten werewolves, this potion is a way for them to keep their sanity and lives nearly intact.

"I have been working on this particular potion for several years," Belby says. "A recent inspiration gave me the break-through necessary to complete the potion." He hastens to add that no potion is ever truly finished; he will continue studying the potion over the course of the next few months.

Belby has been nominated by the League of Potioners to receive the Order of Merlin for such an inspired draught.

Remus was staring at Severus by the time he finished reading it. "That—that's bollocks!" Remus cried. "That's utter shite! You worked harder on it than he did! You even did research while we were in Australia! You should be getting the credit for that!"

Severus made a bitter face and threw the paper back to the floor, where it turned brown as it soaked up the spilled coffee. "Fucking Belby. He'll hear from me on this. I ought to file a complaint with the League of Potioners."

"Yes, you should," Remus said. "I'll go on record as your test subject. You deserve the credit for this." His heart was thumping as soon as he made the offer, but despite the fact that his knees wanted to give way, he knew it was the right thing to offer.

"You—what?" Severus turned and stared at him. "Remus, you can't—they'd penalise you for not registering."

"I don't care. You deserve the credit for that potion. I'll take the punishment they set, as long as they let me witness for you that you worked on it and that you were the one who talked about using Monkshood first."

Severus' expression was working in disbelief. Remus wondered if he was trying to keep from calling his lover a lot of names. "I...No," he said finally. "I can't let you do that. I just can't."

"Severus—"

"No." Severus' tone was final. He came and put his arms around Remus, holding him tightly. Remus took a shallow breath. "No. It doesn't matter. I just won't file a complaint. It doesn't matter who gets the credit; you'll have the potion every month from now on. That's what matters."

Remus got his arms around Severus' waist. "That isn't only what matters," he protested. "Severus, I want you to file a complaint. I want you to be given your due. Even if you don't mention me."

"How can I file without mentioning you?" Severus muttered. "You've been my only test subject. Belby's the one who tested on werewolves from Ministry custody."

"Yeah, he's the one who abuses werewolves who were given no choice," Remus said bitterly. "You at least took a subject who volunteered."

"Look, the League won't care about that. They don't have any requirements on ethics or anything. Even if they did, werewolves are about on the same level as house-elves, in their minds. They wouldn't care."

Remus snorted. "I care."

"I know." Severus sighed and the sound was so discouraged that Remus felt guilty, even though he knew it wasn't exactly his fault.

"I know it won't make up for this," Remus said slowly, "but I'd like to thank you. It won't be an Order of Merlin." He slid one hand lower on Severus' arse. "What about an Order of Orgasm instead? I'm afraid there's nothing you can hang on the wall with that, though."

Severus snorted, and for a moment Remus wasn't sure whether Severus was amused or disgusted. Then Severus pushed him backwards until his back was against the kitchen wall, kissing him hard. Remus lifted his hands to cradle Severus' face, parting his lips and surrendering control to his lover. Severus' full weight came against him, his hips pressing into Remus'. Remus gave a low moan and bucked against him slightly, letting his hardening cock slide against Severus'.

Severus broke the kiss, panting. "God, Remus," he whispered. He rested one hand on Remus' collarbone, the other working Remus' pants down off his hips. Severus shuddered. "Need you more than any stupid award."

Remus felt his pants slide down his legs and pool at his feet. He gasped and arched, undoing the tie of Severus' dressing gown. He glanced over and saw that the kitchen drapes were open, but he didn't particularly care. Let the world see.

Severus pulled away just long enough to shrug out of the dressing gown, then he pulled Remus against him again. Remus groaned, running his arms up and down Severus' lean back. He loved Severus' skinny-but-muscular build, and he Oh God! especially liked Severus' cock. He lifted a leg to sling around Severus' hips, pulling him closer, and Severus let out a low moan.

Teeth were nipping at Remus' throat and shoulders; he arched his head back, giving more access. One hand was buried in Severus' hair. "God, yes, Severus!" he gasped, shifting his hip to gain friction against his cock. Severus responded by whispering the preparation spells. Remus let out a needy noise as he felt himself stretched and slicked inside. Then Severus' cock was pressing into him, filling him.

"You're the only one who cares about me," Severus muttered, reaching down to fist Remus' cock. "You're so gorgeous. Need you, Remus."

It broke Remus' heart just a little, hearing those words. He wanted to march into the League of Potioners and demand they fix this blatant thievery, but Severus was willing to give that up because he loved Remus. He gave a strangled moan and began a rhythmic tightening and relaxing of his muscles. It made Severus groan, so he did it faster. He was stroking his hand up and down Severus' wiry back, glutting himself on touch.

When Severus hit that spot, though, Remus cried out and clutched at Severus to keep from falling as his knees weakened. Severus made a satisfied noise and thrust harder, hitting that spot every time. Remus' body felt like it would explode from the pleasure that was suddenly filling him, flooding every limb with tingles. He rolled his head to the side, then back to stare at Severus. Severus was watching him avidly.

Severus' hand tightened on his cock, stroking faster, his thrusts increasing in speed and force, and finally Remus could take no more. He yelled and tensed and arched and came, spurting over Severus' hand. Severus stroked him relentlessly, milking the last of his orgasm out. When Remus was making little whimpering noises with each stroke, he finally took his hand away and used it to pull

Remus even closer, thrusting harder, faster, hips pistoning against Remus.

There was nothing Remus could do to help, other than lift his hands to play with Severus' nipples. He circled and tweaked and pinched gently, and whether that made the difference or not, soon Severus was groaning and pulsing deep inside Remus, flooding him with hot come. He slumped against Remus, kissing his throat and jaw and panting, whispering things like, "love you," and "so beautiful".

It was several minutes before either of them had the strength to relocate to the bed, where they collapsed, holding each other close.



"You've met him!" Remus looked so bloody eager to hear about the Potter brat that Severus felt a twinge of jealousy. Then he felt like an idiot for being jealous of an eleven-year-old child.

"He's a little terror!" Severus flung himself onto the sofa and glowered at the floor. "Breaking rules right and left, thinking he can get away with anything just because he's the famous Boy Who Lived. Sod that." He wanted a drink, but he wasn't willing to get up again to get anything. He'd made it through the first week of the term and he only wanted two things, to shag Remus, and to sleep for ten hours straight.

Remus was smiling. "Takes after his dad, then, does he?"

"Too right," Severus snarled. "And if you'll recall, I bloody hated his father." He didn't really want to talk about this. He knew it could only lead to an argument, and he didn't want to argue. He wanted to shag.

Remus sighed. "But surely he respects his professors?"

"Oh, wouldn't that be a treat? Of course he doesn't respect his professors. Remus, you were the only Marauder who respected professors."

"There has to be some bit of Lily in him, though."

Severus glanced up. "His eyes," he said grudgingly. "Brilliant green, just like hers. Little bastard. Every time he turns those eyes on me, I feel like Lily's watching me. Makes me want to throttle him."

Remus chuckled. "You deal with regret very uniquely, Severus."



"I deal with everything uniquely," Severus retorted. "Come here, I want to touch you."

"Can't argue with that." Remus scooted closer, smirking at Severus. Severus caught Remus up in his arms and pulled him over onto his lap, leaning in to nuzzle Remus' neck.

"Mmm." Remus angled his head and threaded his fingers into Severus' hair. "Merlin, I love you so bloody much."

Severus growled something he knew Remus wouldn't understand, because it was more emotion than words. He wrapped his arms around his lover and held him close, loving the way Remus felt in his arms. He'd missed him all week, and judging from the way Potter was behaving—and Malfoy, who had apparently been spurned by Potter and was out for revenge—he wouldn't have nearly as much time for visiting as he had had in the past.

"Missed you," Severus muttered. He kissed Remus' neck. "Let's go to bed."

"Bed?" Remus asked, wriggling slightly. Severus gasped at how that interested his body. "Or here? We haven't shagged on the sofa for a while."

Severus chuckled and stuck one hand down the back of Remus' trousers. "Here, then."

That was the last conversation they had for some time.

Later, lying in bed, Remus rolled over and rested his head on Severus' shoulder. "D'you think he remembers anything about any of us?"

"He wouldn't remember me anyway," Severus said. But he knew what Remus was asking, and he hated having to say it. "Face it, Remus, the boy was just over a year old. He wouldn't have any memories. Perhaps images or scents buried deep in his subconscious, but that's all. He certainly wouldn't remember names or faces."

Remus sighed. "I miss them so much sometimes," he murmured. "When I think about what should have been, how they should have taken Harry to Kings Cross for his first Hogwarts Express, how proud they would be that he's been sorted into Gryffindor...And Sirius should have told him all the tricks we used to get into trouble."

"God help us," Severus muttered. "He doesn't have Black helping him and he's already doing just fine getting into trouble on his own. Well. Him and that youngest Weasley boy. The dynamic duo." He snorted.

Remus laughed. "I know he's causing you headaches. Thank you for watching over him, despite that."

Severus swallowed a sigh. "How could I do otherwise? I know the dangers that are still in this world for him. And I believe Dumbledore when he says the Dark Lord will be back. Potter defeated him once; we'll need him to grow up and do it again."



"He was really there." Remus' voice was a whisper in the darkness. Severus tightened his arms around him.

"Yes. I should have seen it sooner. I knew Quirrell was after the Stone, but I hadn't any idea why. And what Potter describes...he knew when Potter lied. He could always do that."

"You could lie to him," Remus said. His nose pressed against Severus' shoulder.

"You saw how long it took me to learn that," Severus pointed out. "I've been telling Dumbledore that we need to start Potter on Occlumency. He's not disciplined enough at this age, he can't even hide how much he bloody hates me. He'll have to do better than that if he's to face down the Dark Lord again."

"What does the Headmaster say?"

Severus sighed. "He just shrugs and smiles that annoying twinkly smile of his. It makes me want to hex it off his face."

Remus let out a laugh that turned into a sigh. "We'll have to convince him, somehow."

Severus pulled Remus close and kissed him again. He couldn't help but feel this was the beginning of the next decline. The Dark Lord and Potter had faced off now, and the Dark Lord would have Potter's measure. He would know the biggest obstacle right now was his inability to touch the boy. Good on you, Lily, Severus thought, admiring her even more. She knew what she was doing when she chose to die for her son.

Remus stroked a hand down Severus' bare chest. A flash of white told Severus his lover was smiling. "I love you, Severus. If anyone can convince him, it's you."

Severus gave a bitter laugh, but his response was interrupted by the tapping of an owl at the window.

"That's odd," Remus said. "What a funny time for anyone to be writing."

"Perhaps it's international post." Severus sat up and disentangled himself from Remus. He got out of bed and padded across to open the window. An owl swooped in and landed on his shoulder, offering a leg.

"Lumos." Severus inspected the address and frowned. "It's for you. It looks like your dad's handwriting."

"Really?" Remus sat up and reached for the letter. He read it, and even in the dim light Severus saw him go pale. He gripped the parchment more tightly, making it crinkle, and read it again.

"Remus?" Severus asked softly.

"My mum. My mum's been killed." Remus choked on the words. He clenched his teeth and looked away, obviously fighting tears. "She—it was raining hard, the motorway was slick..."

Severus closed his eyes for a moment, then put his arms around Remus. He'd liked Maggie Lupin; she was always sending him biscuits made with dark chocolate chips because she knew he liked them.

Remus shuddered and hunched into Severus' embrace. "How can—it just can't be possible! It—I saw her yesterday!"

Severus swallowed hard. He remembered thinking the same things when his father died. It had been nearly seven years since Tobias died, and Severus still missed him. He tightened his arms around Remus.

"Her birthday is in a few weeks. I can't..." Remus shuddered again and let out a quiet sob that broke Severus' heart. "Mum...Mum..."

Severus held Remus close to his chest, trying to make his arms as tight around Remus as possible. His chest felt tight, his throat ached.

Remus finally let go and sobbed against Severus' shirt, his body shaking and shuddering, his fingers grasping impotently at Severus' skin.

Severus just closed his eyes and absorbed Remus' grief.



"I'll owl you as soon as I get settled in," Remus promised. "It'll only be for a few weeks, until Dad's feeling better."

"Yeah." Severus kept his hands shoved in his trouser pockets, watching Remus and wishing it didn't hurt to swallow.

"It was just so unexpected, you know?" Remus' eyes were bright. Severus hoped he wasn't going to cry again. He was used to Remus' emotions, but he was tired of the crying. He nodded.

"And I can Floo back to see you."

Severus let out a short, huffy sigh. "Right, I know you don't want to go any more than I want you to go. But you've made your decision, so will you just bloody get out of here and stop prolonging the agony?"

A hurt look crossed Remus' face, but Severus didn't care anymore. He'd been listening to these same justifications for the past week, and he was tired of it. It wasn't as if he didn't understand. He hadn't actually moved in with his mother after his father's death, but he had certainly visited her more often.

"Right. Well." Remus shuffled his feet, then leaned up to kiss Severus. "I love you," he said quietly.

"Love you, too," Severus said, hoping it sounded as genuine as he meant it.

Remus Apparated, and Severus was suddenly left alone in the cottage. It was the first time in ages that he'd been here alone. It made it difficult to breathe suddenly.

Severus left the house, locked it and warded it carefully, and trudged up the long path to the castle.

