

Information

Rated R

Summary: Two writers learn about the true power of words to forge connections.

→ The Frog Prince

by Arionrhod and McKay

Dear Mr. Lupin -
Enclosed please find your residuals check for this month. Sales of "Eternal Moonlight" have continued to surpass expectations, and next quarter, we expect to begin marketing the Japanese translation to the broad Pacific market. Congratulations on your continued success.

Yours,
Norma Preslyn
Infinity Publications

Remus held the letter in his hand and sighed, wondering why neither it nor the substantial cheque enclosed with it did anything to raise his spirits. He had finally become what he had dreamed of being: a successful, published author. His book had sold enough copies that if he was wise with his investments, he'd never have to work an outside job again, and he could spend all his time doing what he loved most. Yet instead of being happy about it, instead of dancing with glee at being vindicated after nearly twenty years of ceaseless work and millions of words, he wanted nothing more than to lie down on his sofa and never move again.

There was a handwritten note at the bottom of the typewritten page: "Remus, when are you going to do a sequel? We've got all the major bookstore chains ready to break down the door! You need to strike while the iron is hot. Fame is fleeting! Norma." The words made Remus' spirit sink even lower, and he tossed the letter and the cheque down on the sofa table and crossed to his sideboard to retrieve a bottle of whiskey. He wasn't normally a drinker; in fact, this bottle was left over from a party that his university flatmate, Sirius, had insisted he throw five years ago to celebrate his birthday. It had sat untouched since that time, and now he realized why he'd kept it. Just in case.

Pouring the amber liquid into a glass, Remus didn't hesitate before tossing back half the contents, inducing a coughing fit which made his eyes water and his nose run, as well as threatening to peel the lining from his throat. He didn't dare think of what the stuff was going to do to his stomach; all he knew was that he needed

to dull himself before he went from bestselling author to one of those people who inexplicably walked into traffic or threw themselves under a train.

The sofa beckoned, and Remus dropped down onto it, feeling tired and far older than his thirty-six years. He despised people who felt sorry for themselves, but he was in imminent danger of doing just that. Sipping more cautiously at his drink, he leaned his head back and closed his eyes, wondering what he could do to break out of the horrific rut he'd fallen into for the last six months. What he needed was advice, but part of his problem was that there wasn't a single person he knew whom he could talk to about what he'd done. They'd be appalled, or worse, they'd laugh, and he couldn't take that at the moment.

His mother had always said that confession was good for the soul, but Remus cringed at the thought of talking to someone about it. It seemed he would have to hold things in, as he always did. He knew that eventually, he was going to end up with hypertension or an ulcer, but there wasn't much help for it. Fortunately, the alcohol did help, at least a bit, since it made him feel tired. Perhaps the best thing to do would be to check his email and go to bed; things probably wouldn't be any better in the morning, but at least it would be a different day.

His laptop was set up on the same scratched dining room table that he'd used as desk for years, its surface piled high with reference books. His flat was small, since he'd not been able to work up any enthusiasm about spending much of the money he'd earned, not even to move to a place where he could have a proper office. The table itself was the one that had occupied the kitchen of his childhood home, which his mother had given to him after his father had died and she'd moved in with her sister. It was a muddy brown color, and its varnish was peeling away, but it was where Remus had begun writing as a teen, and he couldn't bear to give it up or even refinish it. He'd written nearly every word on its ugly, familiar surface, first on lined sheets of school paper, and then in tablets, and then finally on the secondhand computer he'd bought for school. His current computer

was his one concession to excess: a gleaming, sleek, cutting edge laptop with as much memory and disk space as he could cram into its slender metal case, with a wireless Internet connection that meant he could take it anywhere and still be connected. He'd bought it in a fit of optimism after *Eternal Moonlight* had sold, figuring that he could finally finish his *serious* work.

He sat down in his normal chair - one of the legs was pegged together with a screw several inches too long, which always snagged his trousers - and pressed the enter key to wake the computer up. It greeted him with a whine and several beeps, indicating that he had several emails to get through. Most of them were probably junk, but he still hadn't given up hope that he might have an acknowledgment on the sample chapter he'd sent out. Probably not, but it was hard to give up on that dream.

Sure enough, his inbox was full of spam - really, did *anyone* answer those ridiculous ads claiming they could give you horse-sized genitals? - and a few digests of mailing lists he followed. There was also an email from Sirius, and Remus clicked on it, wondering what his old friend was up to. Sirius was a sporadic correspondent at best, and usually when he wrote, it was about his love life, but it was the closest thing Remus had to social interaction these days.

Surprisingly, Sirius' email was a rant about some advice columnist. Apparently Sirius had seen a letter in the column from someone writing about fancying himself in love with his best friend's wife, and the reply had incensed him. *Moony, can you believe this? The guy must be an utter wanker. Probably tosses off to his own image in the mirror since no one could ever admire him as much as he does himself!* Remus chuckled, and he looked at what had gotten Sirius so riled up.

Get help or get over it, the columnist had written. Either you have severe commitment issues that make you fixate on someone unattainable so you don't have to take any emotional risks or you're a jealous, back-stabbing bastard. The commitment issues can be helped with therapy, but there is no hope if you're a self-absorbed wanker who can't stand seeing other people happy. Either way, you aren't much of a real friend if you persist in harboring this secret attraction.

That caused one of Remus' brows to lift. Apparently the writer wasn't worried about being liked or about hurting anyone's feelings, not with such a bald declaration. Personally Remus agreed with the sentiments, though, especially since he had a sneaking suspicion about why Sirius was so irate over this particular column. It wouldn't do to upset his friend, however, and so Remus

sent back a soothing reply, saying that circumstances were everything and really, the columnist was being too harsh and judgmental.

Once he'd hit send, Remus found himself googling the columnist on a whim, wondering if the man was always so forthright. He found the website for what proved to be a syndicated column - *Princely Proclamations* - and in less than a minute, he was immersed in the letters and responses, finding himself fascinated by the things people were willing to admit to a total stranger. The responses ranged from vitriolic to sarcastic to bitingly humorous, and more than once, Remus laughed aloud. He didn't feel the replies were mean-spirited, despite their sometimes waspish wording; the columnist pulled no punches, and frankly, some of the things people were asking advice about were stupid beyond measure.

He read until his eyes began to ache with strain, and then he sat back, rubbing at them and blinking. It occurred to him that the people who wrote were probably serious about their problems, no matter how trivial, idiotic, or pathetic they might seem to him, but he thought a good dose of the columnist's bracing reality could help most of them.

Then it struck him so hard that he gasped aloud. Maybe what *he* needed was a dose of reality, some practical advice from someone who didn't have an investment in him as a friend, a publisher, or a family member. If he wrote about his problem to the columnist, he'd be safe behind a mask of anonymity, and not only would he be able to unburden himself of the horrid, crushing doubts he felt, perhaps the man might even have useful suggestions about what he should do as well.

There was a submission form for sending anonymous questions, and Remus clicked on it before he allowed himself to think twice about the matter. Maybe the alcohol was giving him a bit of dutch courage, but he didn't care. Even if he never got a response, at least he could pour out his feelings, and that was something he needed rather desperately.

Dear Mr. Prince - Just today I was introduced to your column, and after reading your pragmatic replies to others, I decided to write you about my own problem...



Severus adjusted his reading glasses and moved his glass of wine closer as he settled in to review the questions that Kate, his assistant, had forwarded to him; it was her job to read all of his email and weed out the vitriol, threats, blatant jokes, marriage proposals, and boringly banal questions, passing along only those she thought he might consider answering for the column. It

fell to him to read through those and decide which ones he wanted to answer, a task that required a comfortable chair and lots of booze.

He hadn't set out to be an agony aunt. No, when he'd decided he wanted to be a writer, he'd intended to write novels, not an advice column; that he was good at dispensing advice only added insult to injury, in his opinion. But his mother had been "Dear Eileen" for over thirty years, and when she grew too ill to continue, she had asked him to fill in "temporarily". It was a temporary job that had lasted eighteen years. For the first ten years, he had kept up the "Dear Eileen" persona, but as his own voice had developed and his bosses had decided to try to appeal to a broader audience, he had turned "Dear Eileen" into "Princely Proclamations", signing himself as "E. Prince" as a nod to carrying on his mother's legacy.

It wasn't that he hated his job. He found it annoying at times, especially when he was confronted by people who lacked the common sense God gave a gnat, but he didn't hate it; he just wanted to do something else with his life. He'd had other plans, plans that didn't involve pointing out the obvious to people too stupid to see it, but every time he made noises about quitting in favor of getting back to real writing, his boss, Albus - a relentlessly cheerful, twinkly man - threw more money at him, dangled promises of wider syndication, and told stories about how dedicated his mother had been to helping people in need until the combined weight of pragmatism and guilt sent Severus back to the keyboard to meet his next deadline.

Reaching for his wine, he downed half the glass before he opened his email at last and began skimming the letters in search of one that sparked his interest. He had deleted over sixty before one captured his attention enough to keep reading past the first paragraph.

Dear Mr. Prince - Just today I was introduced to your column, and after reading your pragmatic replies to others, I decided to write you about my own problem. I know it may seem foolish, but it's something that has kept me from focusing on or enjoying anything in months. I suppose in the most basic sense, it is a case of being hoist by my own petard.

I have labored at my calling for nearly two decades with little success. I didn't mind too much, really, because sometimes achieving your goals takes persistence, and in many ways, what I do is something I enjoy a great deal, so much that I would do it whether I was getting paid for it or not. Yet at the same time, like anyone who creates for a living, whether as an artist, an architect, a writer or an inventor, I did crave to be recognized for doing something outstanding, something that touched people and gave

them enjoyment. So I labored away at part-time jobs to support myself, while I spent the rest of my time honing my craft and creating something that, to me, was the sum of my ability, the thing for which I would be proud to be remembered for the rest of my life.

Unfortunately what I felt was great and what the rest of the world thinks is great are far from agreement, and my work was rejected unconditionally by every sponsor whom I approached.

In a fit of bitterness at what I consider to be the narrow-minded focus of those sponsors, I sat down and created a satire, a parody of the things they said they my work should be but wasn't. I threw in every trite, hackneyed, overdone element I could think of, mocking their shallowness and handing it back to them. The thing I produced was, I thought, something that would make any intelligent human being cringe with disgust or horror. Perhaps I was a bit out of my head, but I was quite ready to burn bridges at that point, feeling I had little to lose.

Need I say that my great mockery ended up being embraced by them as something fantastic, far better than my real work?

So now I am in the situation of being praised for something I loathe, something that I created only to demonstrate how little I cared for what was popular. I have made more money in the last few months than I've ever had before in my entire life, and I'm now being pressed to create yet more work in a similar vein. I can't tell my family and friends what I've done, and I don't want it to get out in general, either, because that particular bit of information would bring more notoriety than I ever care to achieve. At the same time, I've found my creativity has dried up and disappeared completely, leaving me unable to be happy about much of anything. I literally have no desire to do anything any longer, and my life feels emptier than I ever would have imagined.

Any advice you have would be appreciated, as at this point I've simply no idea what to do.

Yours,

R in London

Severus rarely found himself relating to the problems to which he responded; his advice was objective, given from the perspective of an outsider with no vested interest in the matter. But this... this hit a little too close to home for him to be entirely objective. For a moment, he was tempted not to answer it for that reason alone, but something about the letter captured his interest, and he copied it and pasted it into a new document, setting up the formatting as a way of stalling while he tried to figure out what to say.

Dear R. in London:

You are hardly the first person to end up stuck in a situation you didn't expect to be in, doing something out of obligation while your dreams shrivel up like the proverbial raisin in the sun, and you will not be the last. I suggest you assess the matter objectively and decide what you want to do. Just because someone pressures you to continue your work does not mean you are obligated to give in to that pressure. Nor are you obligated to reveal your true motives if you do choose to continue.

You have achieved unexpected success. I suggest you reap the financial benefits, let go of any guilt or sense of obligation to continue, and take a break. You seem to be creating a great deal of pressure for yourself, and it is time to break the cycle. Perhaps taking a holiday to someplace tropical where they serve fruity drinks with paper umbrellas in them will help you clear your head and revive your muse. If that locale doesn't appeal, then try somewhere else. Whatever you do, you need to get off the mental hamster wheel as soon as possible before you give in to the pressure of popularity.

E. Prince

Severus gave the response a quick edit before emailing it to Kate, trying to put it out of his mind before he could start wondering whether he'd been writing to R in London or to himself.



The waiter who delivered Remus' drink to his seat was tall, dark-haired, and had an arse to die for, and he was young enough to make Remus feel like a dirty old man just for thinking about him.

"Thank you, Raoul," Remus said, taking the tall, frosty, lime-topped glass from the tray and smiling at the young man in what he hoped was a kindly rather than lustful way. He wasn't entirely successful, and while the light of interest in Raoul's dark eyes was flattering, Remus knew he could never move past his own introversion enough to do anything about it. Being an employee of the beach resort, Raoul couldn't do anything about it, either - or at least not initiate it - and so when Remus didn't say anything further, he nodded politely and moved away. Remus watched Raoul go over the top of his sunglasses, feeling guilty for ogling but unable to stop himself.

He turned his attention to the ocean as he once again silently thanked "E. Prince", who had suggested he do what he was doing now. He looked down at the paper umbrella in his glass and raised his drink in a silent salute to the columnist who had broken him out of his rut. Not that he'd been able to write a damned word yet, but at

least he was sitting in the beautiful surrounding of the South of France rather than his tiny flat in Soho while he was not-writing. It wasn't a solution, but it would do for the moment.

Remus had been surprised and pleased by the practical advice, and he wondered if secretly he'd just wanted someone to tell him it wasn't some form of literary prostitution to enjoy what were, to him, ill-gotten gains. Perhaps he was a bit mad for haring off out of the country - his first trip abroad ever - on the advice of someone he'd never met, but it had seemed like a good idea at the time. And he had to admit the scenery was much better, even if the sight of so many lithe, tanned men made him ache with the realization that he'd just as effectively sacrificed any relationships for his art as he'd sacrificed that art for money, however unintentionally he'd done it. It made him stop and think about just how much he'd given up to write, and while he'd been happy to do it, life had also been passing him by.

Most of his university friends were married - he'd gone to most of the weddings, the most recent of which was nearly ten years ago - and had children, building families and careers while Remus had been typing away, creating his world while they'd been living in theirs. He still wanted to write, but now that he'd noticed he was alone, he had to admit he was also lonely. He wasn't the sort for parties or whatever passed for the social scene these days, but watching the couples strolling along the beach, hand in hand, made him yearn for someone - a special someone - who would understand him and share the kind of quiet things he enjoyed.

Sipping at his tonic water, Remus wondered if he'd cut himself off so completely that he'd never be able to find anyone. He was introverted by nature, much better at expressing himself in writing than in speech, and he didn't think he was anything much to look at. Years of frugality had meant that he was used to wearing his hair long and his clothes were unfashionable, and yet he wasn't certain that making a huge change was the right thing to do, either. He didn't want to become something he wasn't just to attract a mate, since then everything would be based on a lie. He'd had quite enough of obfuscation and deception already, and if he was going to have a relationship, he wanted it to be natural, stemming from shared interests and mutual attraction.

The thing was, he had no idea how to go about even looking; he was exclusively attracted to men and always had been, and while things had gotten better for homosexuals in the last few years, it still wasn't easy, and prejudices didn't disappear overnight. He'd had a few sexual encounters at school, but he'd been circumspect

about them, and none of them had lasted. So here he sat, alone on a beautiful beach at sunset, wondering when life had decided to pass him by.

"I should ask the Prince," he murmured to himself, and then he snorted in amusement at his own nonsense. The columnist's name had, perversely enough, given Remus a mental image of a crowned frog sitting on a lily pad, uttering his proclamations as he waited for the princess to show up and release him from his spell. It was sometimes as much a curse as a blessing to be gifted with an active imagination, and he had no doubt that the columnist who'd helped him would be highly offended to be cast as some cursed creature in a modern fairytale.

Still, there was something Remus could do, and he sat his drink on the chair-side table and reached into his bag to pull out his laptop. In a few minutes, his wireless connection was established and he was busily typing away, first setting up a new email account and then pulling up the Princely Proclamations website. He clicked on the link to send a question, since he didn't know how else to get in touch.

Dear Mr. Prince -

I'd like to thank you for your advice, which I am happy to tell you I've taken. Even as I write this, I am sitting in a beach chair with a frosty, umbrella-embellished drink, listening to the ocean, and enjoying the scenery. It's the first holiday I can remember taking, and I think it is having the benefit you claimed it would. I know it's not a solution to all my problems, and I do have some hard thinking to do at some point, but for now, I'm mostly content to relax, let go of the stress, and simply exist.

I know you're a busy man, but if you ever have any desire to reply to me, I can be reached at rjl@mail.com. I do appreciate your good advice, and I hope that your publisher appreciates your abilities as much as I do.

Sincerely,

R in London



Severus had made it a policy not to offer more than one response per person and not to engage in conversation with anyone who wrote to him, and Kate was diligent about making certain he wasn't pestered by the idiots who thought since he'd taken the time to *do his job* and respond to their question, he was their new best friend. But Kate sent the email from R in London with a brief note: "Thought you might like to see the fruits of your labor." Perhaps, he thought, he'd been grumbling too much about the stupidity of the general population

to her and she thought he needed a reminder of the good he could do when someone actually listened to him instead of remaining mired in their own pathetic drama.

Whatever the reason, she sent it, and he read it, and he found himself imagining R in London lounging on a beach chair, drink in hand, his skin turning bronze in the sun while palm trees swayed and the waves crashed rhythmically on the shore. He could imagine the scene a little too well, and he wondered if his psyche was giving him the hint that it was time for him to take a holiday as well.

Or perhaps, he thought morosely, he was lonely and turning into an idiot himself just because he hadn't had a date in longer than he could remember. The decline in his social life began shortly after he finished school and his plans to begin a writing career were derailed by having to take care of his mother during her final illness and take her place in the column; he'd been too busy to date, and after he finally had a little time to himself, he felt too old for the club scene. It was easier to stay home and focus on his job than to go out and try to find someone - a *male* someone - when you were too old to care about drugs, twinkles, and whatever band was hot for the next five minutes. He'd never been particularly social anyway, and he found it easier and easier to isolate himself - which apparently led to him having inappropriate beach fantasies about someone he'd never met.

Normally, he wouldn't have replied, but it was late, and he was more than half-drunk, which was only making him more maudlin, and he found himself responding before he could think better of it and talk himself out of it.

Dear R in London,

It's gratifying to know someone heeded my advice for once. Taking holiday may not solve your problems, but hopefully, it will allow you the time to distance yourself from them enough to deal with them more objectively when you return home. Sometimes all we need is a different perspective. and then a solution becomes apparent. At any rate, I assure you that my publisher has sufficient appreciation for me, if my wages are any indication.

Enjoy the beach, the drinks, and the scenery.

E. Prince

No doubt he'd regret it in the morning, but if R in London became a nuisance, Severus would block him and have done with it. For now, however, he hit send and stumbled off to bed, where his dreams were filled with palm trees and mostly naked men bearing drinks.

Remus woke up early the next morning, showering and dressing before picking up his bag and heading toward the resort's main restaurant for breakfast. They served not only pastries and coffee, but a proper English breakfast too, something he'd not indulged in often since leaving home. It was purely comfort food and terrible for his health, but he told himself he was on holiday and he could afford the indulgence.

After stuffing himself with bangers, fluffy eggs, and beans on toast, Remus took himself off to the pool. He tended to spend the evenings at the beach and the mornings by the pool, where he claimed a cabana and could relax in the shade. He was developing quite a nice tan, but he didn't want to end up looking like a lobster. He pulled out his laptop and checked his email, surprised to see a response from E. Prince flagged in his inbox. He opened it with an eagerness that was a little surprising. He didn't stop to think about why he wanted to reply; he didn't know E. Prince, and although he was grateful for the advice, he probably shouldn't make a nuisance of himself. Yet he replied anyway, which probably said all too much about just how lonely he was.

Dear Mr. Prince -

I am definitely enjoying the beach and all the rest. Thank you for taking the time to email me; I have no desire to be an annoyance to you, but your obvious intelligence is refreshing and unfortunately rare these days. I'm sure you must have many fans writing you, so I shan't be offended if you don't reply to me. Fortunately for me, since my identity isn't known due to a pseudonym, I've not had to fend off fans, for which I am grateful. As an introvert, I would probably go catatonic if I had to face masses of people all wanting to talk to me. I'm simply not the social type, which is why the beach probably suits me better than you would have imagined. Had you suggested I go out partying, I would still be back in my flat, going quietly stir crazy.

I'm glad that your publisher appreciates you; they should, since you provide a useful outlet for those who, like me, can't bring themselves to discuss their problems face to face. I never would have thought of writing you if it hadn't been for a friend of mine sending me a link to your column. I'll have to thank him at some point, if I can ever bring myself to admit what I did.

I'm sure I've taken up enough of your time, but I appreciate your response. I feel comfortable enough to tell you that I'm a writer as well, and as such, if it ever falls to me to do anything for you, I will gladly assist you. For the moment, I have popularity, but as my publisher says, "Fame is fleeting." At the moment, I don't think I'll mind that too much.

Yours,
Remus

When another email from R in London showed up in his in-box, Severus was surprised; he didn't think his response had been particularly chatty or inviting, since he wasn't a particularly chatty or inviting person. In the broad - and sober - light of day, he wasn't certain why he'd replied in the first place, especially since in doing so, he'd given R in London direct access to him instead of letting Kate filter for him.

He skimmed the email, and then he read it again more slowly, surprised to find himself nodding in places. Apparently, he and this Remus fellow had more in common than both of them being writers. He leaned back in his chair, his finger poised over the keyboard as he debated whether to hit "reply" or "delete". It was perhaps more evidence that he was more lonely than he cared to admit that he was even considering replying to a complete stranger, or perhaps he was more susceptible to flattery than he realized. Either way, curiosity won out, and he hit "reply".

Dear Remus,

Perhaps it says much about my own solitary nature that it never occurred to me to suggest that you go out partying. I would find it far more relaxing to go on holiday somewhere slow-paced that allows me to sit back and watch without participating. Peaceful, quiet surroundings are more conducive to introspection and inspiration for me, and a quiet, peaceful place that offers the amenity of alcohol brought to me upon request is even better, hence my suggestion of the beach.

I am pleased that you think my column is useful, although I don't know that I would call myself a writer. I am not the sort of writer I intended to be, at any rate. At best, I am a decent columnist, which is different from being a decent writer, in my estimation.

Thank you for the offer of assistance, but I have no need of it at present. My job is secure, and I have nothing to submit to an agent, which means I have no need to pester you for the name of yours.

E. Prince

Remus was pleased to receive such a prompt reply, and he wondered if perhaps the Prince was as lonely as he was himself. From the tone of the letter, Remus could believe it; solitary people were also slow to trust, and he knew that the Prince had little reason to trust him, whereas even though Remus didn't know him personally, the Prince was a well established public persona.

Remus had spent a bit of time looking at the questions and replies in the column, and the more he read, the more respect he had for his oddly acquired pen pal, and he was delighted that the Prince had opened up to him a bit.

He decided to hold off until after dinner to reply, however; not because he didn't want to respond at once, but he didn't want the Prince to feel threatened or overwhelmed. A little time between responses seemed a reasonable way not to pressure the man, and so after the beach luau that evening that marked the end of his holiday, Remus sat watching the sunset and composing his reply.

Dear Prince -

I nearly corrected that, but alas, I'm afraid that's how I think of you now, since the "E" is difficult to personify. Which is not a request for information, lest you think I am presuming; I just thought you might find it amusing that I have the mental image of you sitting at your computer, crown pushed back on your head as you furrow your brow in annoyance at some of the asinine questions you must receive. I can even envision a sceptre in your hand, ready to smite those who are particularly stupid.

Now that you are convinced I'm a complete nutter, let me say that I, personally, do call you a writer. It is the goal of the writer to inform and/or entertain, is it not? You do both with a degree of wit that is admirable. Moreover, it seems you are also able to be yourself in what you write and still be successful, which I envy more than you can possibly know. The work I had published, well, let's say that it would be difficult to make it any less the real me than it already is. I deliberately took cliché to a whole new level and fabricated characters so one-dimensional that it was hard to keep them from sliding off the pages. My university degree is in literature, and basically I took every rule of good writing I learned and turned it on its head, only to have my efforts greeted by adoring fans. Beyond the irony, it's almost frightening what that says about the state of our educational system. But I don't wish to bore you to tears, so I'll refrain.

It's fortunate for me that you, too, are solitary by nature, else you'd not have given me such a useful suggestion. The ocean is soothing in a way that few other things are, and it gives one an awareness of how vast the world is beyond one's own narrow borders. It truly does make me realize that while I am not fulfilled by how I achieved my modest degree of success, at least it is success of a sort, ironic though it may be, and I should allow myself to enjoy the fruits of it and use it as a stepping stone to better things. I heard a saying from the theatre crowd back at Uni: the only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about. I

suppose that really is true, and while I am not yet ready to out myself in that fashion yet, perhaps I can find a way to use this chance to make more opportunities. I was simply so blinded by bitterness before that I couldn't imagine anything positive coming from it, but this respite from my own self-imposed hamster wheel, as you as accurately called it, has allowed me some perspective.

Since I can't aid you at the moment career-wise, don't be alarmed if you receive, via your employer, a small token from a grateful fan. It's probably silly, but I've been told I have a most bizarre sense of humor.

Yours,

Remus



Severus was so amused by the image of himself with a crown and writing his column while perched on a throne that he was tempted to see if he could find someone to create an illustration of it for use as his logo. He paused before hitting "reply", wondering if he ought to continue the correspondence; he didn't make a habit of emailing people who wrote to him for advice, but somehow, this correspondence seemed to have moved into more personal territory, and he stopped to consider whether that was what he wanted or not.

This Remus fellow was a writer, articulate, and intelligent, and Severus found his letters entertaining. Severus didn't have a large circle of friends; he didn't even have a medium circle of friends. His job kept him busy, and he wasn't inclined to be social anyway, which meant he spent a great deal of his free time alone. For the most part, he didn't mind, but all of his friends had lives of their own, focusing on their job and their family, and their interaction with Severus these days tended to be limited to forwarding him emails of funny cat photos. He found himself latching on to this interaction with pathetic alacrity, and despite his reservations, he typed up a reply.

Dear Remus,

I suppose I am a writer in one sense of the word. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say I am not the sort of writer I intended to be or want to be. I am able to write in my own voice and be myself, but I have stories I want to tell and creative needs that are languishing while I bang out another response to some lovelorn idiot who wants advice on how to approach women. As if I would know! At any rate, I understand and can sympathize with your lack of fulfillment because I share it.

Still, I wouldn't turn my nose up at commercial success if I were you. Once you reach a certain status in the publishing

field, you could submit your grocery list, and they would rush to print it. My advice would be to crank out one or two more sequels, rake in loads of cash for your publishing company, and then hit them with the manuscript you really want to publish. By that point, you'll be such a proven commodity that they'll be more willing to take a risk on something different. Meanwhile, you can use the money you make from the trash novels to hire a maid and a cook so you can devote your time to writing and to travel to different beaches around the world any time you feel writer's block coming on.

The general public's taste is appalling; that's easy enough to see just by looking at what's on the best seller list. But money talks, and the starving artist route isn't mandatory. Do what you must to maneuver yourself into a good position so that you may write what you please and still get published. There isn't anything wrong with being practical if it gets you where you want to be in the end. Perhaps one day, I'll even take my own advice.

At any rate, I envy you the view. I'm rather fond of the ocean, which is possibly another reason why I suggested it, and after reading your emails, I'm more than half-tempted to take holiday myself.



The Prince

Remus stared at the email on his computer and bit his lip as he wondered if he was reading into the Prince's words something he wanted to see or if it was possible that the man offering him advice was also gay.

