

RANDY
09



Chocolate and ASPHODEL

Snipin Line Volume 2, 2009

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Snapin Line Volume 2, 2009

Cover art by *Tbranch*

Back Cover art: Two Dream by *Xterm*

⚡ Acknowledgments ⚡

Besides all the writers and artists that contributed to this second volume of C&A, you absolutely would not be reading this without the dedication, hard work and commitment of Klynie, Karasu_Hime and McKay.

Klynie was sent from the stars to be one of the most excellent betas with whom I have ever worked. She earned her co-editor title by not only her beta skills, but by her support of me and the entire project. She was a true joy to work with, and I still can't believe how lucky we were when she volunteered to help out. I'm afraid mere words cannot express my gratitude to her, and I'm sure she's tired of reading me try! *grin* As you read, just remember, this project wouldn't have gotten out of the starting gate without her.

Karasu_Hime is who makes C&A look far better than your average zine. If I had laid it out, it wouldn't be nearly as elegant. Karasu also worked tirelessly to make sure we had a better balance of art to go with the stories, and she made sure that every spare nook and cranny of the zine has been filled with more SS/RL goodness. If you find yourself remotely impressed with C&A, you have the hundreds of hours Karasu put in to thank. Toward the end, she was calling C&A her second job, but the end result was so very worth it, I only feel a little guilty. ~_^

McKay held my other hand with patience and sound advice. She didn't have enough time to be an official co-editor this time around, but she never turned me away when I pinged her with "Question!" either. That immediate feedback helped keep this project moving forward, and we have McKay to thank for that and so much more that can't be quantified.

Thank you, readers, for taking interest in the zine and the ship. We hope you enjoy!

love, co-editor lore



I count myself as being incredibly lucky and honored to have had the opportunity to help with this volume of Chocolate and Asphodel. The writers for this 'zine are phenomenal – talented, yes, but so dedicated to the art of writing that I was in awe every time I worked with their stories. I know, dear readers, that you'll enjoy them as much as I have.

Most importantly, I want to give all my love to lore. It's been a blast, sweetie. Fandom is so lucky to have you! *hugs and love*

I'm almost teary at the thought of this project being finished. I'm so excited, but a part of me is a bit sad, because I've had so much fun working with you and with the stories and writers. Thank you again for all of your patience and trust and help.

Very much love,
klynie, co-editor



I wanted to thank all the artists who submitted their works; each art is special and excellent. It's such a pleasure to see the end product filled with lots of Snupin goodness and love. A special nod to those who helped fill in gaps at the last minute - Undun, Ellie, Diz, Rosy and Azurerosa. The zine is fuller because of your added works.

I also wanted to give a heartfelt "thank you" to my co-editor, Lore. Thank you for holding my hand and keeping me company these many nights. And for not letting mistakes just go by.

Karasu_hime, co-editor

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Information

Rated NC-17

Summary: Shortly before the wedding, Tonks backs out of her engagement with Remus Lupin. Left behind, he needs to find someone else he can share his life with.

True Love's First Kiss

by Chivalric

It came as a bit of a surprise to Remus Lupin when Tonks backed out of their engagement one week before the wedding. "I'm sorry, Remus," she said, her hair black and limp on one side and glowing red curls on the other – a visible sign of her divided emotional state. "It's just... I mean, I'm very sorry, but I, well, sort of found out that you're not... um... my true love."

Remus, who had been working on an essay for *Werewolf Today*, looked at her with wide, disbelieving eyes. "What do you mean, I'm not your true love?" he asked, setting the quill on his desk with a shaking hand. "You were chasing me for more than a year! Right after the war, you convinced me that I'm the one you want; we've been together for more than three years now, and we've even talked about having a baby soon!" Too shocked to remain seated, he got up and raked his fingers through his already quite ruffled hair. "Are you saying that you actually reject me now, that you're dropping me like a hot potato? I gave you my heart, my soul, I... I *love* you!"

Tonks sat down on the couch. "I know," she murmured, guilt lacing her words. "And it's not that I had this planned or something. Actually, it's all Ginny's fault!"

Remus frowned, but didn't say a word. He couldn't, or he would have started to shout.

"She forced me to go to this agency," Tonks continued slowly, kneading her hands nervously.

"You know... the Yenta Livery Company."

Remus gasped. "Yenta! They find perfect matches for spouses, they... But... but... you're in love with me!"

"I was, truly, I really was. I thought I would marry you and have a family and then... Well, I'm so sorry," Tonks replied quietly. The rest of her hair went black. For a moment, with her head hung low, she looked like Snape, greasy strands covering her eyes. "They found out that you're not my true love."

"That's bullshit!" Remus began pacing the room. He would have preferred to shake some sense into the

woman on his couch, the woman he had let into his house and into his heart despite his better judgement, the woman he loved passionately...

Well, he definitely loved her. However, passion had never played a big role in their lives.

Frustrated, he slammed his hands on his desk or he would have strangled her. He loved her, that was all that counted, passion or not. She'd been after him for ages, she'd even changed her Patronus for him, and although he hadn't been too happy about the idea of someone sharing his life, it had turned out to be a good arrangement. It was nice to live with someone; it was sweet to snuggle with her on the couch, and it was modestly enjoyable to sleep with her. And now she wanted to end it because... "Who is it?" he demanded. "I want to know who is supposed to be your soul mate." He put an extra bit of sneery emphasis on the last word.

Tonks murmured something unintelligible. Her hair, though, began to gain a red, happy shimmer.

"What?"

She looked up at him, unable to hide the small, longing smile on her lips when she said her new lover's name. "It's Kingsley. I went to him straight after I came out of Yenta, planning to accuse him of interfering with my marriage, and before I knew it, we were kissing, and one thing led to another and... Remus, it was earth shattering! The sex – you wouldn't believe how good it was, and you need to go there, too, to find out who your soul mate is! I mean, you must admit, sex was never that brilliant between us!"

Involuntarily, Remus took a step back. *Who's this witch?* he thought. *I don't know her anymore. The real Tonks would have never told me...* "Did you just say you slept with Kingsley?" he asked coldly. "Because if you did, this relationship is truly over. Get out of my house, get out of my life, and don't come back." Hurt and confused, he turned and left his workroom, heading for the kitchen. He needed some tea. Maybe, he even needed something stronger than that.

"Remus!"

He ignored her call. She'd betrayed him, she didn't love him, and she was moving out.

Now the only question was – what should he do with the shards of his life?



Apparently, one could only spend so much time getting drunk and being depressed before it became tiresome. After around two and a half months, after two transformations during which even the wolf had licked the liquor from the floor, Remus got up on wobbly legs, looked into the mirror and was shocked at what he saw: deep rings under his eyes, sallowness, greasy hair, a shabby beard and teeth yellowed simply because he hadn't brushed them in ages. He reeked of sweat and unwashed clothes as well as Firewhiskey and burned toast, which had been his only nourishment in the past weeks.

"You're pathetic," he told his image, shed his clothes, and had the longest shower in the history of werewolves. After that, he used a brand-new toothbrush, put on clean clothes, and made himself a proper breakfast.

An empty bottle rested peacefully in the sink. He took it with two fingers and threw it in the bin.

Another two days later, his house was clean again – and bottle-free, too.

Tonks is gone, quite possibly shagging Kingsley right now, he thought, but surprisingly enough, the thought didn't hurt as much as he'd have expected a little while ago.

Maybe he should check out those Yenta people. Tell them that they had ruined his life. Yes. Good idea.

With a spring in his step, Remus left and Apparated into London, right to the entrance of the company that claimed to find everyone's true love. He'd tell them what he thought of them, and then – well, maybe he would set fire to the building.



"We've been awaiting you," the friendly young man at the desk said, and Remus had to look over his shoulder, believing the man was talking to someone behind him. He was the only one in the entrance hall.

"Who?" he asked. "Me?"

The young man smiled. "Yes, sir, you. That is – you are Mr Remus Lupin? Yes? Then you're at the right place. Your former fiancée, Miss Tonks consulted us a while back. As

it turned out that you and she were not made for each other, it is only natural that you came here to find your own perfect match. Please take a seat, sir. Miss Elise will be with you in a moment."

"Who the hell is Miss Elise?" Remus muttered, but took a seat in the waiting room. Thankfully enough, he was alone – he couldn't have borne the thought of being seen here, of all places. Only the desperate ones came here; poor souls who weren't able to find someone to love.

Apparently, though, his ex-girlfriend had come here, too.

Maybe he should pay Ginny Weasley a visit once he was out of here. First, he would tell this Elise-woman what a lousy job she'd done and that she had destroyed his life, then he would find Ginny and tell her the same. Maybe he would even wait another few nights until the full moon. Though the Wolfsbane would render him harmless, he still looked quite threatening in his wolf-form. Yes, perhaps he would give the little bitch a very big fright.

Maybe, he would even rip her to pieces. And eat her up afterwards.

The thought made him smile.

Just when he was about to think of a more detailed plan, an elderly woman came into the waiting room, took the seat opposite, and smiled. "Mr Lupin," she said. "How wonderful to see you here. Did curiosity lead you here, or your wish to kill me for the advice I have given Miss Tonks?"

That took the wind out of his sails. Remus felt himself blush, and he stared at his hands. "The latter," he finally admitted. "What did you think, telling her that... that..."

"That you're not the man she should spend her life with?" Elise chimed in. "But you aren't, Mr Lupin. You aren't at all. Kingsley Shackbolt is her true love, and as it took her less than a week to tell you so, she must have been convinced enough to make the right decision. I am very sorry for having caused you harm." She leaned over and patted his knee. "However, I am delighted to let you know that we have been able to locate your true love, too, and luckily, he is neither dead nor otherwise engaged."

He? Remus wiped a hand over his tired face – this meeting was exhausting, he must have misheard, and he wasn't in the mood for any more cruel jokes, anyway. Actually, he should go home and drink some more Firewhiskey.

Miss Elise got up and handed him a folder. "Take a look, Mr Lupin," she said gently. "And don't be shocked. Well, I must admit, I would be shocked, but keep in mind – this is your one and only true love, the one person in the world that can make you happy beyond belief. Give it a chance, and... please don't faint!" With that, she nodded her good-bye and left him sitting in the waiting room with the folder in his hands.

Remus stared at the cover. "My one true love was Tonks," he said bitterly. "No one can ever replace her; no one can make me feel like she did." Not overly curious, he opened the folder, dread looming somewhere deep inside him – he knew for certain that no one else but Tonks would ever be able and willing to look beyond the lycanthropy, no one else would ever understand and accept him as he was.

Carelessly, Remus opened the folder; nearly bored, he scanned the page for the name of his so-called "true love". Whoever it was, it would be...

What?

Him?

The folder slipped out of the werewolf's numb hands, and a moment later, he followed it, crashing face down to the floor. It was the first time ever that he'd fainted, and of course he couldn't see that outside, behind the counter, Miss Elise and the young secretary shared a knowing look. Vaguely, before he passed out completely, he heard the elderly lady say, "It seems he didn't take the news too well. Would you please go and make sure he rests comfortably whilst he's unconscious, Ryan?"

It didn't matter – Remus was drifting away fast from real world, and he was, at the moment, really grateful for it.



The front door of the house at Spinner's End was thick and unyielding, and if Remus had thought about it for as much as a moment, he would have come to the conclusion that his angry banging would hardly convince the man inside to open said door, but he was too far gone with fury and frustration to use his brain. Instead, he banged at Severus's door, willing to break it down with his wand in a moment or two if the Potions master wouldn't answer. "Severus!" he yelled. "I know you're home; you always are during the summer break, so open up, or I swear I'll set fire to your roof!"

"The house is protected against any form of attack. That includes flames," a cool voice said behind him.

Remus jumped and nearly lost his balance as he turned around hastily. "Damn you, man, you scared the life out of me!" he grumbled. "Where have you been? I've been

banging on your door for at least ten minutes." A strand of hair dared to fall into his eyes – impatiently, he wiped it away.

Severus's lips turned into a thin smile. "I know that, wolf. I was in the garden, taking care of my vegetables. I heard you yelling and thought it would be a good idea for you to calm down a bit before I invited you in. Did you calm down?" Mockingly, he raised an eyebrow. In his hand he held a bunch of carrots; under his nails was earth.

He looks good – the thought came involuntarily, and Remus cringed at his mind's betrayal. Quickly, he shook his head, trying in vain to remove a certain image out of his mind, one he had seen only this morning on a picture that had been part of the folder Elise had handed him.

The image of himself and Severus, locked in a passionate kiss. *Professor Severus Snape is your true love*, the note attached to the picture had said, and Remus had screamed with shock and had landed hard on the floor after his legs had given way. He clearly remembered his disbelief, accompanied by an urge to laugh and cry at the same time. Severus? Hogwarts' Potions master, stone-cold and ugly, aggressive as well as gifted with icy sarcasm? Impossible. Ridiculous. Severus was not an option, and anyway, he, Remus, wasn't gay.

Then why am I here? Remus wondered, still staring at the dark-haired wizard, who patiently waited for an answer to his question. *Did I calm down?*

Slowly, Remus exhaled the breath he'd been holding. "I apologise for having been rude," he said. "I got some... disturbing news today and wondered if you'd be willing to help me sort out the mess. Clearly, someone made a mistake. I was angry, to say the least. Yes, I did calm down, and would you please give me a glass of water?"

With a nod, Severus opened his front door. "I have water, tea, and cake, if you like, Lupin. It's been a while since I last had a visitor. Actually, I am quite sure no one has been to my house since Bellatrix and Narcissa forced me to swear an Unbreakable Vow. Come inside. I promise, I won't poison or hex you."

"Wait until I tell you what Elise has told me," Remus grumbled, but followed Severus inside.



"I know." Calmly, Severus took another sip of his tea. "In fact, I've known that you're my true love since the night the Dark Lord tried to kill me."

Remus opened his mouth to say something and found he couldn't.

Severus grinned humourlessly. "Sorry for the disappointment, Lupin, but no one made a mistake. Elise just told you the truth. Learn to live with it. I had to."

"You... you went to *that* company?" Stunned, Remus ate another piece of cake. It was delicious – who would have thought that Hogwarts' feared Potions master was an exceptionally gifted cook?

Severus snorted. "Of course not. I know who Elise is, but I've never set foot in her agency. No, Lily revealed your name to me the night of the final battle." His long fingers, wrapped around the warm mug, tightened, and slowly, he lowered his head and closed his eyes – Remus didn't dare to interrupt his thoughts with another question, so he just waited for Severus to continue, lost in memories of the past.

Severus's voice was deeper than before when he began to talk; apparently, the memories were painful, to say the least. "Nagini had bitten me; blood was running out of me as if I were a broken bucket and was soaking the floor. The snake poison thundered through my veins. The Dark Lord had left, the children had run away, and I was alone in the Shrieking Shack, welcoming the thought of leaving this sodding life behind me." Severus sighed deeply. "I had given the boy the memories he needed for surviving the fight with the Dark Lord," he whispered. "I had looked into his eyes, thinking of Lily and cursing myself for pushing her away when we were children. We were friends for a brief time. All my life, I was worried that I wouldn't be able to apologise for what I had done to her."

Throat clenched and eyes stinging, Remus stared at the other man, taking in the hunched shoulders, the long, black strands touching the smooth surface of the table, and the slight tan on the bare hands and forearms that proved Severus spent a considerable amount of time in his garden. He didn't know what to say, and even if he had, he doubted Severus would have heard him.

"Nagini's bite had been surprisingly painful," the Potions master continued somewhat hesitantly. "Somehow, I had assumed that the snake's poison would numb me, but I was wrong. The venom set my nerves on fire, caused my muscles to cramp, and made thinking of counteractions impossible. I had a Bezoar in my pocket; I knew a spell that would have healed the wound profoundly enough to survive until someone would have cared to check on me, even if only to spit on my corpse. However, I wasn't able to as much as move a finger." He looked up, straight into the werewolf's eyes. "And so I died."

Remus's eyes widened. He hadn't expected his old enemy to share such an intimate memory; he definitely hadn't expected such a crucial resolution. "How can

that be?" he asked, careful to keep his voice low. Severus appeared to him as if he were sleepwalking, and Remus didn't want to interrupt whatever made the other man talk. As far as he knew, the Potions master had never told anyone how he had survived the Dark Lord's attempt to kill him. That he did so now meant more to Remus than he cared to admit.

Severus briefly quirked his lips. "I crossed the veil, leaving my body behind and the shards of my useless life, my guilt at having killed Albus, my loathing for the Dark Lord and my part in his horrible plans, and even my hate for Potter. I expected nothing – definitely not the 'light' so many living people babble about. Maybe I hoped for peace and a bit of warmth after the coldness of my dungeons and the cruelties I had performed as a youth. And as a man, of course." Severus blinked, and then took a sip of his tea. "Imagine my surprise when I was greeted by Lily's fist landing squarely on my chin."

Severus smiled – the first real smile Remus had seen on his face for... well... ever, maybe. "Erm... what?" he asked, confused. "Lily's ghost was there, waiting for you? And she had nothing better to do than hit you?"

"Hit me, kicked me, scolded me and used words I didn't know existed," Severus clarified dryly. "She was furious with me. Told me – no, ordered me! – to go back and prevent my own death. She said it wasn't too late. I was dumbstruck, but due to a lack of other options, I staggered backwards into the Shrieking Shack. You knew her; when she was in the right mood, she could make a stone cry. I stood no chance against her."

Now Remus smiled, too. He had indeed known Lily Evans – it was no surprise Severus had done as ordered.

"I went back into my failing, dying body. The pain was excruciating; I could smell my own blood; I could hear the long pauses between each heartbeat, and the darkness scared the life out of me. Every moment, I expected the Dark Lord to step out of the shadows with Nagini at his heel, biting me again, finishing me for good. It is nothing I like to remember.

"When I opened my eyes, Lily was there, too, hovering above me. Ghostlike, fragile like a picture made of mist, but there nevertheless. Like her son before her, she called me a coward. No surprise it had the same effect on me: I became furious. Instead of trying to die again, I embraced the pain. The moonlight shone through one of the broken windows, and I saw my hand tremble when I shoved the Bezoar down my throat. Don't ask me how I did it. Maybe she guided my hand, but what mattered was that I managed to whisper the spell for closing the wound, too. The magic nearly ripped me apart. I remember screaming and crying with pain. In the end, though, I managed to stay alive."