*Dear Severus,*

*I miss you dreadfully. Dad sleeps a lot. He goes to bed after several glasses of wine every night and from what I can tell he sleeps peacefully enough. But he is still in bed when I get up. I've been fixing him breakfast and leaving it on a tray by his bed, but even so I've been opening the carpentry shop by myself for the past week.*

*I wish I knew what to do. It's like living with a ghost. He doesn't read, he doesn't speak, and he barely eats.*

*Love,*

*Remus*

Remus,

*Life here at Hogwarts goes on despite the fact that I have been in a strop since you left. I don't like rattling around that cottage alone, and coming back here only made me feel as though I rattle around in my suites. We have, as always, a new Defence Professor. I had to restrain myself from punching him on the nose at our first faculty meeting. It is Gilderoy Lockhart. He is very blond and very annoying.*

*Miss you.*

Severus

Dear Severus,

Please tell me you aren't serious. Dumbledore hired Gilderoy Lockhart to teach Defence? I know the job is cursed, but if he's that hard up, he could ask me to teach.

We're falling behind on the work. I don't know what to do to make Dad start getting up earlier. I've been going about this all the wrong way, I'm sure, but I'm at a loss.

I miss you.

Love,

Remus

Remus,

*I wish I could help you in some way. Would you rather I tell Dumbledore I need a year's leave so I can come to Edinburgh? I feel useless.*

*Have you forgotten that the last Defence Professor ended up dead? I shouldn't like to think of you taking this position, thanks to the curse.*

*Love,*

Severus

Dear Severus,

There's no reason for you to take a year's leave. I am ridiculously grateful for the offer, of course, but I couldn't allow it; there's no reason for you to give up a perfectly good job just to come hold my hand while I take care of Dad. It's horrible here. He drinks himself to sleep every night, and sometimes he makes it to bed, but sometimes I find him sprawled in his chair where I left him the night before. I know he misses Mum. I miss her, too. But he's making this harder on everyone.

I miss you.

Remus

Dear Remus,

*Logically what you say makes sense. My heart still urges me to come to you. Perhaps at the Christmas holiday I'll come to Edinburgh. Have you tried slipping a potion into your father's drink? Nothing harmful, of course! Just something to help him remember the good things and forget the bad.*

*Love,*

Severus.

Dear Severus,

I miss you. I sometimes can't remember what it's like to have your arms around me. I want you to come to Edinburgh this weekend. Christmas is still two months away.

Love,

Remus

PS - Have you forgotten to whom you're talking? I wouldn't know how to brew or obtain a potion like that. Know any good brewers?

Dear Remus,

*I wish I could come to Edinburgh today. Unfortunately I have a conference I can't miss. I'll try to get out early (the last session is only "New methods for cleaning your home with potions"). I am*

*desperate to remind you how it feels to have my arms around you.*

Love,

Severus

Dear Severus,

I wish you had been able to make the last visit go on a bit longer. Dad seemed more like his old self with you there. It was almost like he wasn't thinking about the accident for a few hours. Just the fact that he cooked, instead of leaving it for me to do, was a vast improvement.

Thank you, Severus. I love you.

Remus

Dear Remus,

*I wish I had been able to stay longer, too. The Christmas holiday starts in another week. I'll come then and spend the week with you. If that's all right. I miss you.*

Severus

Dear Severus,

If that's all right? That's more than all right. I have an appointment with you and our bed after you arrive. My cock misses you almost as much as my heart does.

Oops, one of Dad's creditors is coming in. I need to go.

Love,

Remus



Severus flung out an arm to pull Remus closer—and felt only empty sheets. He sighed and rolled over. Remus rose early every morning to work long hours at the carpentry shop. He was worried his father might lose the house. Severus could understand, but he only had a few more days to visit before returning to Hogwarts, and he was beginning to resent the fact that Remus didn't have more time for him.

He grumbled his way through his shower, getting dressed, and going downstairs. John Lupin was slumped at the table, his head cradled in his hands. Severus held in a sigh and wondered if he ought to say something.

He opted instead to shuffle across to pour himself a cup of tea. He leaned against the counter and stared into his cup, wondering if Remus' father were trying to drink himself to death.

"Morning, Severus," John said finally. His voice was gravelly from hard drinking and nightmares.

Severus nodded. "John."

"He spends too much time working and not enough with you, eh?" John said, not looking up. "He'll learn, someday, not to take things for granted."

Like having a roof over your head? Severus thought, but didn't say. He just shrugged and sipped at his tea. Too bitter. He added sugar.

"He's a good boy. Serious, though. Too responsible."

"He wants to help you," Severus said. He tried the tea again and found it better.

"Oh, aye, he means well." John rubbed a hand down his face. "He's still a bloody fool."

Severus bridled, but he happened to agree, in this particular instance. He shrugged and took another sip. "I'll just go and see what he wants for lunch," he said.

John muttered something, but fortunately Severus didn't hear it.

"I've barely seen you the whole time I've been here! I feel like I'm only here for the bloody sex! And the sex is fabulous, but what happened to us talking? You're already gone when I wake up, and aside from meals, you're chained to the bloody shop!"

Remus didn't look up from the chair he was sanding as he weathered Severus' storm. His lack of response sent a chill through Severus—since when was Remus able to keep his temper around Severus? Was Severus boring him?

"I'm trying to keep my dad from losing his business," he said, his voice steady. "The only thing I can think to do is fill the orders myself. I'm sorry if you feel slighted, Severus. I'm glad to have you here, I truly am."



Severus stared at Remus' bent head. He didn't sound glad. He sounded as if he wouldn't be bothered if Severus left now instead of staying the remaining three days. "Well, so glad to know I'm inconveniencing you. I did ask if you wanted me here."

"And I said yes." Remus glanced up at him. "Of course I want you here. I just don't have a lot of time, that's all."

"Time for sex but no words!" Severus retorted, and immediately his face went hot. He sounded like a bloody girl.

One of Remus' eyebrows lifted, but he just looked back at a snag on the wood. "I apologise for hurting your feelings."

"Hurting my feelings! What do you think I am, a bloody girl?" Severus glared at him. "You can't make your father live his life, Remus. You can't live it for him. All you're doing is prolonging the whole ordeal. Tell him he's cocking up his business and that he needs to start acting like the man your mum married in the first place! That ought to straighten him up."

"Don't talk about my dad like that," Remus said. His voice was still quiet, but there was a definite edge to it.

Severus drew in a breath. So Remus' dad got more emotion than Severus did? "It's only the truth, Remus. He's turned into a drunken sot, spending all his time trying to drown his sorrows. Well, sorrows can swim, and he'll be the one who drowns in the end."

Remus' face went pale, then flushed. "He just needs some time to deal with it and get back on his feet. I told you this wasn't going to be easy. What he needs are people who support him, not people who call him names and say he's ruining his life."

"I suppose that means you want me to leave, then!" Severus felt a flash of heat and then cold run through him after he said those words. He didn't mean it, he didn't want to leave! But he'd never been good at taking back his words. He clenched his fists.

"Fine," Remus said tightly. "I know this is too hard for most people."

"It isn't that it's too hard!" Severus growled. "It's that you're bloody ignoring me, and have been the entire holiday."

Remus frowned. "I'm trying to put food on the table."

"You're trying to avoid the truth."

"Fine, maybe I am!" Remus said, his temper finally defeating him. "Maybe I need a break! Maybe I need some time to myself, to sort out everything that's happened in the past two years. Maybe I'm just bloody tired!"

Severus stared at him. "Fine. I'll pack and be gone by teatime."

He turned on his heel and stalked out of the shop, aware that John was no longer sitting at the kitchen table. He wondered if he'd heard Severus call him a drunken sot. He decided he couldn't be arsed to care.

Severus took the steps two at a time and began pulling open drawers and throwing things into his rucksack. He would leave the two Lupin idiots to their own self-imposed misery. He took short, quick breaths as he packed, then gathered up his bags and opened the Floo to his quarters at Hogwarts.

When he got through to his suite, he dropped his bags and stared down at his shaking hands.



Remus swiped viciously at the chair, marring the finish. He swore and rubbed a hand across his forehead. He'd got a lot done today, so the floor was littered with papers and sawdust. He couldn't believe the way Severus had taken on, shouting and throwing accusations. All the same, he felt guilty and miserable over the fact that Severus had gone. He hadn't really meant for Severus to think he was unwelcome here.

Remus' hand slipped and he swore as the rough sandpaper scraped across the back of his hand. He stopped working and watched as the blood welled up on his knuckles.

Why had Severus been so upset? Remus was just trying to help his father. He didn't have a lot of time to spend with Severus, but they'd slept in the same bed every night, and they'd had heated sex several times. True, they didn't have much time to talk, but just because Severus was on holiday didn't mean Remus could be.

He sighed and scrubbed a palm over his face, wishing he'd handled things differently with Severus.

Nothing to be done about it at this point. He threw the sandpaper down on the chair and began locking up the shop. The only people who came around these days were people who had lent money to his father. When

he'd shut down the till and turned out the lights, he let himself out and locked the door behind him, then made his way home.



"You're looking well," Remus said. He sipped at his water and smoothed his hands over his serviette, folding the white linen crisply.

Severus took a long breath. "So are you," he lied. Remus looked ill and tired, and there were more strands of grey in his hair. Severus wondered if there was something wrong with the last batch of Wolfsbane Potion he had sent.

Remus shrugged. "I'm finally starting to get a little more sleep at night. Dad...well, Aunt Polly's been staying with us, the past fortnight. It helps." He moved his knife a centimetre to the right, then aligned the spoon next to it. "How are you?"

"I'm fine." Severus drank some wine and forced himself not to look around at all the Muggles surrounding them. "Mother has moved in with her sister's family in Yorkshire. She sold me the house at Spinner's End." He wondered, after he said it, if that was something he should have discussed with Remus beforehand. Would Remus be hurt? Would Remus even care?

"Oh..." Remus looked down at the table, then back up at Severus. "You aren't living in Hogsmeade?"

Severus tried to shrug negligently. He had a feeling it looked jerky and awkward. "I thought it a better idea to buy my mother's house than let it be knocked down for another factory. I'm still staying in Hogsmeade."

Remus nodded, his brow wrinkled. "Good, good." He looked around the restaurant, then back at Severus. Severus didn't know what to say, though, so he just watched Remus.

Fortunately they were interrupted by the arrival of their food. Remus gave the girl a strained smile. Severus wondered if that meant Remus was tired of this conversation, or tired of him. They ate for some time in silence.

Eventually Severus became aware that Remus had gone still across from him. He looked up to find Remus watching him, his eyes full of unguarded sorrow, but his mouth held in tight lines. Severus stare at him.

"I missed you," Remus whispered finally.

Severus swallowed against a sudden tightness in his throat. "I've missed you, as well." He looked down at the plate, hating that he felt awkward with the man he'd loved for more than a decade.

Remus' hand entered his limited field of vision, surprising him when it closed around his own. Severus released his fork and turned his hand to clutch at Remus'.

"I'm sorry," Remus whispered.



*My dear Remus,*

*I hope you are well, and your father. Severus tells me you have been working with your father in his shop. Severus has been spending a great deal of time brewing at the school this year. Poppy's medicinal stores reached an all-time low this year, after Harry and his friends defeated the basilisk. I expect, however, that you already know all this.*

*I am certain too that you have seen the Daily Prophet with the story about Sirius. I have been able to learn very little, but be assured I am attempting to discover how he escaped.*

*In the meantime, I wonder if you would consider teaching at the school this year. We have an opening for Defence Against the Dark Arts, and with your past and background I know you are more than qualified to teach this.*

*Thank you, and I look forward to your answer,*

*Albus Dumbledore*

Remus gazed down at the parchment in his hand. Poppy's provisions weren't the only thing at an all-time low. He wondered about Severus' brewing habits this summer, but he supposed, since they were hardly seeing each other these days, Severus had to do something to keep busy.

He frowned. Severus wouldn't like it if he accepted the Defence post. He had said so in writing last year, and Remus had no reason to think Severus' opinion on the matter had changed. Then again, he had no real proof—he hadn't seen Severus since early July.

"God, what a fix. What do I do?" he whispered aloud. He missed Severus desperately. His father wasn't doing much better, but he had at least learned to drink slowly and steadily enough that he could function the entire

workday. The debt had been paid down to the point where Remus occasionally treated them to takeaway from a chip shop instead of cooking at home every day.

In short, there was nothing to keep him from accepting the position—except his lover.

After the Christmas holiday, Remus and Severus' relationship had been reduced to tense Floo calls and short, carefully-worded letters and a few tense dinners. Remus, at least, had remained faithful—even to the extent that he thought only of Severus when he wanked. He had sent Severus a hand-made wooden box for his birthday, and Severus had sent him three books he knew Remus had been coveting. They didn't go out for either occasion.

He didn't think Severus would cheat on him. He thought the root of their problems lay largely in their lack of communication, as well as Remus' preoccupation with his father, and Severus' growing preoccupation with keeping Harry safe.

Perfect. This was a chance for Remus to return his father's independence and return to his lover. They could work together to keep Harry safe, for a change.

What if Severus doesn't want you anymore? What if you're too brown and coarse, now that you've been working with your hands?

"I did that before, and he never cared," Remus said. His voice seemed too loud in the empty shop—his father had gone home early with a headache.

"Right," he said. "Right. I'll do it."

He grabbed two pieces of parchment from his father's design and billing desk and scribbled out a note of acceptance for Dumbledore and a note of explanation to Severus.

I'll be travelling first to London, because I haven't anything really suitable to wear teaching, he remarked in his next letter to Severus.

It's been a long time since I've been to London. The last time was with you, do you remember? I was wearing that orange shirt and you were in black, and we'd been drinking. We went to the book shop and a tailor's. You talked me into that tuxedo that was too small for me, and then you nearly ripped the clothes off me once we got home.

God, I miss those times, Severus! I'm sorry things have become so difficult. I promise, when I get to Hogwarts, things will be better. I'll work harder at it.

I love you.

Remus



Severus had been correct. Harry was the spitting image of his father—except for his mother's eyes. Remus had been dozing in the carriage when the children spilled in, and they were making such an effort not to wake him that he took pity on them and kept his eyes closed.