Taking a deep breath, Remus reread the words carefully. *...how to approach women. As if I would know!* That certainly seemed to imply that the Prince had no interest in women, although that didn't necessarily make him gay. Or it could simply mean that he had no real experience with women, which could imply nothing more than social awkwardness. Yet somehow Remus couldn't picture that, not from the way the Prince wrote. Of course, anything Remus came up with was nothing more than speculation, but it was fascinating speculation, making him want to do something crazy and impulsive like rush down to the Prince's publisher and demand his address.

It was madness, of course; there were privacy issues involved, and the Prince would probably tear him a new one for his presumption, and rightfully so. Remus felt like some sort of stalker for wanting to go find the Prince, and so he forced himself to sit back and think rationally.

Remus wasn't an impulsive man, despite his actions of late. Impulsive actions invariably led to nothing but trouble, as was proven by the stupid novel he'd written in a fit of pique. On the other hand, his decision to write E. Prince for advice had also been a spur of the moment decision, and it had turned out well. It was impossible to say if the Prince would be flattered or horrified for a complete stranger to show up and ask him out to dinner.

The phone rang, and Remus ignored it, rubbing at his forehead as he tried to control his whirling thoughts. He'd gotten home only an hour before, tossing his stuff down carelessly and hurrying to check his email, which he'd not been able to do from the airplane or in the taxi. It was probably rather pathetic how eager he was to see if the Prince had replied to him, and no doubt it was because of his realization about his loneliness. Knowing why he felt the way he did, however, didn't stop him from feeling it, and he told himself it was all right to be attracted to someone he'd never met - someone with whom he'd only corresponded and didn't even know his proper name. The Prince was wickedly amusing and pragmatic and intelligent, and all in all was, without a doubt, one of the most interesting people Remus had ever encountered, even with the limitations of their interactions. He also had to be around Remus' own age, give or take a few years, since it had taken a little Googling for Remus to find out that the Prince had been writing the column for quite some time, even ghost-writing for his mother.

Of course, the Prince might be seventy years old with false teeth and a bald head, or a precocious twenty-something, short and spotty with bad breath, but somehow Remus didn't think so. When he pictured the Prince in his mind, he saw a tall, regal looking man, with eyes that flashed with wicked humor and a haughty tilt to his chin. It was more difficult to imagine hair and eye color, since they could be anything, so Remus painted him with dark hair, since he had a fondness for brunets. Eye color didn't matter, and neither did skin color; all that really mattered to Remus was that the Prince was fascinating and mysterious and possibly gay, which made him the best prospect Remus had had in a decade.

Too damned bad he couldn't do anything about it.

The phone rang again, and with a sigh, Remus rose and went to answer it. It proved to be Norma, his publisher, demanding to know if he was going to write a sequel because a studio wanted to buy the Film Rights. Remus could hear the capitals in her words just as certainly as he could see the dollar signs in her eyes, and finally he relented.

"All right, I'll do a sequel," he replied, once again taking the Prince's advice. He'd run with this while he could, and then he'd start making demands. The Prince was right: if he made the publisher a lot of money, they'd be more inclined to publish the book he *really* wanted to have associated with his name. Ravenna J. Lypemania could continue to crank out the drivel which seemed to feed the bizarre tastes of the masses, but Remus' real name would be saved for better things.

Norma began to gush, promising Remus the moon and stars, but he was barely listening to her, far more interested in trying to determine how he could arrange to meet the Prince. Perhaps a publishing function, if the Prince attended such things, which was unlikely.

Cutting across Norma, Remus chuckled lightly. "All right, all right, send the contracts to my agent, and I'll get them signed and returned, assuming everything looks good," he said. "And Norma? Look, if you happen to hear of anything having to do with 'Princely Proclamations', would you let me know? I've recently begun reading the column, and I'd love to know if the author makes any public appearances."

"Of course, of course!" Norma was all too ready to fall in with anything Remus requested, and he took shameless advantage of the fact. In short order, she had referred him to her own personal assistant, who would arrange appointments for Remus to view new flats in more pleasant surroundings and help him with selecting furniture and even a maid service. With Norma's voice still echoing in his ears, Remus rang off and returned to his computer to write a reply to the Prince.

Dear Prince -

I am sorry that your writing doesn't fulfill you any more than mine does me; it's an awful feeling. But I agree with your once again sound advice. I'm going to use this opportunity to set myself up for better things; when all is said and done, I suppose that adding a few more vapid novels to the vast collection already in existence is a small price to pay for achieving the connections and influence needed to barter the wares of which I am far more proud. At which point I claim the right to poke you to listen to your own excellent advice. I would find it most unjust if I took your advice and found happiness while you did not!

Remus paused, then drew in a deep breath, wondering if he dared write what he wished to write. He would type it in, just to see if it horrified him in black and white; he could always delete it if he wished.

I promise not to ask your advice on how to approach women, so that you won't have yet another idiot adding to your stress. Of course, that's an easy promise for me to

make, since I'm not inclined in that direction anyway.

And now I that I've agreed to write a sequel to my original drivel, I should start jotting down ideas. I'm back in England, so play time is over. Time to take the rest of your advice and start moving on!

Yours,

Remus

After reading it again, Remus bit his lip and forced himself to hit *send*. He thought his implication of being gay was subtle enough that the Prince might not even pick up on it, but it was definitely there. Now it was just a matter of waiting to see if his subtle words were caught, and, if so, if the Prince was willing to do anything about them.



Severus read the email twice just to make certain he'd read what he thought he'd read. Namely, that Remus had admitted to being gay. Severus had made an oblique admission himself, one that offered plausible deniability if he needed it, but apparently Remus had understood and replied in kind.

So Remus was gay and seemingly single as well. Severus leaned back in his chair and tapped his chin as he considered what he wanted to do with this information. He had to admit, Remus intrigued him, and he hadn't been intrigued by anyone for quite some time. He had no idea what to do about it, however. It was easy to be charming and personable in writing, but Remus might be a boring idiot in person, or Severus' interest might wane if they met in reality. Worse, *Remus* might not be interested. Severus knew he wasn't a prime catch in the looks department. He had money and fame, but he wasn't attractive, and he didn't make up for his lack of good looks with a sparkling, winning personality.

No, he had to proceed with caution. Perhaps he ought to find out if Remus was having a book-signing or giving an interview somewhere and "coincidentally" happen to be there. That way, he could introduce himself and see how things went without jeopardizing their written communication. Severus had been careful to keep his real name and image separate from "E. Prince", so he could maintain his anonymity while gathering the information he needed.

Dear Remus,

Congratulations on choosing a clear path. You may not enjoy writing the mindless drivel, but I believe it will be beneficial in the long run. I give you permission to grumble

and complain to me while you write, since I encouraged you to do it in the first place. Better to vent your frustrations to a sympathetic ear than let something slip to a nosy reporter.

Speaking of which, are you doing any press for your book? I confess being curious about which piece of mindless drivel currently lining the shelves in the bookshops is yours, and if you are holding any book signings in London, I might have to show up and get an autographed copy.

The Prince



"YES!" Remus let out a whoop and pumped his fist in the air, thrilled beyond measure that the Prince was issuing an open invitation to continue their correspondence. Remus had been careful not to presume that the Prince would care to go on, taking each email one at a time, but this was exactly what he wanted: a declaration that the Prince wished to continue writing to him for the long term. And not only that, there was also the subtle implication that the Prince would like to meet him, and in the same way that Remus had been considering: sneakily, to check him out without having to reveal himself. Remus snorted with amusement; they really did have a lot in common, and apparently both of them were cautious almost to a fault.

He knew there was a stupid grin on his face, but he couldn't help it. He'd been a little let down when he'd found out from his publisher that "E. Prince" never made public appearances, and there wasn't even a photo of The Prince to be had anywhere, but now his hopes were rising again. It just meant he'd just have to be the one to let down his guard enough to see if the Prince was interested enough to consider engaging in a more personal relationship.

The question was, did he want to risk losing what they had now? Should he rush or take his time before revealing himself? What if the Prince didn't find him attractive?

Remus frowned and ran a hand through his long hair. It had been a while since he'd had a haircut, not because of a lack of money or care but because his appearance wasn't something he'd been overly concerned about. He knew that he was greying prematurely; the hair at his temples was almost completely silver, and there was a liberal sprinkling of matching strands throughout the rest of the sandy brown. His face was pleasant but nothing special, although he'd been told by one lover back at university that his wide, blue-green eyes were his best feature. They were even brighter now that he'd

acquired a healthy bronze tone on his normally pale skin. He was still slender, due to often forgetting to eat while he was writing, but he knew he could use some toning up.

All in all, he wasn't going to cause jaws to drop, but he wouldn't send anyone running away screaming either. If he updated his wardrobe a little bit, he'd be presentable, perhaps enough to make a certain Prince want to give him a chance.

Still, it was a risk, since the Prince might not like slender, bookish writers. But there was no gain without risk; he knew that well as an author, and he thought the potential payoff might be worth it. But that didn't mean he had to make it easy on the Prince by doing something like sending him a picture. No, his Prince could come to him, if he wanted to satisfy any curiosity he might have. If he was curious and not merely being encouraging about Remus' writing career. Besides, he ought to receive the gift Remus had sent from France any day now, and the small crystal frog prince with his wee golden crown might convince the Prince that Remus was either mad or complete idiot.

For several minutes, Remus considered his options, and then with a mutter of "no guts, no glory," he threw caution to the wind and penned his reply.

Dear Prince -

Thanks for the invitation to vent; you might end up regretting it when I take you up on your offer! You'll understand why when I make two admissions, the first being that I can't have book signings, since my pseudonym is female. So not only is my drivel something I don't much wish to claim, I can't even do so with my actual face because I would look ridiculous in drag.

The second admission is that my book isn't simply a novel, it's a genre work. Think of the most overdone, hackneyed, horribly trite area of popular fiction these days, and that's where you will find it. Not only that, if your vocabulary is as extensive as I believe it to be, the pen name I used will leap out at you and probably cause eyerolling of a degree that will risk them falling out. Those are the only clues I'll give you as to which drivel is my own special work.

That being said, I will say that I frequent a coffee shop in Soho several evenings a week, laptop in tow. I'm not a social man, but I also don't wish to be a hermit, and sitting in a coffee shop gives me some measure of socialization so that my voice doesn't stop functioning from disuse. There are book readings there on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, and usually a rather lively discussion afterward, in which I sometimes participate. The shop is called the Cuppola Cafe, and I favor cinnamon chai. If you happen

by some evening, you might see me in a corner, hopefully working on the new book but probably just scowling at the screen in frustration. If you don't, well, I enjoy our written communication a great deal, and I'd like to continue it no matter what.

Yours,

Remus



As soon as Severus received Remus' email, he jotted down the hints Remus had given him and went to the bookshop near his flat, where he spent over an hour combing the shelves. The problem was, he didn't know which genre Remus had written in, and there were plenty of pen names that were eyeroll-inducing. He was able to rule out books that had been out for over a year or that had sequels, but there was still a great deal of tripe on the shelves. In the end, he narrowed it down to a handful of candidates and wrote down the titles to see if he could ferret out more information with a little Googling.

That was the easy part. The difficult part was trying to decide whether to visit the coffee shop Remus had mentioned. On the one hand, he was curious, and he wanted to see if he could spot Remus. On the other, it was a risk, since they were getting on quite well in writing, and he was reluctant to spoil what they had. Remus had even given Severus an out by saying he enjoyed their correspondence enough to continue, even if they didn't meet face-to-face. Continuing via email would be the safe thing to do, but Severus was tired of being safe. Perhaps he had subconsciously assimilated some of the advice he'd dispensed to Remus or perhaps he was simply tired of being alone. Whatever the reason, he decided a little risk was worth the effort.

He tried not to be skulky and furtive as he entered the coffee shop for the first time, his laptop tucked under his arm. He ordered a cup of green tea and snagged a small table, taking time to set up his laptop before casually checking out the rest of the patrons. There were several men with laptops, but none of them looked like they were writing. He could see one of them was working on a spreadsheet, one was playing solitaire, and while he couldn't peek at the others, one of the remaining candidates appeared to be barely out of his teens, and the other was wearing a business suit.

Disappointed, he opened his email program and hit "reply".

Dear Remus,

First, I should thank you for the gift. It's more appropriate than you could possibly realize, and I have it on my desk, where it will stay to provide me amusement when I'm in need of a break from reading inane questions from my readers.

Second, I trawled through a bookshop and tried to figure out which trashy genre novel was yours. I'm still not entirely certain, but a certain werewolf novel is at the top of the list, since it was written by someone named "Lypemanian", which Google tells me is a reference to pathological mournfulness. That is far too coincidental not to be a pen name, and I can easily see you using that term as a joke, considering the subject matter of the novel in question.

Third, I don't see anyone at the Cuppola Cafe who might be you, but perhaps I will try again another night.

Yours,

The (Frog) Prince



When Remus' email client beeped, he immediately opened it and read the Prince's email, chuckling aloud that Severus had managed to figure it out. Then his eyes widened, and he almost choked on his chai when he read that the Prince was actually there, in the cafe. He risked a quick look around, but really, he would prefer to be found, rather than seeking out the Prince.

With hands that trembled slightly, he shot back a quick reply.

Dear Frog Prince,

I'm here. Perhaps you overlooked the back area of the cafe?

Yours,

Remus



Severus' breath caught when he read the reply, gnawing his bottom lip as he felt a hot flash and then went cold with apprehension at the thought that Remus was here, that they could meet, that he might be on the brink of something more than the safe distance of email. He shut down his laptop and closed it, fortifying himself with a deep swallow of tea before pushing back his chair and rising to his feet. He looked around with slow deliberation,

realizing he had overlooked the back of the cafe, an area tucked around a corner, its walls lined with bookshelves. There were a few tables and some second-hand squashy chairs back there, and Severus rounded the corner with trepidation, his stomach roiling as he looked to see if he could spot Remus.

There were three men; one was with a young woman, which left him out, and of the other two, Severus was certain he knew which one was Remus. It was the long-haired, blue-eyed man with the mild expression and the suntanned skin. It *had* to be, because Severus felt a jolt of... something. Connection? Recognition? He didn't know what it was; he only knew that if Remus wasn't that man, he would be disappointed.

Breathing in deeply, he braced himself and took the plunge, approaching the man's table with a confidence he didn't quite feel. "Remus, I presume?"

Remus felt his face flush, and he pushed his glasses up his nose before looking up from his computer. And up and up, as he realized that the Prince was quite tall. And slender and dark-haired. Something like an electric shock went through him, and he rose to his feet, feeling in a daze as he smiled and held out his hand. "And you must be my prince," he replied, and then he blushed more, realizing what he'd said. "Er... It's good to meet you."

Well, that was promising, Severus thought with a smirk as he clasped Remus' hand and shook it firmly. "My name is Severus," he said. "It's good to meet you too." He glanced at the chair opposite Remus' and raised a questioning eyebrow. "Mind if I sit down? I could return to my table, and we could continue to send email, but since I'm here..."

"Please, do, since you came all the way over here to find me," Remus replied. The Prince... *Severus*... had a strong grip, which Remus found attractive, especially because Severus had the kind of hands Remus loved: elegant and long-fingered. Everything about Severus was elegant, and Remus found himself more attracted than he would have thought possible. He sat back down as well and tilted his head to one side. "So I presume the starting 'E' in Severus is silent?"

Severus chuckled as he took a seat and placed his laptop and cup of tea on the table. "No, the E is an homage to my mother. She was 'Dear Eileen', and her maiden name was Prince. My last name is Snape, by the way. I began my career as Dear Eileen until finally I was allowed to write in my own voice, but I wanted to retain a connection to her column when I began 'Princely Proclamations'."

"That makes sense; you must have been close," Remus replied, smiling with approval. "My last name is Lupin. And I must say I'm impressed that you so quickly picked out my work. My initials are R.J.L., and hence the Ravena J. Lypemania. I do hope you didn't subject yourself to that awful book, by the way. You must not have, or I would imagine you'd not be here now talking to me!"

"No, the lurid cover art was enough to send me packing," Severus drawled sardonically, not bothering to hide the fact that he was studying Remus closely, taking in the details. Up close, Remus was even more appealing; he wasn't drop-dead gorgeous, but if he had been, Severus would never have approached him. Gorgeous men were out of Severus' league, but Remus was attractive in a wholesome, writerly-rumpled sort of way that appealed to him. He had a sudden, inexplicable image of Remus curled up on one end of his sofa, laptop open and glasses sliding down his nose; it was a homey image, and surprisingly enough, it wasn't enough to make Severus run away screaming from the mere thought of someone in his space. "At any rate, yes, my mother and I were close. My father was... out of the picture, so it was just the two of us for most of my life."

Remus chuckled at Severus' comment about the art, which really was as horrendous as Remus' writing, only he knew the artist hadn't been *trying* to be bad; it had happened all on its own. Severus' eyes were dark and intense and made Remus want to shiver, but in a good way. If Severus was mentally undressing him, he found himself all for that idea, his attraction to Severus set to tip over toward arousal at the slightest excuse. He felt that they had connected as easily in person as they had in writing, and it made him eager to find out just how well they clicked in other areas too.

But there was no need to rush, he told himself firmly, and he nodded in understanding as Severus described his family life. "My father died several years ago, and it made my mother and me closer, too. Was she glad you took over her column, then?"

"It was her idea," Severus replied, sipping his tea. "She wanted me to have a steady income, and she wanted her column to continue because she felt it did a lot of good. She was far more of a natural philanthropist than I have ever been. Far more patient and compassionate, too. I doubt I could have maintained 'Dear Eileen' indefinitely. Having my own column freed me from trying to adhere to her standards and let me be more like myself."

"There are those who can be helped by patience and compassion, and others, like me, who need to be told things straight up," Remus replied. He leaned his chin

on his hand, watching Severus as frankly as Severus had watched him, liking the angles of Severus' face, including the jut of his nose and the hint of a frown line between his eyes. Severus wasn't classically handsome, but he had a fascinating face, one with character, and Remus thought he could stare at Severus' face forever and never get tired of it. "There is value in empathy, but also one in practicality. You helped me so much, and for that, I feel as though I can never repay you." He laughed softly. "Even with all the frog princes in France."

"Take advantage of your opportunities and use them to get your real work published," Severus said, reaching across the table to touch Remus' arm lightly. "That will be repayment enough."

The touch was a surprise, but Remus was glad of it, and he rested his free hand on top of Severus'. "I promise," he replied softly, and then he decided to take a bit of a risk. "You've made a difference in my life. Perhaps it's just my inclination to ridiculous fancies, but I rather feel as though I really was woken up by a prince."

Severus glanced away, abashed, unaccustomed to having such comments aimed at him, but he didn't draw his hand back, relishing the warmth of Remus' hand on his. "I'm glad I could help," he said, his voice quiet and deep. "Knowing I've had one success story makes wading through all the drek I'm sent worthwhile."

The faint blush on Severus' cheeks was all the more charming for its unexpectedness, and the tone of his voice sent a pleasurable chill down Remus' spine. "I'm sure you've had more successes than just one," he replied, daring to brush his thumb over the back of Severus' hand. "But I'm selfish enough to be glad that I could add something to your life, as you've added to mine. I went to the beach on your advice, and it helped me to realize several things about my life, more than just the problems I was having about my work. It made me realize I was lonely, too."

Severus stared at Remus with widened eyes, his skin tingling where Remus caressed it, and his breath caught in his throat when Remus confessed to things that echoed realizations Severus had had lately himself. He'd never imagined he could be so fortunate as to meet a man he found interesting and attractive and who was single and gay to boot. What were the odds that such a man would be interested in him too? He licked his lips, wondering how to respond. He'd already taken one risk that evening, and he wasn't accustomed to putting himself out on a limb once, much less twice. Yet something about this man intrigued and compelled him, and he found himself not retreating into safe neutrality as he might have done with anyone else.

"Are you?" he asked softly, meeting Remus' gaze. "That's a shame. What do you intend to do to change it?"

Remus watched Severus' reaction to his words, the flick of Severus' tongue igniting a pool of heat in his stomach. This was more than he could have hoped for, more than he would have dared to dream, and he felt himself growing breathless and a wee bit giddy. If Severus had shown the slightest bit of hesitation or rejection, Remus would have slowed down, but he was feeling more daring than he could remember feeling in many years. And there was even a way to couch what he wanted to say in terms that would allow Severus a graceful out if he wanted to slow things down.

"What I intend to do is to employ the same route that helped me to make the realization in the first place." Remus' voice was husky, and he caressed Severus' hand again, slowly and deliberately. "My Dearest Prince," he said, holding Severus' eyes. "I know I promised I wouldn't ask your advice on how to approach women, but I believe it's not breaking that promise to ask you how to approach men. Or rather, one particular man. After many years of not even realizing how empty my life had become, I've met someone who fascinates and attracts me, and I long to get to know him better. It might seem sudden, as I've only just met him in person this very night, but we've been corresponding for a short while and I feel as though we connect on many different levels. So what do you suggest? Should I take it slow, invite him out on a date as is proper, or do I give in to my sudden and quite uncharacteristic impulse to take him home with me? Your advice has aided me greatly in the past, and I promise to adhere to whatever you deem correct in this case, since I know you won't steer me wrong in these matters, and I trust your instincts implicitly. I eagerly await your reply. Yours most faithfully, Remus." He stopped there, holding his breath, wondering what Severus' reply would be.

Severus felt a zing of arousal, not only from the way Remus was stroking his hand, but from Remus' words as well. Remus wanted him. That knowledge made him feel daring enough to do just about anything, and his voice was strong and sure when he spoke at last.

"My dear Remus," he said slowly as he turned over his hand and curled his fingers around Remus', "It isn't breaking your promise to ask me about how to approach men, since I do know a little something about that, and I am, in fact, an expert on the particular man you have in mind. I believe it's safe to say he finds you equally intriguing and considers you far less of a blithering idiot than most people of his acquaintance. I have it on good authority that he isn't old-fashioned or skittish; therefore, if you wish to act on your impulse to take

him home, I doubt you will be rejected. I expect a full account of your venture - but not until morning. Yours, the Frog Prince." Severus arched one eyebrow with playful hauteur before adding, "PS: I happen to like this fellow, so if you hurt him, I'll have your guts for garters. Don't cock it up."

Knowing that he must look ridiculous from the way he was smiling so widely, Remus tightened his fingers, feeling breathless and eager. Severus was everything he could possibly want - witty and attractive and amusing and intelligent - and it was almost too good to be true that he wanted Remus in return. Remus felt as though he were throwing a lifetime of caution to the wind, but he didn't care. He wanted this - he wanted *Severus* - and he felt certain this was right in ways he'd never experienced before.

"My dearest Prince," he said, before lifting their joined hands so that he could press his lips to the back of Severus', his eyes darkening with arousal. "As always, your advice is sound, and I promise to give you an account tomorrow - as well as treat him with the respect and consideration he deserves. I'd not like to risk your wrath for cocking it up, so I'll be careful. Until tomorrow, Remus."

Rising to his feet, Remus stood beside the table, looking down at Severus. "So, my Prince, have I received sound advice from my most trusted confidante? Will you come back to my flat for the night? For conversation, for a meal...for anything you'd like. Not because I simply want someone to take away my loneliness, but because I want *you*."

Severus stood as well and laced his fingers with Remus', a tiny smirk curving his thin lips. "I don't think your confidante has led you astray," he said with studied casualness. "Yes, I'll go with you. We can start with conversation and see if 'anything' develops from there."

"Sounds perfect," Remus replied, feeling happier than he had in a long time, and a sense of anticipation he'd nearly forgotten he *could* feel. He gave Severus' hand a squeeze before releasing it. "Let's pack up, then. My flat isn't far, which I suppose says much about how low your expectations should be." He picked up his laptop and slipped it into its case, and then he slung it over his shoulder. He held out his hand to Severus again, not just because he enjoyed the contact, but because it felt *right*. "Shall we?"

Severus picked up his laptop and slid it into his bag as well, and then he clasped Remus' outstretched hand willingly. "Yes, let's go. I'd rather not continue our - ah - getting acquainted in the company of others."

"I quite agree," Remus replied. He lead Severus out of the shop, ignoring the speculative looks of the other regulars, all of whom would know that Remus had never left with anyone before. He didn't care what they thought, and he found he was quite proud to be seen with someone like Severus. Fortunately, the sight of two men holding hands was nothing out of the ordinary in Soho, and they wouldn't attract any embarrassing or unwanted attention.

They walked past several brightly colored shops, which were the typical mixture of music stores, pubs, and even a sex shop with a dazzling display of ludicrously sized and shaped toys in the window. Remus chuckled as they passed by it. "My flat is one more block over. The neighborhood has changed in the last ten years and for the better, but you know I've never noticed that shop before? I suppose I've spent too much time focusing inward."

Severus' eyebrows climbed as he peered in the shop window as they passed by, his interest captured by the lurid display. "I can think of several ways those items could be used to make certain your attention was entirely focused outward rather than inward," he replied archly. "It's high time you emerged from your cocoon anyway and started to live a little."

Remus' toes curled in his shoes, and his face flushed at the images Severus' words conjured up. "I'll be happy to do anything you'd like," he replied, squeezing Severus' hand. "But I am quite certain that when I'm with you, my attention will be focused on you and you alone."

That brought an unconscious smile to Severus' lips, and he squeezed Remus' hand in return. "I doubt I'll have any complaints about that," he said. The desire to push Remus against the nearest wall and snog him breathless was growing stronger, and he forced himself to change the subject before he did something that could get them arrested for public indecency. "So - how is the sequel coming along? Have you started it yet?"

The sight of the smile on Severus' lips gave Remus a great deal of satisfaction, and he didn't mind the change of subject until they reached his flat, because he was in serious danger of not being able to make it home without exploding. "I've been jotting down ideas, but I've not started it in earnest," he replied, quickening his steps as they crossed the street and made it to his block. "I'm torn between being completely irreverent again or trying to be a bit less blatant in my flaunting of the literary niceties. It's surprisingly hard to ignore everything I've been taught."

"It might be easier for you to stomach if you take it a little more seriously," Severus pointed out. "Although

that doesn't mean you have to start believing in what you're writing. Perhaps if you treat it as a way to amuse yourself rather than as a means of venting bitter spleen, you might enjoy it a little more. Obviously you must know *something* about the genre, after all, if you're capable of mocking it."

"You're right, I do," Remus replied with a chuckle. "I started out with the serious literature on the subject - Poe and the like - and moved into the more modern horror writers. But always books that had plot and real merit, not the drivel cranked out these days. As it was, I couldn't even bring myself to do the most overdone genre of all, which is why I stuck with werewolves instead of vampires." He looked up at Severus, his eyes gleaming wickedly. "Although I must say, it is an easy enough thing to change the fantasy of you as a Prince to you being the Prince of Darkness. Perhaps I'll have to re-evaluate my opinion of vampires as romantic images."

Severus snorted and rolled his eyes. "I see I'll have to be careful if I don't want to be immortalized in the pages of a trashy novel," he replied tartly. "I should give you fair warning: it isn't blood I want to suck."

"I'll refrain from asking what you do like to suck until we're inside," Remus said breathlessly. Severus was trying to kill him, it was obvious, and he hurried them the last few steps to his building. He unlocked the outer door with unsteady hands, anticipation and imagination threatening to drive him crazy. Fortunately, his flat was up only one flight and at the head of the stairs, so they didn't have long before they were inside, and Remus was pushing the door shut and locking it behind them.

His flat was filled with books - on shelves, on tables, even piled tidily on the floor. He glanced around, feeling a wee bit embarrassed by how obvious it was that he rarely had anyone over. Not that the flat was dirty at all - he couldn't have stood to live in a hovel - but there was nothing to speak of in the way of decoration. He did have a sofa, and he looked at Severus, clearing his throat with sudden nervousness. "Would you like to sit down and have a drink?" he asked. "The sofa looks a wreck, but it's comfortable. I have some wine."

"Wine would be nice," Severus replied as he looked around. Stopping by the window, he glanced out at the view and then turned back to Remus, one eyebrow raised. "Are you into the spartan look, or is this more evidence of your inward turn of mind?"