With a swift gesture, Severus brushed his hair out of his face. Remus noticed that it had grown considerably since he had last seen the man. It reached halfway down his back and was clean and still pitch-black, without a hint of grey. *Suits him*, Remus thought and wondered why he had first been so shocked to learn that it was the Potions master who was meant to complete him in every aspect of life.

Severus looked at him, then at the clock. "It's getting late," he said and got up. "Would you like to stay for dinner?"

Remus, who had expected to be thrown out, found that the prospect of having dinner with Severus was surprisingly pleasant. "I'd love to," he answered. "If I may prepare the salad."

Together, they went into the kitchen, side by side, like old friends. Whilst Severus took care of the main course – *Lupe de mere* with herbs, garlic, carrots and potatoes – Remus chopped onions for the salad. "So you survived because of Lily," he said after a while. "And she was there when you woke up. Did she tell you why she was so angry with you?"

Severus chuckled, a sound so strange that Remus nearly cut off his index finger. "Oh, yes, she did," the Potions master said. "Apparently, she couldn't stand the thought that I had been about to give up. In clear, unmistakable words she told me that I had to live, that I had to find happiness, and that if I didn't do as she wished, she would make the afterlife a living hell for me. I didn't need long to realise that I didn't really have a choice: she wanted me to live, she had sent me back through the veil, so I had better live. Happily, or, in her words, she'd come and rip my black heart out of my chest one quiet night." He shuddered. "Horrible thought, I must admit."

Remus put the bowl with the salad onto the table that stood in the kitchen. "I don't get it. What you told me is amazing as well as bitterly sad – after all, you died alone, you came back, and you had to wait until sunrise before Poppy came and took you into the infirmary – but I haven't got the smallest clue what this has to do with you knowing that I am supposed to be your soul mate." In between bites, he poured himself and Severus a second glass of wine. The fish was perfect, practically melting on the tongue; the wine was fresh and chilled, and the candles flickered their warm light into the cosy kitchen. *Why did I think his house would be mouldy, rotten, dark and damaged?* Remus wondered.

His host took a sip from his wine. "It has everything to do with the night I died," Severus said. "The reason Lily was so angry with me was because she hadn't told me a quite interesting bit of information she'd kept to herself

for the better part of her life: she knew you and I were made for each other. She'd been at Yenta's a week before my sixteenth birthday, getting me the name of my true love. She didn't know I loved her, didn't even consider it a possibility. They told her you were my soul mate, and Lily wanted to tell me, only things went really ugly after I saw her snogging Potter. I insulted her, and she not only decided to remain quiet, but to end our friendship. As a result, I dove deeply into the Dark Arts, became involved with the Dark Lord, and she didn't dare to get near me for years."

"And then Voldemort killed her before she could tell you," Remus concluded. Just one more glass of wine. This evening was strange, to say the least. The wine was perfect, and it helped him to stay relaxed.

"Precisely. She died without getting the chance of telling me what I needed to know. That's why she waited for me at the other side of the veil and took the opportunity to kick me back into the world of the living – so she could share her secret and give me a chance to become happy after all."

"Seems she never stopped being your friend, despite what happened between the two of you."

Severus sighed. "No, she didn't," he said quietly, and began tidying up the table.

Remus watched his every movement, admiring the panther-like, silent, precise way the taller man moved. He was, he had to admit, a bit tipsy. Too much wine, and now Severus put a glass of his best Firewhiskey in front of him. Remus took it, and inhaled deeply the soft, warm scent. "I love that smell," he murmured. "And I cherish the taste every now and then."

The Potions master raised a mocking eyebrow. "It seems you've been drinking a bit too much, lately. You're too skinny and too pale. I never knew you as an alcoholic. What happened?"

"Everything. Nothing. Doesn't matter, really," Remus retorted bitterly and emptied the glass. He needed to go home soon – well, after the next glass, maybe. Accusingly, he pointed his finger at Severus. "Why didn't you come to me and tell me that I'm supposed to be in your bed and not in Tonks's, eh? Why didn't you let me know about Lily's confession?"

Just one more glass. The alcohol exploded in his stomach with delicious heat and helped him to keep his trembling voice under control. Suddenly, he was tired beyond belief, tired and sad and exhausted from too many nights of restless tumbling and turning in his far too empty bed. "Need to go home," he said. "But I want an answer first."

Severus was behind him, helping him up – Remus was swaying, or maybe the floor was heaving. "It is obvious, Lupin. I did not come to you because you're in a relationship, and although Tonks is not your soul mate, you can become happy with her. I might be a cruel, cold-hearted bastard, but I do not interfere with other people's love lives. As far as I know, you will be married soon – actually, I thought you were supposed to marry three months ago – and I will never, ever take you away from the woman who loves you, no matter what Yenta says." Gently, Severus led Remus towards the door, obviously for helping him into his coat.

Remus, though, refused to go. He pressed his hand against Severus's haggard chest and tried to focus on him. "I should have married in May, right," he said, his voice slurred from fatigue and drink. "It's just that Tonks went to those matchmaking fuckers, and they said Kingsley is her true love, and she promptly went to jump him, and anyway, she left. Gone, vanished, a week before the wedding. So much for her loving me. No happy life in the nearby future for me, Severus. Guess no happy life for me at all."

Standing on misbehaving legs wasn't easy – apparently, Remus was more drunk than he'd thought. Severus, being half a hand taller than he, held him upright and looked at him with the strangest expression in his black eyes. Not pity; not sympathy, either. Compassion, probably, and fear in a weird way. "I am very sorry to hear that. And I think you shouldn't go home now, wolf," he said soothingly. "You're in no condition to stay on your own. You're anything but sober, and you're too tired to Apparate anyway, so I suggest you sleep in the guest room."

Remus snorted. "In your dreams," he wanted to say, but that was the moment when the walls began to heave as well, and he not only swayed, but lost control over his feet completely.

Severus caught him before he hit the floor. Cradled in strong arms, Remus was carried upstairs, put into a big, soft bed, and covered with a duvet. At one moment, Remus thought he was getting undressed, but that must have been a dream. Surely. Nothing but a dream.



When Remus opened his eyes to the morning sun that streamed into his room, his head felt twice its normal size, and his tongue had turned into a small, dead, fury animal. He had a dry throat, a headache, and since when was the sun that bright?

Hang on. Where was he, anyway? At home, in his bed, neither sun nor moon had a chance to shine into his eyes, as his bedroom faced north.

Conclusion: this was not home, and he wasn't lying in his bed.

Carefully, he stretched, enjoying the warmth of the room, the smell of coffee that wafted through the air, the softness of the pillow and the size of the bed itself. His own bed was considerably smaller – he had thrown out the double bed after Tonks had moved out, and only now did he realise how much he liked a large bed where there was enough space to kiss and play and...

Erm. Actually, whose bed was it he was lying in?

Slowly, Remus sat up. The duvet slipped down to his waist, revealing his naked chest.

So it hadn't been a dream then. Someone had undressed him. A peek under the duvet told him that this someone hadn't stopped at the shirt, either. His trousers were gone, his shoes and socks, naturally, and his underpants, too.

In short, he was stark naked. And there, in the corner of the room, was a black robe, draped carefully over the back of a chair. Books lay piled up on the small bedside table – books about potions, mainly, and one Muggle novel called "Tainted Blood".

Perfect reading material for a Potions master.

Pale and slightly shaky, Remus took the pillow, pressed his face into it, and inhaled deeply. He could smell flax, feathers, and washing powder; he could also smell the distinct fragrance of his own skin, which was normal as he had slept in the bed most of the night. Bed as well as pillow and duvet had been freshly changed; still, underneath the linen, another scent lingered, one he'd known since his childhood simply because he had known the scent's owner for more than twenty years.

Severus's scent in his nose. Severus's bedroom, Severus's pillow, Severus's bed.

How arousing. How... Damn!

Burning with embarrassment, Remus dropped the pillow and jumped out of the bed as if the mattress were on fire. The duvet slipped onto the floor, and with it his clothes, which had been laid neatly folded at the end of the bed.

Hurriedly, he clutched them to his chest and looked around in search for a bathroom. There was a door – it led to a smaller room with warm, cream-coloured tiles, sink, toilet, and shower.

Getting under the ice-cold stream woke him up completely, and in addition, the water efficiently killed

his morning erection, which he had been covering with his garments. Honestly, getting a hard-on in Severus's bed – now, how embarrassing was that?

Remus scrubbed his skin thoroughly, washing away his unasked-for arousal, the subtle Severus-fragrance he still had in his nose, and the half-forgotten, weird dreams of the past night. Eventually, when his lips turned blue and his teeth began to chatter, he left the shower, dried and dressed, and headed downstairs, but not without one last glance back into the bedroom. *Pity*, he thought. *I haven't slept that well in ages.* He shook his head at himself. *Had someone told me I'd one day crave sleeping in Severus's bed, I would have said they were utterly mad.*

The smell of coffee became stronger the closer Remus came to the kitchen, and when he stepped into the room, he was stunned to see Severus standing at the counter, leisurely dressed in faded jeans and a loose shirt, buttering toast and whistling along with the music. He looked content, to say the least, maybe happy even, and a lot younger than he had when he was in Voldemort's service.

"Good morning," Remus said hesitantly. He was sorry to disturb the peaceful picture, but he was hungry and uneasily aware of the fact that he was undoubtedly an intruder in Severus's house.

Severus looked up. He'd obviously had a shower, too, as his hair was still damp and there was the distinct fragrance of the soap Remus had used himself just a few minutes ago.

He's been in the same shower I've used; he's been naked; his hands had touched his skin – and had he been hard, too? Remus wondered and panicked at the same time when he realised that very clear pictures came with the thoughts, pictures of a naked Severus covered with creamy foam, satisfying himself under a rush of warm water. He coughed and tried to keep the blush that threatened to creep into his cheeks under control. Severus flashed him an amused smile as if he'd read his thoughts.

"Sit, wolf, and have some breakfast," Severus said and gestured at the table – the same one at which they had had dinner at last night. "You need nourishment, and the porridge is ready."

"Just coffee would be fine," Remus tried to object, but just when he said it, his stomach growled loudly at the smell of porridge and fresh milk, sugar and toast. "Well. Maybe breakfast wouldn't be a bad idea," he finished lamely.

The porridge was delicious; the thick blotch of cream was just what he needed to fill his hungry stomach, and

the coffee was as welcome as the silence that permeated the kitchen; Severus seemed to prefer to have his breakfast in peace, as he didn't talk or ask questions.

When most of the toast was eaten, though, Remus couldn't keep his curiosity under control any longer. "Why did you undress me? Why didn't you let me go home? Why did I sleep in your bed, where did you sleep, and didn't you say something about a guestroom?"

Severus leaned back in his chair and looked at him with a strange expression on his face. "You were in no condition to be going anywhere, Lupin," he clarified. "Too drunk; too sad. I could have taken you home, true, but then I would have had to sleep in your flat, and I considered that unacceptable, as you hadn't invited me. Therefore, I carried you upstairs and put you into my bed, as mine is the only bed in the house. Had I told you I would do so – that there is no guestroom – you might have struggled, and I wasn't in the mood to fight with you over accommodations. I took a nap on the couch in the living room, and I undressed you because you prefer to sleep naked."

To keep his hands busy, Remus took one more piece of toast, buttered it, and added honey. It was thick and golden; he assumed that Severus kept a beehive behind his house. Honey as good as that couldn't be bought in just any shop. "How do you know I prefer to sleep...um... without clothes?" he asked. "That's not something many people know."

Severus smirked. "When we were boys, I once sneaked into Gryffindor tower in a sorry attempt to steal Potter's wand. Didn't make it, but I saw a few things whilst being in your bedroom. You were lying spread-eagled on your bed with the duvet kicked to the floor, and you weren't wearing pyjamas. I considered it likely that you hadn't changed your personal preferences since."

"True," Remus grumbled and lowered his head. "Pyjamas feel uncomfortable. Thanks for... doing that for me."

"It was my pleasure," Severus replied lightly. "I have wanted to see you naked for a long time now. After all, it has been more than three years since Lily told me what you are to me. It took a considerable amount of self-control not to touch you beyond the necessary task of getting you undressed and tucked into bed."

Remus, who had been about to take a bite of his toast, halted his hand in mid air. "You would have... I mean... You thought of... of... having sex with me whilst I was passed out?" he asked incredulously.

Severus raised one mocking eyebrow. "Ah, no, definitely not," he said. "Apart from such an act being highly immoral, I prefer my bed partners to be awake once I decide that they are worth my attention."

"Good to know," Remus managed with a bit of an effort.

A smile tugged at the corners of the Potion master's lips. He leaned forward and stared intently into Remus's eyes. "If I took you into my bed, I would want you to be awake so you could fully appreciate what I would do to you," he purred. "I would want you to moan into my mouth when I first kiss you, when my tongue touches yours. I want you to shiver under my fingertips when I open your shirt, button by button, tantalisingly, cruelly slow. I want to feel your nipples harden when I nick them with my teeth. When I lay you onto my mattress, I want you to spread your legs for me so I can drink you in with my eyes, every inch of your wonderful, naked body. You will be hard, and your heart will be beating fast, wolf, when I close my lips around your length, tasting you, kissing the velvet head of your cock. You will want me with all your might, you will beg me to take you, and when I enter you" – his voice became lower, rougher, like silk on skin – "when I finally penetrate you, when my cock slowly, carefully slips inside your well lubricated, tight, hot arse, when I begin to fuck you, you will cry out with desire and lust. You will move with me, meet my thrusts; dig your fingers into my back, urging me on, begging me to make you come. And when I spill inside you after an eternity of pleasure, you will climax, too, crying out my name." Those last words had been just a whisper; now, Severus reached out and tenderly brushed one wet lock out of the werewolf's shocked face.

Honey dripped onto the smooth surface of the table. Remus's mouth hung agape, toast forgotten, time forgotten; all thoughts were wiped from his mind.

Moments ticked by.

"I must admit, I've given this scene a bit more thought than what might be good for me," Severus finally added with a rueful smile. "After all, you're not gay. I assume you're still in love with Tonks despite your fall-out, and that you think of me as the greasy git of the dungeons. More tea?"

Dozens of answers rushed through Remus's mind; slowly, he lowered the toast back onto his plate and licked some honey off his fingers. "I wouldn't cry out your name," he finally managed.

Severus frowned. "Wouldn't you? Are you sure? Because I would want you to. I'd want you to enjoy what I do to you and with you, and I'd want you to express your feelings as clearly as possibly. Crying out my name would be just sufficient, I'd say."

Remus cleared his throat. "I've never cried out anyone's name when... ejaculating. It's not... I mean, I think it is just not in me to lose myself so completely." He blushed

– why on earth had he told Severus that juicy little bit of information?

Severus sighed. "I see. And although I'm very sorry for you that you haven't yet found the one you trust enough to give up control, unfortunately enough neither of us will find out what you might be capable of as you clearly have no intention of ending up in my bed. I said you wanted to leave after breakfast? Well, that would be now, then." Severus got up and flicked his wand; the dishes began washing themselves, and the table was cleared of butter, honey, and toast crumbs. It was late morning; the sun had continued its way up the sky, and surely, outside some gardening tasks were awaiting the Potion master's attention.

Remus couldn't stand the thought of going home... into his empty flat, the cold, lonely rooms, the quiet, dead silence. He wanted to stay exactly where he was: in Severus's surprisingly nice, cosy house, in his presence, watching him, talking to him, telling him...

What was it he'd wanted to tell him?

"Severus!" Remus called, as the Potions master was already on the way into the garden. In the doorway, he turned around.

"Yes?"

Remus got up, too. "I don't consider you a greasy git," he clarified, glad that his voice was steady. "I know back then you put up a performance for all of us, trying to appear as ugly and ghastly as possible so you could do your job in Voldemort's service. And even if I didn't know it, I only need to look at you now to see that you've changed. Your hair is clean, your teeth are straightened and brushed, and since you're obviously spending time outside the dungeons, your skin isn't that unhealthy pale that it used to be. You look good, Severus, especially in jeans. Actually, you look very good."

Severus inclined his head just half an inch. "Thank you," he said simply. "Still, you're not available. You wanted to marry Tonks; you lived with her, you made love to her, and I cannot believe that you have managed to rip her out of your heart so quickly. Go home, Lupin. Come for dinner whenever you feel like company. Maybe we will become friends one day, if nothing else." He left the kitchen and headed for the back door that led into the garden.

Remus went after him, grabbed his arm, and spun him around. "Are you mad, Severus?" he growled, feeling the other man's body heat and sensing a certain tension in his posture. "You can't talk to me like that and then let me wonder what could have happened if your garden hadn't been more important than me." He forced some air into his lungs. "I stopped loving Tonks when she

walked out on me without as much as a second thought. At first, it hurt; now, I'm just lonely, and I can't think of anything else but how horrible it is to be alone and to sleep alone and to wake up alone again. True, I have never slept with a man, but that doesn't mean I'm not willing to try. After all, you're supposed to be my soul mate, and although I might still consider the possibility that all of this may be a big mistake, you could at least try to seduce me for the pleasure of proving me wrong, if nothing else."

"You really shouldn't have said that," Severus replied, and with that, he pulled Remus into a close embrace and kissed him.



Remus wasn't inexperienced in kissing; on the contrary, he had kissed various girls and even a few boys when he'd been at Hogwarts (Sirius as well as James being amongst the latter), and he'd always enjoyed it. When living with Tonks, he might have even preferred kissing over making love to her. And although he had never kissed an adult man, he would have said he knew how to kiss and that there wasn't anything that could surprise him on that matter.

Kissing Severus, though, or rather being kissed by him, nearly swept him off his feet. A strong arm wrapped around his waist, pulling him into a tight embrace. Severus took hold of his shoulder with his other hand, squeezing it hard, and pushed a leg between Remus's knees, parting them just enough to give the arousing sensation of fabric slithering along his trousers.

Heat emanated from Severus's body; his tongue invaded Remus's mouth, asking for a dance. Now that his hand had found Remus's bum, it caressed, teased, and kneaded.

Remus's cock hardened instantly, and he moaned involuntarily at this most unexpected onslaught – true, he had asked for seduction, but he hadn't expected Severus to act so fast and so efficiently.