It gave him a chance to eavesdrop, though. He listened as Harry informed his friends that Sirius Black had escaped from Azkaban to try to kill him. Remus felt a pang in his chest when he heard that, but he also felt a pride he had no right to feel about the fact that Harry didn't sound afraid. He did take a bit of offence at the Weasley boy's opinion that one good hex would finish him off. Merlin, did he really look that bad after the full moon?

Remus didn't remember the train ride being so long in his childhood. Then again, he was still feeling the after-effects of the full moon last night, and that made everything tedious. He let the train rock him back to sleep, confident that the Hogwarts Express, at least, was safe.

He awoke to pitch blackness and a bone-chilling cold. He realised at once that the train wasn't moving. Fuck. Severus had mentioned in his last letter that Dementors were patrolling the school grounds now, looking for Sirius. Wanting to administer the Kiss.

The compartment door slid open, and then Remus heard two bodies impacting. The children squealed and chattered nervously. He couldn't hear what might be happening outside their carriage, no matter how he strained.

"Quiet!" he ordered. They obeyed and he held his breath, listening. A quick spell had flames flickering in the palm of his hand and he took his first good look around at the children. "Stay where you are," he ordered and stood, intending to look out into the passage.

Before he made it to the door, however, it slid open and the carriage went even colder; a Dementor lingered in the doorway. Remus was shocked when Harry crumpled to the floor of the carriage. He flicked his wand in a

furious Patronus Charm. Dementors, as far as he knew, had no sense of humour, nor any capability to understand sarcasm, but he couldn't resist. "None of us is hiding Sirius Black under our cloaks," he informed the intruder. "Go." He could hear the voices starting in the back of his mind—his mother's voice, his father saying real wizards didn't like to take it up the arse and the werewolf curse must have perverted him, the hissing and popping of the charred remains of the Potter house in Godric's Hollow.

"Is he all right?" the girl, Hermione, was asking. Her voice was somewhat shrill and anxious. Remus winced.

"He'll be fine," he promised, leaning down to check Harry's pulse and make sure he wasn't fevered. He suspected it was a reaction to the Dementor—Harry, of all people, would have the worst memories of probably anyone on this train.

"Why'd he fall over like that?" Ron demanded. Remus didn't look up. "Dementors call up your worst memories," he explained. "I imagine Harry can remember seeing his parents murdered." Hermione gave him a sharp look that he felt was unjustified; anyone who read the Daily Prophet would recognise Harry instantly.

Hermione slapped Harry's face lightly to bring him around, which Remus thought was a very Muggle response; a simple Ennervate would have sufficed. He listened absently as they tried to explain to Harry that no one had been screaming; it would be Lily, then, or perhaps James? He ached with the desire to tell Harry he had known his parents, to know what exactly Harry had heard. He resisted, instead offering Harry chocolate to ease the residuals of the Dementor, then going to check along the train. He wanted to be certain there were no other students in need of chocolate.

The rest of the trip to the school was filled with students whispering and muttering about the Dementors. He felt for Harry; the entire third year was going to know he'd fainted, if not the entire school. He simply passed out chocolate as needed and made his way back to his carriage.

When he arrived at the school, Hagrid sent him in the first Thestral-drawn carriage up to the castle, telling him McGonagall needed to see him. She met him at the front entrance and handed him a thick sheaf of parchment, leading him up to the third floor to show him his office.

"Your rooms will be in an out-of-the-way part of the dungeons, next to a staircase," she said. "Dumbledore wasn't sure it was a good idea, but Severus has missed you dreadfully the past year, and I eventually won."

Remus brightened. "Thanks, Pro—erm." He paused, not sure what to call her.

She chuckled. "Severus has been doing an admirable job of calling me Minerva for the past thirteen years—when he's not calling me 'that obsolete bat' or 'bloody Gryffindor!'"

Remus laughed. "All right, Minerva." He looked around his office—his office!—and smiled. "It's good to be back here."

Her gaze softened as she looked back at him. "I think you'll do well here, Remus. You've always had a gift for explaining things, and I know you have the compassion to deal with the students. Just make sure you dredge up some strictness from somewhere, and you'll be all right."

Remus felt his face heat. He knew she was thinking of his behaviour as a prefect, and the way he allowed his friends to get away with cruelty to Severus, in spite of—or probably, in Sirius' case, because of—Remus' friendship with him.



Severus had spent the entire Welcoming Feast wanting nothing more than to drag Remus to his quarters for some long-overdue catching up. He had managed to look appropriately furious when Remus was introduced—couldn't have rumours getting out that Severus wasn't interested in the Defence position, after all. He loitered at the Head Table long enough for Remus to finish speaking with Dumbledore, then tilted his head in invitation. Remus nodded, a small smile quirking the corners of his lips, and followed.

Severus wondered about that smile. It wasn't Remus' usual expression of happiness. Did that mean he wasn't as happy to see Severus as Severus was to see him? Or was it just that Remus was making an attempt at discretion? He hoped it was the latter. He realised it probably was, but despite all their years together, the past year and a half had been so rocky that he was no longer confident of Remus' feelings for him. The fact that Sirius Black was out of prison and on the loose only made it worse.



He knew Remus wouldn't help Black. He knew all too well how much Remus hated Black. But he still wondered what would happen when push came to shove and they were confronted with Black. For Severus had no illusions—Potter was a meddling, trouble-seeking boy. He would go looking for Black, and someone would have to pick up the pieces.

He only hoped the pieces were Black-shaped, and not Potter-shaped.

They reached Remus' rooms and Remus spent a moment keying the wards to himself and Severus, then he closed the door and turned to face Severus.

The expression on his face immediately wiped away all of Severus' doubts.

"God, I've missed you so bloody much," Remus whispered, practically pouncing on Severus and holding him close. "You've lost weight."

"So have you," Severus observed, closing his arms around Remus and breathing in the scent of Remus' hair. "I imagine we both have things to worry about."

"Just a few things," Remus admitted. He kissed Severus' neck. "I feel better now. I've been looking forward to tonight for ages."

"I could have taken a year's leave," Severus said, knowing it was a bad idea to bring up an old argument, but unable to keep his mouth shut. He felt Remus sigh.

"I know," Remus said. "It just didn't seem fair for me to ask you to put your life on hold for me. And I kept thinking he would get better. That one day he would wake up and be my dad again, you know?" Severus tightened his arms around Remus.

"Yeah, I know."

"And that never really happened. I mean, when you visited last autumn, it was better for a while. But the Christmas holiday was bad again—you know, when he went shopping for presents, he saw things he wanted to buy her, he told me that. He gave up shopping and came home and drank."

"I remember." Severus had been there that day. Remus had come home from working all day in the carpentry shop, seen his father, and gone back to the shop, his shoulders tensed.

"I miss him."

Severus made a quiet noise and kissed Remus' hair. "I've missed you," he murmured. "What if we both move to Edinburgh over the summer holidays? We wouldn't have to live with him, unless you wanted to, but we could at least be close."

Remus nodded. "I love you, Severus."

Severus smiled faintly. "I love you, too."

"It's been ages since we had sex." Remus loosened his arms slightly and ran one hand down to grope Severus' arse. Severus made an interested noise and dropped a few wet kisses on Remus' neck.

"We definitely need to rectify that situation," he murmured.

Remus hummed and groped Severus' arse again. "You know what I'd really like?" he said. "I'd like to undress you and have you fuck me." He lifted his head to nip Severus' jaw lightly.

"I believe that can be arranged." Severus' voice was throaty with lust. How had they gone for several months without sex? It didn't seem like it should be possible.

He pushed Remus gently towards the bed, liking the way Remus' fingers were already working at his buttons. In a matter of moments he felt his robe flutter to the floor. By the time Remus reached the bed, his hands were splayed across Severus' bare chest.

"God, Remus," Severus muttered, arching into the touch. Remus laughed softly and flicked his fingers across Severus' nipples again, his mouth against Severus' neck.

In very short order they were both naked and horizontal and Severus was tracing his fingers across Remus' entrance, teasing and preparing. Remus kept groaning eagerly and finally gasped, "Fuck me, Severus!" in a half-amused, half-pleading tone.

Severus was more than willing to obey.



Remus' first session with third year Gryffindors was unfortunate; Neville Longbottom's Boggart was Remus' lover. How could one make Severus less frightening? Remus had once heard Frank Longbottom complain about the outrageous way his mother dressed. It wasn't too much of a stretch to suggest imagining Severus in Neville's Gran's clothes. It was going to be hell getting Severus to forgive him, though.

Sure enough, Severus burst into his office before dinner, glowering. "You!"

Remus didn't even try to pretend innocence. "Sev—" he began, looking apologetic. Severus didn't let him continue.

"If you wanted to see me in a dress, couldn't you have chosen something sexy?"

"Severus, I honest!—" Remus broke off. "What?"

Severus snickered. "You should have seen your face when I walked in here. Idiot." He seized Remus' shoulders and walked him backwards until he hit the desk. "I'm rather displeased at how you've ruined my fear-some image. Perhaps some punishment is in order."

"Pu—punishment?" Remus' mouth went dry—but from lust, not fear. They'd never done anything that might be referred to as punishment, but it sounded good.

"Yes, you've been very naughty. You need to be taught." Severus rolled up his sleeves, which sent a surge of lust straight to Remus' groin.

"Oh, God," Remus groaned. "Teach me, Severus."

Severus smirked and flicked his wand. Remus found himself suddenly naked, his arse pressed against the wood of his desk.

"I hope you locked the door," he managed, staring at Severus' hands, which were stroking his wand.

"Locked the door?" Severus repeated, his tone innocent. "Whyever for?"

"Severus! Someone might come in!" Remus swallowed as Severus squeezed his wand. God, that looked positively lewd. He hoped his cock would get that attention soon.

"Ah, but that's part of the punishment," Severus purred. "You humiliated me in front of the whole school. Perhaps you deserve the same."

Remus stared at him. "You...Severus, you wouldn't."

Severus arched a brow. "Wouldn't I?" He flicked his wand again and Remus gaped in horror as the door creaked ajar a few inches.

Severus gave a low, rich chuckle and took hold of Remus' cock. "Admit it, Lupin," he drawled. "You're turned on by the possibility of getting caught. Who might walk in on this? What will they find? Will they see me stroking

your cock? Will they catch you on your knees sucking me off? Will they walk in as I'm balls-deep in your arse, bugging you so hard you're begging for more?" As he spoke, he began stroking Remus, his dark words making Remus' hips buck.

God, there was no denying it, Remus was turned on by this. So help him, it was a thrill to think of someone coming in and finding them in the throes of passion. He whimpered.

"Oh, you want it," Severus murmured. "But I'm not done punishing you." He took his hand away and folded his arms, watching Remus impassively. "Turn around."

Remus obeyed at once, wondering what his lover had in mind. Would he take him hard? Would he lick Remus' arsehole? Would he fuck him with his fingers first?

It was a shock when the first stinging blow fell across his arse. He cried out in surprise at both the pain and the unexpected surge of arousal that shot through him. He heard Severus' low chuckle in his ear.

"You're such a wanton," Severus said. "You want me inside you, don't you?" As he spoke, his hand cracked down on Remus' arse again.

"God yes!" Remus cried, arching his back. Merlin, he never would have expected this to feel so good.

Another blow, pain followed by fresh-blossoming arousal. "Oh, Severus, please!" he begged. "Please, please, fuck me!"

Severus hummed thoughtfully. "I'm not certain you're ready," he murmured. "Or that you're sufficiently apologetic for the unflattering dress."

"I am! I am! Nothing lacy or dowdy next time!" Remus gasped. "Please, Severus!"

His lover laughed aloud at that, but he whispered and Remus felt the cool slickness inside that went with the preparation spells.

"How do you want it?" Severus purred. "You want it hard and fast, don't you?" There was the rustle of cloth, then he nudged Remus' arsehole with his cock.

"Yes, yes, yes!" Remus babbled. He would say anything, at this point, to get Severus to fuck him.

Severus let out a noise of desire and pushed in fast, not waiting for Remus to adjust. The flash of discomfort turned quickly into a throbbing pleasure. Remus

arched back into Severus, clenching around him. He was satisfied to hear Severus give a loud gasp.

Severus began thrusting with deep, unrelenting strokes, one hand coming around to circle Remus' cock. The hard edge of the desk was cutting into Remus' hips and a wave of distant laughter reminded him that the door was still open, but Merlin! He'd rarely been so aroused in his life.

Severus' rhythm grew stronger and faster. Remus took him deep, tensing and mewling with pleasure. It felt so good to have Severus using him like this.

In a matter of minutes he could feel Severus losing control of his thrusts. Soon his lover let out a long, low groan, and Remus was flooded with hot come. He cried out, arching and straining for his own release, but Severus' hand had stopped moving, and the shallow thrusts of climax weren't reaching Remus' sweet spot.

Before he had time to complain, though, Severus had pulled out of him and was turning Remus around. He kissed Remus sloppily but fervently, then dropped to his knees. The next moment his lips were stretched around Remus' cock, glistening against the blood-engorged flesh. Remus groaned at the erotic sight, clutching the edge of the desk to stay upright.

Severus drew off his cock with a wet, smacking sound, making Remus whimper and buck his hips again. Severus' expression was simultaneously smug and hungry as he gazed up at Remus and took him in his mouth again. He sucked hard enough to hollow out his cheeks, making noises of enjoyment.

"Fuck!" Remus gasped, burying fingers in Severus' hair. He gripped hard, holding Severus' head still as he bucked his hips again, fucking Severus' mouth. He let his eyes fall half-closed and thrust into Severus' willing mouth, liking the way his lips were stretched over his cock.

"Now who's the slut?" Remus demanded breathlessly.