Remus shrugged, flushing a bit. "Both, I suppose, plus the whole starving artist thing. Not that I'm starving of course, but given a choice between a big meal or a book and beans on toast, well... I think my preference is

obvious." He moved into the tiny kitchen off the main area, pulling a bottle of white wine from the small fridge and retrieving two wineglasses, ones given him by his mother and rarely used more than one at a time. He filled the glasses and returned to Severus, handing him one.

"A toast, perhaps?" he asked, beginning to relax since Severus hadn't turned up his nose in disgust and gone running from the flat. "To... possibilities?"

"To possibilities," Severus replied, touching his glass to Remus'. "And to the addition of a few throw pillows," he added with arch playfulness.

Laughing, Remus tapped Severus lightly on the arm and took a sip of his wine. "So, does my Prince also give interior decorating advice, then?" he asked. "I suppose I could allocate a few pounds for a budget, given that my publisher sent me contracts for the film rights to *Eternal Moonlight*. I might even be convinced to move out of Soho for somewhere with less personality."

"Film rights?" Severus glanced at him with surprise. "If your book does get made into a film and it does well, you'll be able to ask your publishing company for anything, and they'll offer it on a silver platter. I don't think you'll need to worry about being able to write what you truly want to write, even if it does mean cranking out the occasional bit of trash to keep them happy." He sipped his wine and looked around the room speculatively. "At any rate, it wouldn't take much to make this place cozy. There isn't anything wrong with living in Soho, and the flat has potential. I'm willing to make a few suggestions, if you're interested."

"I would appreciate that," Remus replied, meaning it. He'd taken the place simply because it was inexpensive and in an area he liked, but he could see that it did have potential. He didn't use the fireplace that took up half of the narrow wall of the main room, but he could suddenly see it with a thick rug in front of it, perfect for romantic evenings with a dark-haired, sinful-voiced lover. It was far too early to make such a declaration to Severus, however, although he thought having a place that Severus had helped him decorate spoke of an intimacy that made him ache with longing. He sipped his wine again, and forced himself to think of here and now. "I don't know if I could stand to watch a film of the horror I wrote, but if it opens doors for my real work, I'd be very happy."

"I'm sure it would open plenty of doors," Severus replied, still looking around with an eye to possible changes. He was already thinking about paint and the types of interesting pieces that could be used in the room, which was ridiculous. He ought not think about decorating the flat

of a man he'd only just met, but the inexplicable sense of connection was working on him, making him think about things he'd never considered before in his life. He turned to Remus, one eyebrow raised. "Although to be honest, I'm only interested in one particular door at the moment."

"And what door is that?" Remus asked, hoping against hope it was the same door he himself was interested in. He was torn between wanting to rush things and wanting to draw them out, so he was more than happy to fall in with whatever Severus wished.

Severus drained his glass to give himself a little shot of Dutch courage, and then he put the glass aside and reached for Remus' hands, squeezing them gently. "The bedroom door, of course," he replied. "I don't want to rush you, but I don't want to leave room for any doubt, either. I do desire you."

"You aren't rushing me. I was afraid of rushing you," Remus said, smiling wryly. "I want you, too, Severus. More than I've wanted anyone or anything in a very long time." He began to move, backing toward the bedroom door, glad that in there, at least, he'd taken some time to see to comforts. He had a large bed with a thick mattress, one of his few indulgences beyond books. "I find what I've seen of you so far to be very attractive, indeed, and I'm eager to see the rest."

Severus let himself be led to the bedroom, relieved that his overture hadn't been greeted with hesitation or worse, rejection. "I'll let you unwrap me as long as you promise you'll still respect me in the morning," he said, casting a faux-coy look at Remus.

Remus nodded, his expression serious for a moment. "I promise I will," he said as he stepped into his bedroom and led Severus toward the bed. He stepped closer to Severus, letting their body heat overlap, both aroused and a little anxious about what they were going to do. "I value you, Severus, and I want you to know I'll never treat you lightly. Perhaps it seems silly, as we've only just met, but as much as I want you - which is a great deal indeed - it's not just physical. When I say I want you, I mean that I want all of you."

Severus gazed down at Remus in silence, a strange blend of surprise and humility filling him at Remus' words. He couldn't remember any of his previous liaisons saying anything like that to him before, but then again, he'd never let anyone get so close before. It was more than a little overwhelming to think how easily he had let down his guard with someone he barely knew, but he felt inexplicably safe in doing so. This was right, and for once in his life, he wasn't going to pull back or run away from a good thing.

"I don't have much practice with this whole relationship thing," he admitted, resting his palm against Remus' cheek. "But for you, I'm willing to try it."

Severus' words made Remus' eyes widen with surprise and happiness, and he turned his head to press his lips against Severus' palm. "Practice makes perfect, they say," he replied, and then he stepped forward and pressed against Severus, wrapping his arms around Severus' waist. He looked up into Severus' eyes, his smile becoming seductive. "Shall we seal that with a kiss?"

"By all means." Severus bent his head and brushed his lips against Remus' to taste that smile, and then he returned for more, deepening the kiss and coaxing Remus' lips apart as he slid his arms around Remus in return.

Severus' lips were warm, and the first brush of them sent a tingle down Remus' spine, all the way to his toes. He tightened his arms around Severus' waist, parting his lips and welcoming Severus' exploration, moaning softly as his eyes slid closed. Severus tasted wonderful - dark and spicy - and a single taste had Remus addicted. He felt his body tightening, but he withheld nothing, kissing Severus back with eager hunger.

Severus explored at his leisure, savoring the feel of Remus' body in his arms, warm and solid; he hadn't been touched or held like this in such a long time, and he found his own body was coming alive, starved for touch and demanding more. Sliding his hands down the length of Remus' back, he groped Remus' arse before slipping his hands beneath the hem of Remus' jumper, a soft moan escaping him as he caressed Remus' bare skin.

Remus felt as though he could barely breathe, but he didn't care. The feel of Severus' elegant hands on his skin made him weak in the knees, and he clung to Severus for support. It had been a long time since he'd been touched by anyone, but he didn't want just anyone; he wanted Severus, and the knowledge that it was Severus touching him was almost as potent as the touch itself. Remus arched against Severus' hands and let his own travel lower on Severus' body, pulling Severus' hips against his so Severus could feel just how much his touching was affecting Remus.

Pulling back from the kiss and drawing in a deep lungful of air, Remus moved his lips to Severus' jaw and placed nipping kisses over the hint of stubble at Severus' jawline before nuzzling the skin beneath Severus' ear. He pressed his lips against the pulse beating in Severus' neck, flicking out his tongue to taste Severus' delicious, spicy skin.

Tilting his head, Severus silently offered access and encouragement, a shiver rippling down his spine at the feel of Remus' lips and tongue caressing his skin, and he tightened his arms around Remus, growing arousal causing his knees to weaken.

Remus felt the shiver with a sense of satisfaction, pleased to know that he could affect Severus just as Severus affected him. Wanting to give Severus pleasure, to make him burn as Remus burned himself, he nipped at the skin of Severus' throat as he pushed his hands under Severus' jumper as Severus had done to him, stroking his palms up Severus' back before using his nails on the way back down, raking lightly, not to hurt but to stimulate.

That coaxed a noise that sounded rather like a purr out of Severus, who arched against Remus' hands shamelessly. "I like that," he murmured, mimicking the action on Remus' bare back to see if he responded positively as well. "A little teeth, a little nails - it won't turn me off, believe me."

"A man after my own heart," Remus replied throatily, shivering with need as he felt the pleasure-pain of Severus' nails on his back. With a sudden, wicked grin, he grasped the hem of Severus' jumper and tugged it up. "Let's get this off, and I'll give you teeth and nails in other, more interesting places."

Severus wasted no time in yanking his jumper up and off, and he tossed it aside carelessly before tugging the hem of Remus' jumper in return. "Your turn," he said, raising a challenging eyebrow.

It was a challenge Remus was eager to meet, and he mirrored Severus' movement, letting his jumper fall to the floor. He licked his lips as his eyes roamed the planes of Severus' chest, his skin a delectable expanse that Remus longed to explore with his lips and tongue. "You look positively edible," he murmured, running his palms over Severus' skin, before bending his head and capturing one of Severus' nipples between his lips.

Hissing with pleasure, Severus clutched Remus' shoulders, jolts of pure need shooting through him, and he felt his knees weaken even more. "If you're going to treat me like your own personal buffet, we need to be horizontal," he said, his voice sounding breathless even to his own ears. "Otherwise, I can't promise I'll remain upright much longer."

"I suppose that would be wise," Remus replied with a chuckle. He straightened, and then he reached back to pull down the duvet before moving his hands to the fastenings of Severus' jeans. "In the interest of ease, shall we take these off, too?"

"We might as well, especially if you want to sample all the dishes at the table," Severus replied with a little

smirk. Obviously, Remus liked what he saw so far, which bolstered Severus' confidence, and he cocked his hip, putting himself on provocative display as Remus undressed him.

"I definitely do wish to sample... and savor, and devour." Remus licked his lips as he slid down the zipper of Severus' jeans. Then he knelt, helping Severus out of his shoes and socks before rising again, slipping his thumbs beneath the waistband and pulling them down Severus' hips. Underneath, Severus wore black boxers, and Remus couldn't resist brushing his fingers lightly over the bulge of Severus' arousal teasingly. "I like touching too. Tell me, Severus, how do you like to be touched? Gently? Or can I be a little rough?"

Severus' breath caught at the brush of Remus' fingers, and he shivered in response and clutched Remus' shoulders tighter. "You can be rough if you like," he said huskily. "I'm neither delicate nor sensitive, and I enjoy a little rough-and-tumble." He paused and looked Remus up and down speculatively. "But I must say, you are entirely over-dressed."

With that, he smoothed his palms down Remus' torso, molding his hands to the planes and angles of Remus' chest to familiarize himself with the feel of Remus' body, and then he unfastened the fly of Remus' trousers, teasing Remus with little strokes of his fingers beneath the waistband.

Remus chuckled, his breath hitching as Severus' fingers skimmed lightly, close enough to sensitive places to arouse wildly but not nearly enough to satisfy. "I agree," he said, stepping out of his shoes. Then he arched a brow. "Rough and tumble, eh?" he drawled, before grasping Severus by the shoulders, turning them and pushing Severus down toward the mattress.

Severus went willingly, falling back on the mattress and then scooting toward the center of the large bed and settling against the pillows. He bent one knee and let his hands come to rest over his head, at once giving Remus an unimpeded view and putting himself in a vulnerable position as a show of trust.

"It's lonely up here all by myself," he said plaintively, giving Remus a pointed look.

"I just had to take a moment to admire," Remus replied, his eyes dark with arousal. "You look fantastic in my bed. I'm half afraid I'll wake up and find this has only been a dream."

"I'd pinch you, but you're too far away," Severus replied. "The only thing for it is for you to shed the rest of those clothes and join me. I'll do my best to prove this is no dream."

Laughing, Remus did as Severus said, peeling away the rest of his clothing, making it a little show. He wanted to project complete confidence, but he knew his skin was flushed, since he'd not been bare in front of anyone in years. But Severus wanted him, and he wanted this, what he hoped was the first of many times together, to be special.

Then he moved onto the bed, prowling toward Severus and licking his lips. "You are gorgeous," he murmured. Since Severus was sprawled so wantonly, Remus took the initiative, placing one knee on either side of Severus' thighs and lowering himself so that he hovered over Severus, looking down at him with wonder. "I want you so much, Severus. I want to be with you, to hear you cry out my name because I've given you more pleasure than anyone ever has before."

Winding his arms around Remus, Severus caressed his shoulders and back, savoring the temptation Remus presented; he found the flush endearing, and it reassured him that Remus wasn't some cocky Lothario, intent on conquest. He had never found it easy to relax with someone, especially not so quickly, but Remus put him at ease, enough that his usual self-consciousness seemed to have disappeared.

"I want you too," he murmured, urging Remus down. "More than I've ever wanted anyone before."

Remus went willingly, pressing Severus into the mattress, moaning softly as warm skin met warm skin. "Then you shall have me," he breathed. He kissed Severus tenderly, before making a small, needy sound and claiming a deeper kiss. He stroked his hands down Severus' sides, then between their bodies, brushing his thumbs over Severus' nipples before rolling them between his fingers, tweaking them to give Severus a hint of the roughness they both seemed to enjoy.

Moaning into the kiss, Severus raked his nails down the length of Remus' back, wanting to stoke Remus' desire even as he arched beneath Remus, seeking more of the rough play.

Remus arched into the slide of Severus' nails, pulling his mouth away so that he could moan in pleasure. If Severus wanted rough, Remus would give it to him quite happily. He was normally a mild man, and he thought those who knew him well would be shocked at the core of aggression he had within him, carefully leashed and almost never allowed to come out. It was a hidden part of him, but he thought Severus might accept it, and so he let it rise up, a growl escaping him as he pinned Severus' shoulders, fastening his teeth to Severus' neck and biting down harder than he had before; hard enough to bruise the pale skin and leave a

mark, something that would leave Severus in no doubt as to Remus' desire for him, nor the subtle claim he was staking on Severus, body and soul.

With a cry, Severus threw his head back, baring his throat eagerly; he'd never had a lover bite him this way before, but he loved it, loved the pleasure-pain, loved feeling as if Remus was claiming him. He'd never experienced anything so erotic or arousing, and it made something guarded and tight within him loosen at last, and he clung to Remus to keep himself grounded even as he moaned a litany of "yes" and "more".

Severus' needy sounds were music to Remus' ears, giving him permission to continue, confident that Severus was enjoying his efforts. He didn't draw blood, but he did place a series of gentler bites over Severus' skin, working his way slowly down Severus' body. He lapped at the skin at the base of Severus' throat, enjoying the musky spiciness of his skin, before worrying the line of Severus' collarbone with his teeth. Lower still he moved, and then he captured one of Severus' nipples, nipping it and then soothing it with broad swipes of his tongue.

Humming softly, Severus combed his fingers through Remus' long, silky hair, enjoying the feel of it twining around his fingers, and he arched beneath Remus, unable to keep still under the onslaught of pleasure; every touch, every bite, every caress was stoking his need to greater heights, and soon he was gasping, panting for air, and he whimpered and wriggled restlessly. "More," he demanded, clenching his fingers on Remus' back. "I want more now."

Lifting up, Remus laughed as he looked down at Severus, pleased with the way Severus was being so demanding about what he wanted. Arching a brow, he smiled. "And just what does my Prince desire?" he asked throatily. "Would you like me to take you, or would you prefer to be the one who stakes a claim?"

"You may take me first," Severus replied loftily, caressing Remus' shoulders in a tender gesture that belied the hauteur of his words. "Since you're conveniently in place already, you might as well complete your claim on me."

"As my Prince wishes," Remus replied, his arousal flaring even higher, not only at Severus' words, but at the way Severus stroked him in a way that spoke of feelings beyond simple desire. He wanted to claim Severus, to give him pleasure, to offer him a completion of more than just his physical needs. He reached out toward the bedside table, opening the drawer and pulling out the tube of lubricant he kept there for his occasional indulgences in solitary pleasure.

Moving between Severus' legs, Remus stroked the skin of Severus' abdomen, and then he stripped away his boxers, baring Severus to his sight. He sucked in a breath as he admired the sight of Severus' arousal, and he couldn't resist the need to bend his head and offer Severus the pleasure of his mouth.

The feel of being engulfed by the wet heat of Remus' mouth wrenched a cry from Severus' throat; normally, he wasn't quite so vocal during sex, but he couldn't seem to help himself, especially since he knew Remus wanted to hear his pleasure. He stroked Remus' hair and cradled the back of Remus' head gently, letting his knees fall open wider as he gave himself over to his heightening arousal, unable to keep from rocking his hips slightly.

"Perfect," he murmured. "Feels perfect..."

Remus hummed with pleasure; he loved doing this for Severus, loved knowing that Severus was enjoying it. He reached for the lubricant again, uncapping it and coating his fingers. He gently circled the entrance to Severus' body, continuing to move his head as he prepared Severus slowly, taking his time to draw out the experience, memorizing the things which made Severus moan the loudest or buck his hips with need. He curled his fingers, seeking the sensitive gland within, wanting to give Severus every pleasure possible.

Groaning, Severus threw his head back, feeling his body growing taut as his desire escalated, rapidly reaching the breaking point; his skin was flushed and dappled with sweat, and his breathing was little more than shallow panting punctuated by moans. He wanted to prolong the pleasure, wanted it to go on forever, but whether it was desperate need born of longtime celibacy or born of an overwhelming reaction to Remus himself, he couldn't hold back. He felt himself poised on the edge - and then he fell, chanting Remus' name as he came undone at Remus' skilled hands.

Remus looked up Severus' body, wanting to watch as Severus lost control and shattered. He felt a fierce jolt of possessiveness; Severus was his, and he didn't want anyone else doing this for Severus, for anyone else to see the way Severus flushed and cried out as he reached the peak. Remus didn't move until Severus collapsed back on the mattress, and then he stalked his way up Severus' body, kissing Severus deeply so that Severus could taste his own pleasure.

"Perfect," he murmured against Severus' lips. "You are so perfect you take my breath away."

Severus wound his arms around Remus' shoulders and responded to the kiss eagerly, unable to remember anything more sensual than tasting himself on Remus'

lips and knowing that Remus had wanted to take the time to offer him such exquisite pleasure.

"Your turn," he replied, nipping at Remus' bottom lip. His features were relaxed in satiation, but there was a heated gleam in his dark eyes that made it clear he wasn't about to be passive in offering Remus equal pleasure. "Go on, then. I want you to have me and make me yours."

Remus felt a tingle over his entire body in response to Severus' words, which echoed his possessive feeling so perfectly. "You are mine," he replied, moving into position. He held Severus' gaze as he slowly eased forward, moaning as he felt himself welcomed into Severus' body. He was trembling with eagerness, sweat beading his skin, but he wanted to take the time to savor the feeling of Severus' tight heat around him and of Severus' long legs wrapped around him. He held still for a moment, and then he began to move, no longer able to hold back from the need to take Severus, to claim him completely, to take his pleasure in Severus' body and hold nothing back. Beneath him, Severus met and matched his rhythm, rocking with him, spurring him toward the elusive heights of pleasure. He moaned Severus' name, and then he cried out as ecstasy overwhelmed him, the perfection of it almost more than he could bear. He gasped, sated and completely spent, as he collapsed down, moving to one side and pulling Severus into his arms. He slowly stroked the damp skin of Severus' back, nuzzling kisses to Severus' temple as he tried to catch his breath.

"I'm yours," he murmured. "All yours."

Severus wrapped his arms around Remus and tangled his legs with Remus', exhausted and sated - and utterly content. "Good," he said, a hint of smugness in his voice. He'd never felt so satisfied after sex before or as comfortable with a new lover, and he had no qualms about relaxing completely in Remus' embrace. "I make excellent eggs Benedict," he added as he pillowed his head on Remus' shoulder, throwing out a not-so-subtle hint that he wanted to stay the night. "My coffee is quite good as well."

"Mmmm, do you now?" Remus asked, lazy amusement in his voice. As if he would even be able to ever let Severus leave his flat again, after that! He continued to caress Severus, glutting himself with touch. "I suppose I can be prevailed upon to make the bacon and toast, then. In the morning. After a lie-in. And maybe round two?"

"That sounds acceptable," Severus replied, draping his arm across Remus' stomach and settling in now that he knew he wouldn't have to get up and leave. He released

a quiet sigh and closed his eyes, unconcerned about his column or deadlines or anything else in the world other than whether they would shag in the bed or the shower next time.

Remus chuckled softly, moving his hand so that he could sift his fingers through Severus' hair. He felt Severus' breathing slow, and he gave in to his own drowsy contentedness, pressing a final kiss to Severus' forehead. "Good night, sweet Prince," he murmured as he drifted off. "And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest."

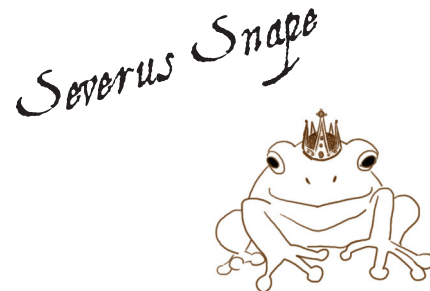


A year later, Severus wrote his last column as "E. Prince"; he answered two last questions and then bid his readers farewell.

While I am proud to have upheld my mother's legacy and grateful for the opportunity to help others in my own fashion, the time has come for me to move on and pursue more personal interests. With the encouragement of my partner, whom I am set to marry in October, I have recently finished a creative work. My first novel, in fact. I have long desired to establish a career for myself as a fiction writer, and I believe 'Princely Proclamations' has helped me hone my craft so that I am now ready to make that transition. I thank you for the years of loyal readership, and I wish you all well.

Two years later, Severus launched a book signing tour for his second novel in tandem with Remus, who was touring to promote his first novel, or at least the first one that had been published under his own name to critical acclaim. There was already talk in publishing circles about a literary award for this fresh "new" author. Severus' alter ego had slipped out once a collection of "greatest hits" from his column had been published, and he found himself requested to sign copies of that along with his works of fiction.

If his readers were curious why he drew a tiny frog wearing a crown next to his scribbled signature, they rarely asked, but it never failed to make Remus smile.



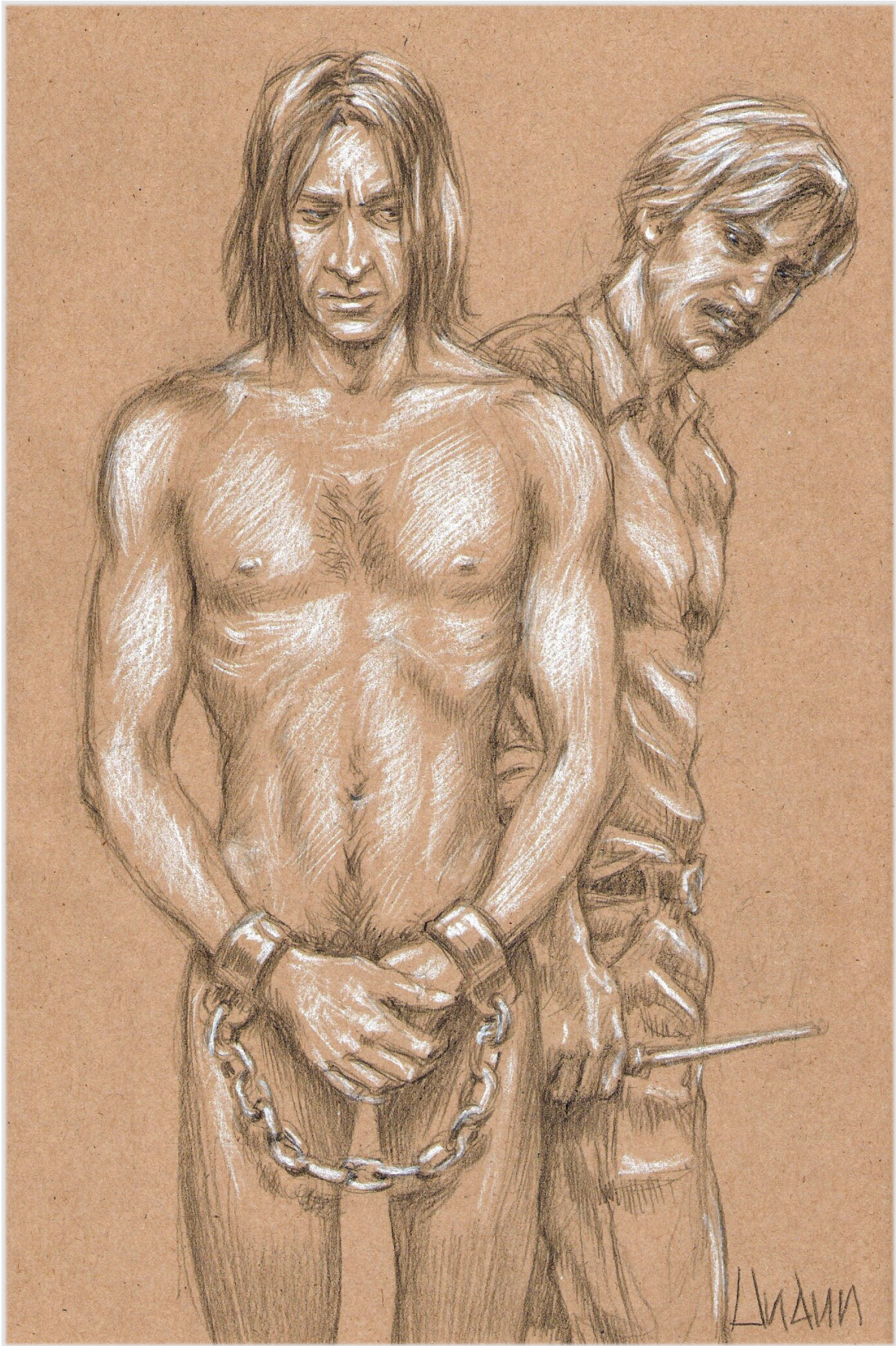
McKay's Bio

McKay is a Fan of A Certain Age who has been involved in fandom on- and off-line for most of her life. Her participation in online fandom began in 1997; she got involved in the Harry Potter fandom in 2001 and has been there ever since with Snape/Lupin remaining her steadfast OTP. She began collaborating with Arionrhod in 2004, and their partnership has endured to the present. In addition to writing fanfiction, McKay enjoys reading, knitting, and playing World of Warcraft and the Sims 3.

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Arionrhod's Bio

The 1960s saw the birth of the Beatles and Arionrhod, although any correlation between the two events is something she remains mysteriously silent about. An avid costumer, knitter, and all around craft fiend, she began writing fanfic in 2002, latching on to the HP fandom like a lamprey and remaining with it almost exclusively. She found SS/RL shortly afterward and has rarely strayed outside the pairing since. In 2004, she started writing with McKay, and their collaborative works are still being cranked out at what she sometimes feels is "a truly alarming rate" - not that she has any intention of stopping.



Information

Rated NC-17 Contains some violence, though not explicit, some naughty words, and some naughty deeds, quite explicit.

Summary: Post-transformation, Lupin wakes up in the woods too close for comfort to a gathering of Death Eaters. Snape spirits him away to Spinner's End for questioning later. High jinks ensue.

↳ Surviving the Night

by Kittylefish

Remus Lupin stood pressed against the trunk of a tree, trying to calm the frantic beating of his heart. His breathing sounded loud in his ears, and he needed it to be quiet. The night air was rent by the sound of shouting and occasional flashes of magic.

He'd had a rough transformation this month. After returning to his human form, he had fallen into an exhausted sleep in a clearing in this forest. He had been torn from sweet slumber by the sounds of Death Eaters arriving only a short distance from where he had been sleeping. He thought he had managed to scramble away without being seen, but now he suspected someone was following him. He just needed a moment to catch his breath, and then he would risk Apparating ... somewhere. Anywhere but here.

Remus couldn't really tell what the Death Eaters were doing or to whom, but he knew that by himself, and as weak as he was, he would not be able to do much except get himself killed. Which wasn't altogether an unpleasant prospect at the moment, but he knew that he still had a role to play in this cursed war.

He couldn't hear any tell-tale footsteps nearby. He couldn't smell anyone close, but then the wind had shifted. All he could smell was the pine of the forest. Perhaps it was safe now.

He realized his mistake the moment before he felt someone grab him from behind, a hand clamping hard over his mouth.

As he made to reach for his wand, a voice hissed, "Don't!" in his ear. Remus would know that voice anywhere. Severus. He wished he felt more relieved at the realization. He forced himself to relax. After all, Albus trusted the man. But with a wand jabbed into his side, he wasn't at all certain he should follow the old man's lead in the matter.

"What are you doing out in these woods at this time of night, Wolf?" Severus demanded. "Cavorting with others of your kind?"

Remus assumed the question was purely rhetorical since Severus's hand was still clamped over his mouth.