He hadn't expected this kiss to be so perfect, either. Frankly, he felt as if he'd never kissed properly before, as if all his experience in this field had been nothing but meaningless preparation for this one kiss, given to him by a man he had mocked when they'd been children, feared at times when they'd turned into adults, and learned to respect only when he'd found out what the Potions master had done and sacrificed for their side during the war.

Another moan – was that him, or was it Severus? Why did that hand on his arse feel so wonderful; why couldn't

he think of anything else but shedding his clothes, and Merlin, was that Severus's cock on his thigh, unbelievably hard and breathtakingly big?

The grip loosened; the tantalising kneading ceased to a gentle caress. Remus took the opportunity to push Severus away.

He just managed to stay on his feet, head down, eyes narrowed, panting and greedy for more. His lips burned from the kiss he'd just received, his heart hammered, and his far too hard cock hurt from lack of action and attention.

Faintly, he could smell arousal; was it his own, or Severus's?

"My apologies," Severus whispered, voice hoarse, and taking another step away. "You had better leave now, Lupin. I only have so much self-control."

Remus's nostrils flared, and he felt cold and lonely without the other man's hands roaming over his body, the heat he had radiated, and the overwhelming sensation of that unbelievable kiss. "I don't think so," he murmured and crossed the distance between them. "Can't go home right now. I'm... curious. I want to kiss you again."

Severus raised one eyebrow, but as his eyes were shining with desire and the outline of his erection showed very clearly through the fabric of his jeans, it didn't come across as sarcastically as he might have intended it. "I admit, that comes as a surprise," he murmured. "I thought I would need to court you, persuade you, maybe even wait for you for another few years..."

"Shut up," Remus interrupted him, taking Severus's face between his hands. "Kiss me. I need to find out if it works as perfectly the second time around." Nearly brutally, he pressed his lips against Severus's, who welcomed him, embraced him, and pulled him into the living room.

Kissing, they landed on the couch; still kissing, Severus began to undo the buttons on Remus's shirt, one by one, and as slowly as he'd promised.

He didn't get far. "There are limits to my patience," Remus growled and ripped the shirt off his body. "Touch me. Do what you've promised – make me scream."

Severus tightened his grip on Remus's hips and slipped to the floor between the other man's legs. His mouth, warm and skilled, trailed kisses from neck down to belly button and upwards again, making Remus shiver with anticipation for the moment when those very lips would find his nipples, already hard as cherry stones.

There – teeth nicked the tender flesh, and Remus moaned, loud and long. One of Severus's hands was high on his leg, dangerously close to touching his erection, and still his mouth was sucking, licking, biting one nipple whilst his fingers twisted the other.

Too much; too slow. Remus pushed his partner's head southwards and tried to wriggle out of his trousers at the same time – a useless attempt, as he wore a belt. "Please," he rasped, and Severus opened the belt and the buttons, pulling Remus's trousers down as well as his shorts in one quick movement. The next moment, Severus had his lips locked around the werewolf's cock, massaging his balls. One hand wandered under Remus's bum, and gods, now he was even begging for more!

Soft lips and sharp teeth and a very skilled tongue; clever fingers, knowing exactly where to press and where to stroke. A small spell, lubricating his entrance as well as Severus's fingers – and when Severus pulled back his foreskin and licked over the thin slit at the head of his cock, Remus yelped helplessly, enjoying every single second. Spreading his legs just a bit wider was only the most natural thing to do, holding Severus's head in position was a necessity, and anyway, he needed to feel those silken strands under his palms – they kept him connected to the here and now, they proved this was real, not a dream.

Not that he'd ever dreamed something this hot.

Slick fingers spread his buttocks; his legs dropped further apart to grant the best access, and when Severus sucked hard on his cock and simultaneously entered him with two fingers at once, Remus cried out his lover's name for the first time. His hips bucked, and he dug his hands deep into the couch's leather lest he slip to the floor. Those fingers! They were deep inside him now and caused a pleasure he hadn't known possible.

Slowly, gently, Severus moved his hand; carefully, skilfully, he continued to work Remus's cock with his tongue.

"More!" Remus rasped, unable to think straight, unable to wish for anything more concrete. "Please, Severus... more!"

The mouth around his cock vanished and the fingers, too. Remus was just about to protest – he wanted more, not less – when Severus moved, came closer, embraced him and kissed him, deep, longingly, and irresistibly. Remus could feel the other man's cock, hard and pulsing, between his legs, brushing along his own length, the barely audible whisper bearing promises of dark, unknown pleasures.

One of Severus's hands moved to Remus's hipbone; the other was between his legs, guiding his cock. The tip was

slick – *precome*, Remus thought dreamily, *or maybe lube* – and it pressed against his anus, that small, puckered hole where right now all his longing was focused. "More," Remus murmured, certain that Severus would understand, and of course he did; of course the tall, dark wizard knew what he wanted, needed, and therefore breached the strong muscle that protected Remus's entrance with a smooth, but nevertheless forceful, push. All the way in, slowly, in one long go, which made Remus scream out Severus's name for the second time.

Severus held him tight, didn't allow him to move, but kissed his neck, trailed kisses from shoulder to collarbone whilst he was newly inside him, adding pressure, gentle, tantalising pressure – torturing pressure – until Remus couldn't stand it any longer. "Move!" he gasped – begged, really – and groaned when Severus just brushed his lips over his. "Pleasepleaseplease move, fuck me, make me come!"

Remus more felt the smile than saw it. "On top of me, wolf," Severus whispered and pulled him down onto the floor. "Find your own rhythm, your own pace; fuck *me*, Remus!" Slowly, Severus let himself sink back to the floor, Remus now sitting on top of him, legs spread and straddling Severus's narrow hips. The manoeuvre forced a gasp out of both men – the angle had changed, Severus's cock stroked along Remus's pleasure point, and now it was impossible not to move, not to take charge of the body underneath and the cock inside him.

Remus pressed both his hands to his friend's shoulders and experimentally swirled his pelvis.

A double yelp rang through the room.

Slowly at first, but before long, Remus rolled his hips back and forth, riding to a slow orgasm. He'd found his rhythm easily, and the pace, well, the pace was perfect as it was. Fast, but not too fast; hard, but not hard enough to make him come, not yet. Severus's hips came up when he pushed down, fucking him deep now, deeper than Remus would have thought possible only moments ago.

He rasped out his lover's name, like an enchantment, losing count on how often he did so.

Then Severus touched his cock, and Remus lost control. His mind shut off, and his brain didn't know which orders to give. As a result, he stopped moving. His head fell back, exposing his neck; his hands rested on Severus's sweaty chest; his eyes were closed, and he didn't know what he enjoyed more: the cock in his arse or the hand stroking his erection, and he had no idea what to do about either of them.

Severus rasped out his name; he didn't, couldn't answer.

The stroking continued; small thrusts into his backside made him groan but weren't as forceful as he would have wished for. Still, he would come soon, very soon, and he couldn't even imagine the intensity of his climax.

Then Severus moved, flipped him onto his back, and was on top of him in a matter of seconds. Remus's eyes snapped open – he hadn't expected to land on his back, and he hadn't considered it could be such a perfect position. Severus was above him, inside him, his pale face a mask of ecstasy, sweat beading on his forehead. Severus's lips were parted, and his breath came in harsh gulps. Black eyes, pupils dilated, stared down at him, and with a sudden rush of insight, Remus realised by stopping Severus's orgasm at the last possible moment he'd made his partner highly uncomfortable.

With a grin, Remus locked one arm behind Severus's neck to pull him down and even deeper inside him; he brought his legs up, slung them around his lover's hips, and thrust upwards, greedy for more, greedy for Severus's cock, greedy to come. "Severus!" he groaned when his lover's lower abdomen brushed along his hardness, squeezing it between their bodies, and, "Severus!" he gasped when he finally spilled his seed, feeling his lover slam inside him one last time, finding his own release, too.



Silently, they lay on the floor, limbs entangled, minds empty, muscles and various other body parts sore or sated or both. Severus had pulled the blanket off the sofa; it now covered both of them up to the waist.

Vaguely, Remus was aware that someone stroked his head, his neck, brushed fingertips over his lips and across the bridge of his nose. It felt wonderful; he could easily get addicted to his lover's touch. "Did I scream out your name?" he asked, moving his shoulders into a more comfortable position.

"Oh, yes. Repeatedly," Severus answered. There was a tender subnote to his voice Remus hadn't heard before. "As I have called out yours." Rolling over, Severus propped himself up on his elbow. "I do hope I didn't go too far, taking you so roughly at the end."

Remus reached up and cupped his cheek. "I didn't believe it would be possible that sleeping with a man could be so utterly wonderful. Believe me when I say that making love has never been so perfect."

Visibly relieved, Severus briefly closed his eyes. "Would you... do you think you would like to come upstairs with me?"

"Upstairs? What's upstairs?" Disbelieving, Remus experienced the rare sensation of getting hard again very shortly after having had tremendous orgasm.

"The bedroom is upstairs, wolf," Severus replied dryly. "In the bedroom, there is my bed, as you know. A big bed. Big enough for two; big enough to... play?" Questioning, he raised one eyebrow. Casually, he placed one hand high on Remus's leg, moved upwards, and cupped his balls.

"Bed would be an excellent idea," Remus answered hoarsely. "And playing, too."



Early the next morning, Remus was dimly aware of Severus getting up. "Whsit?" he mumbled, too sleepy to manage proper pronunciation. It had been a long night – or a short one, depending on which perspective one was using.

"It's only six thirty, but I've got a potion brewing in my workroom, my garden needs some attention, and I need to send a letter to my editor. Go back to sleep. I'll wake you for breakfast in a few hours."

"Hmmm," Remus replied, hugged Severus's pillow, and went back to dreamland until the smell of fresh toast woke him up again. He stretched, yawned, and absently rubbed his right wrist before getting up and pulling on a pair of Severus's trousers – his own were still downstairs. *Breakfast*, he thought, quickly followed by the word *kiss* washing through his mind and heart.

Rubbing a hand across his stubbly face, Remus was just about to search for a shirt in Severus's wardrobe when the small hairs in the back of his neck stood up. Something was wrong.

He left the room, barefoot and wearing nothing but a pair of slightly too long jeans. Silently, he went downstairs, checked the living room, but found it empty.

The smell of burned toast wafted through the small house; in addition, Severus's whistling had stopped as well as the music Remus had heard earlier on.

Voices from the kitchen. Guests?

The hallway tiles were cold under his feet; without making any noise, Remus pushed the kitchen door open with his fingertips, just a bit so he could see what was happening inside.

Three people were in the kitchen: Severus, Kingsley, and Tonks. Severus stood with his back pressed against the sink, both hands empty and raised to shoulder level. His long hair was bound back at the base of his neck, and in the depths of his eyes, Remus could see a tightly controlled anger. Both Tonks and Kingsley had their wands drawn.

"Where's Remus?" Tonks asked.

"What have you done to him?" Kingsley added.

Severus raised an eyebrow. "What makes you think I've even seen him? It's a well-known fact that I despise him. Certainly you didn't expect to find him here?"

Tonks rummaged in her bag with her free hand and slammed something onto the kitchen table. A photograph. "Found that in his flat," she spat. "He's gone, your picture was pinned to the fridge, and that's why we're here. He must have sought you out for whatever reason, and I guess you killed him. He was heartbroken by the end of our relationship; he wouldn't have had a chance against you!"

Involuntarily, Remus grinned and stretched his neck. Yes, it definitely had been a long night. In addition, he thought it strange that Tonks still cared for him – he needed to listen a bit longer, if only to find out what the woman he'd loved not too long ago had to say about him. Severus, on the other hand, could very well take care of himself, even at wandpoint.

"Tell us where he is, Snape," Kingsley hissed. "Did he come here, did he threaten you – did you lose control and kill him?"

Severus's mouth twitched. "You could say I lost control, yes. I didn't kill him, though." Carefully, he lowered his hands – neither Tonks nor Kingsley hindered him in doing so. "Had I known you'd called to question me, I wouldn't have opened the door. Now, I would be grateful if you would leave." Taking a step away from the sink, he picked up a towel and began drying the dishes.

"Where is he?" Tonks shouted. Obviously, she still believed that the Potions master had buried her former fiancée in his back garden.

Remus considered it a good moment to interfere. This had gone on long enough, and anyway, he was hungry. "Tonks," he said, satisfied that his greeting made her jump. "Nice to see you. Still – isn't this a bit too dramatic for your liking?" Nodding at the wand in her hand, he took another step into the kitchen, expecting her to smile and say Hello.

Her eyes widened, roaming over his naked chest, back up to his face, over his neck and down to his hands. "Remus," she said hoarsely. "Good Merlin, what has he done to you?"

Surprised, Remus looked down his body and saw the scratches across his chest, shoulders, and sides – Severus's hands were strong, and his nails, though short, were sharp. There were more scratches on his back, but Tonks couldn't have seen them. Some bruises, too, bite marks

here and there, and around both wrists, pale red circles told clearly of the games he and Severus had been playing. Remus grinned, amused by her misjudgement. "He's..." he began, but Tonks's eyes narrowed with a sudden, hot flash of hate, and she raised her wand again, whipped around, and shot a hex at Severus.

The Potions master, caught by surprise and wandless to boot, couldn't block the spell completely. It swept him off his feet, and he gasped in sudden pain, clutching his sides. A few drops of blood seeped through his fingers.

"You damn bastard," Tonks said icily. "You tortured him!"

Remus reacted fast. In a heartbeat, he was next to her, snatching her wand away, and throwing it into the farthest corner of the kitchen. He growled, low and deep, and bared his teeth. The wolf inside him came to the surface in a swift move, and it showed in his eyes, in his posture, even in the way he breathed. Stepping between Tonks and Severus, all he wanted was to protect his mate from further harm – and maybe to rip the woman in front of him to pieces.

Both Tonks and Kingsley took a step back, Kingsley being wise enough not to raise his wand. Tonks paled – she had never seen the wolf inside him before, and was visibly scared of him.

"He's my lover; my soul mate. He's *mine!*" Remus growled. "Harm him again, and I'll kill you with my bare hands, Nymphadora."

Tonks's eyes widened in shock. "Remus," she whispered, her eyes dashing from Remus to the man on the floor and back. "Look at you! The scratches, the bruises, the wounds on your wrists..."

"Handcuffs," Severus said calmly and managed to get up. One arm was tightly pressed to his ribcage. "Made him scream, that part. As I have already told you, I did lose control for a while."

Tonks would have attacked him if Kingsley hadn't held her back. "You worthless... damn... horrible..." she stammered, fighting against Kingsley's grip. "I don't know what's going on here, but Remus would never threaten me, he'd..."

"This might be a bit different than it looks," Kingsley whispered into her ear.

Slowly, some information sunk into her mind. Her mouth sagged open. "Soul mate?" she whispered. "Lover?"

Remus clenched his teeth at the scandalised subnote in her voice, and he took a threatening step towards her. The beast inside him ruled his mind; it was hard to control.

Casually, Severus slipped an arm around Remus's waist, holding him back as Kingsley held back Tonks. "Easy, wolf," he said. "They came here because they care for you."

"She hurt you," the werewolf said flatly.

"She bruised my ribs and cracked the skin; nothing that can't be taken care of by a quick Healing Spell and some salve. Don't tear them to pieces right now, or you'll have to clean up the mess. I say we have breakfast first. All four of us."

Remus took a shaky breath; gradually, he managed to get the wolf under control, mainly because Severus's arm steadied him, because of the warmth he radiated, his calm voice, and the fact that he wasn't injured badly. "You're bleeding," he stated through gritted teeth. "Sit and let me have a look."

Obediently, Severus sat and shrugged his shirt off his shoulders. Two identical gasps commented on the bruises on *his* fair skin, the scratches, the lovebites, and the marks left by the handcuffs, which were currently stored in the bedside table. Remus had found out quickly last night that he liked to top as much as he liked to bottom.

Casting a spell, Remus took care of his lover's ribs, then summoned a salve and spread it on the damaged skin. The wound from Tonks's hex wasn't big; it would heal easily.

Tonks and Kingsley shared a glance. "I guess we should leave now," Kingsley said uncertainly.

Remus shot them a look. "You'll stay. Severus wants breakfast, and I want an explanation for all of this!"

Tonks took Kingsley's hand in hers. "I tried to get in contact, but you refused to answer my owls. I knocked on your door, but you didn't open up..."

"Guess why," Remus snapped, pulling Severus's shirt up and closing the buttons.

Chivalric's Bio

I was born and raised in South Germany; I live at the lake of Constance with one son, one dog, and several cats. In October 2007, I stumbled into fandom and found a home. At first, I only wrote HG/SS; meanwhile, I have a real big thing for slash in general and Snape/Lupin specifically.

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"...and eventually, I got worried and used my key and found the picture and then I told Kingsley, and we figured you'd come here, and Snape..."

"Severus," Remus corrected her coolly. "It was your fault anyway, Tonks. *You* went to find your true love first; *you* backed out of our engagement – *you* left me. I only took the same path. Went to Yenta. They gave me a file, and in it was Severus's name and picture. He's my soul mate, like Kingsley is yours. I think I mentioned it already."

Tonks dared a small smile, and then she sat down at the kitchen table. She poured herself a cup of coffee, added milk and heaps of sugar, "Huh," she said. "Scary thought. I mean, you and him in bed together... But then, who am I to judge on unlikely bed partners?"

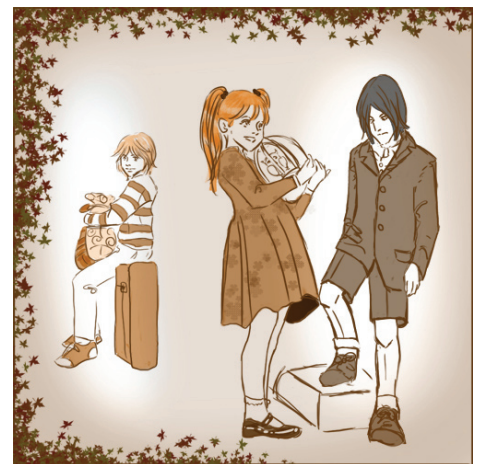
Quickly, she brushed her hand over Kingsley's bum. "Anyway, you're not mad anymore that I refused to marry you?"

Remus sat down as well, and after another moment, Kingsley made some fresh toast, his every movement followed by Severus's narrowed eyes.