Severus blinked and groaned, his hand flying to Remus' hips, pulling him closer. He took Remus deep and groaned again and that was it—Remus let out a shout and came, spurting hard inside Severus' throat.

Severus moaned with enjoyment, sucking and swallowing, massaging Remus' arse with his hands. When he finally pulled off, Remus let his knees buckle and he slid down to join Severus on the floor.

"Someone could have heard," Severus said.

Remus grunted. "Who bloody cares?"

Severus smiled and flicked his wand. The door slammed shut



"You gave it to him!"

"Severus, I swear I didn't!" Remus frowned and wished he knew some way to convince his lover he was telling the truth.

"Why did you do it? Did you just want to humiliate me again? Bad enough you put me in a bloody dress in front of your fucking Gryffindors. You didn't have to lie to me and make me look like an idiot in front of Potter and his little friends!"

"Severus—"

"You know that parchment he has!"

Remus was fairly certain Severus didn't realise exactly what it was, but he still felt bad. He had made a serious error in judgement when he took Harry's side in the confrontation over the Marauder's Map. He hadn't thought Severus would understand. Unfortunately Severus understood all too well that Remus was lying to him, and the map itself had made very obvious that it was a relic from their past.

He sighed. "It's a map."

"A map." Severus stared at him.

"An enchanted map of the castle. We made it when we were at school. It's how we sneaked around so much without getting into trouble. It shows where everyone is in the school."

Severus stared at him. "You knew he had this?" His voice had dropped into the quiet almost-whisper that indicated a high level of rage.

"I didn't!" Remus hastened to assure him. "I had no idea until you called me down to your office. I confiscated it. It will be far more useful as a tool to find Black than as a toy for Harry to sneak about."

"I'm glad you have such a mature attitude about it," Severus retorted.

Remus sighed. "I don't know what to say, Severus. I apologise for acting as if I had no idea what it was. I..." He

paused. "I wanted too badly for Harry to like me. I should have had more courage."

Severus snorted. "I should say. Afraid of what a little boy will think of you."

"You know how quick teenagers are to reach a verdict," Remus said. "But I am sorry. I know I shouldn't have helped him lie to you."

"He'll be lucky if I don't put him into detention. I ought to put you both into detention."

Remus frowned. "I truly am sorry, Severus. How can I make this up to you?"

Severus cocked an eyebrow and smirked. "I'll have to give that some thought. I'll get back to you."

"I am watching for Black, you know," Remus said. "I'm trying to help you keep Harry safe."

"Wonderful," Severus retorted. "Of course, my main concern is keeping you safe. Your job is cursed, you dolt. I'm far more concerned about you than Potter."

Remus couldn't suppress the flash of warmth that sent through him. "I do love you, Severus. I know I let you down a lot, but I love you rather desperately."

Severus sighed and put his arms around Remus. "You still owe me," he reminded him, and kissed his ear.

Remus gasped, pleased at Severus' lips. "Just let me know when you want to collect."

"Perhaps I'll collect in instalments," Severus said, nibbling lightly. "Tonight will be the first."

Remus smiled and pulled Severus in for a kiss.



Severus heard the door to Remus' quarters open and then close again quietly, but he didn't lift his head from where it rested in his hands. It felt as if a band were constricting about his head, tightening slowly but inexorably. He closed his eyes and winced at the pain in his eye sockets.

Soft footsteps crossed the room, then gentle hands fell lightly onto his shoulders. Remus' fingers were strong, massaging some of the tension and anxiety away. Severus sighed

"I wish I could help you," Remus murmured. "You always seem so...angry."

"I am angry, Remus," Severus countered, his voice low, but with an edge to it. "That's who I am here. Who I've always been. Now in particular I cannot change the persona I have used for the past ten years. You of all people ought to know that."

Remus sighed, too, and smoothed his hands down Severus' shoulders, trying to push them down from the way he'd hunched them automatically. "I know, Severus. I know."

"God. I'm so bloody tired."

Remus leaned down and pressed a kiss to his cheek. "Let's go to bed, then. D'you remember how we used to stay up talking?"

Severus wished he could laugh and agree the way he knew Remus wanted him to. Instead he just shrugged and rubbed at his forehead. "If you want to really be helpful, why don't you fetch me a headache potion?" he asked. His voice came out sharper than he had intended.

Remus drew away, and Severus could feel the sting of hurt, before Remus covered it. "Of course," Remus murmured, his voice calm and well-moderated. He began walking away, which somehow infuriated Severus.

"Of course?" he mimicked. "Of course? Merlin, Remus, why can't you for one moment stand up for yourself?"

Remus turned at that, his expression surprised. "Stand up for myself?"

"Say what you're really thinking for once! Tell me to naff off! Something!"

Remus raised an eyebrow. "What would be accomplished by my telling you to naff off when you need a headache potion?"

"So bloody rational!" Severus snapped. "Are all werewolves like that?"

Remus' brows drew together. "You can cut that right out, Severus," he said, his voice tight, and he got a headache potion out of a cabinet. He stalked over and plunked it down on the table in front of Severus. "There's no call for you to take it out on me. I'm on your side, if you'll recall."

Severus just snorted and drank the potion, then set the empty bottle carefully on the table again. "I'm going to bed," he announced, and stood.



Remus was silent for a moment, but as Severus reached the doorway to the bedroom, he said, "Sleep well."

Severus' pride wouldn't let him turn, but his stride faltered for a moment. He hadn't meant for Remus to leave, but... Well, he didn't want Remus here if he was going to be a prat about it, anyway. He dropped onto the bed fully clothed, then pulled the blanket over his head and tried to pretend he wasn't miserable.



Black's continued efforts to get at Potter were driving Severus mad. Several times he had to talk Remus out of going in search of Black. Remus reasoned that he would be the best person to find Black, but Severus reasoned that Black would be the likeliest person to kill Remus, and Remus' death was the most important thing Severus wanted to avoid.

The Christmas holidays went by too quickly, marred by the occurrence of the full moon in the middle. Severus kept Remus in bed the day after the full moon, though Remus had very little reason to complain. Over the holiday they were able to spend several hours talking, and Severus felt fairly confident that their relationship had been repaired. Remus loved him, Remus was committed to him, and Severus felt the same way. How had it been so easy to forget that?

Everything changed the night Remus forgot to take his potion.

Severus found Remus' office empty—the Marauder's Map spread open and on display across Remus' desk. He saw that Lupin and Potter were in the Shack with Black, and that was all he needed. Full of anger and hurt and hating his lover, Severus dashed to the Shack and confronted them. No matter what Remus said, Severus had seen him throw his arms around Sirius, welcoming him back. The bottom dropped out of his stomach then, and he felt hollow the rest of the night, as he woke and found the children and Black all passed out. He heard his lover howling in the forest. He didn't think Remus would attack him, but he wasn't sure he would be able to protect the others if Remus turned on them. He hurried back to the castle, his heart jumping wildly in his chest.

He thought his outburst with the Minister ought to be overlooked—he was distraught with worry over his lover and furious that Potter had nearly got himself killed yet again.

It was his words to Draco Malfoy that were inexcusable.

"Professor? What's wrong? Why is the castle so noisy?" Draco looked almost innocent and pleasant with his fair hair tousled and his pyjama top buttoned crookedly.

"It's just the bloody werewolf again," Severus snarled. Dear God, had he just said that?

Draco's eyes got big. "Werewolf?"

"Oh, didn't you know?" Severus gave Draco a pitying look. "What a shame that Mudblood Granger was the only one to figure it out."

"Sir?" Draco looked nervous. Good. He should be nervous.

"The full moons? His illnesses? The bloody essay I assigned all the third years to write?" Severus wasn't shouting, but he might as well have been, considering Draco's flinch. The words poured from his lips as if something were drawing them out. "Lupin! Lupin is a bloody werewolf!"

Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh GodohGodohGod... Severus stared at Draco, feeling his gut twisting as the words fell together and Draco's expression went from confused to terrified to horrified to disgusted. Oh God, did I really just say that?

"Lupin's a werewolf?" Draco crowed. "Wait until I tell my father! There will be so many letters to the Headmaster that he'll have to bloody fire him. Filthy creature."

Severus wondered if death were truly the next great adventure. Remus was going to kill him.

Draco's face lit up. "Wait until I tell the others!"

Severus went to bed.

By the time they went to breakfast, the news was all over the school. Remus hadn't shown up for the meal. Severus didn't know if it was because he was so badly hurt, or merely from discretion. Eventually he couldn't put off the encounter any longer. He went to Remus' office.

Remus was packing. Severus stood awkwardly in the doorway and watched for a moment before knocking. Remus looked up, his expression unfriendly.

"Come to finish the job?" he asked.

That hurt. "I—I came to apologise."

Remus snorted. "Right."

"I couldn't seem to stop myself. I was so bloody angry at you...the words just sort of spilled out."

"Draco Malfoy!" Remus spat. "You told Draco Bloody Malfoy! Of all the people, Severus." He threw several more shirts into his trunk.

"I'm sorry," Severus whispered, agonised. "I didn't mean to. I really didn't." He hesitated. "Are—how was last night?"

Remus barked with laughter. "Always working, the consummate potions master." He turned his back on Severus.

"I didn't even want you to take this job!" Severus retorted. "We both knew about the curse! With Black hunting you and the curse working against you, what did you think would happen?"

"I thought my lover would be supportive of me and not bloody out me as a werewolf to the entire sodding school!"

Severus glared at the desk.

"I've already handed in my resignation to Dumbledore. He didn't like it, but I also notice he didn't argue."

"He knows how bloody stubborn you are!" Severus snapped.

"Yes, which is why he's given me another assignment," Remus said. "I'm going. Send my cases to the cottage."

"You—what?"

"I'm going," Remus repeated. "Goodbye, Severus."

Severus stared in shock as Remus pushed past him and walked out the door. Those words had never sounded so final.



Remus was tired. So God damned tired. He was muddy, scratched, achy, and walked with a limp. He was still healing from a broken wrist at the last full moon, and he was out of money.

But he was home.

At least, he hoped it was still home for him. He had spent the three-day trek back home telling himself that Severus might even be staying there for the Christ-

mas holiday. He hoped so; he had no desire to look for him at the school, where he might see Dumbledore. Dumbledore would be warm and understanding about Remus' failure to track down Pettigrew. Remus wasn't sure he could handle the Headmaster's gracious reaction just now.

He undid the wards and went inside the cottage. The scents of brewing and cooking reached him instantly. Severus was home, thank God.

A moment later Severus appeared, a wooden spoon in one hand and his wand in the other. He was wearing trousers and a shirt that looked suspiciously like it belonged to Remus. When he saw Remus, he froze.

"Severus." Remus stared at him, drinking in his features. It had been over six months, and that was too long. He vowed he would never be separated from Severus for so long again.

"I got your letters," Severus said. His gaze was guarded. It sent a pang through Remus to know that Severus was afraid Remus would hurt him.

"Good," he said stupidly. After a moment he added, "I would have written more often, but I didn't always have money for parchment or post. I missed you."

"Did you?"

"Yes. Dreadfully." Remus swallowed.

"I missed you, too." Severus glanced at his wand. "I'm sorry I told everyone."

Remus shrugged. "We both knew the position was cursed. It could have been worse. I could've been killed."

"I'm surprised Moody hasn't been," Severus muttered. "Bloody paranoid Auror. I swear if he goes through my office one more time..."

"Moody? Mad-Eye is teaching Defence this year?"

"Yeah. First lesson he did was showing everyone the Unforgivables. I'm told Potter resisted Imperius fairly well, though of course Albus still won't let me teach the little blighter Occlumency."

"I don't understand why Dumbledore won't listen to you," Remus said.

Severus waved a hand. "He says he has his reasons. It frustrates the bloody fuck out of me, but I trust him."

Remus wondered why they were having this inane conversation. Perhaps it was easier than all the apologies and promises that needed to be spoken. His stomach rumbled.

"Have you eaten?"

"Not yet." Remus didn't think there was any reason to tell him he hadn't eaten in nearly two days.

"Come have supper. It's shepherd's pie." Severus started to turn.

Remus dropped his bag and lunged forwards, wrapping his arms around Severus. "I love you so much," he gasped. His eyes were stinging. "I missed you. I kept thinking of how we parted, how I left. I hated myself."

Severus made a strangled noise and reached awkwardly back to touch Remus' hip; Remus had pinned both of his arms to his sides. "I hated myself for driving you away," he murmured. "I knew it was my fault."

"It wasn't. It was the curse, and I even knew it, I just couldn't admit it. I'm so sorry, Severus."

Severus sighed and twisted around. He got his arms around Remus and pulled him close. "I'm sorry, too, Remus."

"Take me to bed," Remus whispered.

Severus just nodded.



Remus spent the rest of Harry's fourth year doing research for Dumbledore. He spent several days at Oxford and Cambridge, reading up on certain superstitions and customs. He went to Edinburgh to check on his father, who seemed to be doing much better. Remus was certain his father would never look at another woman the way he'd looked at Maggie, but he wasn't drinking himself into unconsciousness every night.

Sirius owled him occasionally, keeping him updated on Harry. Remus compared what Sirius told him to what Severus told him and split the difference to surmise the truth. Rita Skeeter seemed to be treating Harry rather badly, but the boy was handling the Tri-Wizard Tournament well. Remus was proud of the third-hand account he got of the Second Task; he was the one who had taught Harry how to deal with grindylows, after all.

Severus got him a seat at the Third Task. Remus helped a bit with crowd control when it became clear that the

Diggory boy was dead. Then Moody and Harry vanished, and Severus seized Remus' shoulders.

"Go home," he ordered. When Remus began to protest, he added quietly, "Please. Remus, I need to know you're safe."