"I can feel your fear. I can smell it." Severus dropped his head closer to Remus and snarled, "The wolf is frightened of me. You are wondering where my loyalties lie. Wondering whether I am truly Dumbledore's man, or whether I am an amoral Death Eater who will kill you without a second thought. Perhaps even enjoy it." Remus shook his head slightly. Severus jammed his wand harder into his side. "Any conclusions yet?"

Slowly, Remus lifted his hand to cover Severus's and pulled his fingers back from his mouth enough so he could speak. "I trust you, Severus," he whispered.

Severus snorted. He spun the man around to face him. Long fingers dug into the werewolf's chin as black eyes bored into brown. "You trust me, do you, *Lupin*?" he spat. "Then you are a bigger fool than even I suspected." Without further ado, he grasped Remus's arm and Disapparated with him, reappearing in the back garden of a dingy, dirty house. Without releasing his grip or lowering his wand, he dismantled the wards and ushered Remus into the kitchen.

The Potions master gestured to a chair at the kitchen table and Remus sat, rather surprised at the turn of events. He opened his mouth to thank the other man for getting him out of that situation, but Severus spoke before he had a chance.

"I must return. I will be missed; explanations will need to be made. You will stay here." He flicked his wand, and Remus was bound to the chair in which he sat.

"What are you doing, Severus? I'll stay. You don't have to ..."

Severus Summoned Remus's wand. "Have to, want to ... it makes so little difference." As Remus continued to protest, with another flick of his wand, Severus cast a Silencing Charm. "I'll be back ... when I'm back. And you will answer my questions."

With that, the Potions master turned on his heel and departed.



"Bloody idiot werewolf!" Snape cursed under his breath. Now he would have to come up with an adequate explanation as to where he had been all this time and exactly what he had been doing — and all to save that mangy cur's worthless arse.

Why he had felt compelled to save said arse, he really could not say. True, the cur was one of the old man's favorites. Dumbledore would not have been pleased to hear that he had been pulled apart by Death Eaters like a pack of dogs fighting over a bone. *Hmm. Perhaps the Dark Lord will believe that it was merely a dog. Or a wolf,* he pondered.

When he had Apparated into the woods for tonight's meeting, he had seen the werewolf almost immediately. Had he been the only one to notice him, he would have allowed him to slink off in silence as he had seemed to be attempting to do. Unfortunately, Macnair thought he had seen something, too. *"I'll check it out,"* Snape had offered. Fortunately, Macnair had been content to let him do the legwork. After all, that meant Macnair would be on hand to participate in the evening's "festivities," while he, Snape, would now inevitably be late. The Dark Lord did not appreciate tardiness.

Snape had followed the werewolf, at first merely intending to ensure that he succeeded in getting safely away. But as he'd tracked him, he'd begun to wonder what the werewolf had been doing there. The thought that Dumbledore might have sent the man to spy on him burned through his brain like acid. At that thought, he'd made the decision to bring Lupin back for questioning instead of letting him go. He needed to get to the bottom of why the man had shown up in that particular location at that precise time.

But that would have to wait until later. First, he had other business to attend to. He slammed his Occlumency shields in place and prepared to make his report to the Dark Lord.



Remus sat, bound and silent, on a very hard chair in Severus's kitchen, cursing this day. He had counted the number of planks in the floor, memorized the location of each and every item on each and every counter, catalogued the cracks on the walls and ceiling. He had stared at the large wooden table that dominated the room for so long that he had memorized every single scratch or carving on its surface.

He stared longingly towards the kitchen sink where an occasional drip from the tap taunted him, reminding him that his mouth was so dry he could barely pry his tongue from the roof of it. His stomach rumbled, yet

another reminder that he'd had nothing to eat or drink since his transformation early that morning. His body felt like it had been trampled by a herd of hippogriffs, and his brain felt as though he had been Confunded. He did not understand why Severus had rescued him from the forest only to abandon him here, in this filthy house. He did not know how long he had sat there, unable to move, to speak, to ease his discomfort in any small way at all. Nor did he have any idea when he might expect Severus to return.

Once again, he tried to maneuver his wrists to loosen the ropes, even though he knew it was futile, as it was impossible to escape from the magical bindings. He wished he could so much as summon a cup of water, but silent, wandless, and weak as he was, it was simply impossible at the moment. All he could do was wait and hope that Severus would return before too long.

Remus realized he must have drifted off to sleep because he was awakened by a loud crash and then a thump. He opened his eyes to see the pale light of dawn creeping through the curtains. He felt a cold rush of wind and turned his head to see the back door standing wide open. Craning around the table, he could just see a splotch of black — yes, it was one of Severus's dragon-hide boots. Presumably, it was attached to the rest of the man.

"What the ...?" he started to say before realizing he still could not speak. His mind began racing through alternative scenarios in case Severus was unconscious or worse. As he watched, the boot kicked the door shut. *Thank the gods, at least he's conscious,* he thought, relieved.

More of the black shape entered his vision as the Potions master heaved himself up, clearly with great difficulty. He grabbed first the seat of a chair and then the table to pull himself upright. As he came fully into view, Remus gaped at him, distressed.

Severus's face was chalk white except for a purple bruise spreading over one side of his face, a bloody gash across his forehead, and his broken, bleeding lips. One eye was swollen shut, and he seemed to be having trouble breathing.

Remus wanted to scream his frustration at not being able to ask the questions that were bubbling up inside of him. He knew his mouth was moving anyway.

At last the Potions master raised his gaze and saw him. "You."

Remus noticed the flush rising on the other man's cheeks and knew Severus must feel humiliated to be seen in this condition by anyone, let alone by a man he still seemed to consider an enemy, yet he found himself



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Long fingers dug into the werewolf's chin as black eyes bored into brown. "You trust me, do you, *Lupin*?" he spat. "Then you are a bigger fool than even I suspected."

unable to stop staring. He raised one eyebrow in inquiry, nodding towards the Potions master.

"Oh, this?" Severus gestured towards his face. He dragged a chair around to face Remus and slumped into it. "Have a good look, then." His voice was raspy and hoarse, as if he had been screaming. He turned so that Remus could clearly see the side of his face that had been beaten. "The Dark Lord did not appreciate my explanation regarding my whereabouts when I turned up late for last night's ... gathering." He coughed a little, then winced and wrapped his arm around his chest. "I told him the interloper I thought I had spotted turned out to be a wolf. I was finally able to convince him. After he finished mocking me for my mistake, I was punished for not bringing the wolf back with me so they could have their sport with it."

Remus winced, understanding the implication that he had inadvertently played a key role in this mess.

His voice bitter, Severus continued, "So, what do you think? Some of my *friends* suggested my looks might actually have been improved."

Remus's mouth worked as he desperately tried to apologize for having been the unwitting cause of such harm.

Severus Summoned a cup. "*Aguamenti*," he muttered and drained its contents. As he lowered the cup, he noticed Remus staring at it and licking his dry lips.

"Ah. You are thirsty?" Severus asked, and Remus nodded an emphatic yes. The Potions master refilled the cup and sent it to him.

The werewolf glanced at his arms, still bound to the chair.

Severus sighed. "If I release you, do you give me your word you will stay long enough for me to get some answers?"

Again the werewolf nodded. Severus muttered the counterspell to release the bindings.

Remus immediately snatched the cup of water and guzzled it, spilling some on his chest in his haste. He set the cup on the table and stretched his limbs, rubbing his wrists where they were a bit sore. Then he pushed the cup towards Severus and mouthed, "More, please."

Severus appeared confused for a moment; then realization dawned, and he muttered the countercurse so that Remus could speak once more. He refilled the cup and pushed it back. "Any more you can get yourself." He nodded towards the sink.

"Thank you," Remus croaked, before draining the contents of the cup a second time. He set the cup down again. "I'm really sorry about this." He gestured towards Severus's face. "I would have spared you ... all of it."

Severus shrugged off his words. "All in a day's work, no doubt."

The two men sat staring at each other for what seemed a very long time. Remus was wondering exactly what questions Severus felt he needed answered. He also wondered when the Potions master would get around to asking them.

"What were you doing there last night?" Severus finally broke the silence, sounding very tired.

"I happened to be in that spot when I ..." Remus hesitated to mention his transformation to the other man, as he knew very well Severus's opinion of the matter.

"When you what?" Snape demanded impatiently. After a moment, he seemed to comprehend what Remus was loath to admit. "Oh. The full moon ..." he muttered.

"Exactly." There was a pause; the two men stared at each other across the silence.

"So — nobody sent you?"

"What?" Remus blinked. "Why would anyone have sent me to the forest last night?"

"To spy on me," Severus bit out.

"To spy on you? But — you're the spy, aren't you?" Lack of food and the surreality of the situation were beginning to wear on Remus. "Who would send me to spy on you?"

"Who knows? Minerva, maybe. Or ... Albus." This last was said softly, barely above a whisper.

"Severus. Albus trusts you. Everyone knows that," Remus insisted. His gaze met the other man's, and for the first time in years, he thought he saw a hint of vulnerability lurking there. He felt an ache just beneath his breastbone as he imagined how alone and isolated Severus must feel. "He will never hear a word against you. You know that."

"Not in my presence," Severus stated evenly.

"Nor in your absence," Remus corrected. "He trusts you. He won't be sending a spy out to check up on you any time soon. He trusts you," he repeated. After a moment, he added, "We all do, really."

Severus snorted.

"Believe what you like, but it's true." And with that, Remus's stomach rumbled so loudly it could be heard plainly across the space between them. It was Remus's turn to flush. "Sorry. I've not eaten in well over twenty-four hours," he remarked.

"Where are my manners?" Severus asked, managing to sound sardonic despite his injuries. Then his stomach rumbled loudly. "Well, then, let's see if there's anything to eat." He made as if to stand up but wobbled on his feet and sat back down heavily. "Perhaps you should just help yourself."

"Severus ..." Remus hesitated for only a moment before crossing to where the other man sat. "Will you let me assist you?"

Severus looked up at Remus, seeming to weigh his options. He opened his mouth as if to speak, then shrugged indifferently.

"Where's my wand?" Remus asked, and Snape gestured towards a cupboard by the door. Remus retrieved his wand and returned to Severus's side. He began to heal the swelling and cuts on Severus's face, but he knew these wounds did not completely account for the other man's condition. He wondered what other injuries remained hidden.

Severus had closed his eyes when Remus started working on his face, and Remus took the opportunity to peer closely at the Potions master to see if he could glean any clues as to what else ailed him. He noticed the way Severus held one arm clutched around his body and that his breathing was quite shallow and wondered if he might have broken ribs.

Remus glanced back at the Potions master's face and saw that his eyes were now open and he was staring at him unblinkingly, but without the usual glint of hostility.

"Why are you helping me?" Severus asked.

"What?" Remus blinked in confusion.

"I asked a very simple question. I shall not repeat it," Severus sniped.

"I know, but I'm having trouble believing I heard you correctly. Never mind that we are on the same side, and I would have helped you anyway, but — you bloody saved my life, if I recall correctly. Oh, and there is the small matter that it seems these wounds are also to be added to my account." Remus stood with hands on his hips, shaking his head disbelievingly. "Great bloody berk," he muttered under his breath.

"I heard that," Severus retorted.

"Fine. Are you going to tell me what else you need? I know that something more is wrong with you than just a few cuts." His gaze caught and held the other man's.

Severus glared at him; when he refused to back down, he echoed, "Fine. Go to the cupboard over the sink. Bring me one of the red, one of the yellow, and one of the blue vials."

Remus opened the cupboard and began removing vials. "Turquoise or cobalt?" he asked.

"Cobalt," Severus sighed.

Remus placed the bottles on the table before Severus. The Potions master reached for the cup and counted several drops of each potion into it, then filled it with water and drank. As his color improved and some strength returned, he sighed. Remus was still waiting to attend him, and he gazed at him speculatively.

"Are you any good at healing broken bones?"

"Your ribs?" Remus was beside him in an instant. "Not as good as Poppy, but I can manage."

There ensued an awkward moment as Remus considered that in order to heal Severus's ribs, the man would need to be at least partially undressed. In all these years, he had never seen the Potions master in less than shirt sleeves, and he had certainly never before been so close to him. He could still smell the scent of pine that always seemed to cling to the Potions master. *I should have known it was him*, he thought. And on its heels followed another thought: *Perhaps I did know*. He shook those thoughts away and returned to the task at hand.

The task at hand: Undressing ... Severus, who sat docile before him, as if he had forgotten what was about to happen.

Remus reached to open Severus's robes, but the Potions master brushed his hands away. "I can do it myself."

"Then do it. The sooner this is taken care of, the better." Remus's stomach growled even louder than before, but he ignored it.

Severus started to laugh, then gasped. "Are you sure you can manage?" he asked again.

"Here." Remus reached out and brushed Severus's cloak and robes off his shoulders. He studied the frock coat for a moment, with all those buttons and the fitted sleeves. Removing it would be tricky. He reached out; his fingers trembled slightly. *Must be the lack of food*, he thought and decided to simply Vanish the Potions master's coat and shirt.

"What the hell, Lupin?" Severus sounded angry, but Remus did not care.

He was staring in shock at the bruises and scars on the Potions master's pale torso. Quickly, he forced himself to gather his wits, used his wand to determine which ribs were broken, and began the spell to heal them. As the bones knit, he heard the other man's breathing become easier. When he was done mending the ribs, he bent to inspect the bruises. "Do you have any salve?" he asked.

Severus raised an eyebrow. "I am a Potions master. What do you think?"

"Where is it?" Remus was not to be deterred.

Severus sighed. "I'm perfectly capable of putting salve on my own bruises, Lupin."

As Remus opened his mouth, presumably to argue, his stomach rumbled loudly once more.

"If you want to make yourself useful, why don't you see to breakfast? I could use something myself," Severus suggested. He got to his feet, much steadier than before, and went in search of the salve.

Remus stood in the middle of the Potions master's kitchen, shaking his head in disbelief. *What alternate universe have I wandered into, where I'm in charge of making breakfast for Severus and me?* he wondered and went to check the fridge.

There were eggs, which seemed to be okay, but he cracked them separately into a small bowl first, just in case. He found bread for toast and put the kettle on for tea. He began to wonder where Severus was at about the same time he noticed an uncomfortable pressure on his bladder. He suspected that wherever the lavatory was, Severus was in the same vicinity. The thought did not comfort him, but his need was growing urgent. "Severus?" he called as he moved further into the house.

The silence that was his only response mocked his urgent need. He ascertained there was no loo on the ground floor and made his way to the staircase. "Severus?" he called up the stairs. "I need to use the facilities." As he reached the top of the stairs, practically running in his haste, he barreled into the Potions master, clearly fresh from the shower and clad in only a towel.

"Bloody hell!" Severus yelled as the towel that had been wrapped around his slender hips was knocked loose and fell to the floor. He bent and scooped it up, quickly wrapping it around himself again. Face flushed, he demanded, "What the fuck are you doing up here?"

At the sight of the Potions master in the buff, Remus was stunned into silence. Severus's body was lean but wiry. The bruises Remus had noticed earlier were already fading, thanks to the efficacy of the Potions master's special salve. His pale skin was offset by the fine trail of jet black hairs that disappeared beneath the top of the towel, reappearing some distance later on surprisingly muscular thighs. Remus had caught the briefest glimpse of what lay in between — a small but shapely bum and his rather tasty-looking lunchbox. He licked his lips. Then he realized he was staring at the man's body. Remus forced his gaze back up to Severus's face and then rather wished he hadn't when he saw the look smoldering there.

"Answer me." The Potions master's voice was quiet, which only made him sound all the more menacing.

"Sorry. I did call you — I need to use the loo." Remus gestured towards the appropriate body part, then wondered what on earth had possessed him to draw attention to his own crotch after so obviously ogling the other man's.

Severus gestured towards a closed door and said, "I'll expect you back downstairs immediately after. I'll not tolerate your poking your nose into places that don't concern you."

Remus disappeared through the door and leaned on it for a moment. *Bloody Hell! What on earth is wrong with me?* Severus's comment about poking his nose into places in conjunction with his naked body had conjured up images of poking other things into other places, and — well, best not to go any further down that road. As he stood there conducting his business, he thought back to the vision of Severus standing in the hallway, bending over to pick up his towel, arse beckoning so invitingly ... When he had finished voiding his bladder, without conscious thought, his hand started to stroke up and down his prick, and he cursed. He had thought that he was past those ancient feelings for the other man. A schoolboy crush; he had decided long ago that was all it was, and probably not a very healthy one at that. He had determined that he had no interest whatsoever in the Potions master. "I've no interest in him," he muttered, his hand still clutching his erect member.

The mirror snorted. "Your body seems to feel differently."

"Oh, shut it." Remus tucked himself into his trousers, washed his hands, and went back downstairs. He made the tea, put on some toast, and started scrambling eggs, hoping all the while to take his mind off the nearly naked man upstairs.



Snape closed the door to his room and leaned against it. Bollocks! Why had he brought the man here, he asked himself, and why had he allowed him to stay? Not only had he seen his house, which was bad enough, but he was even now taking care of business in the dingy bath. And worst of all, Lupin had now seen him completely naked. How would he ever manage to maintain the appropriate professional respect and distance now that the werewolf had seen his dangly bits?

Not that he seemed to mind, whispered a tiny voice in the back of Snape's head. In fact, if he didn't know better, he would think Lupin had been ogling him. He had always suspected Lupin might swing both ways, so that he would ogle a man did not shock him. That Lupin would ogle him, however, did shock Snape. Very much so. Not least because he did not consider himself to be ogleable in the slightest.

Sighing heavily, he crossed the room to his wardrobe to pull out clean clothes. For once, he stopped in front of the heavy, mirrored doors of the wardrobe and took in his reflection. He skimmed over his face — he knew how ugly he was — but he found himself wondering how his body had appeared to the other man. Although he was thin, he did have some muscles. He supposed his form

might be considered pleasing. But his skin was marred by numerous scars crisscrossing his chest and back. His finger traced one particularly vicious-looking scar that ran roughly from his left pectoral to his right hip. He could not quite recall the hex that had inflicted it, but he vaguely remembered waking up in the hospital wing after he had stumbled back to Hogwarts. He could not fathom anyone looking upon his collection of souvenirs, as he called them, and finding him appealing.

And that was what was so odd about what had transpired with Lupin. The man had seemed to be fascinated with what he saw, and not in the staring-at-a-train-wreck kind of way. Snape's gaze traveled down the same path Lupin's had taken, over the area covered by the towel, to his legs, which he supposed looked strong enough and were comparatively free of scars. As he dropped his towel, his hand brushed lightly over his cock, which had been growing steadily harder as he considered the situation. At least he had been spared the embarrassment of Lupin catching a glimpse of him at full attention. Though if he were honest, he had nothing to be embarrassed about in that regard ... He ran his hand down his length, enjoying the feel of his girth in his hand.

Gods, I must be in serious need of a shag if thinking about fucking the — I mean, the fucking — werewolf makes me this hard. Fucking ... werewolf ... His hand, which seemed suddenly to have developed a will of its own, began to stroke up and down his length, despite his reminding it that he had to get dressed and go downstairs. *I have a guest*, he chided his cock as it basked in the attentions of his wayward fingers. *The werewolf is cooking me breakfast*, he reminded his recalcitrant body. Unfortunately, this proved to be counterproductive, as his cock jumped excitedly in his fist at this news.

In the end, it was only the horrifying thought of having to face Lupin over the breakfast table afterwards that enabled Snape to exercise his self-control sufficiently to put an end to the madness his body seemed insistent upon perpetrating.

He somehow managed to get dressed and make his way downstairs. *Breakfast awaits*, he thought, ignoring the fact that his cock jumped as if breakfast had suddenly taken on a meaning quite different from eggs and toast.

In the kitchen, he found Lupin staring morosely at a plateful of scrambled eggs. Considering how hungry he knew the other man was, he was surprised he had managed to wait. "You could have started without me. You didn't have to wait." That little voice in his head chimed in, *After all, I started without you and nearly finished, too.*

"To be honest, I'm not sure I could have waited for long, but I had only just finished cooking it when I heard you on the stairs." Lupin waited until Snape seated himself at the table, then tucked into his food.

Snape was horrified to find himself more interested in watching Lupin than in eating his breakfast. The werewolf had rolled up his shirtsleeves, presumably while he was cooking, revealing his muscular forearms with their slight dusting of golden-brown hairs. Snape noticed the way Lupin's hair fell over his forehead when he bowed his head slightly to take a bite, the way his Adam's apple bobbed when he swallowed. When Lupin's teeth tore off a bite of toast, Snape saw the almost feral gleam in his eye. When Lupin's tongue darted out to lick a bit of butter from the corner of his mouth, Snape felt a tightening in his groin again and wondered when, exactly, Lupin had become an object of erotic interest for him. His mind supplied the answer, *When I noticed him ogling me*. Snape started trying to remember his last shag. If he couldn't remember, then it had been too long. He hadn't even had a good wank in far too long, though he suspected that would be remedied the moment Lupin walked out the door. Truth be told, he was having quite a battle to keep that wayward hand from fondling himself under the table.

Suddenly, Lupin raised his eyes to meet his gaze. Snape felt heat rise in his cheeks. *Bloody Merlin's bloody bollocks*. He cleared his throat and tried to come up with some safe topic of conversation.

Lupin beat him to it. "I believe this is the strangest day I've had in a very long time. I never imagined finding myself cooking us breakfast." He attempted a small smile.

"No, I daresay not," Snape replied. Though Lupin had made himself at home in Snape's kitchen easily enough, Snape imagined that when Lupin made breakfast for someone, the circumstances were usually rather more ... intimate. Of course he had never imagined being with Snape in such circumstances. Why would he? At the thought, Snape lost what little appetite he'd had.

Lupin, meanwhile, had cleaned his plate and was helping himself to seconds. "I hope you don't mind. I'm ravenous this morning."

"Not at all," Snape uttered the polite, meaningless phrase, wishing all the while that he could eject the other man from his kitchen, given that there was no realistic possibility of ravishing him on the kitchen table.



Remus did not know why he didn't just leave. Obviously, he was hungry, but he could always go home and have

breakfast. It was clear to him that the strange circumstances of the past twenty-four hours were wreaking havoc with his common sense. As he shoveled down eggs and toast — *Gods, I've never been so hungry*, he thought — his mind kept returning to that scene upstairs.

He had not given much thought to Severus in that way for a long time — not since his school days, really, when for some reason, the pale, thin boy had filled his head with all sorts of inappropriate thoughts. Those thoughts had been the reason he could hardly look at him back then, though he knew Severus thought it had been because he disliked him. But after Severus had become a Death Eater, any such fantasies ended. Or rather, if he was honest, after the first few times he had fantasized about shagging or being shagged by Severus Snape, Death Eater, he had forced himself to cease and desist. It simply wasn't healthy to continue to be obsessed with someone who had pledged his allegiance to the most evil wizard the world had known in his lifetime, no matter how hard it had made him, nor that it had resulted in some of the most intense orgasms of his life.

It was sheer torture to sit here at the man's table, eating his food, seeing again in his mind's eye his pale, lightly muscled body, wondering about all those scars, but mostly wondering how it would feel to touch him, to trace the contours of his body, to feel the slight ridges and puckers of those scars beneath his fingertips, his lips, his tongue.

His entire body was ridiculously aware of the other man — his hairs were standing on end. Each glance from the Potions master zinged over his skin like electricity. He could feel Severus's gaze upon him almost like a physical touch, like the touch of a lover — now on his arms, now on his neck, now on his lips ... *Wait a second. Severus's eyes on my lips? Now, that is ... interesting*. To test this new line of inquiry, he darted his tongue out to lick a bit of butter from the corner of his mouth. When he glanced up, he caught Severus off guard, only for a moment, but it was enough. The searing intensity of that gaze confirmed his suspicion that perhaps he wasn't the only one suffering this morning. At that thought, he felt the control he had been attempting to exercise over himself slip. He was hard in an instant. Just then, he noticed Severus shifting uncomfortably in his seat.

Emboldened by the thought that Severus might be feeling as stirred up as he was, he decided to strike up a conversation. Alas, the Potions master's responses were polite, but did not encourage further discourse. The man did not seem to want to talk. Lupin did not particularly want to talk either, but simple social inter-

course seemed to promise the most direct route to the sort of intercourse he actually was interested in.

"You're not eating much," he tried again.

"No. I'm not that hungry after all. I suppose I'm more tired than hungry," Severus said, drawing his fork through the eggs on his plate.

Remus watched the Potions master playing with his food and despaired of making any progress. "Perhaps I should go," he mumbled.

"Perhaps you should," Severus replied.

Remus ate his last bit of toast, wiped his mouth with his napkin, folded it neatly, and placed it on the table. Rising from his chair, he crossed to the back door where he hesitated. "Thanks for breakfast," he said as he opened the door and left.

Once outside, he buried his face in his hands. "Thanks for breakfast!" he muttered to himself. "I doubt I could have sounded more inane if I had tried." He stood there cursing himself for an idiot. Eventually, he noticed the chill in the air and realized he was still in his shirtsleeves. In his haste to leave, he had rushed off without his coat. "Merlin's bollocks!" he swore, dreading the thought of having to return to the uncomfortable tension that awaited him in the kitchen.



The door had barely closed behind Lupin when Snape's hand found his lap. He pushed his chair back from the table a little to give him more room to maneuver. With a sigh, he liberated his straining erection from his tight trousers and began to pull hard. *Gods, I need a good shag.* The werewolf's face popped into his mind, but he forced it out. He cast his mind back, trying to remember his last shag — a Muggle he'd met in a bar, he thought, but it did nothing for him. He saw the werewolf licking his lips. Again, he pushed the image from his mind, thinking instead of a strapping young man he'd seen at the green grocer's the other day. Now the lad had Lupin's face. Finally, he accepted the inevitable. *Lupin.* His cock responded immediately, growing even harder, weeping precome from the tip. He clutched himself tighter, hips bucking into his fist. He imagined Lupin's lips closing around him, sucking hard, and heard himself moan. He imagined bending him over the kitchen table and taking him from behind amidst the breakfast things. He bucked so hard now his hips left the chair with each stroke as he felt himself teetering on the edge, then falling into ecstasy ...

The kitchen door opened. "Sorry, Severus, I forgot my ..." Lupin's voice trailed off at the scene before him.

Too late. Can't stop. Snape stared into the eyes of the man who had fueled his fantasy. "Lupin!" he groaned, then closed his eyes and shuddered out his orgasm. And sat there, eyes closed, fingers sticky, absolutely mortified. How could he possibly open them and face the man after this? The way his face was burning, he knew he must be red as a beet.

"I'm sorry. I did knock. I forgot my coat," Lupin said softly.

Snape wondered whether perhaps, if he just sat quietly with his eyes closed, Lupin would simply retrieve his coat and leave. At the sound of footsteps coming nearer, his eyelids flew open. And caught Lupin staring at — well, staring at his lap, where — gods, he was still completely exposed. And the werewolf had been staring at him, for who knows how long. At the thought, he was horrified to realize he was starting to grow hard again. He muttered a cleansing spell and hastily tucked himself into his trousers.

Lupin licked his lips. "Um. Severus. Perhaps we should talk about this?"

"Why the devil would we need to talk about it? I needed a wank, and I had one. Just because you happened to walk in on it does not make it any of your business." His sneer dared the other man to contradict him.

"O — kay," Lupin said slowly. "What about the part where you called out my name when you came?"

"You startled me," Snape insisted.

"Hmm. So, for instance, if Minerva had appeared at your door just then, you would have said her name?"

Snape's horror must have been visible because Lupin threw back his head and laughed, a full-throated, deep, husky laugh that Snape felt reverberate through his body.

"Come on, Severus. Why can't you admit it?" Lupin asked, slowly but purposefully making his way around the table.

"Admit what?"

"Admit that you want me, too."

"I admit no such thing," Snape started. Then his brain caught up with Lupin's words. "Too?" he asked.

"Yes, too." Remus moved the last few steps until he stood in front of Snape. "What I want to know is, why would you rather sit there alone and have a wank when I'm right here?"