Remus looked at his lover. His heart skipped a beat at the thought of the previous night. Everything had started so innocently with Severus inviting him to tea, and everything had ended so very unexpectedly with him getting tied to Severus's bedposts, legs spread wide, weak with need, and begging for release. "No," he said calmly. "I'm not mad at you at all. Actually, apart from calling on Severus, it was the best thing that ever happened to me.

And you were right – sex with one's soul mate is truly earth-shattering."

Tonks blushed brightly. "Told you so," she said and began buttering her toast, clearly trying not to stare at Severus and Remus sharing a quite passionate good-morning kiss.



Information

Rated R

Summary: Young Severus Snape was packed off to Hogwarts with instructions to ingratiate himself to the pureblooded Slytherins who would surely be his House-mates. By the time it's his turn to sit under the Sorting Hat, he has other ideas..

Doors We Open and Close Each Day

by Firefly124

The doors we open and close each day
decide the lives we live.

~Flora Whittemore

Wednesday, September 1, 1971

Severus lugged his trunk onto the train. It wasn't that it was so very heavy, but it was nearly as long as he was tall, which made it terribly awkward. After a few false starts, he managed to shove it along the floor as he looked for a compartment with some room in it.

A grin split his face when he saw Lily poking her head out and waving at him. He pushed the trunk a bit more enthusiastically, not noticing that a leg shot out of the compartment he was passing. Falling into a heap, he bit his lip so as not to make any noise. His right leg had caught the edge of the trunk on the way down, and it throbbed as if it had been broken again.

It might have done. Mam warned me to be careful of it until it's all the way healed.

Laughter hooted out of the compartment. Furiously embarrassed, he stole a glance at the one who'd tripped him. Black hair, gray eyes. He looked a bit like a couple of the pictures Mam had shown him, which meant he was most likely from one of the pureblood families. One of the people he was supposed to make up to.

Sod that!

"Hey, need a hand with that?"

Severus looked up and saw a brown-haired boy, clothes not in much better shape than his own, smiling at him. He tried not to be obvious about leaning on the trunk as he got up, but he couldn't help the tears that sprung to his eyes at the sharp pain. His leg did at least hold his weight.

"Took two of us to deal with mine," the other boy said. "Which way're you going?"

Lily was already running up behind the boy.

"What's the matter with you prats?" she shouted over both of them at the giggling boys.

"Leave it, Lils," Severus muttered.

"It's not our fault the clumsy git stepped on ... whatever that is he's wearing," said the one who'd tripped him. "What exactly is that? Your mother's dressing gown?"

"Look!" said the other black-haired boy. "Is he crying? He is!"

Lily gave a sniff. "Never mind them, Severus. Come on. Our compartment's much better."

"Severus?" the first boy echoed. "More like Snivellus!"

Severus' gut twisted at that. It wasn't as though he'd *actually* been crying, and yet he could already see that name was going to stick.

Lily and the brown-haired boy helped him maneuver his trunk down the aisle and into the compartment Lily had claimed, finally shoving it away into a corner.

"Thanks," Severus said under his breath. Not that he'd wanted the help.

"Is your leg all right?" Lily asked.

"It's fine," he snapped. Lily wasn't even supposed to know about it. Mam would be furious, not to mention that, Muggle or not, Da would kill him. He certainly wasn't about to discuss it in front of a stranger. Still, he couldn't help a sigh of relief once he sat down.

"There'll be someone at the school to have a look at it," the brown-haired boy said. "If it's still hurting, that is."

"It's fine," he snapped again. He couldn't very well have a Healer look at it. They'd know, and then ... He just couldn't. "It's just a bruise."

He could tell the brown-haired boy didn't believe him, but at least he didn't have any more to say about it, simply sticking out his hand and saying, "So your name's Severus? I'm Remus."

Warily, Severus shook his hand.

"And I'm Lily." She stuck out her hand as well. "Won't you sit with us?"

As Remus sat down, and the two of them started to chatter, Severus considered the situation, chewing his lip anxiously.

Barely out of the station, and I'm holed up hiding from the purebloods with a Muggle-born and another half-blood at best. Not exactly what Mam had in mind, even if they are nicer than that other lot.



With a sigh, he looked out the window and watched the countryside passing him by.

“Black, Sirius!” Professor McGonagall called, and the black-haired prat ran up and practically jumped onto the stool like an over-eager puppy. The Sorting Hat was dropped onto his head and appeared to begin muttering.

“Psst,” Remus hissed into Severus’ ear. “That’s the berk that tripped you up on the train, isn’t it?”

Severus pulled back and nodded warily.

“Hope I don’t get into the same house as him then.”

Severus’ stomach twisted. He was almost certainly doomed to that fate himself, given the Prince family legacy. “All the Blacks are in Slyth—”

“Gryffindor!” the Hat shouted at last.

Both boys looked at each other, eyes wide.

“So it doesn’t always work that way,” Lupin said. “Well, good.” He still looked a bit nervous though.

Several students later, Professor McGonagall called out, “Evans, Lily!”

Severus held his breath. She’d never be in Slytherin, but maybe Hufflepuff? She was certainly hard-working, not to mention loyal to a fault when it came to her undeserving sister.

“Gryffindor!” the Hat cried immediately, and the red-haired girl skipped over to join her housemates.

“Lils,” Severus breathed.

“What’s wrong?” Lupin asked.

Severus gritted his teeth a moment before muttering, “Nothing.” Wasn’t any business of Remus’ anyway, after all.

That was it, though, wasn’t it? Their friendship was doomed. Never mind that Black had got into a different House, there was no way Severus would be anywhere but Slytherin. He could, possibly, have managed to carry on as friends with a Hufflepuff. His mates would take the mickey, but it would be nothing compared to what he’d get for being friends with a Gryffindor.



“Lupin, Remus!”

The brown-haired boy ran up to the stool. Just before the Sorting Hat descended over his eyes, Severus saw them squinch shut as if in desperate concentration.

Long moments later, the Hat shouted, “Ravenclaw!”

Lupin jumped down with a grin, shot Severus a wink, and ran over to the Ravenclaw table.

Stunned, Severus thought about that for a minute.

What if ...? Mam couldn't be too cut up if I got into Ravenclaw instead. And I don't think Gryffindors and Ravenclaws fight much except for Quidditch. Plus Lupin seems a decent bloke. Still, it's not like I get to have anything to say about it.

In spite of himself, Severus clung to that bit of hope as Professor McGonagall worked through the rest of the names until she got to his.

“Snape, Severus!”

Snickers came from the Gryffindor table, which he pointedly ignored, though he thought he might also have heard Lily tell them to hush.

Once he was on the stool, the Hat was lowered onto his head. He found himself thinking as hard as he could about how very much he wanted to be in Ravenclaw.

“Already have your mind made up, do you?” a voice said in his ear. “Let’s just have a look then. You’ve a quick mind, sure enough. Cunning, too, however. Are you sure you wouldn’t rather be in Slytherin like your mother’s family?”

“Not really,” he thought. “Not if I’m going to stay friends with Lils.”

“Ah, so perhaps Gryffindor?” the voice said. “You are brave enough, though you don’t seem to realize it yet.”

“No!” Severus thought. He didn’t feel brave at all at the thought of sharing sleeping quarters with that bastard, Black. He’d never get a lick of sleep, having to be on his guard all the time, and then he’d surely fail all his classes.

“Well, then. Perhaps you’d best be RAVENCLAW!”

Severus’ ears rang with the shout of the last word as the Hat was pulled off his head and Professor McGonagall gave him a little nudge on the shoulder to get down. Stunned, he walked over to the Ravenclaw table,

where Lupin had already kicked back the empty chair next to him.

“Brilliant, isn’t it?” Lupin asked. “Best House in the school!”

Severus nodded, already composing his letter home and hoping he was right that Mam wouldn’t be too disappointed.



Friday, September 3, 1971

“How’d you do that so easily, Snape?” Lupin asked as they ran back to the castle for their next class. “It took me half a dozen tries just to get my broom into my hand!”

Severus shrugged. Brooms actually seemed sort of clumsy compared to the way Lily’d taught him to fly from the swings. So much freer that way. But he’d waited until Lupin finally got his broom to cooperate, even though that meant staying a bit after class. After all, Lupin had done more or less the same for him earlier. “You Transfigured your match on the first try. How’d you do *that*?”

Lupin shrugged back. “Guess I see what you mean. C’mon, before we’re late to Charms! Flitwick’d kill us!”

Severus ran a bit harder. Apparently keeping up with Lupin was going to mean lots of exercise. He hoped he’d be able to manage it.



Saturday, September 4, 1971

At the far end of the Ravenclaw Common Room, a couple of sixth-years were fussing with a record player, trying to work out the right combination of charms to get it to work without electricity. What had possessed them to try it out with “Chirpy Chirpy Cheep Cheep” though? Severus couldn’t see how it had ever become so popular in the first place, and randomly speeding up and slowing down as they experimented wasn’t helping it any.

He looked up when he heard the door to leave the Common Room open, surprised anyone would be entering or leaving at this hour.

“Where’re you going? It’s almost curfew!” Severus demanded. Lupin might be a decent enough bloke, but he couldn’t be going around costing their House points the first week!

“I ... don’t feel so well.” Lupin didn’t quite meet his eyes. “I’m going to see Madam Pomfrey.”

“Well, then, take a Prefect with you or something,” he snapped.

“No!” Lupin looked scared at the very idea. “No. I’ll be fine, really. If anybody tries to take points, I’ll just throw up on their shoes.”

Severus rolled his eyes and said, “Well, get out of here then! I don’t want you being sick on me!”

He was a bit surprised Lupin hadn’t returned by the time he closed his Potions book and called it a night, but apparently he must have been sicker than he looked.



Monday, September 6, 1971

“Where the bloody hell have you been?” Severus hissed when Lupin slid into the chair next to him at breakfast.

“Hospital wing,” Lupin muttered.

“Still?” Severus peered a bit more closely at him. “You do look a bit peaky. You’re better now though?”

Lupin just shrugged and picked at his toast.

After watching him for another minute or so, Severus turned and whispered a request to Melissa Ward next to him. At first, it didn’t seem like she was going to do as he’d asked, but then she got a look at Lupin herself, and she turned to pass the message to the girl next to her.

Not long after, a cup of tea made its way down from the upper levels, barely hot anymore. Severus cast a quick Heating Charm on it and elbowed Lupin in the ribs.

“What?”

“Drink this already. If you come to Herbology like that, you’ll fall asleep in your plant!” Severus scowled at him. “We already lost points when McQuillen melted his bloody cauldron yesterday.”

Privately, he thought creating a dangerous situation like that should have more consequences than points, but Professor Slughorn seemed a bit soft all around.

A sip, then a gulp, and Lupin started to look a bit more like himself, even taking a decent bite of his toast and eyeing a banana. Satisfied, Severus returned his attention to his own breakfast.

When they got up to go to class, though, it bothered him to see how stiffly the boy moved. Severus had had days when he woke up stiff like that. They never meant anything good. Still, he couldn’t quite bring himself to ask.



Monday, October 4, 1971

It was gone ten o’clock when Severus finally pulled his nose out of his Transfiguration book. Something about this chapter just wasn’t quite making sense yet, and he

looked about the Common Room for Lupin. He was best in their year at the subject after all.

Unfortunately, he was also nowhere to be seen. Bartleby and Reynolds, the other two first-year boys, were playing wizard chess over by the statue of Rowena Ravenclaw, a trio of fourth-year girls were trading riddles with the Grey Lady, and everyone else was either reading or scratching away with their quills, but no Lupin.

Had he gone to bed already? Seemed unlikely. He was usually up at least as late as Severus. Come to think of it, Severus wasn't sure he'd even seen him since dinner.

When Severus finally decided to call it a night, Lupin's empty bed confirmed that he wasn't in Ravenclaw Tower at all. Puzzled, Severus climbed into bed. Somewhere out in the Forbidden Forest, something gave a mournful howl that sent a shiver down his spine. Between concern for his friend and the frightening noise, it was well past midnight before he finally fell asleep.



Tuesday, October 5, 1971

By the end of morning classes, Severus was well and truly worried. Even when Lupin had been sick a few weeks ago, he'd managed to pull it together to make it to class, but he'd been nowhere to be found all this morning.

"Sev? What's wrong?" Lily plucked at his sleeve. "Aren't you going in for lunch?"

He shook his head. "I think Lupin's sick. I'm going to the hospital wing to check on him."

"I'll come with you." She shifted her rucksack and started down the hall a few steps. "Well, aren't *you* coming?"

Severus snapped out of it and caught up to her.

When they reached the hospital wing, Severus felt his stomach twist sickly. Lupin was there all right, and he looked like he'd been torn half apart.

"Remus!" Lily cried out, dropping her bag and rushing over to the bed. "What happened to you?"

Severus tried to shush her, but it was too late. An infuriated Lily Evans was a force of nature.

"Who did this to you? Was it Black and Potter?" she demanded. "I'll hex them both myself!"

"That won't be necessary, Miss Evans," Madam Pomfrey said. She glared sternly at both Lily and Severus. "While I appreciate your concern for your friend, I assure you, any consequences for misbehavior will be meted out by the staff at this school, *not* students. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, Madam Pomfrey," Lily replied.

After receiving an additional glare, Severus added his own reluctant agreement. Whoever had done this deserved more than points taken off or detention, even if it did last for the remainder of the year. Lupin's face and arms looked like they'd be permanently scarred, and he could only imagine what the covers hid.

"Surely the two of you have somewhere else you ought to be rather than badgering Mr. Lupin? He needs his rest." The matron tapped her foot impatiently.

Lupin hadn't said a word, but he did look rather like he could fall back to sleep at any moment.

"Sev can at least bring him his homework later, can't he, miss?" Lily asked.

"I imagine that won't be necessary," Madam Pomfrey replied. "Most likely, Mr. Lupin will be ready to leave here by dinnertime."



Severus found that rather hard to believe, right up until the moment Lupin flopped into the chair next to him and stared morosely at the selection of food. While there were still faint scars on his face, he looked miraculously better than he had earlier.

"Not hungry?"

"Kinda queasy. The asparagus doesn't look bad though." Lupin reached for the relatively untouched bowl of the stuff and transferred some to his plate.

Severus shrugged. It wasn't what he'd be craving if he'd just had the crap beaten out of him, but that left more roast for everyone else, not that they ever ran short. Looking at Lupin curiously, Severus noticed for the first time that there were other faint lines along his neck. They looked lighter than the others. Older. He looked away before anyone caught him staring and tucked into his own dinner.



Tuesday, November 2, 1971

It was a bit weird that Lupin hadn't come to dinner yet. He couldn't be "sick" again, could he? Severus didn't like feeling quite so concerned about him, but it wasn't as though he'd made many other friends.

Their housemates were decent enough. Nobody actually *said* anything about the fact they both had second-hand books and tatty robes. Well, nobody but that pair of Gryffindor prats, Black and Potter, but *they* didn't matter. Still, nobody but Lupin was actually all that friendly towards him. It only made sense that Severus should

want to make sure he was all right, then, since he didn't exactly have friends to spare.

After wolfing down his dinner, Severus checked the Common Room first and then the dormitory but found no sign of Lupin. His bag and all his books, however, were sitting in their usual spot, so that ruled out the library.

Grabbing his own bag so it'd look like *he* was going to the library, Severus stepped out of the Common Room and headed for the hospital wing. Nobody said a word.

When he got close to the hospital wing, he stuffed the bag behind a suit of armor and cast his mam's version of the Notice-Me-Not Spell that would sting anybody who tried to snatch it. Being as quiet as possible, he opened the door into the hospital wing and peeked around.

There were a couple of Slytherins covered in boils over in one corner, Avery and Rosier, he thought their names were. But that was it. No Lupin. Unless he was in Madam Pomfrey's office, but Severus didn't think she allowed students in there.

Closing the door softly, he went back to the suit of armor, now gleaming in the moonlight coming through the window across the hall, cancelled the spell, and fetched his bag.

So where is he then?

On the off-chance he might've been wrong about the library, Severus went there next. No Lupin there either, but at least he could settle in and work on his essay on Red Caps. It wouldn't hurt to look up a couple of things the textbook only touched on, after all.

Later that night, he lay in bed for a long while before he fell asleep. Where was Lupin this time? Was he "sick" again? Did his parents take him home for something? And if so, was he going to come back a mess again? Even on his worst nights, Da had never left Severus looking like Lupin had last month.

Again, the sounds of the night seemed so much more frightening with his friend gone. Missing. Possibly ... no, probably being hurt.

Severus pulled shut the curtains around his bed. His housemates might be decent enough, but he still didn't want them hearing him cry.



Thursday, December 2, 1971

"It's just ... it's a condition I have." Lupin looked scared and miserable, but at least he was finally explaining.

"A condition that makes you look like you tangled with a Hippogriff?" Severus crossed his arms tightly over his

chest, glad no one else was in the dormitory just now.

"Well, um ... yeah." Lupin shrugged. "Sort of."

"I thought we were mates, but you're still not telling me everything." Severus tried to keep the hurt out of his voice.

"We are!" Lupin looked, if anything, even more scared. "But ... I can't. I promised."

That sent a chill down Severus' spine.

"And don't ye go blubberin' ta yer mam or anyone else, damn ye!"

"Fine, don't tell," he snapped. "But if you think that's going to make it go away, you're too stupid to be in this House!"

"Madam Pomfrey takes real good care of me." Lupin slouched a bit. "I get better much faster now than I ever used to." He shot a quick glance out the darkening window. "I'd better go now."

Severus didn't have any more to say to him. Later, when he found himself pushing his food around his plate at dinner rather than eating it, he told himself it was just that he wasn't all that fond of chicken.



Friday, December 3, 1971

This time, Severus hadn't been surprised when Lupin failed to show up for classes. He simply kept aside a scrap of parchment on which he wrote all the assignments for all their classes, though he drew the line at actually making a second copy of all the notes he'd taken throughout the day. Lupin could recopy his notes if he wanted them, especially considering he'd said once that Severus' writing looked like "a bunch of spiders got into the ink pot and ran all over the page."

Charms was the last class of the day, and Professor Flitwick noticed the scrap of parchment Severus was keeping to the side of his desk.

"Five points to Ravenclaw for helping your housemate keep up with his studies while he is ill, Mr. Snape," the Charms professor said with an approving look on his face.