Remus looked at him for a long moment, then nodded.

Sirius arrived at the cottage later that evening, saying he was meant to lie low for a while. Remus owled Severus, but got no response.

That was when he knew that the war had begun again in earnest.



"He told me to come to you here," Sirius explained. He was sprawled over the table, his legs splayed out in two different directions. His hair was unkempt, he was down to skin and bones, and he obviously hadn't shaved in several days. And if the way he was gnawing at the left-over chicken was anything to judge by, he hadn't eaten in perhaps as many days.

"How is Harry taking it?" Remus asked. More than anything he wanted to know how Severus was, but he couldn't think of a way to ask. He hadn't, in the past year's exchange of letters, managed to think of a way to tell Sirius that he was gay, let alone that he was with Severus.

"Harry's a real trooper," Sirius said, licking his fingers and looking proud. Remus held in a snort. As if Sirius had anything to do with that. Severus had had more to do with Harry than Sirius had. "He spent some time telling Albus everything that had happened, and then I was in hospital with him for a while. Until Fudge threw his hysterics and Dumbledore sent me here to you."

"Did he have any messages for me?" Remus asked.

"Dumbledore? No." Sirius' expression said clearly that he couldn't imagine why Dumbledore would have any messages for Remus. "He just told me Snape's part of our team this time around, and told me to round up the old crowd." He snorted.

"Severus was part of our team the last time around, too," Remus said. "It's just that most people didn't know it because it would be something of a danger to him, if we'd all known."

Sirius snorted again. "Whatever, mate. Anyway, if I can kip on the sofa here for a while, that'd be much appreciated."

Remus thought of Severus, due to come home from the school term in a few days, and sighed. "Of course," he said. He'd just have to ask Severus to go to the house at Spinner's End for a while. Or you could just tell Sirius, you sodding twat, said Severus' voice in his head. Remus smiled faintly. That was exactly what his lover might say.

"Thanks. You're ace, Moony."

Remus turned away so Sirius wouldn't see his bitter smile. It wasn't that Remus didn't welcome him, exactly. It was more that Remus' life was just settling back into something approaching normal again, and having Sirius here was going to make it that much more complicated. He didn't believe Sirius could have changed that much during those years in Azkaban.

When Remus was spreading a blanket on the sofa for Sirius, he realised he'd left a picture of him and Severus on the coffee table. They weren't doing anything incriminating, just sitting together in the staff room at Hogwarts, but it would be enough to make Sirius ask questions. He palmed the picture and slipped it into his trouser pocket.

Sirius came back from the toilet and Remus was surprised to see that his pyjamas hung off Sirius' frame. It was incongruous; Sirius had always been the bigger of them.

"You're sure you don't mind? Having me here, I mean. I'm not interrupting your private life?" Sirius' voice sounded odd.

Remus shrugged. "What could you possibly be interrupting?" he said, which wasn't an answer at all.

Sirius' only reply was an answering shrug.



Remus woke much later in the night to the sound of raised voices. He sat up in bed, trying to think why someone would be yelling in his house.

"What the devil are you doing here?" Severus' voice was tight with fury, and Remus thought he could hear a certain amount of desperation in it.

"Why the fuck are you creeping about Remus' house?" Sirius demanded, and there was only pure hostility there.

Remus jumped out of bed, clutching his wand, and ran out of the bedroom.

"I'm here on Order business," Severus retorted, "and nothing that concerns you. I have information for Remus, not some washed up has-been of a criminal."

Sirius snarled and raised his wand, but Remus, with an exasperated sigh, hurried out to stand between them. "What is going on?" he asked, knowing he sounded cranky but unable to care. "Your shouting could wake the dead."

"Snape here says he needs to see you," Sirius snarled. "He came sneaking in, got through your wards somehow—you can't fucking trust him, Moony!"

"I confess, I wasn't expecting to see another man sleeping in your house, Lupin," Severus said smoothly, his tone arch. "Perhaps I ought to leave you two your privacy."

"Fuck you, Snape!" Sirius retorted.

"Shut it, Sirius," Remus said, glaring at his old friend. "Come back to the bedroom, Severus. I don't want to disturb Sirius' sleep."

Sirius made a sceptical noise behind them, but Remus ignored it. He led the way back to his bedroom, waited for Severus to follow him in, then placed an Imperturbable Spell on it. The moment they were in private, he spun and seized Severus in his arms.

"Are you all right?" he demanded, pulling Severus against him.

"I am...in better shape than most of my compatriots." Severus allowed himself to lean slightly against Remus' frame, resting his cheek on Remus' head.

"I've been so bloody worried," Remus admitted. He lifted his head to kiss Severus, his lips gentle but searching. "What happened?"

"I can't really tell you much, Remus. Not until the Headmaster decides what to do."

"I know." Remus squeezed lightly. "Tell me what you can."

Severus pressed his forehead to Remus' shoulder. "You know I'm going back."



Remus sighed, but nodded. It didn't make either of them happy, but it was no great surprise. Severus had been watching the Mark grow clearer all year.

"He was displeased at my lateness, but when I explained that I have maintained Dumbledore's trust all these years, he praised me. I have earned a place of honour at his side." Severus' voice was bitter.

Remus drew Severus towards the bed. "So he trusts you, that's good."

Severus shook his head, though he sank down onto the bed with Remus. They lay together, arms wrapped tightly around each other, fully clothed.

"Karkaroff has fled. I imagine he will be dead soon. Mad-Eye Moody has never been the Defence Professor. It was Barty Crouch, posing as Moody."

"Crouch? What, the Ministry bloke who—" Remus was rubbing his hand absently along Severus' back, as much to comfort himself as to impart comfort.

"No, not him, his son. The Death Eater."

"Merlin! I thought he was dead."

"We all did." Severus sighed. "He was mad, utterly mad. But he was able to trap Potter and take him to the Dark Lord." He closed his eyes. "I am so tired, Remus."

"Rest here, Severus. Stay here, where you're safe, tonight." It was foolish, perhaps, with Sirius in the house, but Remus needed to hold Severus, needed to be whatever small comfort he could. Severus could Apparate out later in the morning, before Sirius woke.

Severus nodded.



Remus had left most of his possessions at the cottage in Hogsmeade when he moved to Number Twelve Grimmauld Place with Sirius and the Weasleys. Dumbledore had explained that he would leave Harry with the Dursleys only as long as necessary and then send out a group of Order members to retrieve him. In the meantime, letters to Harry were to have as little detail in them as possible.

The news that Harry had been forced to fight off two Dementors in Privet Drive was alarming. Severus and Dumbledore had an argument that night, something about teaching Potter Occlumency. They were

ensconced in the Headquarters Library, but from what Remus overheard, Severus won that argument, at least nominally. He was finally to be allowed to teach Harry.

"Not until after Christmas," Dumbledore said. "We should give him one last semester of normalcy."

Remus shook his head and spent the next two hours calming Severus down in his rooms on the third floor. Sex that night was rough and fast.



Sirius was bitter about being back in his old home. When the Advance Guard finally did go to bring Harry home, he wasn't allowed to join them, which made him even angrier. The Order members had been working on cleaning up the house, but it was slow going, and Sirius resented having to do so. Once the adults caught on to the fact that Fred and George were inventing things with some of the Dark items they found in the house, Remus caught Sirius giving them tips. "From a Marauder to the next generation," Sirius murmured, with a furtive grin.

With Dumbledore's encouragement, Remus had got in contact with some of the werewolves of Fenrir Greyback's pack. Severus wasn't happy about it, but he knew Remus was uniquely suited to the job. "We'll need a spy among the werewolves soon," Dumbledore told them. They were in a private meeting, just the three of them, after everyone else had gone to sleep.

"Remus is too openly allied with you," Severus said. "He'll never pass as a lone wolf."

"I've been careful not to appear too happy with Dumbledore since the scandal," Remus told him. "It seemed prudent to distance myself. I didn't want to bring the Order down along with me."

Severus shook his head, but it was obvious from his expression that he admired the forethought.



"He's mad! He's a danger to everyone in this house!" Severus was pacing Remus' room at Grimmauld Place, waving his arms and scowling. Remus was leaning against the wall, arms folded across his chest, hoping his Imperturbable Spell would hold.

"What happened, Severus?"

"What do you think? That rabid dog of a friend of yours dared to question my authority in front of his precious godson! Bad enough that the boy is insubordinate and rude to a professor, Black has to go and bloody make it worse!"

Remus sighed. Some days he wanted to punch Sirius. "What happened, Severus?" he repeated.

Severus glared at him, then spun and stalked off to look out the window. "I came to tell Potter about Occlumency lessons—Dumbledore has finally agreed to begin them, now that the Dark Lord is aware of Potter's weakness. A fine time to begin!" he added scornfully. "When Black got wind of it, he insisted on being there when I told Potter. First he twitted me about this being his house, then he twitted me about Lucius Bloody Malfoy!"

Remus sighed. "I can't believe you didn't have anything to say back to him."

"As if he cared about being called a coward," Severus scoffed. "It bounced off his thick skull and had no effect." He snorted and turned to face Remus, mirroring his stance. "Bloody imbecile. He'll get himself captured, and then Potter will go into hysterics. We'll end up getting ourselves killed trying to rescue a fucking dog from the Dark Lord."

"Severus," Remus said, his tone disapproving. He didn't dare say anything more, though; he'd spent so many years not defending Severus that he felt no right to defend Sirius, now their positions were reversed.

"Tosser," Severus said. He flung himself down on the bed with a snort. "Come let me fuck you. I'm in no mood to charm you tonight."

Remus wasn't really in the mood for fucking tonight, but he didn't feel like having an argument. He began unbuttoning his shirt. "You said Arthur's home safely?"

"He got home just before I came upstairs," Severus said, his voice a bit calmer. "I suppose it's a good thing he arrived when he did. Dumbledore would've been displeased if I'd hexed Black."

Remus frowned. "What, you don't think I would have been displeased if you'd hexed him?"

"What does that matter?" Severus waved a hand. "I frankly don't care what you think about Black. Your little friendship with him is the least of my concerns."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Remus said, letting his hands fall to his sides. His shirt hung open, letting a draft blow across his chest. "Look, I don't let him say nasty things about you, Severus! Why can't you just keep your feelings about him to yourself?"

"Because he's a bloody menace!" Severus shouted. He sat up, his expression clouding over again. "Always bloody defending him, aren't you? 'Sirius is depressed! 'Sirius isn't used to inactivity'—he ought to be, after thirteen bloody years in Azkaban. Bugger Sirius Black! I'm sick and tired of having to put up with him in order to see you!"

Remus had been growing angrier the longer Severus spoke, but something about the last sentence brought him back to his senses.

"Look, you don't have to," he offered. "I mean, I'll come up to the castle."

"And have Black crowing that he'd finally run me off? I think not." Severus snorted. "I'll come here as often as I like. This is still Order Headquarters, after all. And I am a member of the Order, am I not?"

Remus sighed. "I don't know why you have to make everything so difficult."

"Because life is difficult." Severus frowned at him again, but the heat had gone out of it. "Come here, Remus," he said, his voice taking on a petulant tone that was the closest he would get to asking, tonight.

Remus went.



Sirius expelled a heavy sigh. "Will you quit your bloody pacing and sit the fuck down?"

Remus turned and glared, jealous of the way Sirius was able to sit almost still in his chair, a book propped on his crossed leg. "Will you just keep your nose out of it?" he retorted, though the school-boy insults had grown tiring. Sirius was his age, but mentally, emotionally, there were times he seemed no older than twenty. It brought out the worst in Remus.

"I don't see what you're so overwrought about, anyway. It's just the bloody Death Eaters terrorising Muggles and half-bloods. Nothing to do with you."

"Nothing to—" Remus broke off. "Look, you idiot, Severus is out there! This charade grows more dangerous for him as time passes—"

"So concerned for poor Snivelly," Sirius remarked. "I don't know why you care about him so much."

"Because I love him!" Remus retorted, too angry to care that he'd just blurted it out. "Because I have done for fifteen years, and he puts himself in danger every time he does this! Because I'm afraid someday he won't come back!"

The room suddenly seemed as if it had no air. Remus sucked in a breath.

"You love him?" Sirius was staring at him. "What the fuck, Moony." He shook his head. "A whole fucking year later you finally grow the stones to tell me. Congratulations, d'you want a prize?"

"What?" Remus blinked, suddenly confused.

"D'you think I'm stupid?" Sirius demanded. "Did you think I wouldn't notice the picture of you two together? Or the way your closet has black swoopy robes in it? Or the fact there's two toothbrushes in your loo? God!"

"I didn't—"

"What about the way you pushed me aside the first night I came to you for help, pushed me away and let Snape into your bedroom? Did you think I honestly believed that was about Order business? That was about fucking each other to make sure he was still on our side!"

"What?" Remus stared with growing anger at Sirius. "My relationship with Severus has nothing to do with assuring his loyalties! I love him! He's the only person in this world I couldn't do without! The only one, Sirius, because you haven't been around for the last fifteen years!"

"I was in prison, you fucking idiot!"

"You bloody got yourself thrown in Azkaban! If you'd just trusted me enough to tell me you'd bloody switched, none of that would've happened!"

"Didn't do much to try to keep me out, did you?"

"You fucking murdered the Potters! Or as good as, in my opinion back then." Remus' fists were clenched.

"Yeah, thanks for not even bothering to see if it was true!"

"You'd already proved you were capable of attempting murder!" Remus shouted.

A silence fell between them, broken only by Sirius' bitter chuckles and Remus' angry pants. He felt almost sick to his stomach—look at them! They'd been such good

friends in school, and now that Remus knew Sirius was innocent, they ought to be close again. Instead they were doing a fine job of dividing themselves without Voldemort having to lift a finger.