"I didn't think ..."

"Apparently not," Lupin interrupted. "You know, Severus, for someone so intelligent, you can be an incredible prat at times."

Snape glared at him, but Lupin was clearly unimpressed as he proceeded to grab Snape by the hair and urge him from his seat. When Snape opened his mouth to protest this treatment, Lupin silenced him most effectively by covering Snape's slightly parted lips with his own, taking advantage of their opening to slip his tongue into the Potions master's mouth.

There was no denying the werewolf knew how to kiss. His lips felt somehow both soft and firm, his tongue gently demanding a response. Snape heard himself whimper into Lupin's mouth as he surrendered to the sensuous seduction.

In response, Lupin growled and wrapped his arms around Snape, pressing their bodies tightly together as he devoured Snape's mouth.

Snape found his hands caressing Lupin's back, his well-muscled arms, the broad expanse of his chest as he returned the kiss. Mindlessly, he insinuated one of his legs between Lupin's and rubbed his erection against the werewolf's thigh. Lupin grabbed his arse and pressed his own erection into him so that Snape was left in no doubt as to his desire.

Lupin broke the kiss, his hand tangling in Snape's hair, turning his head to the side and using his teeth to nibble down the side of Snape's neck. Snape shivered and felt his nipples harden at the contact. When Lupin's hand rubbed over the bulge in his trousers, Snape moaned and thrust towards him, taking Lupin's brazen touch as his cue to lightly trace the lines of Lupin's erection through his trousers as well. As the two men fumbled to remove each other's clothes, buttons went flying and fabric was torn.

They resumed kissing, naked flesh pressed to naked flesh, each now taking the opportunity to run his hands over the other's body, caressing, rubbing, teasing, squeezing. Lupin's hand slipped between Snape's legs, cupping his balls before he began sliding over his cock with long, slow strokes. Snape grabbed the edge of the table for balance with one hand, while his other reached out to find Lupin's cock, which he grabbed firmly, causing Lupin to yelp in surprise.

Moments later, it was Snape's turn to yelp as one of Lupin's fingers began playing with his arsehole, rubbing over it lightly before insinuating itself inside.

"Severus." Lupin's voice was hoarse.

"What?" Snape didn't really feel like talking just then; he would have much rather concentrated on the sensations Lupin's hands were creating.

"Tell me what you were thinking about earlier." His hands moved in a lazy rhythm while he waited for Snape to answer.

Snape concluded there was no sense acting coy at this point, what with one of Lupin's fingers gently probing his arse and all. "I was thinking about you sucking my cock." At the thought, he wriggled a little against Lupin's finger.

"Mmmm," Lupin sighed. "Is that what you were picturing when you came?"

"No. I was thinking about ... fucking you here at the breakfast table," Snape panted, not caring what Lupin thought of him as long as he didn't stop what those amazing hands were doing.

"Guess what?" Lupin breathed in his ear. "I think I'm going to get your wish." He removed his finger from Snape's arse; Snape cried out at the loss. He turned the Potions master so he was facing away from him and pushed him so his chest was lying across the table, his arse pointing towards him.

Lupin caressed Snape's back and shoulders, then trailed his hands down to his bum. He spread the Potions master's cheeks and positioned his cock at the entrance. He rubbed his tip against the tight ring of muscles. Snape rubbed back against him, thinking that this might be just as good as when he'd imagined it the other way around.

"Tell me you want this," Lupin demanded.

"I want it," Snape said, his voice muffled slightly by the table.

Lupin began to press his entrance. "Tell me," he said, as he slowly began to sheath himself in the tight heat. "Tell me what you want."

"I want you to fuck me," Snape admitted, finding it somewhat freeing just to say it for once instead of trying to hide his feelings. "I want you to ... oooh!" His words were cut off as Lupin drove deep inside him, filling him with such intensity that he was straddling the fine line between pain and pleasure.

"Gods, Severus! You feel so good!" Lupin held still for a moment, allowing Snape to become accustomed to the sensation. When Snape started to squirm, he began moving, slowly at first.

Snape grabbed one of Lupin's hands and brought it to his aching cock, and Lupin began rubbing up and down his shaft in the same unhurried rhythm. Snape could feel the tension building, building, and he started to move faster. Lupin followed his lead, thrusting faster and more forcefully. With each stroke now, the table shook as Lupin drove deep, holding there for the briefest moment before he pulled back and then thrust in again.

Snape met him stroke for stroke, bucking back against him, pulling him in deeper, then thrusting forward into his tight fist. The Potions master reveled in the sensations Lupin was arousing in him. He felt overwhelmed, swamped, like he was drowning in pleasure. Finally, he couldn't hold back any longer and let himself go. As Snape felt himself coming apart, he felt Lupin's strokes grow shorter and more erratic, felt him stiffen, felt Lupin come inside him as Snape's cock pulsed and emptied in Lupin's fist.

Lupin had collapsed onto Snape's back when he came, and Snape marveled that he didn't mind the man's weight on him. It actually felt rather delicious, though it was a little hard to breathe. After a few moments, Lupin rolled to the side of him, stroking his hand down his back.

"This table is damned uncomfortable," Lupin said.

"Mmm," was all the response Snape could manage.

Lupin sat up. "You must be miserable there. Come on, get up."

"Too tired to move," Snape mumbled. He thought he could go to sleep right there just fine, if only the werewolf would stop talking. But it was not to be ...

"Bollocks!" Lupin exclaimed.

Snape opened one eye to look at him. The man was clearly upset about something.

"I'm so sorry — I forgot — did I hurt you?" he asked.

Ah. Now that his needs have been met, his basic human decency kicks in again. "No, you did not hurt me, Wolf." He placed a slight emphasis on the last word, but supposed any sting was removed by the slight smile he could feel curving his lips. He started to sit up and wordlessly accepted the hand Lupin extended to help him. "You did a good job with the ribs. I'm just tired."

"I can't believe I — You should be in bed, resting."

"Oh, stuff it, Lupin. Do I look like I'm complaining? Don't get sanctimonious on me now." He sighed. "However, bed does sound like a good idea." He stood and started walking towards the doorway. Then he turned and looked at Lupin over his shoulder. "Well? Are you coming?"

Lupin scrambled to his feet and followed the Potions master upstairs. The two exhausted men tumbled into bed and climbed under the covers. Lupin pulled Snape into his arms, cushioning his head on his shoulder. As Snape relaxed in the circle of Lupin's arm, he mumbled, "It seems ensuring you survived the night was one of my better ideas."

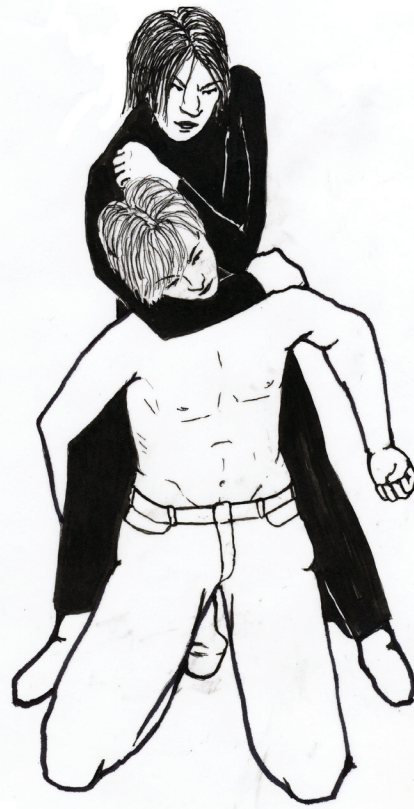
Kittylefish's Bio

I came to fanfic after DH to mend my broken heart and to find some kind of redemption for Snape. My first story, a sad SS/LE called *Stealing Glances*, was nominated in The New Library Awards in 2008. I have recently realized that SS/RL is my OTP, so though I've only written a few stories with this pairing so far, I look forward to devoting more time in the future to finding new ways to bring them together and give them as many non-canon-compliant happy endings as I can possibly imagine.

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Adjustments

"Severus, are you sure you know what you're doing?"

"If you doubt me, would it not behoove you to shut your muzzle and allow me to concentrate?"

"It's just a little crick in my neck."

"You've been looking at me sideways for days. Now be quiet, relax and let me do this!"

Crack!

"Ah, that is much better. Thank you, Severus."

"If you wish to express your gratitude, Remus, take off those pants and shag me properly. It's been a bloody week!"

-- Art by Xterm,

Words by Lore

Information

Rated PG-13.

Summary: Severus gets a new opportunity to start with a better life. Of course, it comes with a price... a price that is going to be staying with him in very close quarters..

Sharing Rooms (and Sometimes, More)

by *Dungeons_Master*

Severus Snape, age 38, stood in front of a Gargoyle statue that was sporting an expression no less grim than his own.

He'd hoped, sometimes even prayed, never to see that statue again, but, as always, someone up above had decided not to listen to his pleas.

The damn scar itched, a reminder of past events always present on his body. It had started as soon as he'd woken up in the hospital bed, and nothing he could think of had stopped it.

That meant no more high collars, and no more long hair, either. He couldn't stand anything touching it for a long time. Such a pity, though, he'd always liked his hair long, it helped him hide his emotions better, and in these circumstances he was even more aware of the absence of his favorite barrier.

He squared his shoulders and spoke aloud the password he'd found written at the end of the short missive Minerva McGonagall, the new Headmistress of Hogwarts, had sent him, asking to meet for tea.

The only thing that had stopped Severus from refusing was the knowledge that if he hadn't answered with a 'yes' the woman would have probably barged in his house unannounced.

The door to the Headmaster's – Headmistress' now, he corrected himself – office opened as soon as he'd reached the landing, and Minerva greeted him with a small nod.

"Thank you for coming so promptly, Severus." The Headmistress gestured towards the empty chair in front of her desk, and as soon as he was seated a cup of hot, fragrant tea materialized in front of him. "I'll come directly to the point. I've called you here to offer your old position back."

Severus was taken aback, and he spilled some of the hot tea on his hand, hissing in pain. McGonagall looked at him pointedly while he spelled the burn away.

This was an unexpected turn of events. He thought he'd been called to the castle to help with the rebuilding, not

to get a job. A very well paid job, by his standards, with many positive sides.

The house in Spinner's End was in shambles, while the rooms at Hogwarts, although slightly chillier, were clean and comfortable. Plus, having a fully equipped laboratory and the biggest library in the country was a luxury he'd gladly give his free time for.

He realized he hadn't said a word, lost in his own musings, and Minerva was still looking at him, expecting an answer.

"Same conditions as before... before?" He didn't need to finish the phrase.

"Well..."

Severus narrowed his eyes. He should have known.

"Don't look at me like that, Snape! It's not my fault the castle is half destroyed," the Headmistress said, trying not to sound too accusing.

Snape couldn't look her in the eye. He knew well enough whose fault it was.

Minerva probably sensed his change of mood, because her expression seemed to soften a bit.

"It's nothing difficult, I assure you. As you already know, during the battle a good part of the castle was destroyed, damaged or rendered inhabitable by Dark curses, and the available space has been reduced to one-third of its original. That's why, if we want to open the school in September, we need to make some sacrifices and live in... shall we say... closer quarters."

Minerva got up and started to pace behind her desk. "We need to find a way to fit all of the Houses in two dormitories, since the Slytherin and the Ravenclaw rooms are uninhabitable for the moment, and we don't have as many classrooms as we'd like, so we need to free some of the teachers' rooms to make space for classes. That's why you'll have to share living quarters with one of your colleagues, Severus. I hope this won't pose a problem for you."

Severus gnawed on his lower lip.

Sharing quarters had never been his forte. He still remembered how awkward his student years had been, sharing the dormitories with his classmates. The derision, the pranks, the bullying... He remembered thinking that finishing school had been one of the best things to ever happen to him.

The time spent babysitting Wormtail hadn't been fun either. The slimeball had been at his side practically every minute of the day, checking, probably, for something suspicious to refer to his Master.

The years he'd spent as a teacher had been bliss, instead.

To have quarters just for himself, be free to act as he liked in his own room - walk around in nothing but pajama pants, eat and read at the same time at the table and leave his things scattered everywhere without fearing someone would steal them - that had been heaven.

But if he refused this offer out of fear of a roommate he faced a rather meager fate for himself.

He didn't have many chances of finding a job, and with his reputation not many would buy his services or anything he could create. Potter's steady defense had made of him a free man, but the taint of the mark on his left arm was a lot harder to forget.

Besides, Hogwarts offered free food, clean laundry, and was really the only home he'd ever had. No matter how difficult his life had been, he'd always found a nook in which to hide and stay safe for a couple of hours when he needed it.

He knew he'd already made his choice as soon as the Headmistress had made her offer.

"I'll do it."

Minerva nodded, got up and extended her hand. Severus took it in his - no matter how frail the woman looked, her grip was still firm enough to command respect.



That day Severus started packing his belongings, or what of them was left in Spinner's End after his year as Headmaster. He'd taken all he could to the school, leaving behind only the things that could appear suspicious to the Dark Lord, like old photos of Lily, a couple of the Muggle things he had kept from his childhood and his Muggle books.

After all his belongings were packed and sent to Hogwarts, Severus started cleaning the place up with magic as best as he could. He took care of bloodstains, burn marks, potion residues and everything that could seem suspi-

cious to a Muggle eye, and freed the house completely from anything magical.

The next day, the first thing he did after breakfast was put a 'For sale' sign on the fence. He kept cleaning the house and the garden hoping to be offered a good price for it, and it took only three days to get an offer that he accepted promptly.

That night he sent a letter to the Headmistress informing of his upcoming arrival and said goodbye to some of his worst memories.



The move to Hogwarts was easy enough, not so his brief stop at Hogsmeade.

If he thought being laughed at during school had been bad, the glares he received when people realized who the stranger in the black cloak was sent shivers down his spine. The hate was almost solid.

Fortunately he had long legs and the road wasn't that long, but he released his breath as soon as he touched the Hogwarts gates.

He was welcomed by Hagrid, and although his manners weren't quite hostile, he could feel he wasn't exactly welcome.

Who would want him here, anyway? He shrugged off this train of thought; it wouldn't do to think about it too much, since he'd known all along when he'd accepted the position that he'd have to stand glares, insults and possibly some curses thrown his way.

It was the price he would have to pay for the rest of his life, and the mere fact that he still had his freedom was good enough for him to make it all bearable.

Minerva was waiting for him at the main door, and greeted him with a nod, sending Hagrid, who had accompanied him without saying as much as a word, away to the gardens.

"Severus," Minerva greeted him, shaking his hand then turning the other way suddenly, "come, your rooms are ready."

Severus followed her like a student in his first year, watching in silent awe the walls he'd never thought he'd see again.

And most of them he really couldn't see, because they were in crumbles on the ground. Windows were broken, armor was burned and battered, the pavement had big holes here and there and the stairs were trickier than he'd ever seen them.

The last time he'd been here under the Headmistress request he'd taken a straight route to her office, and the damage in that part of the castle had been almost invisible, but this?

It was impressive, and Severus' heart bled at the thought of all that wasted beauty. He didn't think it could be possible to take Hogwarts back to the magnificent castle it once was.

And it was partly his-

"Here we are, Severus," said the Headmistress, who had stopped and was gesturing to a large wooden door, interrupting his musings.

Severus opened the door a bit warily, hoping the conditions of the room were at least acceptable.

To his surprise, the room was perfectly fine: it had also been recently cleaned, it seemed, judging by the sparkle from the polished furniture and the brightness coming from the window, and it showed no dust.

"I had some house elves taking care of the cleaning for the staff rooms before your arrival, but I'd like if from now on you took care of the simplest cleaning charms, so the elves will be free to help with the rebuilding."

Severus nodded, putting his suitcase down and looking around.

"Your side of the quarters is at the left. Behind these doors there is a bedroom and a small study. You'll have to share the bathroom, I'm sorry. And you'll have to let the pupils of your House into your private quarters if they need you, I hope that won't be a-

"My House?! Am I to be Slytherin's Head of House again? Are you crazy, woman? Do you hate the Slytherins so much that you want them retired from school on the first day?"

Minerva glared her best glare at him.

"I'd like, in the future," she said, straightening her posture, "if you would refrain from criticizing the way I run the school. I don't think you've gained enough experience to tell me how I should do it, and even if you did, now it's my responsibility. And yes, you'll be the Slytherin Head of House. You're the best suited for the part, seeing as Harry keeps referring to you as a hero, and that no other professor would understand their problems better than you. Am I wrong?"

Severus clenched his fists and then exhaled. She was right, damn her. No one else would care about what those children had suffered, they would just judge them from the actions of their parents, or for what they were coerced into doing during the last school year.

Besides, he still loved Slytherin House, no matter how bad it had been for him.

Minerva nodded, having understood that she had won, and then turned to the door.

"I'll leave you to the unpacking, then. Meals will be served at the usual time in the Great Hall. You are free to join us or eat in your rooms. You should check on your new classroom, an elf will guide you there if you ask for it. Oh, and Severus..." she turned to look at him, a small smirk on her lips that didn't reach her eyes, "welcome back."

She closed the door before he could reply, and he snorted.

He looked around at his new quarters. The main room was large enough to contain a small coffee table, a comfortable looking sofa and two matching armchairs, a small cupboard with a liquor cabinet and a bookshelf.

There were four doors, and two were to the left, one of which, he noticed opening it, led to a spacious study with a capable bookshelf and a medium sized desk. There was a small fireplace too, and the room had a reassuring feeling all over it. It would do nicely for counseling students.

His bedroom, he noticed, was slightly larger. He wouldn't define it as 'cramped,' but it wasn't very spacious either, maybe because his bed was so big.

He accosted the headrest and he realized it was *his* bed, the one he slept in in his old quarters. He sat on the mattress and bounced a bit, feeling the firmness and the silk of the sheets under his hands. He'd missed this bed really badly. He should remember to thank Minerva for it.

The rest of the room was quite ordinary: a small desk and a large bookshelf, with a wardrobe that filled half a wall. He stretched on the bed, took out his wand and started unpacking, swishing and flicking and looking at his robes, shirts and socks as they folded and took their proper places. The books were stashed in alphabetical order, so it was even easier to arrange them on the shelves.

The action of swishing and waving was so monotonous that as soon as the last book was placed, Severus fell asleep, and for once, didn't dream.

He awoke a couple hours later, rested but a bit groggy, and started making plans for his Potions classes. He didn't even realize the time until a soft *pop* made him raise his eyes from the parchment.

"Master Snape," said an ancient elf, bowing with respect, "the Headmistress sent Mukky here to ask Master Snape if he intends to starve to death before the term starts," the elf repeated, timidly shuffling his foot on the floor.

Severus realized he hadn't eaten in a while, and he still didn't feel that hungry, but it wouldn't do to get sick with all of the things he needed to do.

He rose up, feeling slightly weak, and nodded at the elf.

"Tell the Headmistress I'll be at dinner in a minute."

The elf bowed again and disappeared.

He went to dinner still thinking about his lesson plans, and only when he noticed no sound was coming from the usually very noisy room he realized that there were people, and they were staring at him.

His steps faltered, but then he kept walking, avoiding eye contact and walking straight to his seat. He nodded to the rest of the table, and the Headmistress greeted him.

"I thought you would send for food by yourself," she said, smirking, "but the elves told me you hadn't called, so I thought I'd remind you. I'm glad you decided to join us."

You're the only one, thought Severus, still a bit unnerved by the surreal silence. Hagrid, Sprout, Trelawney and Flitwick still weren't talking, and they weren't eating either, which was starting to grate on his nerves.

Yes, he knew what he had done in the past two years. Yes, he knew they hated him, they'd made that quite clear. That didn't mean they had to stop doing what they were doing just because of him. That was.... *childish*.

He was about to get up and leave, when he heard a timid voice from his left.

"Could you please, er, pass the salt, Severus?"

Severus raised an eyebrow, his hand already on the chair, poised to escape. He turned towards the voice and saw that Flitwick was looking at him with a determined stare, underlined with fear.

Severus lowered his eyes, understanding this was a peace offering of sorts, and slowly took the small glass bottle and extended it towards his colleague.

Flitwick took it with more force than necessary, but he did say 'thanks'.

An eerie silence descended on the table, then Minerva mmmhed appreciatively and held up a piece of lamb with her fork.

"This," she said "is delicious. Have you tried it, Pomona?" and from then on, albeit not exactly including him, the conversation started again, and Severus felt well enough to eat half of his helping of roast beef.

After the meal, spent picking at his food and listening to his other colleagues, he shared a glass of scotch with

Minerva, discussing the new plans for the school, then went to see how much damage had been done to his Potions lab.

He was surprised to see that it was practically intact.

Only the door had been torn to splinters, and some dust had entered it, but it was nothing a couple of swishes with his wand couldn't fix. The efforts for rebuilding were mostly centered on the ground floor and on the first floor, while the dungeons had been spared the damage.

As soon as the dust was gone, and he'd put everything in its proper place, Severus turned and walked to his quarters, already planning to ask a house elf to fix the door for the next day.



Severus woke up feeling rested and a bit disoriented.

It took him a couple of seconds to remember where he was, but when he did, he felt the need to stretch on the bed and bask for a couple of minutes in the feeling of being safe.

The next day was spent checking what was left of the stock of ingredients in the storage room.

Severus was pleased to see most of the more useful ingredients had been preserved, and the other ones would be easy to procure if he asked the Headmistress for them. He could, however, refill the stock of Potions for the Infirmary, provided Pomfrey would trust him enough.

He set to scrubbing the cauldrons to perfection, and by noon he had started three batches of Pepper-Up and had the ingredients ready for the fourth one.

He worked at stirring, adding, testing and decanting until he had a neat row of exactly one hundred vials of perfectly concocted potions, all of which would please Madame Pomfrey enough to return to at least a polite level, or so he thought.

It was only when he was returning to his quarters after having delivered his day's work that he realized he hadn't had time for lunch or supper, but he was too tired to go to the kitchen now. Besides, when he opened the door, he lost all his appetite with a single look.

He realized that instant that Minerva still hadn't forgiven him for his role in the war.

The only comfort was that his new roommate was as shocked as he was.

"What do you think you're doing?" Lupin thundered, rising up from the couch where he was playing with his son.

Severus felt rage filling him like never before.

“I,” he snarled, noticing that it made the small infant start, “am going to my quarters.”

He didn’t even leave the werewolf time to reply before striding to his room and slamming the door closed.

He seethed, disrobing and climbing on the bed, hiding under the covers and muttering on the injustice of it all.



The next morning when he woke up, he prayed it had only been a bad, bad dream, but the wailing coming from the room next to his told him it had been his usual shitty reality.

The war started just then. There was only one bathroom, after all, and the wolf seemed to be an early riser just like himself.

As soon as Severus started snarling about needing the bathroom he heard muttering about never having known Severus knew the proper use for a shower.

Severus stopped himself from hexing the man just because he had his son in his arms.

He managed to take the first turn anyway, suddenly sidestepping the man and locking the door behind himself. He took the longest shower ever, a bit sad that the castle had an endless supply of hot water. He would have loved to see the man showering under an icy cold spray.

He didn’t waste time with breakfast, going straight to his lab, where he had still a lot of work to do. Pomfrey had been, if not enthusiastic, at least grateful for the potions, and had compiled a list of the other ointments she needed, which was unsurprisingly large, seeing as most of the castle’s stock had been used to cure the people injured after the battle.

Severus was glad to have something to do that required his full concentration; it kept him from thinking about his new roommate. Roommates, actually, although the child, Severus admitted grouchy, hadn’t been as much as a nuisance as his parent.

It seemed to be quiet and well behaved, but he was still the son of a Marauder, and Severus couldn’t trust him to be any better.

He didn’t want to go to Minerva and request a change of rooms though, because he knew she would look at him with that damned superior look and tell him to stop acting like a child.

Not that he was, he just wanted to be left in peace. Hell, he’d prefer to be Hagrid’s roommate, than the werewolf’s.

At least the gigantic man knew when to shut up and stay in his place.

But he could manage it. After all, he didn’t need to stay in the rooms all the day, since he’d be busy brewing. A couple of hours in the evening wouldn’t be too hard to bear, if the werewolf kept to himself.

He worked for twelve hours straight, before weariness hit him, and he cleaned up the counters after the last vial was screwed shut and retired for the night, fearing what he would find when he got to his quarters.

Thankfully the quarters were silent, and he released his breath. But already there were signs of another occupant in the room. The child’s toys were scattered all around, there was a vase of flowers on the coffee table and photos on the mantle, some of which represented people Severus didn’t even want to think about again, and the books on the bookshelf had doubled in quantity and were now sorted by subject instead of alphabetically.

It took him all of seven minutes to sort the books appropriately again, banish the toys in a chest in the right corner of the room and put the photos face-down.

The vase of flowers he left alone, it smelled quite nice, after all.

He sat in front of the fire and Accioed the last Potions Quarterly from his bedroom, starting a bit when a *pop* at his left announced the arrival of a house elf.

“The Headmistress sent Mukky to bring Master Snape dinner, sir.” The elf let the platter on the coffee table, and disappeared without another word.

Snape munched on a sandwich while reading, sighing in bliss.

He’d missed just sitting in a chair and reading, without having to wonder if the next day he would be alive.

The door opened suddenly, and there Lupin was, staring angrily at him, his son almost asleep in his arms. He must have noticed the absence of toys and the photo frames, because his lips were pursed, but he took a look at his sleeping son, threw a glare in Severus’ direction and strode to his bedroom.

Snape smirked, hoping the man had learned his lesson, and went to bed himself.



The next morning he woke up to find the photos back up again and glued to the mantle with a powerful sticking charm, the books arranged in no order whatsoever and, thankfully, no sign of toys anywhere. Three minutes later,

the books were in their proper place, the photo frames had been obscured and Severus was in the bathroom, taking a shower. He'd woken up half an hour before his usual time just to be sure not to meet the werewolf, and he was glad when he went out to the lab and everything was still quiet.

He needed to brew more Skele-gro today, and it was quite a difficult potion, almost as long to prepare and as difficult as- Damn.

It dawned on Severus that moment that, if the werewolf was to stay at school, he needed to brew the Wolfsbane potion. As if he hadn't anything better to do!

Well, the potion *was* an interesting one, so Severus didn't really mind brewing it. It was the why that irked him, always had, even when the damned fool Albus had hired the wolf to teach. However, Minerva still hadn't told him anything about that, and he wouldn't do it unless asked.

Fourteen hours later, the Skele-gro was ready, the vials labeled, the laboratory clean and Severus was falling asleep on the counter.

He was so tired that he didn't even notice the dinner plate left at the coffee table, nor the missing books, until he stumbled upon them when entering his bedroom.

It was too late, and the baby would probably be asleep, so Severus didn't tear into the other room screaming bloody murder. He just conjured a temporary bookshelf for his bedroom, placed his books there, then sent a simple, nasty hex that misplaced all the pages in the books Lupin had left in the common room and went to bed with a satisfied sigh.



The next day, he found the bathroom already occupied.

He snarled, but it all went away when the werewolf smiled falsely at him and wished him a good day when he came out, a good half hour later. Severus had spent that time drawing crude, obscene but hard to notice symbols all around the photo frames, and if Lupin wasn't angry with him it meant he hadn't found the hex on his books yet.

Severus smirked to himself during his shower, and was in an enough good mood to drink a whole cup of tea and have a croissant for breakfast.

That was when the baby woke up, which was his cue to leave.

Only, the child's cries seemed off today, like he had some trouble breathing, and he heard a small cough. *'Must be catching a cold'*, thought Severus, and after an exhausting day bending over his cauldrons he returned to his quarters with a bottle of cough syrup to help with the oncoming illness.

When he arrived, Lupin wasn't anywhere in sight. The child, however, was playing in his playpen, a protecting charm surrounding it, unsupervised.

Severus snorted to himself. "Such an unfortunate child you are," Severus informed the infant, shaking his head. "You don't even know yet how unlucky you've been with the sort of parents fate has chosen for you."