Severus ducked his head, embarrassed. He didn't mind being praised for knowing his lessons and doing spells properly, but this was a bit different.

"Now, none of that, Mr. Snape."

Severus looked up, and Flitwick's expression was a bit different, though he couldn't quite work it out. He almost

looked as if he wanted to ask Severus something, though he didn't.

"True Ravenclaw spirit isn't just about seeking to increase your own knowledge; it includes helping each other. Being a good friend is nothing to be embarrassed about."

Severus nodded, though he still felt a bit wary, especially as Flitwick still wore that questioning look. So he was unsurprised when he was asked to stay after class.

"You're a bright young man, Mr. Snape."

Severus tried not to flinch. It was hard not to hear that as, "Ye think ye're so smart," the way Da would do when he was in a mood.

"And you've undoubtedly worked out that your housemate, Mr. Lupin, has a situation that is unlikely to simply go away."

Severus looked at his Head of House sharply. *He knows?*

"Yes, of course I am aware." Flitwick tilted his head curiously.

"But ... can't you do anything?"

"I wish there were more I could do, Mr. Snape." Flitwick spread his hands wide. "Alas, magic cannot fix everything, though I dare say Madam Pomfrey does an excellent job caring for him."

"But she shouldn't have to!" Severus blurted, then bit his tongue.

Flitwick looked pained. "I agree. It would be far better if he did not incur these injuries to begin with. However, as I say, there are limits to what can be done. Perhaps someday ..." His eyes took on a faraway look for a moment, then snapped back to meet Severus'. "In the meantime, I trust that you will keep Mr. Lupin's confidence. That is as important to his continued education as seeing to it he has his assignments."

Pressing his lips together tightly, Severus nodded at the implied warning. "I understand, sir."

Flitwick looked at him carefully. "I believe that you do. Good. Off with you then!"

Severus fled. By the time he reached his next class, his leg was aching from running up so many stairs.



Saturday, December 18, 1971

"I wish you'd said something." Lupin frowned. "Maybe next year you can come home with me for Christmas."

"Or you could stay here." Severus knew his own Christmas would be far better at Hogwarts than it had ever been at Spinner's End. Yes, he'd miss his mam, but that was about it. Besides, she was probably safer without him there. Lupin though ... Severus couldn't understand why he seemed so excited to go home.

"I don't know if I could just see my folks in the summers," Lupin was saying.

"Last call f'r the train!" Hagrid shouted into the Great Hall.

"Sev! You're not going home?" Lily ran up to them both.

"I'm not fussed," he said with a shrug. That turned out to be a mistake, as Lily threw her arms around him in mid-shrug, trapping his shoulders up by his ears so that he couldn't hug her back. He felt his cheeks grow pink.

"C'mon, Remus," she said, detaching herself from Severus. "We've got to go."

Severus just nodded good-bye to them both. He couldn't quite find his voice, and he wasn't sure what he'd have said if he did.

Watch out for each other on the train? They'll do that anyway. Don't come back all torn to pieces by your mental family? Wouldn't do any good.

That last bit did make him wonder though. No other students ever had their families pull them out, except that ponce, Malfoy, and his gang of sneaky Slytherins. But they were seventh-years. Would Dumbledore *really* let someone's family take them out every few weeks, just about once a month really, especially if they always came back a mess? The only evidence he had that Lupin went anywhere was that he wasn't in the hospital wing that one time, after all.

And Lupin only ever called it a "condition." Even Flitwick just called it a "situation."

Well, he had a couple of weeks ahead of him, all his homework already done, and Hogwarts' very well-stocked library at his disposal. Maybe he could figure something out. And maybe *then* he could find a way his friend wouldn't be hurt anymore. He'd already improved a couple of potions recipes. Just a little bit, but it was something.

And it proves that just because there's no magical solution now, doesn't mean there never will be.

Thus resolved, he gulped the rest of his pumpkin juice and set off for the library.



Thursday, December 30, 1971

Stunned, Severus sat back into his chair, letting *Cyclical Curses and Other Recurrent Magical Maladies* flip itself closed on the table.

There's no way. It just can't be. They'd never allow it!

The chair legs squeaked loudly against the floor as he pushed back from the table, earning him a glare from Madam Pince that he soundly ignored. He did take care to be quiet as he ducked into the Astronomy shelves and grabbed *Months and Months of Moons*. Flipping to the current year, he looked at the dates.

They looked about right.

Hurrying back to his table, he paged through his notes to see if he could work out which days Lupin had been “sick.”

It's not like I thought there was any reason to keep track!

There it was. In his Charms notes. He'd scribbled in the margin the day Flitwick had given him points for writing down the assignments for Lupin. Points, he kept track of. He always mentioned them in his letters home. Da wouldn't care, but then, he probably never read them anyway. But Mam would.

So there it was. December 3. Five points.

He looked back at the moon chart. December third was the day after the full moon.

Of all the insane things he could possibly have done, he'd gone and made friends with a bloody werewolf.



Sunday, January 2, 1972

Severus was in his bed, reading, when Lupin and the others rushed in from the train. Bartleby and Reynolds just dropped their trunks by their beds and ran back down to the Common Room.

“How was your Christmas?” Lupin asked.

Severus shrugged, barely looking up from his book. It had been nice enough, he supposed. At least right up until he'd made his discovery. “Yours?”

“It was brilliant!” Lupin grinned like an idiot, highlighting the new scar running up his cheek. It hadn't healed nearly as well as Severus was sure it would have if Madam Pomfrey had been the one to treat it.

From the corner of his eye, Severus saw Lupin's grin falter.

“What's wrong?”

“Nothing.” Severus turned a page, even though he hadn't managed to read even half of the one he'd just been staring at.

“Right.” Lupin messed about in his trunk a bit. “I'll just go then.”

After he'd left, Severus finally let the tears that had been stinging his eyes roll down his cheeks.



Monday, January 3, 1972

Severus didn't really understand the point to half the things they did in Transfiguration. He supposed it came down to practicing with little things, but couldn't their practice at least be ... practical? He tapped at his matchbox, turning it to glass and back again.

After class, he almost thought to stay and ask Professor McGonagall when they would get to some of the things he thought would be dead useful. He rather liked her cat trick, for one. But something held him back. It didn't seem ... safe to ask about that.

Instead, he nipped down to the library. Something he'd seen last week, just before he'd worked out what was wrong with Lupin—he shuddered at the thought—was stuck in the back of his mind, and he couldn't quite reach it.

Now, if he could just remember whether it had been in *Weird Wizarding Dilemmas and Their Solutions* or *Confronting the Faceless*.



“So you're talking to me now?” Lupin asked at dinner.

Severus shrugged. “Just been thinking about something.”

Lupin looked a bit worried.

Severus carried on eating. He still wasn't all that used to the idea of what Lupin was. But if he could find a way to help him control it, maybe he didn't have to lose a friend after all, and anyway, it would be better all around if he could get back to acting normal.

After a minute, Lupin went back to his own dinner as well. Later, he even asked Severus for help with his Potions essay.

Normal. Severus could manage normal. He was sure of it.



Sunday, January 9, 1972

“Happy birthday, Sev.” Lily plopped down onto the chair next to his and set a small package on the table.

Bartleby, Reynolds, and Lupin all stared at him.

“What?” Severus tried not to flush as he poked at his oatmeal.

“How come she knows it’s your birthday and we don’t?” Reynolds asked.

“Yeah, I thought we were mates!” Lupin said.

“I didn’t want to make a big deal,” Severus said with a shrug. “Don’t tell you lot *everything*, after all.”

“Aren’t you going to open it?” She sounded hurt.

He’d actually hoped to wait until he was alone, but clearly Lily wasn’t going to let him. Dutifully, Severus undid the wrapping to find himself looking at ... a neatly folded square of parchment. “Um, thanks, Lils.”

She let out a huff. “Aren’t you going to even ask how it works?”

Severus thought he already knew how parchment worked, but that was obviously the wrong answer. “Right. So, how does it work?”

She rolled her eyes and pulled out her wand.

“It’s for all this research you’ve been doing,” she said. “You always have half a dozen books sprawled out everywhere, and your notes are a mess.”

Bartleby snickered.

“These are the ones you had on the table in the library yesterday.” She unfolded the parchment. “But they’re not in order. And obviously this is just the names of them, not your notes.”

Severus nodded.

She flicked her wand at the parchment and said, “*Compone nere opes.*”

The titles of the books suddenly arranged themselves alphabetically.

“If you want to find the ones that are just on the Dark Arts, you’d do this.” She tapped the list and said, “*Exquiro Dark Arts.*”

Two titles moved to the top of the list and the others faded away.

“That’s brilliant, Lils!” Severus grinned. “Where’d you get this?”

Now it was her turn to flush. “Well, it’s just a little different than the Sorting Charm Professor Flitwick taught

us last term. And I haven’t worked out how to make it hold more on it than you can write on the page front and back.”

“You *made* this?” Lupin exclaimed. “How’d you end up in Gryffindor again?”

“Hey!” She gave him a playful slap on the arm. “So you like it?” she asked, turning back to Severus.

“I do. Thank you.” He wanted to give her a little hug, the way she sometimes would do, but he figured Lupin and the rest would take the mickey for the rest of the day if he did.

“I’m glad.” She smiled. “Okay, I have to go. I promised Susie we’d work on our Charms essays. See you in the library later?”

“Where else?” Lupin replied with a laugh.

Severus smiled and nodded, already working out how he could add a privacy charm to the parchment. It would be a huge help organizing his notes, but he wasn’t about to risk anyone putting together just *what* he’d been researching.



Friday, March 10, 1972

“No worries,” Lupin said with a shrug. “It’s not like I knew in time to do anything for your birthday.”

Well, that was true enough, but Severus had hoped his research might bear fruit by now. It would’ve been a brilliant birthday gift. Since he couldn’t say any of that, he just made a face.

Lupin opened up the rumpled package the owl had dropped off and pulled out a small book. When he thumbed through it, Severus could see that the pages were blank.

“A journal!” He turned to Severus. “Do you think Lily would teach me that charm she used on your parchment?”

Severus shrugged. “Or I could. She taught me weeks ago so I could make more of them. You’ll have to charm every page though.”

Lupin grinned. “And you thought you hadn’t got me a birthday gift!”

Severus couldn’t help but grin back, though he insisted on waiting until they were safely alone in their dormitory before showing him. Some things should just be kept amongst friends.



Sunday, May 20, 1972

Severus slammed the book shut loudly enough that Madam Pince stalked over to his table.

“I shouldn’t think I’d have to tell anyone in *your* House the importance of treating these books with respect.” She crossed her arms and glared down at him. “If I ever see another display like that, I will revoke your access to the Restricted Section, and I don’t care *who* you have sign another permission form!”

“Sorry, miss.” Severus bit the inside of his cheek. Professor Flitwick would be furious if Madam Pince revoked his permission. It had taken three requests just to get him to agree to even the fairly limited access he’d been given to the books on Dark Creatures, for all the good it had done.

With a stern nod, Pince turned and hurried off to scold a pack of Hufflepuffs who were being noisy at the opposite end of the library.

Breathing a sigh of relief, Severus turned back and scowled at the offending book, *Transformational Curses and Hexes*, as though it had slammed itself.

It might as well have done.

Finally, he had his definitive answer. Werewolves could not learn to control their transformations by becoming Animagi. In fact, part of the curse prevented them from doing so, even if they had been able to before they were turned.

Oh, there was the fairly useless fact that those few wizards and witches who managed to become Animagi were safe around werewolves, since the creatures only hunted humans. What good was that to someone who’d already been bitten though?

Severus really didn’t want to give Lupin up. He didn’t see how they could carry on as friends, though, if there’d always be that bit of fear. Lupin would never hurt him on purpose. That much was obvious to anyone. Equally obviously, wherever it was he went every month, the only one getting hurt was him. But Severus’ mam had told him tales of werewolves and other Dark Creatures since he was old enough to walk. He knew how many things could go wrong, and he didn’t think he could stay friends with someone he knew might someday kill him or worse.

Chin in hand, he tapped his fingers nervously against his lip in unconscious imitation of his mam, staring at the useless book with a solution no good to someone who’d already been bitten.

He felt a smirk begin to steal over his face as a new idea took shape. Really, he should’ve thought of it as soon as he’d read it.

Pulling out two of his Filing Parchments, he tapped each with his wand and began looking for the scraps of information he’d found so far on becoming an Animagus.



Monday, September 15, 1975

“Don’t grab that one!” Severus hissed out of the corner of his mouth, glancing to the front of the classroom to be sure Slughorn hadn’t heard.

Lupin’s hand stopped just short of the bunch of monkshood that needed to be chopped.

“That’s one of the ones you’re allergic to,” Severus added, thinking that after three years of helping him learn to avoid herbs and potions dangerous to werewolves he shouldn’t really have to explain this. Again. “Merlin, you really are still pants at this.”

“So shall I stir while you chop?” Lupin appeared mostly unfazed, though Severus could tell he was a bit taken aback.

As he should be. While Severus wasn’t sure whether all the teachers knew of Lupin’s ... condition, it seemed a bit odd that Slughorn had chosen *today* to insist that they not use Bubblehead Charms, something most had used heavily since learning the spell last year. Yes, scent was an important indicator for many potions, but it was not critical for this one.

“Right.” Severus suppressed a wince. “Just ... try to keep your strokes even. And tell me if it starts to look orange, even a little.”

With a nod, Lupin traded places with him and began to stir.

Severus made quick work of chopping the monkshood finely, added it to the potion, and surreptitiously made sure all traces of it were gone from the cutting area before motioning Lupin to switch back. He was relieved to see that the potion was still a clear red with no lumps forming and not a hint of orange.

By the end of class, Lupin was clearly starting to wheeze, so Severus nudged him to go see Madam Pomfrey before Charms while he took care of decanting and turning in their potion.

“Just a minute, Mr. Snape,” Slughorn said as he set down the labeled phial and turned to leave.

Startled, Severus stood to one side and waited for the rest of the students to finish turning in their work and vacate the room.

If he caught us talking, he should just take points and be done with it.

“Mr. Snape,” the potions teacher said, “you continue to do O quality work in this class. I fully expect you to do as well on your Potions O.W.L. and eventually your N.E.W.T.”

“Thank you, sir,” Severus replied warily, wondering if he was about to be invited to one of those deadly dull Slug Club meetings Lils had gone to last term, and if so, whether it would be academic suicide to decline.

“However, if you wish to rise to the levels your talent and work merit, you would do well to consider the company you keep.” Slughorn gave him a pointed look. “I realize that it is considered the realm of my House, but surely even a Ravenclaw has *some* ambition?”

A slight chill ran down Severus’ spine as he nodded and answered, “Of course Slytherin doesn’t have a monopoly on ambition. Thank you for your advice, sir.”

Which I will give all the consideration it deserves, right before I dump it in Professor Sprout’s heap of dragon manure.

As he headed off to Charms, he was still considering the implications of said “advice” and didn’t see Potter, Black, and their squirrely sidekick, Pettigrew, until Black had already cast a Trip Jinx on him, laying him out flat on the cold stone floor.

“Oops, d’you think he broke his nose?” Black asked as he twirled his wand lazily.

“It could only be an improvement,” Potter said with a shrug.

Severus heard a pair of girls giggle off to the side.

“You’d better hope not!” Pettigrew piped up. “You’ll be in real trouble then.”

“You’ll be in real trouble now!” Severus retorted, keeping an eye on them as he picked himself up and gathered his books. He actually hadn’t hit his face at all, though his elbow and shoulder were going to ache until he put something on them, and his leg, predictably, was throbbing. His fingers itched for his wand, but unlike those prats, he wasn’t stupid enough to draw a wand in the hallway right outside an occupied classroom.

“What’s going on here?” Slughorn demanded, waddling out of the classroom as if on cue.

Severus looked over at the three self-styled “Marauders,” wanting to enjoy the sight of them getting what they had coming for once.

Not a wand in sight, and only Pettigrew looked the least bit guilty.

Damn and blast.

It’d be his word against theirs, and Slughorn had just made it clear he didn’t entirely approve of Severus’ choices or, by implication, him.

“I tripped,” he said at last. It was true enough, after all.

“Hmph.” Slughorn didn’t look convinced. Still, he didn’t ask anything else, just said, “Well, what are you all waiting for? Get in here, you lot, and Mr. Snape, you’d best hurry if you’re to make it to your next class.”

Mouth pressed into a firm line, Severus walked quickly to do just that, silently fuming. He passed Lily on the way, but she was as hurried as he, so there was no chance to ask how she’d got separated from the rest of her classmates nor to warn her that Black and Potter were in rare form today.



Saturday, September 20, 1975

“Aren’t you coming to dinner?” Reynolds asked, holding open the Common Room door.

“Not hungry,” Lupin said, stealing a glance at the clock.

“I’ll be down in a bit,” Severus mumbled without looking up from his Ancient Runes homework.

Once the door was closed, Severus did a quick Scanning Spell to be sure the rest of the Ravenclaws had gone.

“You should go,” Lupin said. “I’ve only got about a half hour before moonrise.”

“If you don’t eat anything, you’re going to feel worse tomorrow.”

Lupin shrugged. “Does it matter? I lose a day anyway.”

He looked so sad, so very much like he’d absolutely given up, that Severus wanted to shake him and almost spilled his secret right then. Instead he shrugged and replied, “Suit yourself. I’ll bring you your assignments at dinner tomorrow then.”

“I know you will.” His smile was weak but genuine as Severus ran his books up to the dormitory before running off to dinner.



A bit nervous now that it was right down to it, Severus ran through the entire plan in his head one last time as he stood in the doorway of the secret exit he’d found. As he mentally ticked off each step, he willed his breathing and heart to slow to normal levels. Someday, he hoped, this would come easily to him, even in a moment of crisis. For now, however, he had to be completely calm or else it just wouldn’t work.

Finally ready, he closed his eyes and willed his body to change and flow into its other form, absorbing his clothing and remaking it into fur. He felt his nose and mouth lengthen and reshape, leaned forward so his paws could reach the ground, and swished his tail as it lengthened out of his spine until finally it reached just the right amount of counterbalance.