Finally Remus sighed. "I'm sorry," he began, just as Sirius muttered the same thing. There was a moment of silence, then Remus nodded and Sirius shrugged.

It would do, to be going on with.



Severus flung the door open, expecting it to be the Headmaster. Instead he found himself staring at his lover. "What are you doing here?" he demanded in a low voice. He dragged Remus inside and shut the door. Then he turned to glower at Remus.

"You already know why I'm here," Remus said, folding his arms across his chest.

"Regardless of your persistent ideas to the contrary, I am not a mind-reader," Severus snapped.

"Funny, that's exactly why I'm here," Remus replied. "You quit giving Harry Occlumency lessons? Severus, you spent the better part of five years telling Dumbledore that the boy needed to learn it! You can't just quit!"

Severus swallowed but turned away as if he were unconcerned. "The boy has no aptitude." He went further inside his quarters, fully expecting Remus to follow.

"No aptitude! That's bollocks! He's brilliant when he puts his mind to anything! Do I need to tell him again how important this is? We can get him to apply himself, Severus."

"I don't want him applying himself!" Severus burst out. "I don't want the little bastard anywhere near me!" He spun and faced Remus. Finally, here was someone to whom he could vent all of his rage. And conveniently, here was one of the people who had stood by idly while Severus was humiliated.

"Did Potter happen to tell you why I've stopped the lessons? Or did he just pretend he didn't know, like the coward that he is? He looked into my Pensieve! The little sneak-thief felt he was entitled to see what I chose to keep from him, knowing I didn't want him to see!"

Remus frowned. "He had the nerve to peer into your Pensieve? He should serve detention for that, for a good long time."

"Yes, well, I can't exactly give the brat detentions, with Umbridge about, can I?" Severus glared at Remus. "You shouldn't be here, either, you idiot! If she caught a werewolf in the castle—and in my quarters—if she found out I'm queer—Merlin! I'd be out on my arse."

Remus stepped closer, looking determined. "Don't change the subject. Sirius and I will speak with Harry. What he did was wrong. But he needs to be taught! You've been saying so yourself for years, Severus, don't let this stop you—"

"He saw the day of our Defence OWL!" Severus shouted. "Do you remember that day, Remus? I sure as fuck remember it! Your friends turned me upside down in front of the entire school and stole my pants! And now that bloody arrogant brat Potter has seen it, too!"

"We were stupid children, and you should know that seeing that bothered Harry. He hadn't ever believed you when you told him how horrid James was to you, you know. He saw that you'd been telling the truth. He understands better now, Severus."

"Just what I want, Potter's pity!" Severus snarled. "Why don't you get the fuck out, if you're going to take his side!"

"I'm not taking his side," Remus protested. "I just don't want to see this fall apart because he's done something wrong. You're right, you know you're right, he does need to be trained in Occlumency. Please give him another chance, Severus."

"Sod that," Severus said, turning and stalking across the room.

"No, Severus, please!" Remus said. "He needs you!"

Severus whirled and glared at him. "Get out!" he ordered. "I won't teach him! Dumbledore can teach him himself—he's plenty of talent for it."

Remus frowned, extending a hand, and Severus cut off his words.

"Out!" He reinforced the order by throwing a teacup he hadn't even remembered he was holding.

Remus ducked and hurried out the door.

Severus stared at the wet patch of tea dripping down the stone wall and suddenly his rage drained out of him, leaving him empty again. God, what a mess. Occlumency lessons were ruined, he wasn't joking

about that. He couldn't stand to see Potter in class anymore, let alone think of spending time alone with him. And now he'd run his lover out of the castle by bloody throwing things at him.

He went to the drinks cabinet for a tumbler of Firewhiskey and slumped onto his sofa, staring at the fire.



Severus knocked hesitantly on the door of Remus' bedroom at Number Twelve Grimmauld Place. He had finally been released from Dumbledore's office ten minutes ago, and he'd left the school at once, making the trek down to the school gates so he could Apparate here. Dumbledore and Minerva had both assured him that Remus was uninjured, but he had to see for himself. And he needed to know if he would be welcome, or if Black's death would ruin things somehow.

There was a long silence, so long Severus knocked again. Just as he was about to admit defeat and concede that Remus didn't want to see him (because it might be three in the morning, but Remus wouldn't be asleep, he knew that), the door creaked open. Severus could see the flickering light of a fire, but no lamps were lit.

"Severus." It was a whispered word, but there was a frightening amount of need and relief commingled in it. He stepped forward and wrapped his arms around Remus, pulling him against his chest and burying his face in greying hair.

"I came as soon as I could get away," he murmured, hoping he really was welcome here.

Remus melted against his embrace, his hands twisting themselves into Severus' robes. "God, I'm so—I needed you to come. I'm so glad you did." He was shaking.

Severus tightened his hold on Remus and guided him over to the bed. "I've been worried about you," he murmured. Remus didn't resist as Severus lowered him to the bed, then began working at the buttons of his shirt. Severus stroked his palms over Remus' skin, not to arouse, but to reassure himself. He wanted to take care of Remus, to help him in any way he could.

"Sirius..." Remus didn't finish that sentence, so Severus ignored it for the moment. He got Remus' trousers off and lifted Remus' legs into bed, pulling a blanket over him. Then he undressed himself and climbed in next to Remus, doing his best to wrap himself around Remus.



Remus sighed and turned his face to press it against Severus'. His cheeks were wet. "I couldn't remember how to cry," he said. His voice was strangely normal. "I kept thinking I ought to be screaming, I ought to be crying, and all I could do was stare."

"It was unexpected," Severus said. He was worried about Remus, but he frankly didn't care about Black. He felt mostly relieved that he was gone. There would be no more fights about how Black and Severus weren't getting on. He didn't like seeing Remus grieving, but he himself wouldn't mourn for Black's passing.

"You're glad, aren't you?" Remus said after a while.

"I'm never glad to see you hurt," Severus said truthfully.

Remus, of course, would know how to translate that correctly. He sighed. "He could be kind, and clever, and he was my first friend."

"He made my life miserable," Severus said. After a moment he added softly, "But I know you loved him."

Remus shifted in his arms. Severus could tell, even in the dim light, that Remus was peering at him. "Not more than I love you." He swallowed audibly. "Thank you for not coming to the Ministry tonight. Thank you for not getting yourself killed."

"I should be saying that to you," Severus protested. The thought that it could easily have been Remus to go through the Veil like that—although Severus knew Remus didn't have the puffed-up pride or fatal recklessness that Sirius had possessed—made him shudder.

"Will you stay with me tonight?"

"I thought," Severus said hesitantly, "that you might come stay at the castle with me. Just for a few days. Dumbledore—I already cleared it with the Headmaster."

Remus was silent for a long time, then he sighed. "Get out of this prison?" He was silent for another minute. "That would be good, I think."

Severus nodded and sat up slowly. "We can Floo to my quarters. The Ministry isn't watching the Hogwarts Floos anymore. Dumbledore got that done straight off."

Remus sat up, too. "Yes, take me back with you." He watched Severus, then lifted his head and kissed Severus clumsily. His lips were warm and wet and hard, and for a moment Severus wasn't sure if this was really

what Remus wanted. But then Severus responded and Remus' lips softened for him, parted for him, and Remus let out a quiet moan. Yes, this was what Remus wanted. Severus pulled Remus onto his lap and kissed him again. They could always Floo later.



Remus knew the rest of the Order members were surprised (and disapproving, most of them) at how well he took Sirius' death, but more than anything he felt a burning resolution to defeat Voldemort once and for all. He wanted to destroy those responsible for ruining his life. His friends had been killed, his lover tainted and manipulated, and his mentor discredited. He wanted out. He wanted to end it. He wanted to live his happily ever after with Severus, and that wasn't going to happen until Voldemort was destroyed.

He went to the werewolves in August.

He had paved his way by making tentative friendships with several of the werewolves. He couldn't say he was particularly fond of camping out in the woods, but the werewolf camp was more comfortable than some of the tenements he'd lived in, and at least the water was clean.

He had to fight his way up through some of the lower ranks to be accepted by the pack in general, but a few bloody noses and black eyes and cracked ribs past August, Fenrir decided Lupin was a decent enough bloke, and worthy to be accepted as a ranking pack member. From then on, Remus was included in some of the pack meetings and invited to eat with Fenrir's group at the campfire every night. He passed along some of the information to Dumbledore, but most of it he shared only with Severus, allowing Severus to determine what should be betrayed and what shouldn't. Severus, after all, was the experienced spy. Remus was fairly new at this.

All the same, their roles were placing a heavy strain on their relationship. Severus turned up in the werewolf camp sometimes, making plans with Greyback, and Remus didn't like the person he saw. Then again, one of the times Severus turned up in camp, Remus was engaged in a lengthy scuffle with one of the other wolves. He'd had to watch as the other man, who outweighed Remus by a good three stone, broke Remus' wrist and bruised a kidney. Remus had come out the victor, all the same, and his lips had been wet with the other man's blood by the time the fight ended.

Greyback had asked Severus to give Remus healing and pain potions, so they'd had a few moments of privacy in the shack Remus shared with two other single men. Remus almost wished they hadn't.

"What the fuck was that?" Severus demanded, his voice a sibilant hiss. He was dabbing ointment on one of Remus' bloodied knuckles.

"Dominance," Remus grunted, equally quiet. "It's how things are done."

"You looked like a bloody animal."

"Yes, well, that's what I am, *Snape*, so glad you noticed." Remus hadn't got over the way Severus smirked and put his nose in the air and dropped thinly veiled insults around him when he was playing the Death Eater.

"Sod off," Severus muttered. "I didn't mean it like that, to insult you. We're both just—"

"Acting?" Remus snorted. "Except we both know you think it's dirty here, and you don't like the fleas or the primitive conditions."

"That doesn't make me a snob," Severus objected. "It makes me someone who wants a little civilisation, that's all."

"We're civilised!"

"Oh, so it's 'we', now, is it?" Severus asked. He lifted a brow and held out a tiny vial of purple liquid. "Drink it all."

"There's no need to give me orders like I'm Greyback or one of your other lackeys!"

Severus raised an eyebrow, but said nothing. He pointed his wand at Remus' wrist. "*Ferula*." Remus winced slightly at the tightness, but didn't protest.

"Leave it on for at least a day," Severus said, his voice even more curt than usual. "And here's another pain potion for when that one wears off. Mind you don't anger Greyback, or he'll likely rebreak that for you." He stood up, his gaze hooded.

Remus' eyes widened as he realised Severus was going to leave it at that. He opened his mouth to protest, but before he could speak, Severus swooped down and pressed his mouth hard against Remus'. A moment later Severus Disapparated.

"Oh, Severus, there you are. Dolohov said you'd chosen to grace us with your presence, but I hadn't seen you yet."

Severus glanced at Rodolphus, who was sprawled casually in a chair, smoking. "Hardly a pleasure for any of us, I'm sure," Severus said, though his tone was dry with humour, rather than hostile. He didn't care for Rodolphus, but he was better than Malfoy.

"You say the drollest things, Severus," said Rabastan, who walked behind Rodolphus' chair and draped himself over it to steal his brother's drink. "One might almost think you didn't like us."

"One might almost be right," Severus said lightly. He had found, over the years, that it was extremely enjoyable to say unpleasant things in a joking sort of fashion. People never quite knew whether he was joking, but then they never quite realised he wasn't joking at all.

Narcissa's face flashed in front of his mind. It was unfortunate that she had turned into such a damnably likeable woman, once she was left to think on her own while her husband rotted in Azkaban for a few months. It was disgustingly clever of her to have come to him for help; she knew he was rather fond of Draco, and she knew he loathed emotional displays.

"Won't you join us at table, Severus?" said Dolohov, who had already filled his plate. "You so rarely have time for us these days, what with serving both masters and all."

Severus looked sharply at him, but Dolohov merely blinked at him. "I serve Our Lord, Dolohov. Better than you, with your fumbling attempts and failure to kill a school girl. Blast you, I was looking forward to not having to teach that Mudblood Granger ever again." As he spoke, Severus sat between Dolohov and Nott and dished himself small portions of food.

"You should have saved the Mudblood for me, Antonin," Bellatrix said. She raked her fingernails down his cheek and went to sit next to her husband. Rabastan gave her a disgruntled look and took the seat on the other side of Rodolphus.

"You needn't watch me so avidly," Severus said, glancing at Nott. "If you have poisoned the food, I shall, of course, be immune. I've built up a tolerance for every poison you cretins could possibly think of."

Nott gave a nervous chuckle and took a bite of his potatoes.



"Draco won't be joining us, Narcissa?"

Severus glanced up at those words. He hadn't even noticed Narcissa. She was sitting in a chair at the other end of the long table, her robes black. She wore a black lace thing over her hair, and her eyes were rimmed in red.

"Fuck you, Bellatrix!" Narcissa burst out, and she jumped to her feet, then stormed off. The Lestranges glanced at each other, then laughed.

Severus stood, placed his silver precisely, and stalked out after her. It wouldn't stop them tormenting her entirely, but he was the Dark Lord's most faithful. His disapproval would register with the others, at least.

He caught up with Narcissa in the next room. She was standing with one hand on the wall, as if it were holding her up. Her thin shoulders were shaking.

"You take them too much to heart," Severus murmured, stepping behind her. He placed a hand on one shoulder. "I have sworn to protect him, Narcissa. Do you trust me so little? Or do you value my skills so poorly?"

"No, no," she wept, "but my son, my baby boy!"

He bit back a sigh. He was growing heartily tired of her waterworks. "Narcissa, he is nearly a man grown. If you wanted something else for him, you should have made different decisions years ago. As it is, he has made one decision for himself already. I cannot undo it, but I have already promised to do what I can to ameliorate it. You must trust me, Narcissa."