The baby had turned at Severus' voice, probably fascinated by the low rumble, and was now looking at him with a bit of a runny nose and a chew toy stuffed in his mouth.

Severus frowned and cleaned the baby's face with a flick of his wand, which, strangely, made the baby giggle, and conjured a spoon. "Now be a good boy, put that thing away and open your mouth."

The boy, used to being fed with a spoon by now, opened his mouth obediently, attracted probably to what was the nice smell of this batch he'd modified just to make the baby more amenable to take it.

The spoon was almost in the boy's mouth when a growl made Severus startle, and both the spoon and the vial fell to the floor, the spoon bouncing until it finished under the sofa and the vial crashing in a thousand little pieces, the goo inside splashing all over the ground.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing?" screamed an angry, red-faced Remus Lupin.

Snape noticed immediately the threatening posture, the nails planted in the cover of a book on counter-curses the man held in his hands, and the white teeth bared in a growl.

A shiver ran down his spine.

"Get away from him, you filthy bastard!"

Severus was taken aback for a moment, but then it dawned on him who he was talking to. Of course, how could he have forgotten? Ugly, filthy Snivellus had no place going near the spawn of a precious Gryffindor.

He got up, banishing the mess in a matter of seconds, and gave a last disdainful look at the infant, whose lower lip was trembling slightly.

"You will pay for this," he told the beast in a glacial whisper.

"Go near him one more time and I'll rip you limb from limb, I swear." The man was practically frothing at the mouth, Severus noted with disgust. "And don't you dare tamper with my books again!"

"Likewise Lupin," he snarled, closing the door on the werewolf's face.

He'll learn, Severus thought maliciously as he stripped for bed. And this time Severus would do absolutely nothing.



Theodore got sick two days after that accident.

Severus could hear coughs coming from the closed door, and the soft crying of a child who was too little to understand why his body felt so hot and he couldn't breathe properly.

There wasn't a single cough potion to be found in the whole school, since it wasn't the season, and those Severus had brewed three days before had mysteriously disappeared. Severus had used a lot of key ingredients for other potions, which made brewing a new batch impossible. It was a pity that the war had caused so many shops, apothecaries included, to close for reparations.

Severus enjoyed three very peaceful evenings by the fire undisturbed, the Silencing spell protecting him from any noises. He didn't feel even the tiniest bit guilty about it.

When Theodore started showing signs of recovery and was allowed out of his quarters again, Severus started to retire early for bed, so that he didn't have to interact with his roommates anymore.

It was almost bearable, considering he used his Potions lab as a refuge and stayed there most of the day. He missed the desk in his studio when he needed to take notes about the improvement he was trying to obtain from the experimental potions he was making, but the counters would suffice, and the room was blessedly silent.

Two weeks went by without further accidents.

Lupin had finally realized how drafty the castle was and put proper socks on his son's feet, Severus' books were safe and sound in the new bookshelf he'd asked a house elf to put in his studio, replacing the hearth, and re-stocking the Infirmary was well on its way to being finished.

He'd really missed brewing in his year as Headmaster, and now that he had free time he could finally read all the books he'd wanted to, and start tinkering with ideas he'd wanted to try for years.

It wasn't until the start of July, when Minerva came to remind him that she'd like to have his Potions schedule ready for the end of the month that it really hit Severus fully that he'd come back to the school to teach.

It was like a cold shower that took away most of his good mood.

He decided to leave the lab alone and for a while he concentrated on making an appropriate schedule. The

most difficult part was planning a decent Seventh Year's course, since a lot of the past Seventh Year's students would come back to repeat the year and sit their NEWTs, and it came out that the Golden Trio would be there too.

The thought caused Severus an headache; he hadn't seen nor spoken to Potter since that day at the Shack, even if he knew he owed his freedom to the young man. He didn't exactly know how to face the boy anymore, and he'd hoped never having to again, but he knew how what he wanted and what actually would happen never coincided.

Planning for a course that wouldn't be boring to those who had already taken the class and not too challenging for those who hadn't wasn't an easy task at all.

Severus had been at it for three days now, looking for the right potions and trying to rectify the mess Slughorn had made with his leniency and the flashy but totally useless potions he liked to teach.

He'd felt irritated and tired, having to focus at this difficult but awfully boring task, and the headache hadn't lifted for a minute. The fact that he'd had to leave his potions sanctuary and go back to the constant presence of one of the most annoying men on earth contributed to his bad mood.

Today especially, when a headache potion hadn't done anything but cause him a stomachache, he wanted to crawl under the covers and hide until the school year was done.

A sudden bang distracted him from the parchment he was writing on. He'd forgotten to cast the Silencing charm, but that was not a reason for allowing the other people in the quarters to do what they wanted unstopped.

The banging persisted, and Severus started to grow irritated. He got up, ready to give Lupin a piece of his mind about respecting one's roommates, but when he opened the door the only thing he found was a toddler enthusiastically hitting the walls of his playpen with a rattle.

Severus raised an eyebrow and put his hands on his hips. "Lupin!" he called, when it became clear that the boy was alone in the room. Severus scowled at the baby who had stopped his banging.

"Alone again, are we?" he said, menacingly.

The baby giggled.

The raised eyebrow was joined by its companion. "You find this funny, don't you?" He advanced, towering on the small child. The boy just opened his arms and wriggled, as if he wanted Severus to pick him up.

"Surely you don't think I'm going to let you dirty my robes with spit and snot? Where is your high and mighty parent? Why did he leave you alone again?"

Noting that Severus didn't seem to want to pick him up, Theodore resumed his game, banging his rattle more cheerfully, which sent a fresh wave of pain up Severus' skull.

Severus grimaced, and reached for the boy, speaking loudly to counteract the noise of the banging. "I'm going to pick you up," he said, reaching for the toy that the boy was waving madly about and missing, "but you have to—" another near miss, but his hand finally closed on the handle and pried the toy gently from pudgy little fingers, "stop this infernal banging this inst—"

The next moment Severus was blinded by pain, an excruciating wave of it starting from his skull and spreading down his spine, due to the blunt force with which Lupin had slammed him into the wall. The hand on his throat was squeezing painfully and making him dizzy with the lack of oxygen. Severus found he wasn't able to move a muscle, fear paralyzing every cell of his body.

"I warned you not to come close to my son again," the werewolf whispered, strengthening his hold and slamming him against the wall again.

Severus was sure he was about to be killed then and there, strangled with bare hands, but the lack of air was making him lose his consciousness, which would make the whole process of dying a lot less painful.

A wailing pierced the room, and suddenly Severus found himself sprawled on the floor, his hip hurting from the sudden impact, gasping for breath while Lupin went to pick up his son.

He wasted no time in getting up and running away, forgetting dignity and everything else. He slammed the door of the lab open, glad he hadn't met anyone on his way there, locked it with every warding charm he knew and emptied the meager contents of his stomach in the first empty cauldron he could find. He kept retching and heaving until his breath went back to normal.

His throat stung like mad, and the scar was burning, not to mention the ache in his back and the swelling feeling from the back of his head, but the only thing in his mind were memories of all the times he'd been beaten up by brutal physical force, starting from his childhood, passing through his school years and coming back to this moment.

He thought it would stop, that he had given enough, just enough to be left alone for the rest of his life.

He didn't want anything else, medals, accolades, recognition... he'd left all that behind the day Albus had asked to be murdered. He knew what he'd done, what had to be done, and he'd been ready to be tried for his sins and thrown to prison or die, but he couldn't handle this.

He didn't want to live again with the fear of being attacked when the mood struck, by whomever felt entitled to give the Death Eater scum a lesson.

He wanted... He wanted to go away.

But away where?

It wasn't as if his knowledge of the Muggle world would allow him to support himself if he left the Wizarding community, and the money from the house wouldn't last that long, but he couldn't hope to find employment anywhere in the Wizarding community either. This job offer had been a blessing in itself, a chance to earn his keep while the world around him could forget, or at least learn not hate him too much for what he had to do.

But like this... no, not like this. It shouldn't have to be like this. He shouldn't have to struggle once again to live without injuries to his body or his pride. He'd had enough of that during his school years, and he wasn't a boy anymore. He was a man, tired and old beyond his years, and he didn't have the strength to keep up with that kind of battle.

But what should he do, then?

His gaze fell on the nearest table, where one of his notebooks had been forgotten, the shiny black letter creating a nice contrast with the Slytherin crest embedded in the center.

Suddenly, everything became a lot clearer.

Severus got up from the floor where he was sitting, and vanished the mess in the cauldron and on his clothes, mending the fabric that had been torn apart by the manhandling and wincing at the pain in his skull.

He touched the place where he felt a bump forming and his fingers came away bloody. Just the sight made him dizzy again, but he got a hold of himself and went in search of a pain potion and a salve for his bruises and that damn scar.

It didn't take much to heal himself, a couple of bruises and a bump to the head were nothing compared to a punishing session from the Dark Lord after all, and after applying a salve that left his throat unblemished save for the scar, he went in search of an empty classroom with a fireplace and some Floo powder in which the Floo connection was still working.

A few seconds later a blond, almost white-haired woman appeared between the flames.

"Severus, is that you?" Narcissa Malfoy exclaimed, visibly surprised.

"Good afternoon, Narcissa. I'm sorry to bother you, but I need to speak with your husband."

"I'm afraid he's not available at the moment," she said, her beautiful face saddening for just a second. "He's... helping the Aurors with their investigation." It was clear that wasn't the whole truth, but Severus didn't think he should pry too much into the matter. It was well enough that Lucius was still a free man, after all. "I can help too, if you like. I haven't forgotten that I owe you, Severus."

Severus *had* forgotten. The Unbreakable Vow had meant more to Narcissa than to him, and he'd had too much to juggle after making it to think about claiming old debts.

But it seemed that Narcissa had remembered, and was eager to repay him.

"Very well. I was wondering... do you happen to have any tents? Even old ones, or small ones? You know, the ones used for camping? You've probably seen them during the Quidditch World Cup."

Narcissa was clearly taken aback by the request. She was probably expecting a totally different kind of favor.

"I think we did have one or two, from when Draco was around three or four years old, and he wouldn't stop bothering Lucius until we bought one and had a camping experience in the farthest corner of the garden," she said, her eyes softening at the mention of her son.

She seemed to recover quickly, and snapped her fingers. "Dotty! Please fetch me the tents that I had you hide in the dungeons last February. Excuse me, Severus, I'll have them in a minute," she said smiling. "I had to make sure they didn't fall into the wrong hands."

Severus nodded, understanding perfectly. "Thank you, just one will be more than enough."

"Oh, don't worry, it's not like we're going to need them for camping anytime soon, after all. Draco is coming to school in a month and Lucius will be busy for a long time, it seems, so you can do whatever you want with them. Oh, here they are," Narcissa said, and forced two small packages through the flames.

Severus took them, pleased to see that they seemed to be in pristine condition. "Thank you, Narcissa, you've been very kind."

"Don't mention it, Severus. Slytherins help their own," Narcissa said, with a tone that brooked no argument, and made him understand he had at least one ally in the world.

"I'll be sure to give them back to you in a perfect state when I'm done. Send my regards to Lucius and to Draco too, even if I'll see him soon enough. I'll make sure to keep you informed about his progress with his school-work, as usual. Thanks again, Narcissa."

"Take care, Severus," she replied, and then the Floo connection was broken. Severus straightened and set to opening the two tents.

The first one seemed a bit too childish, probably belonging to Draco, since it had little kneazels and crups that chased each other on the outside, but the second one was pure Lucius.

The outside was a deep green velvet with silver trimming, and the Malfoy crest was artfully embroidered on the sides.

It was self-installing, too, and after Severus had found the perfect spot, at the far end of the storeroom of the lab, he set it down and took a look inside.

It was better than everything he'd ever hoped for. The bed was a luxurious four poster, it had a nice, solid mahogany desk paired with a small bookshelf, what seemed to be a very comfortable armchair and the pavement was a giant carpet of a green so dark it could be mistaken for black. It even seemed to have a weather charm that kept it at a constant temperature, and, wonder of wonders, a small bathroom with all the required necessities.

In a word, it was *perfect*.

Severus fell on the bed face down, and let exhaustion sweep his worries away.

He woke up in the middle of the night, the perfect time to enact the second part of his plan.

The castle was deserted, and he made sure not to make any noise when he entered his shared quarters. Everything seemed to be in place, in the main room and in his, and not a sound could be heard from the other bedroom. He cast a strong Muffliato all over his room and, for the second time in less than a month, packed his things with a lighter heart.

When he closed the main door behind himself he sighed, relieved.

Maybe he could finally find some peace.



The next day, for the first time in a long time, Severus woke up without headaches.

He started to diligently compile his lesson plans after he set two batches of Pepper-up. He intended to brew as much as he could during this summer so he won't be forced to give up his free time during the school year. He already had projects he wanted to work on. First of all a salve to stop that damn scar from being so sensitive, or, better yet, to remove it entirely.

He didn't mind how ugly it looked, but the constant tingling when it came in contact with anything drove him

crazy. It had even gotten worse after the werewolf had- No, that train of thought wouldn't do.

Severus concentrated on his lesson plans, sipping with pleasure the hot tea he'd conjured from the kitchen.



His peace lasted almost a full week.

He knew he was a fool to have thought it would have worked out in the end, but still, life hadn't been able to quash those tiny sparks of hope he got every once in a while. As always, reality crashed down on him like a ton of bricks.

Or, this time, like a scorned Scottish woman.

He was experimenting with a new batch of Skele-gro that would hopefully mitigate the pain of bone regrowth when he heard a sharp rap at the door, followed by a violent opening of the door itself.

"Severus!" the Headmistress' voice scolded, "I've been searching for you for more than half an hour! Would you care to explain where the hell you have been?"

"As you can see, Minerva, I was here," the Potions Master answered calmly, adding a pinch of ground orchid leaves and stirring clockwise three times.

"Oh, don't think you can use that tone with me, Severus! I went to look for you yesterday evening in your quarters and Remus told me you weren't there. Then I tried this morning and after lunch but still nothing... Have you been spending all your time holed up here?" the Headmistress inquired, sending a reproving look all around the room.

"I'm brewing, as you can see. I'm working on a special potion that needs constant attention."

"Well, suit yourself. I just need to revise your Potions lesson plans, if you don't mind. It was due yesterday, that's why I was looking for you."

Oh, right. Severus had finished it earlier than he thought possible, but he'd completely forgotten to deliver it, engrossed as he was in his new experiments.

"I'll have them ready for you in a while then. Let me finish this, I'll be with you shortly."

The Headmistress didn't seem impressed, clearly at the limit of her patience. "I'd like to have them now, please," she demanded, gesturing towards the door.

Damn and blast. He couldn't give her the schedule now. He'd left them on his desk in the tent, and he didn't want her to discover that he hadn't been living in his quarters for days just yet. The school term was still three weeks away, and he didn't want to lose his haven so soon.

"I said I'm almost done, woman! Can't you just wait for five more minutes and leave me alone?"

Uh-oh. He really shouldn't have raised his voice. That glare promised nothing good.

"Accio Severus' lesson plans!" Minerva whispered maliciously, waving her wand.

Severus clenched his fists and closed his eyes when a thump came from the storage room and the door opened, sheets of parchment flowing in the Headmistress' direction.

Minerva raised an eyebrow. "Your storage room, Severus? What were your lesson plans doing there?"

"I must have forgotten them last time I went to check for an ingredient," he lied, unsuccessfully.

"Is that how it is?" the Headmistress advanced toward the storage room, and Severus tried to stop her, but it only took a look from her to get out of her way.

She took a look at the inside of the room and gasped. "A tent? You've been living in a tent? Tell me, since when has this been going on?" she gestured, furious, towards his refuge.

"Not that long, just a couple of days. I don't see what's the problem with it, actually," he answered, getting defensive.

"You don't see what- Listen, Severus, I gave you one of the best accommodations in the whole castle. What's so wrong with your rooms? Are they too small? Too cold? Too warm? Is it just because they're four floors away from your potions lab? Or is... ? It's Remus, isn't it? You left your quarters because you didn't get on?" Minerva calmed all of a sudden, clearly exasperated. "Is that true, Severus? You really prefer hiding in a tent than share quarters with him?" The tone with which she said it, full of disappointment, made Severus see red.

"Yes, if you really want to know!" he snarled. "What possessed you to put me in the same living space as him to begin with? What were you thinking?"

"I," Minerva paused to exhale very loudly. "I was thinking I hired two competent, qualified teachers who should be adult enough to avoid getting in the other's way at every opportunity and making fools of themselves over schoolboy grudges--"

"This has nothing, *nothing* to do with schoolboy grudges! I'm tired of having to defend myself from what I did when I was a stupid teenager, while anyone else has already been forgiven and patted on the back for it, so don't you dare make this about that. The way he acted last week--"

“You two had a squabble? I don’t think this is your first one, and you don’t seem much worse for wear Severus. I assume you suffered a lot more during the war. We all did, but that’s not a reason to try and exaggerate a single episode!”

Severus paled and closed his eyes. His next words were deadly calm, but he delivered them with the intention to cut as deep as they could.

“I see, so this is how it’s going to be from now on. Well, Minerva, I hope you’re pleased. You fill the shoes of your beloved predecessor perfectly.”

The Headmistress stepped back, her face a mask of pain, but Severus couldn’t care less. He turned and strode towards the door.

“Severus, wait!” Minerva exclaimed, and took him by the wrist to stop him from running away. “Severus I’m sorry, I...” she suddenly stopped, as if something was wrong. “Severus...?” she said, her voice inquisitive.

She started groping him, for lack of a better word. “What...” she said, when she touched his bicep, and then she put a hand on his chest and ribs.

Severus was flabbergasted. Was Minerva caressing him? The mere notion was ludicrous. He tried to take his hand away but Minerva wouldn’t budge.

“Severus Tobias Snape!” Ouch. This was definitely not going to end well. “What the hell are you doing to yourself?”

“What are you on about now?” Really, this was bordering on insane.

“I’m taking you to Poppy, immediately.”

“What? What for? I’m fine, I-” but he was already being dragged down the corridor and towards the infirmary.

“You’re fine? Have you seen yourself in a mirror, recently?”

Severus scowled, still being led by the wrist, which, by the way, hurt. “I know perfectly well how I look, thank you.”

“Really.”

By, now, they’d reached the infirmary, where Poppy looked a bit surprised and frightened at their arrival. “Minerva...?” her voice questioned.

“General scan, Poppy”, Minerva ordered, almost throwing Severus at the Medi-witch. Poppy took one look at him, blinked, then frowned.

“I think I’d better get a full check-up.”

Severus tried to complain. “I do not consent-”

“Shut up. This is for your own good.”

It took three seconds to get rid of his outer robes and shirt and make him sit on the bed. Severus squawked, embarrassed. His squawk didn’t, however, cover the gasp from the two women.

“Well?” he snapped.

“Severus, look at yourself! You’re practically all skin and bones! When was the last time you had a meal?”

Severus stopped and looked at himself. He didn’t think he looked much different from usual.

“Yesterday night, I think...”

“You *think*?” Minerva was now pacing at the side of his bed, looking furious.

Poppy, meanwhile was passing her wand all over his body. She tut-ted frequently, shaking his head. “I think it was at least a couple of days.”

“How is this possible? Albus warned me that you often forgot to eat, so I made sure Mucky left meals for you when you didn’t come to lunch or dinner - lunch and dinner, and breakfast, now that I think of it. Why didn’t you eat it?”

“I... I simply wasn’t hungry,” he replied stubbornly. The truth was he really hadn’t been. He had never been a big eater, and he was used to go on for days on adrenaline alone when he was a spy. Or when he was engrossed in new projects.

“No, you didn’t because you weren’t there, and you didn’t even see them! Mucky had the order to put the meals in your quarters, where you could see them, and she didn’t know, as I didn’t, that you weren’t living there anymore! Well this has gone on long enough! For the next week you’re going to be on bed rest, you will eat every meal, down every potion Poppy sees fit to fix your health, and you’re going to live in your quarters!”

“I don’t-”

“Don’t you dare complain, Severus! You can’t stay in that tent any longer! School term is about to start in a couple of weeks, what will you do then? Get out of bed and greet your class? Or what about when Slytherin students need counseling? Are you going to make them comfortable between cauldrons and ladles, or maybe invite them into your tent for a cup of tea?”

“I...”

Well, she wasn’t completely wrong. He hadn’t considered this aspect; he’d only wanted to be left in peace for a while. It seemed a week was all he would get.

He let himself being prodded and poked and turned upside down until Pomfrey was satisfied to let him go. Then Minerva forcefully marched him to his quarters.

Sadly not the ones he liked.

When she opened the door she found Lupin playing with his son in front of the fire; both jumped at the glare the Headmistress sent them.

"Severus, take care of the baby. Remus, I need to speak with you. No objections," she clarified when Lupin was about to open his mouth.

Severus sat on the couch near the baby while Minerva almost dragged Lupin in his private rooms, and, after making sure little Theodore was all right with his toys, cast a charm on the door and listened to the conversation.

"... know anything about why Severus isn't living in these rooms anymore?"

"How would I know, we're not friends -"

"I heard something about a fight, is that right?"

"Always the snitch," the werewolf snorted.

"Really. So, pray tell, what exactly happened? And don't lie to me, Remus, you know I can see it from a mile away."

"Well..." was that a meek tone? Did the werewolf really sound... cowed? "He was trying to hurt Teddy-"

"Hurt Teddy? I've seen Severus berate, humiliate and punish unfairly a lot of children, Remus, but hurt them? I don't think so." This gave Severus a warm feeling in his chest; being defended was a very strange experience for him since the time his friendship with Lily had died.

"Well, he was!" insisted the werewolf. "He was gripping Teddy's rattle like he wanted to hit Teddy's head with it!"

"That's one of the most ridiculous things I've ever heard, Remus." Severus agreed. "A rattle? And where were you at the time?"

"I... I went down the hall to take a book from the library, to get my lesson plans ready!"

Severus could almost *hear* Minerva's eyes rolling.

"So, you left your son unsupervised for Merlin knows how much time, came back, found Snape holding the baby's rattle and assumed he was out for murder?"

"Well, he was talking about stopping my son from doing I don't know what, so I reacted on instinct..." Did Lupin's voice sound insecure?

"So? What happened, then?"

"I..." a small cough, "I might have slammed him against a wall..."

Minerva didn't say anything for a couple of seconds. Then: "I should have you sacked for that." Her voice was barely a whisper but it made the temperature drop even in the room Severus was staying in.

The werewolf didn't even try to justify himself.

"I'll chalk it all up to the fact that since the end of the war you've been very protective of your son and the full moon was making the wolf in you even more aggressive than usual. From now on, though," her voice was steel, "I'm going to demand complete respect in the relationship with your colleagues. Each and every one of them. Is that clear?"

"Yes," was the subdued reply.

"Good. One last thing. Did you see trays of food lying around in these rooms?"

"Ah, actually yes, I found some often, but I'm still having lunch with Andromeda and dinner with Harry, so you can tell the house elves to stop sending it."

"It wasn't for you," Minerva said, annoyed.

"Oh." Lupin's tone indicated that had understood who they had been for, now. "Well, I vanished them when I found them dry or cold, I didn't think..."

"Well, I'm sure we're all clear of misunderstandings, now, so I expect a peaceful cohabitation and a little more manners. Also, from now on I'm putting you in charge of Severus' health." Severus missed Lupin's answer because he was too busy spluttering. "No buts, Remus. You're in charge of making sure that Severus eats every single one of his meals, at the time they're due each day. Consider this a way to redeem yourself from your temper. And no more complaints, from either of you. Is that understood, Remus? Severus?"

The Potions Master glared at the wall, knowing the Headmistress' eyes were probably twinkling by now. Her expression betrayed nothing however, when she exited the room, exclaimed over the baby and then was gone in a blur of robes.

As soon as the door was closed, Severus was already up and halfway to his room, but Lupin stopped him.

"Snape. Wait." Severus wasn't exactly in the mood for more emotions for the day. He'd already been roughed up enough, but there was nothing he could do about it, so he sighed and turned.

Lupin was looking at him warily, holding his son in his arms, and gritted his teeth before speaking.

"I wanted to apologize. For the other day, I mean."

Well, well, well. The threat of being sacked had really put fear into Lupin. "Really. Apologize for what exactly? Accusing me of being a child murderer or throwing me against the wall?"

"I won't say it again. I've acted out of line, and that's the only thing I'm sorry about. I won't ask you to apologize for your petty tricks since I know you won't, so we'll leave it at that. From now on we can start with a clean

slate, so no more pranks, no more violence and no more cold war.”

The werewolf had actually put his hand out, waiting for Severus to shake it.

Severus raised an eyebrow. “I don’t think anything more than mutual ignorance of the other’s whereabouts is going to work for us, Lupin, so let’s not bother with pretending, all right?” he said, heading once again towards his rooms.

“Always the coward, Severus? Choosing the easier path, running away? I offered you my cooperation and you’re throwing it away because you couldn’t be arsed to act civilly.”

“Says so the man who greeted me with a ‘what the fuck are you doing here’.”

“It was just shock, nothing more. It wasn’t me who messed with the room or stole the shower first thing in the morning.”

“You didn’t have any right to scatter your belongings around the place without even asking for permission!”

“These are my rooms, too, in case you didn’t notice! Just because you don’t have any- Oh, this is going nowhere.” Lupin slumped and cuddled the baby who was starting to get fussy due to the mood in the room. “I don’t want to fight anymore, all right? I have a son to take care of in addition to my teacher duties, and it’s difficult enough as it is. I was mistaken in thinking you wanted to harm him, and I apologize for that. I know I can trust you with children, you didn’t let any of your students get injured when you could avoid it, and I know you wouldn’t really hurt a baby this young, even if it’s mine.”

“It’s all easy and nice for you to say, but you are lying, and you know it.” Severus raised his hand quickly and made as if to touch Theodore’s arm, but Lupin was quicker and stepped away from him snarling.

Severus laughed darkly. “See? You can’t even stand to let me touch him. That shows how much *trust* you have in me. Now please, Lupin, stop trying to be the good, charitable Gryffindor when we both know you don’t give a rat’s arse about this filthy Slytherin bastard.”

Lupin flinched. “You’re still thinking about that? I said it in a moment of anger-”

“You said it, and that’s what matters. Besides, it wasn’t even justified rage. So don’t lecture me about courage and civility, Lupin, when you yourself lack them in the first place.”

“Listen, Severus...” Oh, was it back to a first name basis, now? Lupin sighed and went on. “It’s not you at all. I’ve been this protective about Teddy with almost everyone since Dora... well, since she died. Only Harry and

Andromeda can touch him without the werewolf jumping out; I gave quite a scare to Poppy too when she tried to check on him last week. And since it was the day before the full moon I was even more agitated than usual. Please, for once pretend nothing happened. It wasn’t about you, really.”

“That makes me wonder what would happen if it actually was about me.”

“Oh, sod off!” Lupin scoffed, having probably had enough of pretending, and Severus glared at him.

“You don’t scare me, Severus. You’ve always been overly dramatic, and I think it’s time you stop taking everything as a personal offence. I offered you my apologies and you didn’t accept them, and I don’t think you ever will, so that only means you like to wallow in the concept that people have wronged you so you can continue to act like a prick towards them. Well, suit yourself, if that’s how you want to do it. I’ve more important things to take care off. See you at dinner,” Lupin stated, with a cruel smirk, and then he was off, Merlin knew where, carrying his son possessively against his chest.

Severus stood there, blinking, for a long time. He couldn’t believe the cheek of that man!

Overly dramatic? He? After the life he’d led and all that he’d suffered the werewolf wanted to deny him the right to be upset by people who lived just to make him angry?

... Maybe *that* was a bit overly dramatic, but still! He and Lupin had done nothing but fight since the day they met. Well, actually Lupin mostly watched as the others bullied him, or came up with the pranks themselves, not to mention that one time when he’d actually tried to eat him, so he was far from innocent in Severus’ book.

Severus was perfectly justified in his hate, and the recent episodes just confirmed that.