When he opened his eyes again, everything around him looked taller, as it always did. Tonight, that seemed a bit ominous, but he shook his head as if to rid himself of the thought. Instead, he discovered that one last bit of his uniform remained. He pawed at the blue and bronze tie until it slid up over his pointed ears so that he could nudge it away with his snout. He'd be coming back this way later, and he could pick it up then.

A howl echoed through the night, and he decided he'd best get to it. Carefully he picked up the neatly folded napkin containing as much food as he'd thought he could smuggle out of the Great Hall without being caught and set off at a trot for the Whomping Willow.

Just out of the guardian tree's range, he set down the napkin and picked up a branch he'd set there earlier. It was definitely harder to manage it in his mouth than in his hands, but he wasn't about to transform to human and back again. Not that he was too worried about being spotted, but there was always the chance, and at any rate, he didn't feel proficient enough to be shifting back and forth quite that rapidly. Not yet, in any case.

Once he'd finally managed to get a grip on it, he angled the branch towards the knot on the trunk of the Whomping Willow. It took three tries, but he finally had it lined up just so when the tree finally took offense at his behavior and smacked the offending stick away, breaking it in two and leaving his jaw sore.

With a low growl at the base of his throat, he tossed the remaining part of the branch away and picked up the napkin. He watched the Willow's branches until they finally stilled, then made a dive for the hollow at its base.

A flailing branch clipped his tail just as he got in, and Severus let out a yip that was surprise more than pain. He cut the sound off quickly and stayed very still for a moment. Howls echoed through the passage, but they didn't sound terribly near.

Reassured or mostly so, he started down the passageway to whatever holding area Lupin was in.



The tunnel seemed to go an awfully long time, though Severus was glad to be taking it at this height. He'd have

to crouch down quite a bit to manage it in his human form. His instincts kept telling him he ought to be moving away from the howling sounds rather than closer, but he pressed on.

"The werewolf is only a threat to humans. One of the best, though also one of the most difficult and rare defenses for the wizard or witch, then, is to be able to take on an animal form. Not only will the werewolf not attack, its bite is not infectious to one in animal form." The words replayed through his mind like a mantra of safety. He just hoped Armestius Lubeck knew what he was talking about, as *Transformational Curses and Hexes* was the only book that had said anything on the subject at all.

Eventually, the passage twisted, and the howling abruptly became louder and less distorted. In the dim light, Severus could see where the tunnel opened into what looked like a room. Slowing his pace, he cautiously stepped through.

In an instant, the howling stopped and claws snicked against the floor. Repeating Lubeck's assurances to himself again, Severus held his ground as the wolf clambered into the room.

Some abstract corner of Severus' mind took in the broadened snout, golden eyes, and tufted tail that marked this as a werewolf rather than the regular sort, not to mention the angry looking gash in his shoulder. He was also rather larger, though it was hard to say that for certain from this vantage point. Any wolf was much larger than a fox, after all.

But only a threat to humans. Only humans.

The two stared at one another for a moment, Severus' instincts screaming at him to run while he firmly pressed his paws into the floor. His jaw started to ache, reminding him of what he held, and he tossed the napkin filled with food towards the wolf.

Warily, the wolf sniffed at the cloth, then bit into it, growling with frustration.

I should've thought about a way to make it open more easily.

An awkward bit of prodding and tearing later, the napkin was hopelessly destroyed, and the wolf had gobbled up its contents and was smacking his tongue along his lips.

Of course, then he turned his attention to his visitor.

Severus kept his feet planted as the wolf circled him, sniffing him all over. He resisted the urge to take a swipe at him with his tail when the beast insisted on sniffing there as well. He'd seen dogs back home do the same. In fact, he found his own nascent vulpine instincts prodding him to reciprocate. After a brief debate with himself over whether it was worth the loss in dignity, he gave in and sniffed at the wolf as well.

It didn't smell like a wolf, though how he knew *that* was a bit of a mystery. He'd never met one that he knew of, whether in human form or fox. He didn't think it smelled much like Lupin either, not that he'd ever paid that much mind.

Once the greeting ritual was apparently over, the werewolf touched his nose to Severus' and then gave it a lick.

Simultaneously relieved and affronted, Severus yipped and took a little jump forward, clamping his jaws around the broad muzzle. He barely had time to wonder just what in Merlin's name he thought he was doing when the wolf, far from breaking free or even pulling away, lowered itself to the floor so that now, Severus was no longer looking up at him. In fact, if he were just a bit taller in this form, he supposed he'd actually be looking down. Something told him it was time to let go, and he did, relieved when the wolf's response was to roll onto his back.

Bewildered, if relieved, Severus stared at him for a minute before yipping at him to get up and stop acting like an idiot. He wasn't sure that translated very well from human to fox to werewolf, but the wolf did get up and give him something that looked vaguely like Lupin's cheeky grin, tongue lolling out for all the world like a great big dog.

Now what? Severus really hadn't known what to expect he'd do once he delivered the food. He'd considered dosing it with a Sleeping Draught to solve that problem, but there just wasn't enough information about whether it worked properly on a transformed werewolf.

If it did, wouldn't Madam Pomfrey have been giving him one all this time?

As if in answer to Severus' unvoiced question, Lupin turned and picked up a piece of wood that looked like it might have once been part of a chair, then ran out of the room. He came back a few seconds later, still holding the wood and looking confused.

He's not the only one.

Severus jumped to the side, fur flaring, when Lupin threw the bloody stick at him, but he settled down when he saw the wolf just staring at him, still bewildered.

If he wants me to fetch the bloody thing, he'd best think again!

A grin stealing over his face, he picked up the piece of wood, trotted over to where Lupin stood, and then ducked between his legs and ran into the room beyond. A whuff and a whine, then claws scabbled at the floor as the wolf gave chase. A couple of laps around the larger room, up and over one bit of ramshackle furniture and under the next, and Lupin finally caught up, pulling the stick away

and running in the opposite direction and darting up the stairs.

With a grin and a yip, Severus ran after him. This was turning out even better than he'd planned.

Severus was bone-tired, and from the look of things, so was Lupin. After hours of chasing and roughhousing—that had frightened Severus at first, but even when the wolf nipped at him, it was never enough to break his skin—the werewolf had curled up in a corner and fallen asleep. As good an idea as that appeared, Severus had to get back.

First, though, he picked up the bits of napkin that he could find and nosed them under a pile of debris. Then he climbed down into the passageway and started the long walk back. He noticed with some satisfaction that his right leg was no more sore or tired than the rest of him. Perhaps learning to reshape his bones had helped finally fix that old injury for good?

Nearly half an hour and an annoyingly difficult question from the Ravenclaw guardian later, Severus moved silently through the Common Room and crept into his dormitory. Bartleby and Reynolds were both snoring. With a feeling of relief, he Vanished the simulacrum he'd left in his own bed and slid under the covers, falling asleep almost before his head touched the pillow.

Sunday, September 21, 1975

Severus tried not to show his surprise when Lupin showed up to breakfast the next morning. He thought he might've caught a suspicious look from Bartleby, but it was gone so fast that he supposed he might have imagined it.

"So, library?" he asked Lupin. "I still have another eight inches to write on my Transfiguration essay."

"Really? I thought you'd finished." Lupin gave him an odd look.

Lupin didn't say any more, but he did turn up in the library about an hour later. Grabbing several books from a nearby shelf, he sat down, pulled out some parchment, and began writing.

After a few minutes during which they both worked in silence, save the scratching of their quills, Lupin looked up and asked, "Why didn't you say anything?"

Severus just shrugged. He wasn't sure he could even really explain it all to himself.

"I mean, I know it was you. It had to be." His hand shook a bit. "That was a ridiculous risk."

"I'm not a complete idiot." Severus pulled out a sheaf of parchments and thumbed through them. Activating the one with the relevant information, he passed it across the table.

"Shh!" Madam Pince hissed from her desk.

Severus cast a quick Silencing Spell around their table. Normally, he didn't like to use it, as it looked too suspicious to be seen talking when no one could hear what was being said. In the library, though, that was hardly unusual and frequently the only way to avoid being pitched out.

Lupin read over the parchment, then looked up and said, "Some of these notes go back to first year."

Severus just shrugged again. Yes, it had taken him three and a half years to manage the Animagus transformation. Did Lupin think he'd mastered it in a week?

"How'd you know that ... biting thing would work?"

"I didn't. Not exactly." He'd certainly given it plenty of thought before falling asleep. "I think maybe I saw a dog do something like that once, to get the other in line."

"Huh." Lupin looked thoughtful. "I didn't rip myself up as badly, having another animal around."

"Yeah." Severus squirmed a bit. Even knowing he should be safe, he'd still been terrified, but he wasn't about to let on.

"That was brilliant. Thank you."

"Don't be all sappy about it. You're not going to be missing any more classes, right?" Severus gave him a pointed look.

"Maybe not," Lupin agreed.

"Good. Can't have you bringing down the House statistics come O.W.L. time."

"Of course not."

Lupin sounded a bit sad as he said that last bit. Rather than think about that, Severus pointed to some of the books Lupin had grabbed and asked, "So what're you working on now? Arithmancy, Potions, or Transfiguration?"

"Arithmancy." Lupin grinned. "I'm done with Transfiguration, and I'll save Potions for when you have time to talk me through it."

Rolling his eyes, Severus canceled the Silencing Spell and went back to his own homework, relieved to have that conversation over.



Monday, October 20, 1975

"Where do you think you're going?" Black demanded.

Severus ignored the question and kept walking. Unfortunately, he was in completely the wrong hall to be headed

for the library. A better question was where the hell Black and his lot thought they were going, considering there was nothing down this way other than the passage he planned to use.

"I said, 'where do you think you're going?' Do you suppose all that grease has mucked up his hearing, James?"

"Nah. The stuck-up Ravenclaw just thinks he's too good to answer a simple question," Potter said.

"Don't see what he's got to be stuck up about, going around in ratty, too-short robes without ever taking a bath. D'you even know how, Snape?"

Fed up, Severus whirled and silently threw hexes at each of the three idiots in turn. Black sprouted a pair of donkey ears and a tail. Potter, unfortunately, had enough time to get a shield up, and Pettigrew had ducked behind him. Then Severus had all he could do to block all the hexes they threw back at him.

He'd thought he was holding his own fairly well right up until a Sponge-Knees Curse hit him in the right leg, forcing him to brace himself against the wall for support or else fall. He felt the packet of food in his pocket smash between his hip and the wall, not to mention the old dull ache flaring sharply to life. Furious, he slung back everything short of an Unforgivable that he could think of in between attempts to Disarm his attackers and blocking the spells they threw at him. Still, a couple of Stinging Hexes got through, almost making him drop his wand just as Potter cast yet another Disarming Charm.

"What in Merlin's name is going on here?"

Severus' wand jerked out of his hand and flew to the new arrival. Fortunately, so did Black's, Potter's, and Pettigrew's.

"Three Gryffindors and a Ravenclaw. What are you lot doing dueling in the halls down here? You're lucky I can't take points, though I bet your Heads of House will, once they hear about this," said Rosier.

Severus groaned. Just what he needed, to be caught by a Prefect, and a Slytherin at that. They'd take any chance they could to drag the other Houses down so they could keep their monopoly on the House Cup.

At least the Gryffindors should lose more points, since there are more of them.

"Now get back to your Common Rooms or the library or someplace you actually belong."

"But our wands!" Potter demanded.

"I'm sure Professor Slughorn will pass them along to your Heads of House. I can't say what they'll do about getting them back to you, of course," Rosier replied.

With much muttering, the Gryffindors turned and left. Severus, on the other hand, didn't move.

"Well, what about it?" Rosier asked. "Leaving or what?"

"Or what." Severus folded his arms across his chest, trying to make his propped up position look nonchalant. "There's no rule against just being here, you know."

"No, there isn't." Rosier looked at him thoughtfully. "That wasn't half-bad wand work."

"Am I supposed to thank you?"

"Too bad you weren't sorted into Slytherin. We could use a few with moves like that." He nodded at Severus' leg. "You should have Pomfrey take a look at that knee."

"I could fix it myself if I had my wand back," Severus snarled.

Rosier appeared to consider this for a moment before sorting through the wands he held and tossing one to Severus. The right one, surprisingly enough.

"Got no problem with Ravenclaw," he said, "even if you lot do give us a run for the Cup."

Warily, Severus kept an eye on the Prefect as he countered the spell on his knee, then tested it and pushed off from the wall. It held.

"Now get out of here before I change my mind."

With a nod, Severus turned and left. He'd have to use one of the other exits tonight.



Hours later, he crawled into bed, even more exhausted than he'd been last month. It had been worth it, though, to see that ridiculous grin on Lupin's face when he'd popped through the hole that led into his shack. He didn't think too hard about why that made him fall asleep wearing a grin of his own.



Saturday, November 16, 1975

"Supposed to be the most haunted house in Britain," Lily said with a shudder as they looked at the boarded up building. "They say it's got worse lately. Picked up an extra ghost or two."

"That why they're calling it the Shrieking Shack?" Severus asked, bemused. He supposed the combination of Lupin's howls and his own odd screeching noise once they really got tussling probably did sound like angry ghosts.

"I guess. Nobody's been able to get inside to check it out," she said.

"Why bother?" Lupin asked, an edge of fear to his voice that Severus hoped Lily didn't catch.

"For the thrill, of course!" said Black, coming up behind them. "Besides, I don't think there's anything to the haunting rumors at all."

"Oh, really?" Lily narrowed her eyes at him. "Even Nearly Headless Nick says the Hogwarts ghosts won't go near the place."

"Nah," Potter said. "Sirius is right. Probably somebody's found a way in and uses the place for a good time. Maybe they should call it the Shagging Shack!"

Severus rolled his eyes while Black and Potter laughed at their own stupidity, Pettigrew giggling nervously behind them. Still, it wouldn't do for them to go thinking there was any reason to mess with the place.

"The Grey Lady says the same," he said, despite the fact he'd never talked to her about it at all. "I think the Hogwarts ghosts probably know a haunting when they see one."

"Maybe we should try it out," Black said to Lily with a leer.

"Hey!" Severus yelled.

At the same time, Lily slapped Black hard across the face. "As if I'd go anywhere with a tosser like you!"

Undaunted, Black said, "Well, then, maybe your friend here? The one that knows how to take a bath, I mean. I'm not fussy, but I have *some* standards."

Severus' wand was in his hand almost before he'd thought to draw it, and he was about to try out his new Cutting Hex on the bastard when suddenly Lily was in the way, shoving Black into the other two Gryffindors.

Lupin didn't say a word, but his wand was out too, and his face had turned an angry red.

"Leave us alone, you insufferable toerags!" Lily yelled. "Go drown yourselves in Butterbeer or stuff your faces with Sugar Quills or something!"

"We have to head back soon anyway," Pettigrew said with a quivering voice. "And I did want to stop in at Zonko's."

"Fine, fine," Potter replied. "More fun to be had there anyway than looking at some dumb old building."

Severus let out a silent sigh of relief and put his wand away when the three Marauders finally left.

"I'm sorry, Remus," Lily said. "I don't know why Sirius said that to you. He's just an idiot."

Remus didn't say anything, though he was still awfully flushed.

“He shouldn’t have said what he did to you either,” Severus pointed out.

“I did slap him for it.”

“And then you got in my way.”

Lily looked at him curiously, and Severus realized she was probably wondering why he hadn’t drawn his wand already when Black insulted her but had when he’d gone for Lupin. He wasn’t quite sure himself.

“Since they’re all off to Zonko’s, why don’t we try Honeyduke’s before we have to go back?” Lupin said at last.

“Great idea,” Lily agreed, grabbing each of them by the arm and all but dragging them back to the road into Hogsmeade.



Tuesday, November 18, 1975

He trotted along the passageway, food-stuffed napkin gripped in his teeth. He’d managed to avoid the Marauders this time, but only just. It was eerie how they always seemed to know right where to find him.

When he climbed through the hole into the Shrieking Shack, Lupin was just stuffing his clothes and wand into a box that vanished when he shut it. Then he turned to look at Severus.

“You’re early this time.” He came closer and knelt down. “You’ll hex me later if I pet you, won’t you?”

Severus set down the food and yipped in reply. He wasn’t sure he really would. In fact, it made him feel odd in a not entirely unpleasant way to be sitting here with his naked friend. Lupin didn’t seem bothered, for all that this felt very different than simply being in the same room whilst changing or other times they’d seen one another without clothes.

“You probably should’ve waited just a bit,” Lupin said. “The moon’ll be up in a few minutes anyway.”

Severus nudged the packet of food towards him.

“Nah, not yet. Though it wouldn’t hurt to open it.” He suited actions to words and had the thing just about undone when he yelled and fell back like he’d been hit.

This looked nothing like the flowing, shifting transformation Severus had learned. Lupin shook and cried and retched, and the only sounds worse than his screams were those of his bones breaking and clacking together in new arrangements. When he finally lay still, completely changed, Severus padded over and licked his nose, feeling oddly protective of the larger animal.

The wolf looked up at him and whined, then licked his snout in return before scrabbling to his feet and ambling over to the half-unwrapped food. When he’d ripped it the rest of the way open and gobbled the food, he gave Severus a grin and flipped the torn napkin at him, apparently declaring that the first game of the night.

Severus snatched it out of the air and darted away, eager to get on with the night’s games and to forget the hideous moments he’d just witnessed.



Saturday, February 14, 1976

“That for Lily?” Lupin asked as he rooted around in his trunk for something.

“What?” Severus looked up from the letter he’d been writing, annoyed. He wanted this done before breakfast. “Why would I be writing to Lily?”

“Oh, I don’t know, because it’s Valentine’s Day?” There was an edge to Lupin’s voice.

Severus shook his head and went back to his letter. He hadn’t written home since before Christmas, and even though he doubted his father would let the owl in, he wanted to at least ask how his mother was doing and tell her a bit about his term. Now, however, he couldn’t seem to concentrate on what he’d wanted to say next.

“Well, you do fancy her, after all,” Lupin said.

Severus’ stomach tied itself into a knot and undid itself again in the space of two breaths. He didn’t say a word. No, he didn’t fancy *Lily*, though it had taken him ages to realize it.

Lupin came to stand next to Severus’ bed. “You do, don’t you?”

“No,” Severus muttered, wishing Lupin would just go away before he said or did something stupid.

“Well, I don’t, if that’s what you’re worried about.”