"What do you know of loving someone this much?" she burst out, whirling to stare accusingly at him. "You've never had anyone love you, you've never loved anyone! You can't understand what it's like!"

Oh, if you only knew, he thought. Instead he merely nodded curtly at her. "I have given my word. If you do not mean to call me liar and duel with me, then kindly shut your mouth."

She stared at him, but she shut her mouth.

Severus began to pray even more fervently that some miracle would get both him and Draco out of the school term without having killed.



It wasn't until Christmas that Remus was able to get away from the pack for any extended length of time.

The Weasleys had invited him to spend Christmas at the Burrow; they were worried about Harry, and thought a visit with his former professor and friend might help. Remus, for his part, didn't see why they were so concerned about Harry. He seemed a bit obsessed with this Half-Blood Prince, but aside from that, he seemed to be taking things well. Remus just wished Harry hadn't given up Occlumency lessons.

Molly and Fleur weren't getting along well at all, and it was clear to see the battle lines drawn in the house. Ron and Ginny loathed her. Charlie and Percy weren't around to voice their opinions, and Bill obviously loved her. Remus didn't have any arguments against her. She was French, yes, but he'd never seen in her any of the prejudice the French had against werewolves.

Remus and Arthur had a few pleasant discussions about Muggle things and the way the werewolves lived. Bill had been interested in that, too; he claimed to have a werewolf friend in Egypt. Molly Weasley spent the holiday making digs about Tonks that he didn't quite understand, while Fleur gave him knowing looks. On Boxing Day he went home to the cottage in Hogsmeade, where Severus was waiting for him.

"What's all this shite about Tonks?" Remus demanded, stroking a hand down Severus' chest. They were both still slightly clammy with sweat after their earlier exertions. Severus arched against Remus' hand, humming. "Doesn't she have a family?"

"What, the brown hair and whinging?" he asked. "Don't you know?"

"Obviously I don't, or I wouldn't be asking you. Is she still upset about Sirius?"

"Idiot. She's arse over tit in love with you. You honestly didn't realise it?"

"If I'd realised it, I would've done something about it," Remus said, once the initial horror had worn off and he could speak again. "Honestly she's in love with me? Where did she get that ridiculous notion?"

"He's so brave and noble and self-sacrificing," Severus simpered. "He carries on so stoically after all of his friends are dead. Everyone shuns him, but they ought to be thanking him. He's such a hero."

Remus made a gagging noise. "Stop, or I'll stop you," he warned.

“And he’s so handsome! He has those little laugh lines by his eyes that show what a good sense of humour he has! And his hair is so manly and rugged—”

Severus made a muffled noise of surprise as Remus rolled over and pounced on him, silencing him with his mouth.

Several minutes later, they were nestled together, Remus’ arm across Severus’ stomach, his head on Severus’ shoulder. “I love you so much,” he murmured. “I know we never really broadcast our relationship, but I didn’t suppose it was much of a secret from the Order this time around. I suppose no one really noticed.”

“Of course they didn’t realise, the dunderheads. They wouldn’t notice if we both dressed in drag and held hands at the Order meetings,” Severus said.

“Your opinion of our allies doesn’t inspire much confidence that we’ll win the war,” Remus said.

Severus sighed. “We’ll win,” he said. “Or I’ll die in the attempt.”

“Don’t say that!” Remus tightened his arm around him. When Severus didn’t respond, Remus tilted his head to look up at him. Severus looked grieved. “Severus?”

“I’m going to kill Dumbledore,” he said. His voice was heavy, his eyes shining with sudden tears. “Before the school year is over, he’ll be dead either at Draco’s hand or mine.”

“What?” Remus whispered. “You’re lying.”

“I wouldn’t lie about this. The Dark Lord has ordered Draco to kill Dumbledore. He has failed in two attempts, and our master grows impatient. I made the Unbreakable Vow to Narcissa that I would protect Draco—and that I would complete his task in the event that he failed. I expect he will.”

“Severus...” Remus trailed off. “It...you can’t.”

“He’s already dying, just a little bit at a time,” Severus said. “The curse that shrivelled his hand is slowly working its way up. When it reaches his heart...” He sighed.

“You’re keeping him alive,” Remus guessed. “With potions, aren’t you?”

Severus nodded. “I’m doing what I can to slow it. But I can’t stop it indefinitely, not without truly Dark magic. And I don’t really want to see Draco become a murderer. I have no desire to kill the Headmaster myself, but Draco isn’t a killer. He’s a nasty little prig, but he’s not a killer.”

Remus swallowed and held Severus tighter. “I’m so sorry, Severus. Do the others know?”

“No!” Severus’ voice was fierce. “No one knows but us three! And it has to stay that way, Remus! No one in the Order can trust me, or Dumbledore’s plans will be for naught. If I kill him, I will truly be the Dark Lord’s most faithful servant. He will keep me at his side, he will tell me his plans and secrets. I will be ideally placed to help Potter and pass information along to the Order—through you.”

“Oh, Severus. Will this never end?” Remus felt as if he were choking. He wanted to take Severus away from all this, to give him freedom from the life of servitude that had been imposed on him because of one moment of poor judgment.

“Just promise you’ll always trust me, Remus. If I have you, I have all I need.” Severus’ voice was barely a whisper.

Remus pushed himself on one elbow and leaned over to kiss him passionately. “I promise.”



Remus didn’t have to feign his shock and horror when Ginny announced, at Bill’s bedside, that Dumbledore was dead. He shouldn’t have been surprised. He’d seen Severus dashing up to the Astronomy Tower, had tried to follow and been thrown back. He had known what Severus had sworn to do...and yet, when it came to it, he couldn’t quite take in the fact that his lover had killed the Headmaster.

His mind spun and reeled as they recounted the battle for Harry. Tonks was right, they had been losing. They were so grateful to know Severus was going to help them. He’d had a near miss when Gibbon took the Killing Curse instead of him. It hadn’t stopped him rushing forwards once the barrier fell, but then Severus was back, Malfoy in tow, and he brushed past Remus as if he didn’t even see him.

His mind kept replaying that moment. Severus brushed past Remus as if he didn’t even see him.

What if it had all been a sham? What if Severus had truly thrown his lot back in with the Death Eaters? Remus listened to the phoenix song reverberating in the air and struggled against the unwelcome thoughts creeping into his mind. Dumbledore had been growing weaker since he destroyed the ring Horcrux. Severus



would have seen this easily, with his proximity to Dumbledore. He'd been brewing potions to keep the infection from spreading. He would know how close Dumbledore was to death. He knew the old man wouldn't resist when Severus pointed his wand for the Killing Curse. How easy would it have been for Severus to turn his allegiance back to Voldemort?



The thoughts plagued Remus so that he was only mildly distracted and humiliated by the scene Tonks made. He answered her with a clenched jaw, feeling more anger for Severus than for Tonks. He let her shake him, he made the same, tired old excuses, he brushed her aside. None of it mattered. Dumbledore was dead at his lover's hand. What if Severus had truly switched sides again?

All through the funeral, where he clutched Tonks' hands tightly to keep from coming apart, he wondered. Had Severus betrayed them? Had Severus truly had no time for farewells? Had Severus ever really cared?

But later, when he sent the others on ahead of him to Headquarters and he rested his back against the sun-warmed stone of Dumbledore's grave, Remus could feel life and strength slowly returning to him. Severus had asked Remus to promise he would always trust him. Remus had promised that. He hadn't known, at the time, what a test it would be, to keep that promise.

But he looked back at their relationship—nearly twenty years of defying the logic that would have kept them apart. In all that time, there had only been one time that Remus had questioned Severus' loyalty—and that moment, that confrontation in Slughorn's classroom, had been what pushed Severus into the fold of the Death Eaters to begin with.

What would it do to Severus if Remus stopped believing in him now?

Remus shook his head. No, he had promised to trust Severus always. He would keep that promise.



When Remus arrived at Headquarters, everyone was already gathered in the kitchen. People scooted around to make room for him at the table, and Molly placed a plate of food in front of him. After he finished eating, the Order got down to business.

Harry informed them all that he wasn't returning to Hogwarts. Hermione and Ron would be accompanying him on his Horcrux hunt, though Ginny had agreed to stay on at the school. Remus could read the relief clearly on Molly Weasley's face; she had nearly lost one child to the war, and though she wasn't thrilled about Ron's accompanying Harry, no one could deny him that right. Ginny, though...Ginny was her baby.

"We've lost our spy among the Death Eaters," Minerva said, stirring her tea absently. "If he was ever truly our spy."

Remus saw an opportunity and jumped in. "You still have me," he said. He knew Minerva wouldn't trust him as much as she had before; she would wonder if he'd known about Severus' loyalties. But he'd been included in the meeting, so he had to assume she thought he was trustworthy. "I know the werewolves aren't as good as the inner circle, but Greyback is a Death Eater. And he trusts me. I can get information."

She looked dubious. "You were fighting on our side at the school, Remus. Surely he saw that."

"He thinks I was fighting for him," Remus lied. He hadn't been back to the pack, but he suspected he'd been made. All the same, it was a good cover for where he was getting the information that would actually be coming from Severus.

"It's a good point," Tonks said, smiling at Remus. Lord, the soppish, self-deceiving love he saw in her eyes made his stomach lurch. "Remus can be our spy."

"It's too much to ask," Molly said. "Tonks could lose him."

"We all have to make sacrifices," Tonks said. Remus felt sick.

"I'm going back," he said, his voice harsher than it needed to be. "Tonks doesn't have any control over whether or not I go back. I have a duty to the Order, and that comes before any personal considerations. Always."

Molly looked surprised, and Tonks stared at him. He saw Fleur nodding slowly.

"Eet ees true," she said. "Remus knows theese, as my Bill knows theese. We must bring Voldemort down. He will destroy all that we love. What does eet profit if we stay safely at home, only to be killed by ze Death Eaters once Voldemort takes over the world?"

Minerva gave her an approving look. "Well said, Fleur," she said. "Very well, Remus. Thank you."

Severus' first owl told Remus where to find the next Horcrux. Remus passed along to Harry that Voldemort had werewolves guarding Malfoy Manor. Along with Hermione, Ron, and Harry, he came up with a plan to subdue the werewolves without hurting any of them—a modified version of the Wolfsbane potion would make even untransformed werewolves sluggish and unable to fight back. Draco was a fugitive and Narcissa had gone into hiding; Malfoy Manor was attended only by the house-elves and the werewolves.

The stealth attack went exactly as planned—partially because the werewolves 'guarding' Malfoy Manor were friends of Remus' who had arranged to take this guard shift. Remus had asked them to cooperate by drinking the modified potion and 'falling asleep' at their posts.

The Hufflepuff Cup was destroyed before the sun rose that day.

Remus couldn't help them scour every second-hand magic shop in England looking for the Slytherin locket, but he had been able to tell them the names of several criminal types with whom Mundungus usually dealt. Hermione and Ron looked for the locket while Harry spent time looking through the Room of Requirement at Hogwarts. Harry had explained how he'd hidden the Half-Blood Prince's potions text there, and how he was certain he'd seen something with an eagle crest on it, though he couldn't remember exactly what.

The Slytherin locket was found a fortnight before Harry discovered Ravenclaw's writing case. They burned the writing case in a magical fire hot enough to melt the locket.

Severus reported to Remus that the Dark Lord was becoming forgetful and easily confused. Nagini was always by him, and Severus was certain Dumbledore's theory had been correct; the snake was the final Horcrux.

Now it was up to the Order and the Aurors to plan their final attack against Voldemort's stronghold at Riddle House.

The battle was raging around them. Remus ducked another curse and recast his shields. He had to find Severus. He had to learn if Nagini had been killed. Harry couldn't face Voldemort until the snake was dead.

Remus had been caught up in the first skirmish, fighting off werewolves and giants along with some of the goblins that had gone to Voldemort's side. He finally fought free of it and made his way further into the house. Bodies were crumpled on the floor of the entryway and smoke hung thick in the room. Remus stayed only long enough to determine that Severus wasn't among the slain, then he went on to the next room.

He finally found them upstairs, in the room that had obviously once been a library. Now it was reduced to little more than rubble, the books smouldering and the shelves collapsed. Severus was kneeling in one corner, blood streaming from a nasty cut on his temple, his wand raised. Nagini was writhing at his feet. Snake bodies, Remus remembered, continued to twitch for some time after they were actually dead. He hoped that was the case with Nagini.

Harry and Ron was standing over a fallen Hermione, their wands raised. Voldemort and Lucius Malfoy stood at the other end of the room. Bellatrix Lestrange was also there, dragging a surly-looking Draco forward into the fray.

"Let Draco prove himself, my lord!" she shrieked. "Let Draco kill Potter's friends."

"Severus pushed himself to his feet and stepped over Nagini's body. "Leave my godson out of this, Bellatrix!" he ordered. "You've bullied him for far too long."

Lucius looked surprised, Bellatrix astonished. Voldemort never took his eyes from Harry. "Severus has outlived his usefulness, Bella," he announced, his voice conversational. "Kill him."

It must have been the flare of agony that gripped Remus' heart which drew Severus' gaze to him; Remus knew he was too horrified to speak. Severus stared at Remus with a gaze full of love and regret, raising his wand to duel Bellatrix, who was cackling as she raised her own wand. There was no time to think, only to act. She was a rabid bitch, and Remus was well-trained. He did the only thing he could do.

"Avada Kedavra!" he cried. A jet of green light shot from his wand, just as if the past twenty years had never happened, as if he were still Dumbledore's assassin. Lucius made a noise of shock and Draco wrenched himself out of her suddenly limp hand as she fell. Her body made a dull thudding sound on the floor.