But since no one seemed to pay him any mind when he complained, he decided to direct his attention to something that could help him cope.



Severus was just finishing the last stir before adding the lemon zest when there was a brief knock on the door, followed by an awful creature and his son bringing what seemed to be a picnic basket.

Severus scowled.

“I’m in the middle of a very delicate potion, Lupin, go away.”

“Dinner time, Severus! Teddy and I bought you dinner!” Ah, how he’d always detested the false cheer in the man’s voice! Also, he hated people who ate in the Potions

classroom. It was dangerous and stupid. Which actually summed up Lupin's character well enough.

The man was setting up a spare table with cutlery and plates, the baby perched on his hip.

As much as Severus wanted to ignore them, he knew how persistently annoying the man could be, so he cast a stasis spell on the potion and went to hang his brewing robes so not to get them dirty or full of crumbs. He'd seen the results of a mistake like that once, and it had been ugly.

"Feel free to join us, Severus," the werewolf joked, before taking a look at him, eyes widening.

"Oh dear, Severus, I see now why Minerva insisted, you look like a scarecrow!" and he added one more sandwich to what Severus supposed was his plate.

The Potions Master scowled. "Thank you, you look dashing yourself."

"Not my doing. But I'll make sure you stopping looking like that. We both will, right love?" he said to his son, scrubbing the boy's belly until Theodore giggled. Lupin tied a bib around the baby's neck and proceeded to feed him, with some effort, a pale pink goo that looked like mashed meat.

"Isn't it a bit too soon to feed the baby real food other than milk?" Severus inquired, curious despite himself, while the baby eagerly swallowed a mouthful of the stuff.

"I think that's my fault, or, more exactly, lycanthropy's fault. His stomach developed faster and he seems to need meat at least twice at week. He's also a big fan of spinach and soup, all properly mashed of course. He still drinks milk each day, though. We were a bit scared at first, Dora and I, but this little fellow has the appetite of a big wolf and can digest everything you give him. He hasn't had a stomachache since he's been born, have you, puppy?" Theodore wasn't interested in replying, busy as he was chasing the spoon Lupin was moving left and right in front of his tiny mouth.

"So he inherited her powers and your stomach. A deadly combination."

"He's a healthy, happy baby, and that's all that matters to me. I hope he stays this way even when he grows up. It won't be easy when he gets a little older and starts to understand things," Lupin said, growing somber.

For the first time in a while Severus actually noticed Lupin was still a grieving man. Losing his wife surely hadn't been easy, and caring for a son all alone wouldn't be either. As annoying as Tonks had been sometimes with her strange tastes and even more questionable manners, she was a good person, and her son should have had the opportunity to know her better.

Lupin was looking at him now, as if understanding what he was thinking, but changed topic quickly enough after looking at his plate.

"You still haven't eaten anything, Severus. Do I have to feed you too, or will you do it on your own? Or better yet, let's call Minerva, I'm sure she will be thrilled to know you aren't obeying her order to stay on bed rest for the week."

"Are you actually threatening me with an old woman, Lupin?"

"I hope she isn't listening to this conversation, Severus, or you'll learn soon enough not to call her old," Lupin smiled, beatifically.

Severus snorted, but reached for a sandwich anyway, because, truth be told, he really didn't want to have to do with Minerva again so soon.

They all finished eating in relative silence, Lupin inhaling four sandwiches while feeding his son, Severus munching and swallowing his two with effort. Lupin cleaned the baby with a wave of his hand and was on his feet as soon as Severus had finished drinking a glass of pumpkin juice.

"Poppy told me to bring you food in small quantities but at least four times a day, until your stomach gets used to eating again. Don't stay too late in the lab because Teddy wants his breakfast almost as soon as the sun rises," Lupin explained, then left without a backward glance.

Severus put on his brewing robes again and took off the stasis spell from the potion, working as quickly as possible to finish it. It wouldn't do to keep a baby waiting. The wailing alone would drive him mad.



Breakfast was a quiet affair. Theodore drank his milk while Lupin nodded off. The man was definitely not a morning person. Severus ate his jam-filled croissant and watched, amused, as a stretch from tiny feet or a little shaking fist made Lupin start and wake up from his dozing state.

Lupin drank a cup of very strong, very dark and very scalding tea to fortify himself for the morning to come and forced Severus to eat an apple too before letting him go on his way.

Severus didn't even have the heart to argue with the man. He was practically asleep on his feet, it wouldn't have been any fun.



Lunch was the first time they had a row. Lupin insisted on going to the Great Hall, Severus wanted to bottle his last

batch of Blood Replenishing Potion, so threats followed insults, shouting followed snarling until a piercing scream cut the air; both men bowed to Teddy's will and Severus sat at the teachers' table glaring daggers, until Minerva looked pointedly at his plate.

It turned out he was going to have an afternoon tea too, accompanied with buttered toast and jam and a freshly woken up Theodore, who drank his milk slowly and peacefully. All of this in the quiet of his rooms, since Severus had foregone brewing for research after being done with the bottling.

Surprisingly, the next weeks passed quietly.

Severus made sure to finish all his brewing before lunch time so they could eat in the Great Hall, and the rest of the time Lupin came to find him with the baby wherever he was. Severus actually felt a little healthier and stronger, even if he insisted he had been fine in the first place when Minerva asked him, but he was less tired when brewing and his nausea and headaches had diminished considerably.

It was proving to be a good arrangement.

It had its up and downs, of course. Like for example, the day before the term was going to start.

Lupin had bought him breakfast in his rooms, while Severus was checking his lesson plans for the last time, and Severus took a look at it and turned away. "I'm not really hungry today."

Lupin looked at him surprised. "Not hungry? Are you feeling ill? Did you get a fever? Or maybe it's a relapse from the--"

"I'm simply not hungry, Lupin," Severus stopped the man's rambling.

"Well," Lupin said, reluctantly, "you know the orders, Severus. You need to eat at least some or Minerva and Poppy will fall upon us like birds of prey. Come on, it's porridge today! The house elves are making it again since the term start tomorrow! Just a couple of spoons--"

"I said I'm not hungry!" snapped the Potions Master.

Teddy whimpered and Lupin went to fuss over the baby until he calmed down. "Nothing's happening love, it's just Severus being a stubborn a- a stubborn wizard, but we'll make sure he behaves, won't we?" Lupin told the baby, who had calmed down and was now suckling happily on his pacifier.

Lupin turned his cheerful smile at him, even if it wasn't really sincere. "You know the rules, Severus. You have to eat. If you won't do it alone, I'll be forced to make you."

"You wouldn't dare," Severus said, and he found himself immobilized to the chair, his head the only part of his

body still able to move. Damn the man, he must have had his wand hidden behind the baby!

"If you don't free me this instant, I swear I--"

"Not in front of the baby, Severus," Lupin said, and put his son on the playpen, before advancing on Severus and sitting near him. The wretched man took a spoonful of porridge and drew near Severus' mouth. Severus promptly jerked his face the other way.

Lupin chuckled "You're worse than Teddy, and he at least has an excuse. Come ooon," Lupin cajoled, pushing the spoon against Severus' lips.

Severus felt so humiliated in that moment, so impotent, with porridge all over his lips and his limbs frozen that the expression on his face must have betrayed him.

"Severus?" Lupin said, taking away the spoon. When he said nothing, Lupin released the spell and tried again. "Severus...?"

"Get out, Lupin."

"You know I can't, I have to make sure you eat, you know the Headmistress--"

"I don't care about the Headmistress. She can fire me, if she wants. I want you out of this room this instant."

"Not until you tell me why you won't eat today."

Severus' rage was slowly taking the place of impotence and Severus snapped. "I said I'm not hungry, and I won't eat, so get out of here before I test how good a Defense Against Dark Arts teacher you are!"

Lupin was taken aback by the threat, and took a step back, in the direction of his son. "I've seen you eat before even if you didn't want to, the past few weeks, just to be left alone. Why are you being so hostile? Did I do something? Do you really feel ill?"

"Would you please stop bothering me with your questions and go away?"

Teddy was starting to get upset, so Lupin bent to retrieve him from the playpen, then turned around to look at Severus. "Not until you answer me."

"Using your son as a shield, Lupin? I didn't think you would lower yourself to that point." Severus said cruelly, hoping it would drive Lupin away, at last.

"I'm not using him as a shield, I know you would never hurt him, nor cast dangerous spells with him in the room, so I don't actually think I need protection right now. So tell me what's wrong."

"Who do you think you are, Lupin? "

"Well, Severus: you can either eat your breakfast or you can tell me why you won't and I will stop bothering you

about it. I actually have all day, and I'm sure you know how stubborn Gryffindors can be."

Severus took a look at the desk, where the porridge still sat cooling, and a shiver of disgust run through his spine. Then he looked at Lupin and felt the same exact feeling, only mixed with annoyance.

"I," he stated with great effort. "don't like porridge."

Lupin was looking at him like he'd grown a second head. "That's it?! You don't like porridge? Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

Severus would have answered with a colorful string of epithets for the man if Lupin hadn't immediately called for a house elf to dispose of the porridge and bring him his usual breakfast of tea, brioches and fruit.

"Honestly, Severus," he said after the elf was gone, "what's with you? And you get angry when people call you overly dramatic! Now eat, so we can both get on with the rest of our day."

Severus didn't want to obey so easily, but he was even more wary of Lupin asking more questions, like why he didn't like porridge or force-feeding upset him so much, since he'd never spoken about some things that had happened his childhood, not even to Lily.

He ate his meal as fast as was possible, while Lupin kept ignoring him in favor of his son.

After he was finished, Lupin apologized for being rude and left him alone until the next meal, which consisted, Severus noticed with surprise, of all his favorite dishes. Lupin must have had a talk with the house elves, which was a very thoughtful thing to do, for a Gryffindor. Neither man commented on it, they just ate in companionable silence, interrupted only by Theodore's occasional squeals.

Then the school term began, and there was much less time for both of them.

Snape was actually dreading his return to the classroom, certain that the students would rebel against him or be lazy and uncaring on purpose, but when he entered his first class, the feared Seventh Year which contained The Boy Who Lived, the Granger chit and the Malfoy scion, he found nothing but well behaved, respectful students that listened and actually took notes.

If Snape had known that near death by snake was the only way students would start to pay attention to his teaching, he would have done it a lot sooner.

Well, maybe not. Potter's rapt, intent gaze was a bit too much.

His first ordeal was over, and he relaxed with the passing hours. No one acted hostilely towards him, and even if there were a few glances now and then, it was perfectly

understandable. He even found one or two promising students in the first year batch, something that hadn't happened in far too long.

He was forced to have lunch in the Great Hall with all the students, as was customary, and Lupin of course decided to sit near him and look pointedly at his plate until he finished the last of his potatoes.

The rest of the day passed in a blur. Severus found he'd missed the routine of teaching.

At the end of his last lesson, after he'd made sure everything was spotless in the lab, he returned to his quarters, only to find them invaded by yet another Gryffindor.

Potter was there, making Theodore bounce on his lap, but raised his head as soon as Snape entered and greeted him politely. Severus nodded, then went to his room and warded the door, before casting a spell that would allow him to hear any conversation in the other room.

"I still can't believe they put me with him," Lupin was whispering.

"If you want, we can exchange quarters," replied Potter, sounding almost eager, "the Eight Years have to sleep in the same dorm - all the male ones I mean - so I'm stuck with Malfoy. Can you believe that?"

"You'd change Malfoy for Snape?" Remus inquired, shocked.

"Oh, Snape is all right. He passes all his time in the lab or the classroom from what I hear, and there's only the two of you for sharing the bathroom. I don't see how this is so bad," Harry shrugged.

"Well. If you put it that way..."

"No, really, you should hear how loud he snores, Remus! It's enough to make the walls tremble! Not to mention how long he takes in the shower every morning..." The boy had a point. Severus had the same complaints about Draco when living with him in Spinner's End after they fled from the castle.

Lupin chuckled, amused.

"Besides, Snape is a hero, and I think he's a very interesting person. My mum thought so too, or she wouldn't have befriended him," Potter stated.

"I never understood what Lily could possibly see in him. He was always so surly and alone, while she was always happy and caring..."

"Maybe she could see what he had hidden inside," Potter answered in such a soppy tone that Severus wanted to bang his head on the wall.

"Maybe," Lupin acknowledged, "but I hardly think he's going to let me have a look, too."

Severus snorted to himself. As if the werewolf would even care!

“You should try stopping from throwing him against the walls, for starters, maybe he would be more amenable,” Potter scolded the other man, and Severus’ mouth dropped open. Who else knew? More specifically, who else had Minerva told? Her knowing seemed worse than making the front page in the Daily Prophet!

“I already apologized for that, Harry. It wasn’t my intention, really. I don’t have anything in particular against Severus, even if he thinks so. After you explained to me his role in the war I was angry for a while because it was partly his fault if Lily and James died, but then I came to the conclusion that he has more than atoned for it. I’m afraid old habits die hard, anyway, and I may have been a tad more hostile towards him than necessary, which he didn’t take very well.”

Severus sneered. ‘A tad more hostile’, indeed.

“But it wasn’t all my fault,” the werewolf continued. “He’s not an easy man to live with, even if he doesn’t snore and his showers are of normal length. I have to admit that spending time together, however, I’m starting to change my opinion about him

“Well,” Potter said, with a happier tone, “I hope you sort out your differences. Mum would want to see you both happy, I’m sure of it. Just like she is in these photos.”

A couple of seconds passed, in which probably they both were staring at the pictures on the mantle. Suddenly Potter’s voice broke the silence.

“Uhm, Remus?” Potter asked, obviously perplexed by something. “Where exactly did you find these frames? They’re... sort of weird...”

“What? Oh, Andromeda gave them to me. They look fine enough, I think.”

“Andromeda did?!” The boy sounded shocked, and suddenly Severus remembered.

“What’s wrong, Harry? Here, let me have a look...” Uhh. “SEVERUS!!!”

Severus smirked and feigned sleep.



The next day at breakfast he bit on his croissant and found it full of hot chili sauce. He didn’t retaliate, fully aware that he’d deserved it, but that didn’t stop him from smirking at Potter during his next lesson.



A month went by, and Severus started to relax. Things were going smoothly; classes still had some mishaps,

here and there, but nothing unusual. His fellow professors seemed to have gotten past their initial coldness, even if it never went over mutual respect, and Lupin had actually been tolerable, mostly keeping to himself and reminding him politely to eat at every meal time.

He actually came out to be an interesting person, if you ignored the past animosity, the slamming on walls and the fact that he was a Gryffindor.

During their forced mealtimes together they started to chat, sometimes about teaching, sometimes about their research (Lupin was trying to write a book on werewolves that for once told the truth about them), and they discovered they didn’t clash opinions so often as he’d thought. Lupin was well read and had a quick mind, and Severus liked that in a person.

He was also relieved to see that Lupin’s protective issues towards his son were calming down. Just a couple of weeks before he growled or showed his teeth to every student or staff member who approached Theodore without permission, which could be fun to watch, especially because after sniping at them Lupin would act all flustered and apologetic.

Lately the man had even started to allow students (mainly the Golden Trio or Longbottom and Lovegood) to carry the baby for a while, even if always under his watchful eyes.

It made Severus feel better, somehow, that Lupin’s violent reaction a couple of months ago hadn’t really been caused by the fact that it was Severus touching his son, but from the protective and dangerous instincts of something Lupin couldn’t entirely control.

Now it was a Friday night, and Severus was looking forward to a fitful night’s sleep and maybe some oversleeping in the next morning, when the crying started. And went on. And on. And on.

Severus could have put a Silencing charm on his walls, but Theodore had never cried that long before and he was intrigued despite himself at the fact that Lupin still hadn’t managed to soothe the baby. He put on his dressing gown and went to knock on the other man’s door.

Lupin opened it, looking frazzled and on the verge of panic.

“Severus, what- Oh, damn, I forgot to cast the Silencing spell! I’m sorry if we woke you up, I’ll cast one now so you can go back to sleep.”

Severus heard that only because he was very close, since the baby’s wailing had never stopped and was getting worse.

“Stop fidgeting, Lupin, and tell me what’s wrong with your son.”

“Oh. He’s... well, he’s teething and it’s hurting him, and I’ve tried almost everything Molly Weasley told me to try but he keeps crying until he falls asleep exhausted, which makes him nervous for the rest of the day, so he cries some more and never seems to stop. I don’t really know what to do anymore, I just hope this ends soon for both our sakes,” Lupin explained, clearly exhausted himself.

Severus noticed the sunken and bloodshot eyes of both father and son. Teddy was chewing on a moist cloth but it didn’t seem to do much for his pains.

“Teething, isn’t it?” Severus remembered reading something like that in one of his books.

He turned on his heels and went to his chambers, where it took him fifteen minutes to find the book in question. Since he’d been woken up he’d decided to put his time to better use; he strode to the lab still in his nightgown, and had the pleasure to take 20 points off Gryffindor for finding the Golden Boy out after curfew (no expelling, sadly, since the boy was now of age and could stay up as much as he liked, but he had to do it in his own dorm).

Forty-five minutes later he had three jars of salve ready, and was knocking again on Lupin’s door, from which not a sound escaped, but Severus could clearly feel the magical shield raised around it.

Lupin opened the door and Severus could hear pained hiccups again, coming from the cot where the baby lay. He thrust one jar none too gently at Lupin.

“You should try this,” he said, only then realizing that Lupin could refuse his help or think once again Severus was trying to hurt his son, but Lupin had been a lot more relaxed with him in the past month, and Severus hoped he would try, at least for his son’s sake.

Lupin looked at the jar with sleepy, unfocused eyes, and Severus snorted.

“Rub some on the baby’s gums, it should stop the swelling and the pain, and hopefully the need to bite everything in sight. If it doesn’t work I could brew a bland sleeping potion modified for a baby his age, so you both can rest.”

Lupin seemed horrified at the idea of drugging his son, but he opened the jar as fast as he could and bent over the baby, rubbing some of the ointment gently on the red gums with a clean cloth. Theodore wailed for a couple more seconds, then hiccupped once or twice, gave a great sigh and relaxed on the bed, blinking slowly with sleep and finally succumbing to a well-deserved rest.

Lupin was staring alternatively between his son and the jar in amazement. “I’m amazed,” he said, finally, raising his head to look at Severus. “You are a genius.”

“Good of you to finally notice, Lupin,” Severus replied with a sarcastic tone, a bit embarrassed at the compliment. “Now go to sleep yourself, and don’t forget to reapply the salve every twelve hours.”

Two days later Severus was welcomed at breakfast by an overenthusiastic werewolf. “Look, Severus, look!” The man was saying, holding out his son towards Severus.

Severus looked at Lupin, then at the baby who was kicking his feet in the air but seemed mostly unimpressed. “What now?”

“Come on, Teddy, show him!” Since the baby didn’t seem interested in anything else than his fist, Lupin said: “Scratch his belly, Severus!”

“What? Why? I will do no such thing!”

“Scratch it and you’ll see!”

Severus extended his hand warily, curious in spite of himself, and tentatively poked at the baby’s stomach with his fingers.

The baby wriggled and giggled, smiling his toothless smile- oh. Not so toothless anymore. A tiny white line of a tooth was showing, and Lupin looked like the proudest man on the face of the earth.

“It came out tonight! He didn’t even wake up once, and when he did, there it was! Isn’t he the best little man you’ve ever met?”

Lupin was so taken with his son that Severus didn’t have the courage to mock him, so he just ate his breakfast making approving noises while Lupin kept talking about his son.

After that, Lupin was a lot less wary of leaving his son alone with Severus for small periods when he needed to look for a book or use the bathroom.

Even if the baby stayed always in his playpen, the mere fact that Lupin left him while he went in another room was significant enough. Of course Lupin never asked Severus to watch out for his son, but if they were both in the common room, Lupin would ask his son to behave while he was away and just go, which meant he was leaving to Severus the task to make sure the baby didn’t hurt himself.

Severus never approached the baby of his own initiative, though. He’s learned his lesson, plus he didn’t like babies that much. True, they could be entertaining, especially at this age, when they were eager to try new things.

Right now, for example, the baby, seating on a big rug in front of the fire, was trying to reach out to Severus’ book, probably because he’d heard the old pages rustling and was curious. He’d crawled all the way to the sofa and

was looking at Severus with big, light brown eyes, which quickly morphed to black to mirror his own. Severus was intrigued, and kept rustling the page to see what the baby would do next.

Try to win him with cuteness, it seemed, because he raised his hands in a ‘pick me up, please’ gesture, but Severus shook his head. “I don’t think so, young man. You probably don’t remember what happened the last time I tried something like that, but my skull and spine do, so find something else to entertain yourself with.”

Severus resumed his reading, keeping an eye on the child who seemed to have forgotten the rustling and was now poking and prodding the sofa.

It wasn’t until he felt something touching his leg that Severus came out of his book-induced trance and noticed that there was a very tenacious looking baby standing on his own by his side, one hand fiercely gripping the sofa cushion, the other moving slowly towards the yellowed, rustl-y pages.

Severus was speechless. Had the baby just stood without him even noticing? And would he fall down now, after standing up for his first time without support, if Severus didn’t help him to sit down gently?

His mind was racing with possibilities, doubts and amazement, but before he could decide on a course of action, Lupin came back, took a look of his son and promptly started exclaiming.

“Merlin, Teddy, look at you! You’re standing up!” The man looked like he couldn’t believe his eyes, and he was so excited that he startled his son and the baby let go of the sofa. There was a ‘tonf’ sound when the diapered bum hit the carpet, but the baby didn’t cry, only looked crossly at the traitorous piece of furniture.

Lupin was fawning all over the boy, and encouraging him to try again, but the baby didn’t seem to be interested.

Severus smirked and rustled the page of his book once or twice. The baby’s ears perched and, much to Lupin’s amazement, he tried climbing up the sofa once again, guided by the sound.

Lupin was beyond himself with joy, and promptly conjured a camera to snatch a few pictures of the event.

Severus scowled, hiding behind his book until Lupin put the thing away.

Lupin scooped up his son from the floor and sat next to Severus. The boy immediately tried to reach for the pages of his book.

“I don’t think so,” he told father and son with his most forbidding look. Books were sacred.

“Teddy has earned it, hasn’t he? I promise I won’t let him do any damage! Here, let him touch it a bit,” and that was how Severus found himself with a lap full of baby.

“Be a good boy, Teddy, don’t tear the pages or Severus will Transfigure you into a toad and use you in a cleaning potion,” he instructed the baby.

“There are no toad parts in cleaning potions, Lupin,” was all Severus managed to reply, still a bit dumbfounded to have the baby in his lap with the werewolf’s approval.

Theodore patted the book once or twice, squealed, wriggled, poked the book once more then, as happens to most children, lost interest quickly and started reaching for Severus’ nose.

“No, no, no, Teddy,” Lupin scolded, alarmed. “Not his nose!”

The baby seemed put upon to be denied this new toy, but Lupin conjured dancing fairies and Severus’ appendage was forgotten. Thank Merlin.

Books were sacred, but his nose was forbidden.



The first student who asked for counseling was, of course, Draco Malfoy.

Severus ushered him in his quarters where Lupin was sitting on the sofa with his son in his lap, reading him a fairytale.

Draco tried to be subtle about the glances he was throwing the baby but he was making a really poor job of it.

Lupin noticed him immediately, and got up, his son in his arms, and went to meet them. “Hello Draco,” he greeted the blond. “This is your cousin Teddy. Say hello to Draco, Teddy,” Lupin said, holding the baby up to meet Draco’s stare.

Both boys seemed fascinated by each other. Draco seemed speechless, and Teddy was watching Draco’s hair with rapt fascination. With a big squeal he morphed until his hair was the exact same color, making Draco take a step back.

“Wow! He looks exactly like me at his age!” the original blond murmured, patting the baby on the head. Teddy preened under the attention.

“It’s the Black blood in him,” Lupin replied, amused. “Well, now that you’ve introduced yourself, I’ll leave you and Severus to your affairs. We hope to see you again soon, Draco,” the werewolf added, making clear that he wasn’t adverse to his son and the Malfoy heir getting to know one another.

Draco nodded and followed Severus to the study, where, after a few awkward apologies and confessions, Severus

said the magical word, ‘Potter’, and Draco started on a rant that took most of an hour, but that left them both pleased and more relaxed.

More so when, coming out of the room, they found Potter there, visiting, and Draco made a big show of promising his ‘little cousin’ to come and visit as soon and as often as he could, causing Teddy to morph his hair once again and Potter to seethe with jealousy. All in all, a very successful session.



“Here’s dinner, Severus.”

“Isn’t it too soon?”

“Yes, well, please eat it all even if I’m not here. I... ah, I have a date.”

Severus looked up sharply from his papers. “A date?”

“Yes well, Bill and Fleur invited me to dinner, and they’re trying to partner me with one of their friends that they insist would be perfect for me, since she loves children and is a DADA expert herself... I’ve been fending off their invites for months, but this time I couldn’t find a way to refuse.”

“Why would you? I though you would jump at the chance to give Theodore a mother,” Severus said, managing not to put too much venom in his words.

“Teddy has already all the love he needs from me, his family and his friends. I’m not looking for a replacement or for a caretaker for him. Not even for myself, really.”

“Do you mean you intend to spend the rest of your life alone?”

“I’m not alone, Severus. I’ve got my son, Harry, Andromeda, the Weasleys and also other people who often annoy me or get me mad but make my life more interesting. I’m perfectly happy just like this,” Lupin said, and from the smile on his face Severus understood the wolf really believed that.

He scowled.

“You could be more, with a partner at your side. Life could be easier and more enjoyable,” Severus pointed out.

“Are you trying to convince me to take today’s date to the altar, Severus? I didn’t think you’d care so much,” the werewolf replied, amused.

“I don’t,” answered Severus brusquely. He shouldn’t, at least, but the news that Lupin was dating again irked him, and he couldn’t point out the reason why even to himself.

“Well, I’m going in an hour. Harry is going to babysit, he should be here shortly...”

“Actually, Potter has detention tonight.”

“What?!” Lupin shouted, panicked.

“He and Draco were fighting again, and it got physical this time, so as a punishment I told them both to clean all the cauldrons of the class until they shined, and without magic. I think they will be at it for a while, I’m sorry. No, actually I’m not sorry at all. I hope they learn their lesson and leave the fights out of my classroom.”

“But... but I need Harry to babysit! I can’t leave Teddy alone, and I don’t want him to meet this woman until I know if she’s going to be any good!”

“Well, I’m afraid you’ll have to cancel.” Severus said, smugly.

“Or...”

“Or..?” a shiver ran down Severus’ spine at Lupin’s calculating expression.

“Or you could babysit!”

“I’m not your nanny!”

“Come on Severus, just this time! Bill and Fleur will be really pissed if I cancel at the last minute! Plus, Teddy likes you, and knows you well enough not to misbehave! I promise I’ll make it up to you any way you want!”

That idea had some merits. Still, Severus was finally making some progress in his research and he was loath to throw the evening away like that.

“Pretty please?” begged the werewolf, and Severus sighed, won over.

“Only this one time.”

Lupin sagged with relief. “Thank you, Severus! I promise you won’t regret it! Now you know where everything is, Teddy’s diapers, his pajamas...” and, as Lupin talked about what Theodore would need, Severus cursed himself for being so weak-willed to offer babysitting while Lupin went out and found a new mate.

Lupin didn’t take long to get ready; he was dressing in his usual formal robes, which were form-fitting enough, but nothing special. They did bring out the man’s eyes, but one could see them easily enough without the dress, they were so deep and penetrating.

After a kiss on his son’s plump cheek and a few last-minute words of advice for Severus, Lupin was off, and he and Theodore looked at each other, unsure of what to do next.

Severus decided to check on his lab, so, the baby on his hip, they journeyed there.

They found Potter and Draco quietly scrubbing cauldrons next to each other in an almost companionable atmosphere, and they were almost done, by the look of it.

Theodore was impressed by all the shiny things and kept wanting to squirm away to reach them. Potter snickered at a particularly dangerous leap that had Severus struggling, but a glare from him and an elbow to his ribs from Malfoy were enough to make him stop.