“I’m not ‘worried about’ anything,” Severus growled, though that was reassuring to hear. He kept his eyes firmly on his letter.

“Good then,” Lupin said. After a moment he added, “So I’ll see you at breakfast, yeah?”

“Right.” Severus didn’t look up even after the door shut, but it took him several minutes to get back to his letter.



Severus got to the Great Hall with just barely enough time to grab some toast and pumpkin juice before class.

He was deliberately ignoring the candles that had been shaped into hearts floating over the table, so he almost missed the heavy silence and the looks being shot back and forth amongst Bartleby, Reynolds, and a very red-faced Lupin.

“What?” He looked at all three of them.

“Someone sent him a Valentine,” Bartleby said.

“But he won’t say who,” Reynolds added.

His toast turned into lead in his stomach as Severus turned to look at Lupin, who held a bit of parchment crumpled up in a fist. “Oh, really?”

“It’s nothing,” Lupin said. “Someone’s idea of a joke.”

Severus couldn’t quite decide whether that was better or worse, but the ice-cold feeling in his stomach flashed abruptly into a heated fury, and he thought he had a fair idea just where it ought to be directed.

“It’s nothing,” Lupin repeated as the others got up and started to leave.

“Fine, it’s nothing,” Severus snapped. “Come on before we’re late then.”

It was a shame the halls were so crowded with teachers lining them all up for the trek to Hogsmeade. He had a perfectly good shot at Black if not for Professor McGonagall standing not three feet away. No matter. There would be other opportunities.



“What? Heading to Puddifoot’s with both of them?” Potter came alongside and tugged at Lily’s scarf. “Didn’t think you had it in you, Evans. I mean, I knew you had to be up to *something* when you turned me down, but I never imagined—”

“As if I need a reason other than not wanting to go with you!” Lily retorted, shoving him away. “Besides, we’re not going to Puddifoot’s. We’re going to Scrivenshaft’s.”

“How utterly boring,” Black said from beside Lupin.

Severus didn’t need to look to know Pettigrew would be behind him.

“So is that why you didn’t even answer my note?” Black continued. “Too busy shopping for quills and parchment?”

“Like Evans said, don’t need a reason.” Lupin had his hands rammed into his pockets and was looking down at his feet as if expecting to find something there waiting to trip him.

Furious, Severus slid his wand into his hand quietly and glanced around to see if there were any teachers nearby.

Not that the shopkeepers might not say something, so it can’t be anything obvious.

“You know what I think?” Potter asked.

“What?” Black and Pettigrew replied on cue.

“I think Evans here is just covering up for these two.”

“What? You’re passing me up for this greasy git?” Black demanded of Lupin, his hand held over his heart and a look of fake horror on his face. “Say it isn’t so!”

“That’s enough!” Lily shouted, just as Lupin said, “Better him than you!”

With a flick of his wrist, Severus sent a Trip Jinx behind him and heard Pettigrew land with a satisfying thump. When Black turned to look, Severus shot one at him too. He regretted having to leave Potter standing, but Lily was in the way.

“Sev!” She nudged him with her elbow. “We’ll get into trouble!”

“Leave us alone,” he said to the other three Gryffindors, pointedly ignoring Lily’s warning, “or you’ll get worse than a bruised arse for it.”

Potter gave Pettigrew a hand up as Black scrambled to his feet.

“This isn’t over!” Black said.

Severus didn’t even dignify that with a reply, though he heard Lily say, “It never started, you prat.”

By the time they reached Scrivenshaft’s, he could barely remember why they’d been so set on going there to begin with, but he wanted nothing more than to make their purchases and leave.



Sunday, February 15, 1976

Severus didn’t wait until after dinner this time. He couldn’t. Something about the afternoon’s confrontation had needled at him all day, but the only place he thought he could possibly deal with it was their shack. He’d arrived nearly half an hour ago, and was pacing back and forth when he finally heard footsteps approaching. He ducked behind a pile of debris. Lupin said Pomfrey only ever came as far as the first room and never upstairs, but he didn’t intend to risk that this would be the one time it was different.

“There you are then,” the matron said. “I’ll see you in the morning. With any luck, you won’t need to stay. I’m impressed with how well you’ve been handling your changes this year.”

“Thank you, Madam Pomfrey.”

Severus heard an audible sniff.

“Madam Pomfrey?”

“I thought I smelled ... never mind, Mr. Lupin. Just send your clothes over as usual, and I’ll see you in the morning.”

After a few minutes, he heard Lupin call his name. He transformed and went downstairs, relieved to find Lupin still clothed.

“Why’d you come so early?” Lupin looked him up and down. “You know I’d rather you weren’t here while I change.”

Severus stuffed his hands in his pocket. His idea from earlier seemed stupid now.

“Well, you can’t stay here like that!”

“Wasn’t going to!”

“Well then, what?”

He’d thought of things to say. Really he had. But whatever they’d been, they were gone now, and all he could do was grab the front of Lupin’s robes and pull him close, mashing their mouths together and hoping Lupin wouldn’t push him away.

He didn’t.

After a very long few seconds, Remus grabbed his robes as well, holding them both together tightly. Their teeth clacked against each other, their noses got in the way, and they were probably doing it all wrong, but it was bloody brilliant.

And then Remus did push back, but it was all right because he didn’t actually let go of Severus’ robes. They just stood there staring at each other like idiots for a minute.

“You’d better go,” Remus said. “I mean, come back. But just ... just go out for a bit until I’ve changed. There’s not much time. I can feel it.”

With a reluctant nod, Severus stepped back and shifted into his fox form before leaving.

He went about halfway down the tunnel before he stopped and sat, tail curled about his feet. From this distance, he thought he might manage not to hear Remus’ bones breaking and reshaping themselves. He didn’t bother wishing it could be different. Wishing was a waste of time. But he still hated that Remus’ transformations hurt him so much, though at least he no longer tore at himself, not since Severus had been staying with him.

To distract himself, Severus considered the many possibilities that this protected hideaway of theirs might offer. Even if they weren’t both blokes, he didn’t much fancy

the idea of sitting around the Ravenclaw Common Room snogging like some of the sixth years got up to. And since they were both blokes, well, it wasn’t much of an option anyway.

But here! Here they had the perfect hideaway. Yes, it was a bit of a walk, but no one would disturb them. He tried not to think of Black’s crude comments, but the fact remained that it really was the perfect place to try a bit more kissing without risk of interruption. Or possibly other things. He grinned at the thought.

Just then, he heard the howls that told him it was safe to come back. He smirked to himself at the irony of that thought as he trotted back up to the shack and hopped through the hole leading inside.

Remus was there, tongue lolling from the side of his mouth, and Severus wondered if the wolf knew what had happened before he’d changed. Remus remembered enough about his time as a wolf, but he’d never been really clear about whether the wolf remembered anything about being human.

And if he does remember, what will he do about it?

Kissing a werewolf right before he transformed might not have been the brightest idea Severus had ever had. It wasn’t in any of the research he’d done, but he rather didn’t think that wolves in general, much less werewolves, took that sort of thing particularly slowly. While he’d just been thinking of the various *things* they could do in this shack, he didn’t much want to do them right now, in this form, with Remus in *that* form.

He waited, scanning the room for the best escape route, should he need one. One of the boarded up windows caught his eye. One plank had rotted away in a lower corner, leaving an opening that might be just large enough for him but was definitely too small for the werewolf. He didn’t much want to leave Remus alone, but at least the option was there.

Remus whuffed at him, then whined, and Severus tilted his head to one side trying to decipher his meaning. Then he worked it out.

Damn!

He’d been so preoccupied, he’d forgotten all about the food. Hell, he’d skipped his own dinner. He always brought food. Always. So of course, the werewolf was looking for it. Or at least, that’s what he hoped the wolf was looking for.

Casting about for a distraction, he picked up one of the pieces of wood strewn on the floor and tossed it over to Remus, who snatched it out of the air, dropped it to the floor, and looked at Severus expectantly.

Running back down the tunnel to go fetch some sort of dinner was looking more and more like an enticing option when Severus heard something. Clearly so had the wolf, as both went still, ears twitching towards the hole that led into the passage back to the Whomping Willow.

Severus sniffed the air, but there was no breeze to bring in a scent that would tell him what had got into the tunnel, but he had a sinking feeling in his stomach that was confirmed when the next sound he picked up was Black's voice.

"I'm telling you, I saw him come this way."

"The map's broken, Sirius," Pettigrew said. "You didn't see him come here from Hogwarts. You said he just suddenly showed up in this tunnel and then turned around and went back."

Severus felt a low growl start in his throat. He choked it off when he heard it echoed behind him.

The werewolf was staring intently at the entryway. Had he recognized the voices as human?

Likely not. But when he catches their scent, there'll be no stopping him!

A dozen possibilities tumbled through Severus' mind. Any combination of the Marauders killed or turned would see Remus being sent to Azkaban or worse. Hell, even for them to find out about Remus' lycanthropy could be a disaster. What was he to do though? Chase them off? They weren't likely to run away from a bloody fox!

"I bet they're both here somewhere," Potter said. "He's up to something."

"Yeah, 'up' all right. Can't imagine what Lupin sees in the greasy bastard."

"Well, I don't want to find them if they're ... you know," Pettigrew whined.

"We're not going to find anybody if you two don't shut up!" Potter hissed.

Remus' growl had grown louder.

"What's that?"

They were getting too close. He had to do something. Severus turned and faced the werewolf, reminded once again just how disparate their sizes were.

The faintest of breezes finally brought the scent of the three humans into the room.

The werewolf darted for the hole leading to the tunnel.

Severus reared up on his hind legs with a screeching noise he hadn't even realized he could make.

Confused, the wolf stopped.

Severus lunged forward and bit down on the werewolf's snout, pulling both of them down to the floor.

The wolf lay down, but unlike the first time, when Severus let up on his snout, he didn't roll over, just lay there and growled.

Severus yipped at him and turned towards the hole, never taking his eyes off the werewolf.

Remus didn't move.

A few steps and Severus looked back.

The wolf hadn't moved.

Severus leapt through the hole and into the tunnel, scrambling down until it became level and racing towards the wand-lit idiotic Gryffindors, screeching as loud as he could manage.

"What in Merlin's name is that?"

"Let's get out of here!"

"I told you this was a bad idea!"

Their voices jumbled together as they ran. Severus' throat was getting sore from keeping up the noise he was making, but it seemed to be working to drive them out, probably all the better since they hadn't got a good look at him. Relief surged through him, but he didn't dare let up.

Behind him, he heard the werewolf finally wrest itself into the tunnel with a crash of shattering wood.

At least he'd stayed put as long as he did, but dammit, they weren't safe yet!

The Gryffindors all had a good enough head start, or so he hoped. But the wolf was fast, and if Black, Potter, and Pettigrew didn't get their arses out of the tunnel quickly, Severus wasn't at all sure he could keep the wolf from getting at least one of them.

Putting on a burst of speed, he caught up to the slowest of the Marauders and nipped his ankle, spitting out the coppery taste that drew.

"Something bit me!" Pettigrew shrieked, kicking out and falling down.

Idiot!

Severus could hear the wolf gaining on them. He screeched again, and Black and Potter hauled Pettigrew to his feet and dragged him away.

The tunnel was getting a bit lighter. They had to be near the Whomping Willow.

How are they going to get past it? How did they manage it in the first place?

There wasn't time to do more than wonder, because the werewolf was catching up. Terror rose like bile in his throat.

Severus turned and yipped at him to go back, but the wolf only howled and kept coming.

And then a beam of moonlight lit the three Gryffindors as they climbed out of the tunnel, Severus still chasing them.

"Quick, grab it!"

"I can't! It'll get me!"

With an inward groan, Severus realized what they must have done. He exited the tunnel and quickly spotted the branch leaning against the knot that controlled the tree. He pounced, knocking it away just as he heard the sound of another set of claws scrambling for purchase behind him.

The tree came to life, limbs flailing and pounding at the ground. The werewolf ducked back into the tunnel as a branch slammed down right in front of the entryway.

Severus jumped again, hoping to get clear of the tree's range.

A branch thumped against the ground behind him, and he allowed himself a small sigh of relief.

The next branch caught his hindquarters and sent him flying.

He was too high. Much, much too high for this body that had never practiced leaping from swings in the park. Black and his friends were like ants on the ground in the moonlight. Severus shifted quickly and tried to catch hold of the threads of magic in the air that could support him, carry him, but the stabbing pain in his leg cut through his concentration, and the limb hung at an awkward angle that wouldn't let him catch his balance.

He flung his arms in front of him as the ground rushed up to meet him. Fire raced up from wrists to elbows to shoulders, and it was a sweet relief when the darkness swallowed him whole and snuffed out the pain.



Monday, February 16, 1976

It was like swimming through treacle, trying to fight his way up to fresh air and sunlight, and even once his face was clear of it, he still couldn't quite fill his lungs and had to make short gasps between the pain.

Forcing his eyes open, Severus took in his surroundings. Considering the way he felt, he was not at all surprised to find himself in the hospital wing, but he couldn't quite

recall what had happened to bring him here.

A moan from the next bed got his attention, and he looked over to see Lupin—no, Remus—looking worse than Severus had seen him all term. The night's events came back in a rush.

Oh, hell.

Another moan, this one from further away, drew his eyes to a bed on the far side of the room. Madam Pomfrey and the headmaster were leaning over someone, casting spell after spell.

"It can't be, Albus," the matron said. "Look! The result is unmistakable."

"I cannot take a chance with this," Dumbledore said. "There are parents who will feel this proves I have taken too many risks as it is."

Madam Pomfrey had more to say about that, but it all blended together as the treacle dragged Severus back under.



The next time Severus woke, the headmaster was standing over Remus' bed, staring at him.

"Sir, I-I don't remember everything, but I'm sure I didn't! You said I never got out of the tunnel."

"Mr. Pettigrew said the incident occurred inside the tunnel," Dumbledore said sadly. "And if you cannot remember the details, then how can you be sure that you did not—"

"But I couldn't have!" Remus sounded panicked now.

"Couldn't have what?" Severus wheezed, the pain in his chest making it hard to get enough breath to speak.

"Ah, Mr. Snape. You are awake." The headmaster didn't look particularly pleased by this. "Perhaps you can explain some of this." His tone suggested that he did not expect to like the explanation.

"Explain what, sir?" he stalled. Why couldn't he have woken up sooner and found out what had happened?

"Explain why you led three other students out onto the grounds at night, what you were all doing in that hidden passage under the Whomping Willow, and why I now have a hospital wing full of injured fifth years?"

"Led?" he croaked.

Madam Pomfrey handed him a glass of water, which he gulped down immediately. It did nothing for his chest, not to mention his obviously re-broken leg, but at least he could swallow properly.

“I didn’t lead anyone anywhere, sir,” he said. “I ... I didn’t realize I was being followed.”

Not to mention I’ve no idea how.

“Be that as it may,” Dumbledore replied, looking only slightly less angry, “your carelessness may very well have been far more costly than I think you realize. Do you have any idea the danger in which you have put Mr. Lupin?”

“What?” He darted a look at Remus, who looked pale and frightened. “No! I chased them away once I knew they were there!”

“Not, it would appear, in time.”

Madam Pomfrey snapped, “I’m telling you, my Lycanthropy Diagnostic is accurate. Mr. Pettigrew is *not* cursed!”

“And yet he was bitten by something.” Dumbledore spread his hands.

Those words seemed to turn Severus’ blood into a river of ice. If they believed Remus had done it, never mind being expelled from Hogwarts, he’d be sent to Azkaban at best. With all that was going on these days, it was more likely they’d just execute him.

“I bit him,” he choked out.

“Excuse me?” the headmaster asked.

“I bit him.” Severus tried to draw a deep breath, but the pain in his chest stopped him. “He wasn’t running fast enough, so I bit his ankle to get him to move.”

Dumbledore’s eyes opened wider than Severus had ever seen them, as did Pomfrey’s.

“And why, pray tell, did ankle-biting seem the most logical recourse to you, Mr. Snape?” the headmaster asked.

“I’m an Animagus,” he muttered, then waited for the tirade that was sure to follow. A student might get let off the standard two year sentence for being an unregistered Animagus, but there would surely be something.

“Are you really?” Dumbledore no longer looked angry, but his eyes glittered strangely.

“I told you there was nothing wrong with my diagnosis,” Pomfrey said with a huff. “Now let this poor boy alone. He’s going to be drinking Skele-Gro for the rest of the afternoon, now that he’s awake to do it.”

Dumbledore turned to Remus. “It seems we are fortunate to have evidence that it was not you who bit Mr. Pettigrew. But make no mistake, both of you have acted recklessly. Your attendance here has always been contingent upon other students and their families remaining unaware of

your condition and the ability of our arrangements to keep you contained.”

“Yes, sir.” Remus looked down at the sheets he had twisted between his hands.

“I cannot risk another such incident. The house-elves will pack your belongings so that you may leave when Madam Pomfrey deems you fit to be discharged from her care.”

“No!” Severus cried out.

Dumbledore turned to look at him. “You will have your turn. However, it would behoove you to remember that this is, in part, the result of your actions.”

Severus pressed his lips together tightly, lest he say anything to make it worse. Madam Pomfrey pressed a steaming beaker filled with Skele-Gro into his hand, a stern look on her face. He swallowed it, barely noting the burning sensation and foul taste, though it was hard to ignore the splinter-like sensations in his chest and leg that began almost as soon as he’d finished. Predictably, she asked about the prior break, but he didn’t bother to answer.

Dumbledore was still talking to Remus. It seemed he wasn’t going to break Remus’ wand, but rather had some plan for him to finish his education outside Hogwarts.

But he won’t be here.

He glared at the occupant of the bed on the far side of the room. Whatever Dumbledore might say, Severus knew who he held responsible for this fiasco.



Tuesday, February 17, 1976

Severus woke well before dawn. He looked over at Remus’ empty bed, heavy blue curtains tidily pulled aside, linens neatly arranged. The sick feeling in his gut propelled him to his feet.

Dressing quickly and quietly, he hurried to get back to the hospital wing, completely ignoring the mumbled inquiries of his other dorm-mates.

When he arrived at the hospital wing, Remus was still fast asleep. He looked small and frail as he laid there, nothing at all like his boisterous canine playmate or the ravening monster he’d turned into when he’d scented his prey.

Pettigrew, fortunately, was long gone.