Voldemort finally lifted his eyes from Harry.

"Ah, the werewolf," he murmured, his glittering gaze impaling Remus. "I must say, Severus, your lapdog has been astonishingly faithful all these years. How touching. I shall let you die together."

"You aren't killing anyone else!" Harry said, levelling his wand at the inhuman face. "Your time is at an end, Voldemort."

There was a space of disbelieving silence from all the spectators and participants in this battle, then Voldemort began to laugh. The high-pitched noise raised the hair on Remus' neck.

"You fool!" Voldemort spat at Harry. "You can never defeat me!"

"No?" Harry looked at Severus. "Professor, show him what you did." His voice, for the first time in Remus' memory, was somewhat respectful as he addressed Severus.

Severus stepped aside obligingly, revealing the twisted form of Nagini. Voldemort let out an odd cry at the sight.

Harry nodded. "Terminus Est." He flicked his wand in a complicated gesture. A thin rope of golden fire shot out towards Voldemort, wrapping about him and suffusing his form with light. "Amas Complexus."

Voldemort let out a thin, high shriek that rose in pitch and volume, writhing and flailing, but the light didn't dissipate. Rather, it seemed to absorb into his skin, changing him, making his form less distinct. The shriek grew so loud that it seemed to shake the very foundations of the house. Draco staggered and slapped his hands over his ears, but Lucius let out a cry of pure rage and lunged at Severus.

Remus didn't move in time to stop him, but Severus flicked his wand and sent Lucius crashing into the wall. Ron dashed over to train his wand on Lucius' chest.

Remus looked back at the pillar of Voldemort-fire. It seemed to have grown thinner, less corporeal. "Harry!" he cried, alarmed, but Harry just shook his head.

There was a final shriek of denial from Voldemort, and then a flare of light blinded them all. They flinched, covering their eyes, as a deafening roar filled the air. When they looked again, a pile of ashes was all that remained of Voldemort.

He didn't understand. Oh, he understood the words—This is the end. Love combats, love envelopes. "But...but how?" he stammered.

Harry shook his head, his jaw clenching though his eyes never left Voldemort's still-burning remains. "You'd have to ask Hermione. She's the one who figured everything out."

As usual, Remus thought. He crossed the room to stand in front of Severus. He didn't dare pull him into his arms as he wished, not with a group of Gryffindors Severus most likely didn't wish to have witness their reunion. But he stared at Severus with hungry eyes, devouring the sight of him.

"You aren't hurt?" Severus murmured. Remus shook his head. He didn't know what to say back. It was obvious Severus was hurt.

"Your head," he began finally, and was grateful when Severus made a dismissive gesture.

"Nothing you can't fix at home."

A heavy hand clamped on Remus' shoulder. "You aren't going home, lad," said the gruff voice of Alastor Moody. "Not yet, at any stretch."

Remus scowled, but Moody clapped a hand over his mouth and talked over him. "You need to be looked over by a Healer, and then the Ministry will want to talk to you."

Remus pushed Moody away, though gently. "You know he won't run," he argued. "I'll stay with him at all times."

Severus shrugged. "I have nowhere to go," he told Moody.

"I'm not going home without you!" Remus insisted.

"And I tell you Snape's not going home," Moody roared.

Remus and Moody were still glaring at each other when the rest of the Aurors arrived and began taking the remaining Death Eaters into custody. The craggy-faced Auror waited until the Malfoys had been dragged out and Bellatrix's body Portkeyed to the Ministry, then he relaxed somewhat.

"Lupin, you and I both know there's no way for you to win this argument. Not unless the two of you plan to hex me and go on the run. And there's no future in that. I have it on good authority that Snape here was helping the Order all along, but if he doesn't stand trial, no one will ever believe that."

Remus felt a pang in his stomach. "I can't lose you," he whispered, staring at Severus, rather than Moody.

Moody's hand came down heavily on his shoulder. "You also need to work on hiding your emotions, boy. If I weren't an old pervert myself, you'd be in a world of hurt. How do you think the whole bloody Order didn't know you two are queer for each other? There's a reason Nymphadora Tonks spent two years pining after you, you imbecile."

"What?" blurted Remus. He heard Severus' voice echoing his question.

"Well, it was obvious she wasn't going to fancy Snape, wasn't it?" Moody said, his voice ironic. "But you, Remus, the noble, over-worked, under-appreciated, persecuted, long-suffering, kindly werewolf?" He laughed. "You were a shoo-in, boy."

Remus and Severus both just stared at him. Moody snorted and shook his head. "Don't they bother teaching logic at Hogwarts these days?" he demanded. "Aberforth and Albus and I worked hard to keep your secret from reaching the wrong ears. Snape may have been able to lie to anyone up to and including the Headmaster and You-Know-Who, but he could never quite hide the fact that he was only pretending to hate you. For that matter, he wasn't the only one pretending—why do you think I roared so loudly about the Death Eater in our midst? Trying to keep everyone focused on that, and not the way you two looked at each other sometimes." He snorted again. "And all the skill in the world at lying couldn't keep Lupin from admitting he's queer when push came to shove with Tonks."

Remus sighed. "What can we do?" he asked finally.

"You're asking me?" Moody said, pretending to be surprised. "Why should you take my advice?"

"Because you've known right from the beginning, haven't you?" Severus put in suddenly. "Damn you, you sneaky bastard." He sighed. "I'll go with him, Remus. You shouldn't make a fuss unless you want to be incriminated with me."

"D'you think I care about being incriminated if I'm going to lose you?" Remus murmured, stricken.

"Oh, for fuck's sake, Lupin! I swear, I was never as melodramatic at your age. You big girl's blouse." Moody flicked his wand. "*Incarcerous*. I promise I'll take good care of him," he growled.

Remus couldn't shake the irony—he had just murdered someone, and yet his lover was the one being led away in chains.



"And that was when I knew Professor Snape must be working as a double agent still, deep under cover," Hermione explained. Her know-it-all tone was a bit subdued, but she glanced at Harry and her resolution visibly strengthened. "It took some time to convince Harry I was right, but when it came down to the final battle, Professor Snape helped us by killing Nagini, the last of Voldemort's remaining Horcruxes."

There was a sharp intake of breath all around the crowded chamber, but despite their dismay at Hermione's insistence upon using Voldemort's name, the audience was hanging on her every word. Remus had his hands clenched tightly in his lap, though he was working very hard not to show any anxiety.

"Pray continue, Miss Granger."

She shrugged. "Bellatrix was about to kill Professor Snape when Professor Lupin acted to save his life. I saw Lucius Malfoy attempt to attack Professor Snape, but Professor Snape—"

"Miss Granger, the man is no longer a Hogwarts Professor."

Hermione paused and raised her eyebrows at the Wizengamot witch who had interrupted her. After a moment, she said, "Mister Snape deflected the attack. Ron stood guard over Lucius Malfoy while Draco watched."

"Did Snape attempt to escape?"

"Escape from what, exactly?" Hermione asked. Remus wanted to laugh. She had learned the imperious act very well.

"Escape from the Aurors."

She stared at the woman for a moment. "Of course not. He had no reason to 'escape' from his allies."

There were noises of scepticism from the gallery.

Harry stood up. "I was there!" he said, his voice echoing in the round room. "I saw it as well. Snape very clearly acted to preserve the Order and the Ministry. He's a bloody war hero and you're treating him like a criminal!"



Murmurs went around the Wizengamot. Then one of the older wizards leaned over the desk. "Mr Potter, you have defied this assembly once before, have you not?"

"There was no defiance about it," Harry said; Remus could tell he was forcing himself to speak calmly. "I was brought before the Wizengamot on charges that never stuck. I'm telling you, I'll vouch for Severus Snape's loyalty." He rubbed at the spot where his scar had once been so vivid. Somehow, during the last battle, it had faded until it was nearly invisible.

"I would also like to speak on behalf of the accused." It was Moody's voice, strident and with a note of belligerence. "First of all you're trying him on the same charges of which he was found innocent twenty years ago. Secondly you're overlooking the fact that I knew he was in deep cover, and I invested a great deal of time and money keeping him alive. Thirdly, you haven't a lick of real proof that he wasn't working for the Order, whereas Hermione Granger and Harry Potter do have proof, which I have seen. Severus Snape is innocent of the charges laid against him, and he should be free to go."

Remus hadn't realised just how much weight Moody's word would have. The Wizengamot members shifted uncomfortably in their seats and cleared their throats. Finally one of the witches said, "What Alastor says has merit. If he has seen the evidence of Snape's innocence and is convinced of it, I recommend this body not contradict his judgment."

Sudden hope seized Remus' heart in a painfully tight grip. If this was a prank, a horrible set-up, he thought the disappointment might kill him. He glanced at Severus, who, to most eyes, appeared impassive; Remus knew Severus was just as poleaxed as he himself was.

"Very well," said an officious-looking gentleman with a walrus-moustache. "We, the wizards and witches of the Wizengamot, find the defendant, Severus Snape, to be not guilty of any treason or conspiracy against the Ministry of Magic. We commend and thank you for your role in winning the war, Mr Snape. You are free to go. Please be advised that you may be called back before the Wizengamot as a witness."

Severus shot to his feet as the clasps holding him in place released. Remus wished he could catch him up in his arms, but the most he could do in public was cross the room and grip Severus' hand to show his support.

Severus drew nearer to Remus and curled his fingers

into Remus' lapel. "Come with me," he murmured. "Come home with me."

Remus nodded.



Home.

For too long, it had just been a word to Severus. He had stayed places, he had used shelters, slept in safe houses. But for the past two decades, if he had ever had a home, it had only been wherever Remus was.

Now he was free, and he wasn't sure he knew what he wanted to do. The only thing he was sure of was that he would be with Remus, and they would have a home. A real home, a place they both liked, a welcoming place.

Dumbledore had left his entire estate to them, with no instructions other than to be happy.

Severus had no idea what would make him happy. It didn't seem normal to pin all his happiness on Remus, and Remus had wounds to heal from, too. Severus wanted them to build a real life together, a life that wasn't a secret, a life that was limited by nothing. For once, he and Remus had discussed this idea, and to his relief, they both agreed.

"We'll give this a try," Remus said, looking up at the sprawling stone cottage. "And if we don't like it, there's always Egypt."

"And whatever we do, we'll do it together," Severus murmured.

Remus wrapped an arm around his waist. "Yes. Together."

## Innerslytherin's Bio

On 30 June 2002 Innerslytherin entered the HP fandom as a writer with six semi-dystopian hetfics. She went on to write a chaptered fic (forever incomplete) featuring her two favourite characters, Snape and Lupin, as the love interests of an OFC. In October 2003 she dipped her toes into the slash pool with Remus/Sirius, and followed that with a very dark Draco/Remus series.

On 3 March 2004 Innerslytherin's first Snupin fic was posted. In February 2005 the Remus she RPed in Walpurgis Night began an affair with Severus, forever cementing Lupin/Snape as her OTP. Since that time, she has written sixteen major Snupin fics, some of them one-shots, a couple of them novel-length, and one (Redemption) currently unfinished.

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## xterm's bio

xterm has been a lurker in fandom for more years than she is willing to admit to. Encouraged by a friend, she posted her first fanart, which was Snape, in December 2005. Since then she has sporadically posted work, mostly in her favourite ship, Snupin. HP is the only fandom she is active in, though she peeks in to many others

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## Isildurs\_babe's bio

Isildurs\_babe likes to mess about with art/graphics and is a novice fic writer who discovered the joys of snupin via McKay's Website, 'Chocolate Frog' and the 2005 snupin santa fic exchange.

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## Karasu Idime's bio

Karasu is a mom of 2, wife of 1. Half Japanese and very manga crazy! Misses winters in her Kotatsu, but California living is great! Karasu has enjoyed being active in fandom since 2004 and Lupin/Snape has always been a prominent love.

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## Dancingskeleton's bio

Lydia (aka: Dancingskeleton, Frank-d) is a Las Vegas college student, single and parent to one very insane and slightly violent cat named Hiro.

A big fan of the Japanese Music scene, specifically access and Johnny's Entertainment (Kinki Kids, NEWS, Kat-tun and SMAP) types.

Currently has more manga, books, cds and dvd's than shelves. Much of which are Shounen Jump series. Is also a Japanese Monster (Obakemono) buff.

Definite Japan-o-phile.

Has been in the Fandom since around Junior year 2002, but became a badge carrying (which is really just a keychain that her friend made for her) Snupin Fan since around 2004ish.

Has always and will always view Snape as her absolute favorite character from the series.

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### Special Note:

Isildurs\_babe did almost all the lovely and fun filler art found throughout the book - Thank you!

## Moonycakes's bio

I'm a graduate student from New York City and I like to draw and write in my not-so-spare time. I tend to use traditional black and white mediums like charcoal, pencil, and graphite for figure drawings.

Most of my fanart however has been digital color pieces. I became an HP fan when the PoA movie came out and have been addicted since.

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## Neodandiesrule's bio

French student, I discovered the HP fandom about a year and a half ago. Since then I've been mostly reading and sometimes drawing, snupin being my major source of inspiration. Staying this long (for me) on a particular interest shows how much I enjoy the lupin\_snape com :)"

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## Ebonyserpent's bio

Ebonyserpent is a 20-something who has lived in Florida all her life. Her husband doesn't share her HP addiction, but somehow the relationship still works. She enjoys dabbling in all sorts of artistic mediums, but mostly sticks to pencils, ink and Photoshop. She started participating in fandom nearly 4 years ago, and enjoys contributing to various fests and exchanges. Snape/Lupin was her first shippy love, and it's still going strong!

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## Tagay's bio

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## Hill's bio

Hill has been a Harry Potter fanartist for two years. She enjoys it immensely!

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