Severus felt rather than heard Madam Pomfrey come up behind him.

“The headmaster has sworn the others to secrecy,” she said. “No doubt he’ll ask the same of you.”

Severus snorted.

He hardly needs to.

“Indeed.” She rested a hand on his shoulder briefly but withdrew it when he flinched. “Mr. Lupin will be leaving directly after breakfast.”

Once she’d gone, he took a few steps closer to the bed, fingertips reaching towards the angry red scar that ran across Remus’ cheek. After a brief hesitation, he let himself trace the shiny newly healed skin, only pulling back when Remus’ eyes fluttered open.

Severus nearly smiled. This was a sight he’d be happy to see more often. Problem was he never would.

“Hey,” Remus said.

“Good morning,” Severus replied.

Remus sat up and ran his fingers through his hair. “It’s morning already?”

“Technically.” A glance out the windows showed at least a slight lightening.

Remus grinned at that, though only for a moment. “I can’t believe this is my last day here. Ever.”

Severus jammed his hands into his pockets. There really wasn’t anything to say to that.

Two trays appeared on the small table beside Remus’ bed, laden with steaming bowls of porridge, toast, butter, jam, and pumpkin juice. Almost as an afterthought, a teapot and two cups popped into existence between the trays.

Severus thought that was rather rich. Not that he much felt like eating, but couldn’t they be arsed to give Remus a full English for his last meal at Hogwarts? He sat down but didn’t touch the tray closest to him.

Remus, on the other hand, didn’t seem fussed, though he just sort of poked at the porridge for a bit before asking, “You’ll write to me, won’t you?”

Severus shrugged.

“If you let me know when there’s a Hogsmeade weekend coming, maybe I can get Dad to bring me.” Remus didn’t sound very hopeful about that. “And there’s always the summer.”

Severus gave him a pointed look. If they’d never managed to meet up during the past four summers, even when both needed to go to Diagon Alley at least once for school supplies, he didn’t think it was bloody likely they’d manage it now.

Remus looked away and busied himself pouring the tea, mumbling, “Don’t see why you came here.”

“What?”

“I thought ... never mind. So this is really it then.”

Severus shrugged again. “Don’t see how it can’t be.” After a moment’s consideration, he added, “Bastards.”

“Yeah.” Remus sipped his tea, still not looking up. “Thanks for chasing them off.”

“Wish I hadn’t bitten him,” Severus replied, mentally adding, *Or that I’d bitten him harder. My life’s ruined. No reason he shouldn’t have more than a scratch for it.*

“Not sure it would’ve mattered.” Remus gave a little half-shrug. “They saw me anyway.”

“Bet Dumbledore would’ve found a way for you to stay if you were one of his precious Gryffindors,” Severus muttered. “It’s not like we invited them to come around spying.”

“Yeah.” After a minute Remus said, “Since we’re not ever going to see each other again, I might as well just ask. Did you mean it?”

“What?”

“What you did before everything went bad.” Remus squirmed. “Did you mean it?”

Severus swallowed hard. “Yes.”

Madam Pomfrey burst out of her office and strode over to them, hands on her hips. “Recovered or not, you’re both growing boys. Those dishes should be empty by now.”

They both mumbled half-heartedly, Remus taking a mouthful of porridge and Severus picking up a piece of toast to nibble at.

She rolled her eyes. “See that you do better than that. I’ll be back to check that you’re ready to go in half an hour, Mr. Lupin.”

With that, she turned on her heel and went not back to her office but out the hospital wing door.

They looked at each other for a minute. She didn’t come back. Remus’ eyes glittered strangely, and then he jumped out of bed and grabbed a fistful of Severus’ robes before bending and crashing their lips together.

It was every bit as fumbly and messy as last time, but if anything, it was even more brilliant.

When they broke apart to catch their breath, Severus found himself saying, “I’ll write.”

“And I’ll get my Dad to bring me to Hogsmeade,” Remus answered.

This time, Severus pulled Remus down to him, insinuating his tongue between Remus’ lips and exploring. Devouring.

They think they can take this away? Take him away?

He felt a low growl in the back of his throat.

Remus gave a small moan in reply.

It took much longer to pull away this time, and when they did, Severus just stared hard into Remus' eyes, wishing he knew for sure what the other boy was thinking.

A pair of faint images formed in his mind, first himself reflected through a mirror charmed to be ridiculously kind, then a set of thin, red jaws clamped around a broad, grey snout. They faded so quickly he'd have been sure he'd imagined them, except that he'd never seen himself look anything other than ugly. He wasn't sure what amazed him more, what he'd apparently done or the idea that that was how Remus saw him.

By the time Madam Pomfrey returned, Severus was planning ways to make sure those bastards regretted stealing this from him.



Saturday, April 24, 1976

The walk to the village seemed to take an unreasonable amount of time. Severus' leg twinged a little, but he thought that was probably because it was supposed to rain later. Madam Pomfrey had said there was probably no help for that other than Pain Potions, and he'd be damned if he was going to guzzle one of those every time it rained.

"I still don't see why you have to be so secretive about it," Lily said. "I mean, being too sick to carry on with school doesn't mean being banned from coming to Hogsmeade."

He flexed his fingers around the bag in his pocket holding far too many Knuts and Sickles and too few Galleons, his earnings from tutoring Rosier and his lot for the past two months. "It's just better that way."

She didn't press it, to his relief. Knowing Remus' wand was at risk was enough to keep her from poking too much.

Finally they were walking down the High Street, around a corner, between a couple of shops, and through a stand of trees to the meeting spot.

Remus was leaning up against a large stone, his robes as tattered as ever. He straightened when he saw them, looking as though he were about to dart forward, but then he checked himself.

"Oh, go on then. I've worked that much out," Lily said.

Severus ducked his head so that his hair hid the flush he felt climbing his cheeks. Was she daft? She might think

it was "sweet" or something, but he wasn't about to run over and snog Remus in front of her.

"Boys," she muttered before walking over to Remus and giving him a peck on the cheek. "Good to see you."

"It's good to see you, too, Lily." He smiled.

"Your father didn't come with you?" Severus asked hopefully.

"He's meeting up with some friends at the Three Broomsticks," Remus answered. "Some of it's even supposed to be business." Now it was his turn to flush. "He told me to meet him back there by two. And, erm, gave me a bit of a lecture. He's got the idea I'm meeting a girl."

"And so you have." Lily grinned. With a wave, she was on her way to meet up with Felicity, Alice, and the other fifth-year Gryffindor girls.

Only when she was out of sight did Severus let himself lunge for Remus, fisting his brown robes and claiming his mouth. He tasted of tea and a hint of cinnamon, but most of all he tasted like himself, a flavor Severus had called to mind at least daily since he'd left, more often on the days his letters arrived. A flavor he could easily lose himself in.

As relatively safe as this meeting spot was, though, it made Severus nervous to linger here, so after a few minutes, he reluctantly pulled back.

"If you don't want—" Remus started.

"Come on," Severus interrupted, turning and walking around the stone and into the trees.

Remus caught up quickly. "I have a few Sickles."

"I have enough," Severus replied, looking along the backs of the shops until he found the one they were looking for, angling towards its back door.

"You shouldn't have to pay it all."

"You'd be surprised what the purebloods think it's worth for me to help them bring up their marks." Severus surely had been, though not in the way he intended Remus to interpret that. "When you're working, we can split things."

Before Remus could argue any more, they'd arrived, and Severus had knocked out the code he'd been assured would get them in.

A tall, grumpy-looking old man opened the door and scowled at them both as a pungent smell nearly bowled Severus over. "Well?"

Severus pulled the bag of coins out of his pocket and counted out the amount he'd been told would be asked.

The man took the coins and looked Severus and Remus up and down. "What year are you two?"

"Fifth," Severus answered. "Are you planning to tell the headmaster?"

The old man snorted and muttered something about kettles and cauldrons as he fished about in his own pocket, finally tossing over a key and waving them in.

It probably wasn't dignified to run up the stairs like a couple of third-years being let into Honeydukes for the first time, but Severus couldn't be arsed to care.



It had gone one-thirty by the time they started sorting out whose clothes were which and scrambling into them.

"If your father sees that ridiculous grin on your face, he's really going to believe you were meeting a girl," Severus pointed out as he pulled on his boots.

"And so I did," Remus agreed. "In fact, I can say in all truthfulness that I did meet up with a girl today, and she even kissed me."

Severus rolled his eyes, though he found himself approving of the deception. It was far easier not to be caught in a lie, after all, if one never actually told one to begin with. Still, he found himself grabbing Remus for one last frantic kiss, trying to memorize the feel and taste of him.

Finally, though, they had to leave. Once downstairs, Severus tossed the key into the drop-box the inkeeper had indicated and ducked out the back door just after Remus. With a look and a nod to one another, each took a different direction: Remus for the Three Broomsticks and Severus to meet Lily at Dervish and Banges.

The air still smelled like rain, but somehow, he wasn't quite so bothered by it. Oh, his leg still hurt, not to mention all the new aches he'd picked up in places he hadn't realized he even had before, but he wasn't fussed. No foolish twinge or ache could dull the shine on this day.

Walking up the steps to Dervish and Banges, he'd just grabbed the door handle when a hand clapped onto his shoulder.

"Fancy finding you here!" Black said with a too-wide grin. "What've you been doing, Snivellus?"

Severus sneered at him, eyes darting around to figure out where he'd come from and where the other two were hiding. He stepped away from the door and planted his feet in a dueling stance.

"More like who," Potter added from behind him.

Severus forced his expression to remain bland. "Is that really the best you can do?"

"Oh, I'll bet you think you've outfoxed us," Potter said softly in his ear. "But I know. We know."

"What do you want?" Severus demanded through clenched teeth.

"Want?" Black asked. "Don't want a thing from you."

"Just a friendly reminder that we'll be keeping an eye on you," Potter said.

"Consorting with Slytherins, shagging Dark Creatures." Black spread his hands, palms up. "I'll bet that alone could land you both in Azkaban. Who knows what sort of other trouble you'll get up to?"

Severus felt every nerve in his body flare to life with the urgent need to rip Black's throat out for that. If not for the shop full of people next to them, he feared he might have done.

Just then, the door to the shop flew open, and Lily and her friends streamed out.

"Sev! Perfect timing," she said, barely sparing the other two boys a glance as she grabbed his elbow and pulled him along with her. "I found something you absolutely have to see at Scrivenshaft's."

"We're not buying it, Evans," Potter called after them.

"Sod off!" she tossed over her shoulder, adding to Severus, "You all right?"

"Never better," he muttered. "Don't need you rescuing me."

She gave him an odd look, but he wasn't about to explain. She couldn't possibly understand what her Housemates had just done to what had been the best day of his life. It took every bit of determination he could muster to pretend interest in the new batches of Ever-Changing Inks and Copperplate Quills that had Lily so excited. He didn't think she'd approve of the things he was planning instead.



Friday, June 11, 1976

Severus stared at his Defense Against the Dark Arts exam paper. He knew he really ought to move on to studying for next week's exams, but he never could help picking apart the questions afterwards. At least he had no doubts about question ten, even if he had been sorely tempted to add, "*And the sixth sign identifying a werewolf is that he was dismissed from school for no fault of his own and now has to be tutored by an Auror in training who's never taught a day in his life before this.*"

At least Remus was to be allowed to take his O.W.L.s. Good job the full moon was tomorrow so it wouldn't interfere too much.

I wish I could be there.

Remus made light of it in his letters, but there was no doubt he was tearing at himself in frustration, locked in his parents' barn for the full moon, something he'd never done in the few months Severus had spent the evening with him. It just wasn't fair.

Deciding that he wasn't going to get anything accomplished sitting under a patch of bushes woolgathering, Severus shoved the parchment into his bag and started back towards the castle. He'd barely taken three steps when he heard Potter call after him.

Severus had his bag down and his wand out in an instant, but Potter sent his wand flying, then hit him with an Impediment Jinx as he dove after it. He struggled against it, but he might as well have been chained down for all the good it did, and with his wand still a good ten feet away, all he could do was sputter at them. "Just you wait! You'll get yours, you bloody bastards!"

"Language," Black said in a falsetto voice before casting, "*Scourgify!*"

Pink bubbles frothed from his mouth faster than he could spit them out, and he started to choke.

"What's wrong with you lot? Let him be!" Lily was storming across the grass at them.

"Why should I?" Potter asked.

"Really, Evans, if you knew ..." Black let his voice trail off.

"I don't care what you bullying toerags think you know!" She put her hands on her hips. "And it's not like you haven't gone out of your way to leave enough hints what you think."

Finally, the Impediment Jinx wore off, and Severus started crawling over towards his wand while the others were distracted. Pettigrew noticed, he saw, but he seemed more interested in the show than who won, as he didn't say a word.

"How's this, Evans: I'll leave him alone if you go out with me." Potter smiled at her.

"I'd rather go out with the giant squid," she retorted.

"You really have been hanging around Snivelly too long," Black muttered.

"Shut it, you!"

Severus reached his wand and spun with it, nonverbally casting his newest hex and slicing that grinning idiot's cheek open. Half a second later, he was hanging upside down with his robes up over his face.

How the hell did he get hold of that one? Lily wouldn't have, would she?

"Let him down!"

Severus fell into a heap on the ground, only to find himself in a Full Body Bind before he could react.

"Stop it already! What's wrong with you?" Lily demanded.

Abruptly, the Body Bind was released, and Severus clambered to his feet.

"Quite the defender you've got there, Snivellus," Black sneered.

"I don't need defending by a silly Mudblood," Severus snapped, clamping his mouth shut too late.

Lily went pale. "Fine. If that's the way you feel about it."

He swallowed hard.

I didn't mean it!

"Apologize right now," Potter demanded.

"As if you're any better!" Lily yelled.

"I'd never call you that!"

But Lily had already turned and was leaving. Severus tried to push past the other two to go after her, only to find himself hanging by his ankles again with James bloody Potter asking who wanted his pants taken down.

"I told you I didn't want to see that!" Pettigrew whined.

"Here, what's this? What're you lot up to?"

Severus landed in a heap on the ground again, wondering if it wouldn't just do him the favor of swallowing him whole this time. His right leg had buckled under him this time, and he cursed the sharp pain that shot through it. He ignored the bickering until someone grabbed his shoulder and gave it a shake.

"You all right, mate?" It was Rosier.

Severus groaned as he stood up. "Never better."

"What do you let them get away with that for?"

"What's it to you?"

Rosier ignored the question. "Don't even see your Housemates around."

Severus shrugged. Most were probably in the library. That didn't mean anything.

"Look, thanks for showing up when you did, but I've got to run."

"Suit yourself."

Severus ran to find Lily and apologize.



Friday, June 18, 1976

Remus was waiting right where he'd said he would be, just out of the way of the cars coming and going from King's Cross. He wasn't doing anything quite so obvious as holding a bouquet of flowers, but he was wearing an utterly foolish grin.

"You're here," he said when Severus got closer.

"Obviously." Severus smirked at him. "Did you find a place?"

Remus flushed. "It's not the greatest, but at least it doesn't smell like goats." He looked around. "Isn't Lily going to say hello before we go?"

Now Severus could feel his own face reddening. "We had a bit of a row. She's not quite forgiven me yet, so I wasn't able to tell her you'd be here."

"Oh." Remus furrowed his brow. "Are you all right? Only I know you've been friends since before Hogwarts."

"She'll come around," he said with a confidence he didn't feel. "We'll need to stop at Gringotts. I've only got a couple of pounds of Muggle money."

Remus' brow didn't smooth. "Right then. You know, I might actually be able to get a bit of a job soon. Then you won't have to treat all the time."

"What kind of job?"

Severus hardly cared about the details, though they sounded mad. He might've lost Lily for a bit, but he still had Remus. That was enough for now.



Friday, July 23, 1976

"So he hasn't made you register?" Remus asked, eyes darting about to make sure no one was close enough to hear.

"Stop it," Severus hissed. "Nobody's near, and you're acting suspicious. Flourish'll think we're going to pinch something." Severus brushed his fingers along the row of books, stopping at *Experimental Potions Theory* by Damocles Belby. "And no, he hasn't." He shook off the sense of foreboding that fact always seemed to evoke.

"Guess it doesn't matter. You couldn't visit at ... certain times, even if I could tell my parents why you'd be safe." Remus shrugged. "Not till next January anyway."

Severus had his doubts whether the Ministry could track an underage Animagus, but he wasn't in a terrible hurry to find out. He flipped through Belby's book and added it to his growing pile.

"That one's not on my list," Remus observed.

"I fail to see why you are even taking Potions with your tutor," Severus replied.

"I think it's more to do with Kingsley than me. He says having to find eight different ways to explain things helps him understand it all better, and they do a lot with Potions in Auror training."

Severus snorted. *Poisons at any rate.*

"Doubt I'll take the N.E.W.T. Slughorn would never have let me in with an A on my O.W.L., after all."

They paid for their purchases and headed for the Leaky Cauldron.

"Too bad Lily couldn't make it today, at least for a bit of shopping," Remus said.

Severus suppressed a wince. He wasn't sure when, if ever, she'd be willing to even speak to him again, and the worst of it was he couldn't blame anyone but himself.

"Sev?"

"Perhaps another time." Severus kept his tone as even as he could. She hadn't answered any his letters, but Remus didn't need to know that.

Arriving at the gateway to the pub, Remus had a lighter book load, so he tapped out the correct sequence to open the door. As they stepped through, they came face to face with the two people Severus wanted least to see.

"Snivellus! Fancy meeting you here, and with your pet, too." Black grinned horribly.

"Been to Knockturn Alley, have you?" Potter asked.

Severus felt his lips curl into a sneer, but he flatly ignored the question. He could feel Remus tremble slightly beside him. He only hoped that was rage and not fear.

"What're you doing with these?" Black pulled at the top of Remus' sack of books and peered inside.

"There's no law against reading," Remus said, his voice even if forced.

"But there are rules against clogging up the doorways in this pub," said an angry witch behind Potter. "Move your bloomin' arses!"

Black and Potter stepped aside reluctantly. A rat darted past them and over Severus' shoe.

"Sorry, miss," Remus said as they passed.

She sniffed indignantly and stormed through to Diagon Alley.

Severus kept walking, Remus first on his heels and then by his side, and didn't look back until they were well out of the pub. When he did, there was no sign that they were being followed.