Severus decided he and Teddy had had enough excitement, and, dismissing both boys for the day, he went back to his room.

He took Theodore on his lap and started reading to him from a Potions text. Theodore was too little to understand what was said to him, but he seemed to like the low rumble of Severus' voice, because he listened with rapt attention until he fell asleep on Severus' chest.

Severus put the baby to bed carefully, having already changed him into his pajamas before, and watched over him from an armchair, obviously one of Lupin's favorite spots, seeing how well worn it was, and let his mind drift away.

He wondered how the dinner was going. Was Lupin having fun? Was the witch nice? Severus knew he shouldn't be so interested, but he couldn't keep himself from wondering. After all, if things went well, she'd probably move here to live with them.

The thought sent a jolt of loathing through his whole body.

He didn't want things to change. He liked things exactly as they were at the moment.

He realized he was almost, in his mind, admitting to being content.

Well, and why shouldn't he be? He was again in a powerful and respected position, he had enough money, he was actually making some breakthrough in his research and life with his roommates was proving to be bearable enough.

He'd always hated changes, and he didn't want to deal with the ones a new person in Lupin's and consequently his life would bring.

He lost himself in his musings and was woken up some time later by a hand gently shaking his shoulder while someone spoke his name softly.

He opened his eyes to find Lupin bent over him, and straightened in his seat.

"What time is it?" he asked, wincing when his voice came out groggy.

"Around eleven, I guess. Did you fall asleep reading to Teddy?"

Severus looked at the book in his lap and shook his head, still drowsy. "Actually, he fell asleep on his own while

I was reading, then I put him to bed, started reading by myself and fell asleep."

In his cot, Teddy sighed and turned, sucking on his thumb.

Lupin lowered his voice and gestured for Severus to join him in the living room.

Severus sat on the sofa and Lupin joined him after closing the door to the bedroom.

"Well, how was your evening? Was he fussy? Did he cry a lot?" Lupin seemed quite concerned, and Severus could tell he probably felt guilty about leaving his son home.

"He behaved perfectly. He didn't cry once, and he fell asleep easily once I started reading my Potions book to him. I'm told it has the same effect on people a lot older than him, though, so that should be normal."

Lupin chuckled. "He seems to like your voice. He perks up anytime you use it, even if it's to insult me," the man admitted, smirking.

"I shall remember to do it more often, seeing as your son likes it so much," Severus retorted. "And how was *your* evening?"

Lupin suddenly got fascinated by his own hands. "Well, it wasn't that bad. Fleur is a very good cook, almost as good as Molly, and Bill showed me an ancient Egyptian paper that he's trying to translate.... and well, Amber was quite OK. We do actually have a lot in common, and she seems to genuinely like children and all..."

"But?" Severus could hear from Lupin's tone that the man was reluctant to speak about it, so he naturally wanted to hear it all.

Lupin sighed before speaking again. "But I felt no spark. She was good to chat with, but I couldn't even look at her as more than a passing acquaintance. I really wasn't interested in pursuing more. I spent half of the time thinking about how you were faring here, to be honest."

"About me?" Severus asked, surprised.

"About you, and Teddy, and if you were having fun, and I was so eager to come back that they actually took pity on me and sent me here with a pat on the shoulder, shaking their heads."

Severus couldn't stop himself from feeling pleased to hear this, even if Lupin was just thinking about his son.

"We had fun on our own. Theodore was very interested in my Potions equipment and helped me supervise detention, then made his opinion on my book very clear by drooling on it a bit. That doesn't mean, however, that since he behaved you can take back the promise to make it up to me."

"I would never, Severus," Lupin looked at him with a strange intensity in his eyes, leaning in a bit, as if to make his point more clear.

Severus suddenly felt warm all over, and got up quickly. "Well, I'll let you know the price when the time comes. Good night, Lupin," he said, before making a hasty retreat.

"Good night to you too, Severus, and thanks."

The warm smile Lupin sent his way accompanied him until he fell asleep.



One thing that Severus discovered was that Lupin had never, ever spent a full moon in the company of his son. The man was actually horrified by the idea of Theodore seeing or even hearing him in those moments.

After having decided to be a sensible man for once and brew the Wolfsbane so Lupin wouldn't need to wince every time he held his son after every transformation, he went to his quarters with a steaming goblet only to find them empty.

He scowled and went to the Headmistress, who raised an eyebrow at the potion he held in his hands.

"Severus, I wasn't aware you were brewing the Wolfsbane."

"I just finished. Where is Lupin? I couldn't find him, and this has to be taken while still hot."

"Well, he's at the Shack, of course."

"What? Why would he go there of all places?"

"To transform, obviously. Do you think I would let a feral werewolf transform inside of the castle?"

"Feral- are you telling me all this time Lupin has been transforming without taking the Wolfsbane?" Severus was astonished. The danger to the school population and to Lupin himself such a thing could pose...

"I can't see how we could have done otherwise. The Wolfsbane isn't a potion that can be made by anyone, you know well enough how difficult it is to brew."

"You could have asked me!"

"I actually proposed that to Remus, but he said he didn't want to impose on you, and that he'd stolen enough of your time during all those years, and that now that you are a free man you shouldn't feel obligated to waste your time brewing such a complicated thing. He said he would take care of it himself and so I respected his wishes."

"Stupid Gryffindor morality!" Severus growled, and without another word to the woman he went in search of Lupin.

He found the man pacing restlessly in the same room where he'd almost died.

He hadn't entered the Shack since then, and the uneasiness mixed with the anger made his voice even more spiteful than usual when he called "Lupin!"

The man started and turned to look at him, his eyes widening. "Severus? What are you doing- oh," he said, recognizing the goblet and looking at it, transfixed.

"You're one of the most irritating men on the face of earth! Why must you always act as a doormat is beyond me! When you want something, ask it, you imbecile! You have a son to take care of, you told me so yourself not too long ago, if I'm not wrong, and here you are, endangering yourself along with the rest of the school just because your stupid pride stopped you from asking!"

The full moon mustn't be so far away, because Lupin growled, before taking a couple of calming breaths. "Do not try to anger me tonight, Severus, for both our sakes."

Severus knew he shouldn't have, but he was incensed. The scolding would have to wait for the morning after.

"Drink," he said, offering the still warm goblet. "All of it."

Lupin did, greedily, like a starving man, not even wincing at the taste.

He gave the goblet back afterwards, accompanied by a meek "thank you." Severus was not impressed.

"Next time, *ask*. No, actually, next time, I will take the potion to you and make sure you drink it all, and not in this nightmare of a house." Severus shivered. "You'll stay in your quarters-"

"No!" Lupin shouted, alarmed.

"Why not? You can't tell me you prefer this disgusting hovel!"

"I don't want Teddy to see me like that! I don't want... I don't want him to be near me when I'm like that."

Severus was taken aback by how much sadness was coming out from the man's voice.

"When you take the Wolfsbane you retain your mind, there's no danger you'll hurt him."

"I don't care about that. I just want my son to know the man, and not the monster."

Severus stood silent for a couple of moments.

“Lupin, you are a fool. I suggest you get out of your martyrdom and think about the absurdity you just said. In case it escaped your notice, you are both the man and the monster. And since I’m brewing the Wolfsbane for you, you are the man and the cur, which I think your son should know since he’s your son, and he’s bound to discover you are a werewolf sooner or later. He will get curious about it, because he loves you, and he’ll want you to make that too a part of his life. I think it would be better, to save you and him further pain, if you stopped trying to shield the others from something they probably wouldn’t even care about and just live.”

Lupin was staring at him with his mouth open.

“You... you want my son to see me while I writhe and twist and scream in pain and become something that could tear him apart with a simple swipe of his paw?”

Severus rolled his eyes.

“And you call me overly dramatic. First of all, it’s not necessary for him to see you transform. Second, you won’t kill your son under the effect of the Wolfsbane. I’ll be there to make sure you behave, if that makes you feel better, but the concept of you staying here every full moon just because you’re too damn obsessed with something that only happens once a month is ridiculous. You are the man *and* the wolf, not the wolf *and* the man.”

“I...”

Severus waited, raising an eyebrow to invite Lupin to continue. The man was gathering his thoughts, and seemed torn between wanting to accept Severus’ proposal and his self-punishing habits.

“I... I’ll think about it,” he said finally, in a tired voice.

Severus nodded and turned towards the door.

“Severus...” The Potions Master paused, his hand already on the door. “I... thank you.” Whether it was for the potion or for the advice, Severus would never know, but as the moon rose and no wailing or snarling came out of the house, Severus convinced himself that it was for both.



The next full moon a very apprehensive wolf approached a toddler in the warmth of the castle’s room. The toddler stood fascinated and reached for the soft pelt, grabbing at it in what seemed to be a very painful way, but the wolf behaved through all the manhandling.

When the wolf licked at his son’s face, the boy giggled and squealed “Da!”



Coincidence? Could be, but Severus couldn’t stop from smirking smugly all evening. Not even after he got his face thoroughly licked.

Somewhere around the end of March, in one of the rare quiet evenings when Andromeda had taken Teddy with her to stay for the night, Lupin came back to their quarters.

Severus looked up from the book he was reading and stared at him.

“What happened?”

Lupin looked uncomfortable, to say the least, and kept pressing the palm of his hands on his eyes, as if trying to scrub away some horrid thing he’d seen.

“You must promise not to tell anyone,” he turned suddenly towards Severus, “but I need to talk about it to someone!” Lupin frantic was an amusing sight, and Severus nodded his promise, eager to know more.

“I was passing by the debris down by the Charms classroom, and I heard a strange sound, very feeble, so I went inside to look and there was a green tent, that looked, from what Minerva told me, just like the one you used when we had that fight... I was worried something had happened and you had taken refuge there again, so I went to see what the matter was, and when I moved the fabric aside and peered inside I saw...”

“Come on, Lupin, say it! Don’t you dare leave it at that now that you’ve started telling me!”

“Just a moment, Severus, I need to clear my head of the image before I can say it...” Lupin took a deep breath and started speaking rapidly. “It was Harry, and Malfoy, Draco, I mean, and they were... oh Merlin, the noises, and they were naked, facing away from me, and Draco’s arse, oh, it was so pasty, and I just can’t believe I caught the baby for whom I changed diapers shagging!”

Severus couldn’t help himself. He burst out laughing, startling the werewolf who glared at him. “Well, thank you so much for your support, Severus,” the werewolf said, pouting.

“Oh, come on, Lupin. Don’t tell me you didn’t see this coming. They’ve been constantly bickering and teasing each other for months; it was quite clear.”

“Yes, well, I still didn’t want to see the actual act happening before my eyes, thank you. Besides, that’s not exactly true. Not every couple that bickers does so because they fancy each other.”

“Really. Then what about Potter and Malfoy, Granger and Weasley, Potter Senior and Lily?”

“And what about you and me?”

Severus stood straight, stricken by those six simple words.

Lupin smiled. “Should we just admit our attraction to each other and pursue this relationship, or do you think it’s better for us to continue bickering?”

This had to be a joke. Lupin was surely messing up with him.

True, in the past weeks after Lupin’s date they’d started to spend more time together, due to the fact that Severus had asked for Lupin’s help with preparing potion ingredients in exchange for the babysitting, and he looked forward to spend time with Lupin and his son every day, but he’d never thought the other man would feel the same way.

Severus squirmed on his seat as mental images conjured by the werewolf’s words formed in his brain, and he stood there, breathless.

Lupin sensed his discomfort and put a hand on his shoulder.

“We could also continue bickering and pursue this relationship at the same time, if you want.”

“If you’re joking, Lupin, you’d better say so now, before I take you on your offer and make a fool of both of us,” Severus managed to reply after a few seconds of silence, his voice a hurried whisper.

Lupin took Severus’ sweating hand in his and gave it a firm squeeze. “I’m not joking,” he replied, tugging Severus closer and planting a soft, chaste kiss on his lips.

Severus inhaled sharply, unsure of what to do but wanting to feel that spark again. He looked the other man in the eyes, and what he saw there made him decide, for once in his life, to take the plunge, consequences be damned.

What followed was the best fifteen minutes Severus ever remembered having as they became acquainted with each other’s mouth, lips and tongue. They broke up, panting.

“Should we move this to the bed?” Lupin asked, breathless.

“I should warn you, I have an extremely pasty arse too.” Severus replied, still not entirely sure.

“It won’t be a problem if it’s you that’s attached to it.”

Between kissed and gropes they stumbled across the room to the bed, and from then on the words were few, incoherent and barely whispered.

The rising sun woke them up, and Severus opened his eyes to find amber ones looking at him intently.

“Having regrets already, Lupin?”

“I will, if you are. I like being with you, and it would be a pity if this ruined it.”

“I don’t think that everything is ruined. We’ll still see a lot of each other, since we live in the same quarters.”

“Yes, but I don’t want you to hide from me anymore.” Lupin made clear, poking Severus’ chest.

“Very well, I won’t.”

“Good! Now let’s get up, you need to eat your breakfast.”

Severus rolled his eyes. “Are you still insisting on feeding me?”

“Of course! I want that pasty arse of yours to remain as firm and round as it is now, otherwise where will I hold on while you’re pounding inside me?”

Severus blushed, but rose with a renewed appetite.

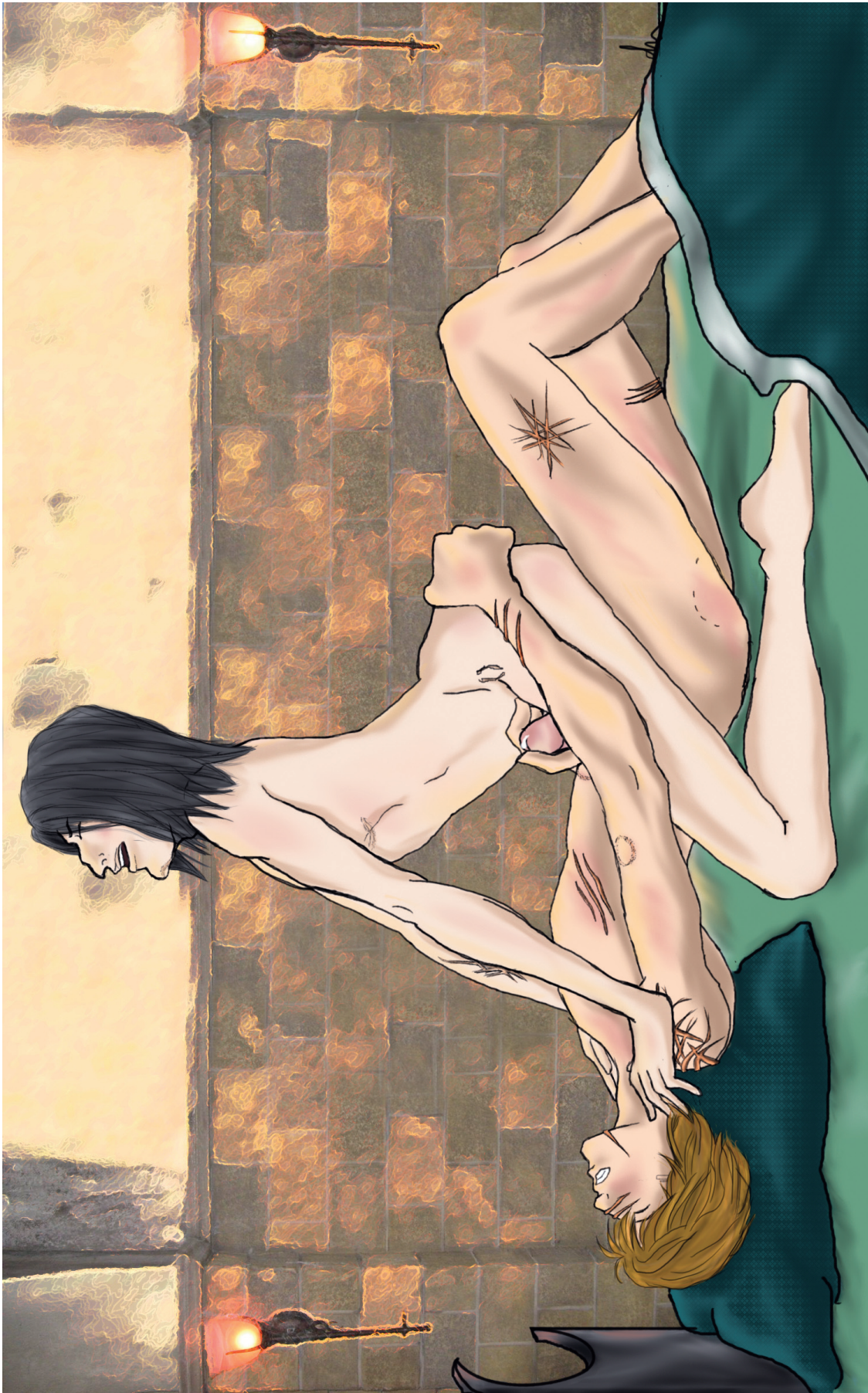
Dungeons — master’s Bio

Dungeons_Master is usually a lurker, and only comes out to play when there are interesting fests or events. She’s Italian and has been a Snupin fan since 2004, and even if she ships a lot of other HP pairings, this is the only one in which she’s active. She likes to read, write about and sometimes even draw Snupin, but she is, by her own admission, really lazy. She’s also very verbose, and she probably bores her betas to no end. Other things she loves besides Snape are miniature food replicas, cooking and sewing/knitting cute things, and if she had to choose which magical power to have, she would like to be able to Apparate or Portkey so she could finally visit her favorite countries.

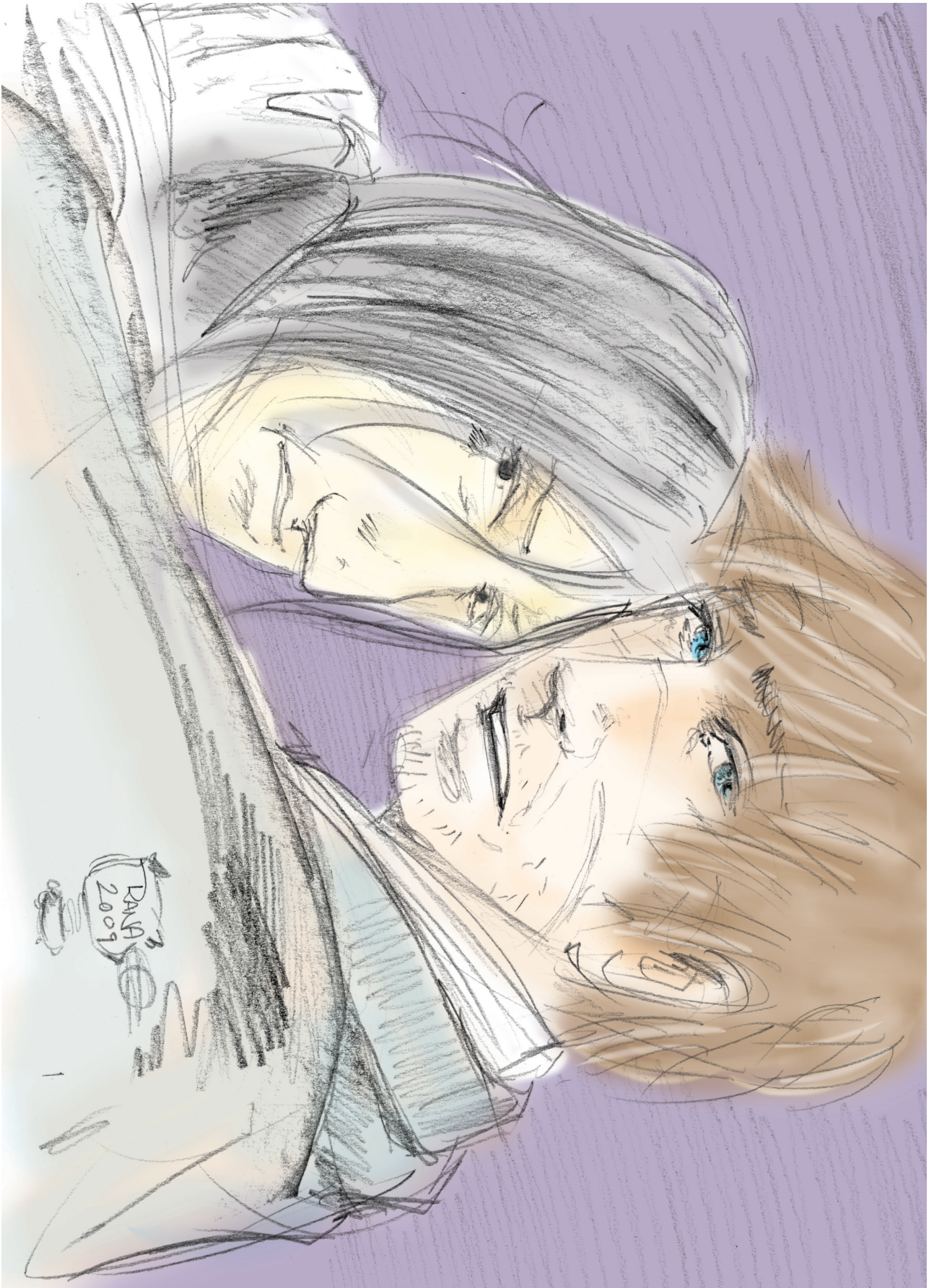
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With or Without You by Diana Moon



After Curfew by Chibitoaster/Littleblackbow

Information

Rated R.

Summary: To lose a child is to lose one's very soul...

Genre: Alternate Universe/Alternate Reality; EWE; Romance

Warnings: Alpha/Remus; Drama/Angst; Tragedy (Implied); There is no Teddy in this story.

➤ Moon in Blue

by bonfoi

A/N 1: Some have expressed the opinion that grief is tempered by time. They are correct. But, I still cry when something reminds me forcibly of my mother. In turn, when she was alive, she cried for the brother I would never know, who died in my father's arms as a baby. Grief is part of us, and there will always be tears ready to fall.

A/N 2: Without *Lore's* exhortations and so many kind words from the folks in chat, I would not have had the heart to present this. Thank you all for having such faith in my idea.

The moon rode high in the spring sky,
a bowl of light that almost stole his breath.

Disclaimer: The world of Harry Potter, its characters and settings are the copyrighted works of J.K. Rowling, Warner Bros., her publishing companies and affiliates. No profit was made from the writing of this story nor was any malice intended in any way, shape or form to the author or the actors/actresses who so brilliantly have brought them to life.

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The howling was human, but only just.

Severus Snape shivered within his warmest cloak. He knew that sound—it was **his** sound—made real and shared with an uncaring world. Turning away from the edge of the forest, he struggled to put one foot in front of the other as he stumbled back to his cottage. Looking back up at the lopsided moon, Severus wondered at how the two most important people in his life both had something to do with Selene in all her majesty.

He'd spun and twisted at the hands of Dumbledore and Voldemort until he was almost buried in the ruts of their war. At the end, it took the most unlikely of allies to convince him he had a future, but he had to be alive for it to come true.

The door looked far away as he rounded the standing stones at the edge of his property. His hands were cold, so he shoved them into his pockets, the motion pitching him on his side. He cursed, tugging one hand out as he fell, an attempt to grab at a stone.

"Severus Snape was always graceful in our youth." A dark presence caught him close, strong arms cradling him gently to its chest. The words rumbled through Severus' back as the man—the scent of him wild and wicked—spoke. "I was always the one falling to the wayside and skinning my knees."

Taking a deep breath to steady himself, Severus kept a hold on his temper and his tongue. "You never fell. You were always stronger than that." He stood still as he knew who was holding him. A glance at the hand across his chest showed the golden ring he'd given his lover before his marriage to the young Auror. "You only needed to be pushed to rise to the occasion, something I'm sorry to say I could never do."

A low growl of...desire...awareness...sounded against Severus' throat, and then he was hoisted into his rescuer's arms. Severus' face lay against a soft wool muffler, the subtle scent of male...*mine*...wafting over him as they continued on their way toward his cottage. He rubbed his nose against the wool and sighed, relinquishing his anger for the moment; he was too tired to fight just then.

"Do you have a key or is it bespelled?" The light of the moon reflected the two of them in the still water of a puddle, a tableau he'd always hoped for but never thought to see. "Severus, are you sleeping?" his rescuer asked softly, his breath wafting over Snape's cheek and warming more than just his skin.

"*Acta non verba,*" Severus mumbled. The door opened wide, showing a cosy entrance with a runner depicting the beasts of the wood, an Elizabethan settee, and a bright room beyond.

"Actions have always spoken louder than words, haven't they?" The man looked around, twisting his body but never discommoding Snape. "Nice place, Severus."

Very warm...and inviting." His voice had dropped in register. "May I?"

Snape motioned him onward, still safely cradled against a barely heaving chest. As they passed the door, a mirror hidden in the shadows reflected their merged form. His rescuer stopped and stared, then tightened his arms around Severus.

Snape felt lips in his hair even as he saw his rescuer hide his face there. Muttered words, "*Aut viam inveniam aut faciam*," filled his ears and he felt his face grow warm. Flustered, he struggled to get down.

I will find a way or make one....

"You can let me down now," Severus said past gritted teeth. He knew exactly what was whispered in his ear, the promise of a future that was a vicious lie. "Now, Lupin!"

"Your wish is my command." His rescuer lowered Snape's legs, letting him slide down. Severus found himself standing in the entry way with Lupin's—not his lover's, not Remus'—hands curved around his hips. He stepped back, his weak leg gave way—and once more, he was crushed against Lupin's chest. "You belong in my arms, Severus."

"Kiss me again and I'll turn you inside out!" Snape growled. His tired eyes looked up into blue eyes tinted with amber—warm, inviting, beckoning.... He shook his head and gingerly reached out for the settee's arm. Once he had his hand on it, he moved—out of Lupin's arms—and sat. "Tell me what you want, Lupin. I'm tired...so tired..."

Severus fainted, his wand falling to the floor.



Standing so still an observer would have thought he was a sculpture, Remus looked—for the first time in a decade—upon the man he'd ignored, reviled, desired, lost and then loved. He shook his wand from his sleeve and waved it to close the door.

Letting Severus be, he wandered through the small home until he found a bedroom. Once there, he turned down the covers and even found the healing potions he knew would be there. With everything ready, he returned to the entry and tenderly picked up the prickly bastard. Swallowing a grin, Remus Lupin resigned himself to a small war—one he was going to win.



"Morning, Severus."

A cheerful voice—something that had no business in his home or his life—brought Snape to wakefulness. He groaned.

The voice continued. "You've lived through two wars, twenty-odd years as a Professor of Hogwarts, and you still can't enjoy the morning sun?"

The clatter of dishes made Severus wince, but the divine smell of rashers and eggs, fried tomatoes and toast, a breakfast he'd once eaten heartily, made him sit up with his eyes still closed.

"Coffee?"

He waved his hand until a warm cup was pressed into it. After a few gulps, Severus felt slightly prepared to face both the day and Lupin, but not necessarily in that order.

"Food?"

The tray was Levitated over his lap and set to hovering while he removed the covers. There were even grapes and candied pears, delicacies he only allowed himself upon occasion. Ignoring his unwelcome guest, Snape ate as heartily as he could. When his plate was clean and only two pear halves remained, he lay back with a sigh.

"Now that's the way to enjoy your meal, Severus. I've missed seeing you eat with gusto." Remus' hand—with the gold ring—curved over Snape's cheek before dropping away to clear his breakfast. At the door, he turned. "We're going to work things out, Severus. No more of this."

"She shouldn't have died. It was my fault." Severus' voice cracked; it wasn't the first time he'd said those words. But it was the first time Remus had been conscious, there, to hear them.

Halting just through the door, Remus spoke over his shoulder. "As I said, we'll talk about this. No more anger, no more silence." He took a breath. "Take a bath. Once you're fully awake, we'll talk."



Summoning his cane—a gift from Draco Malfoy that sported a wolf motif—Severus thumped his way out of his room. He'd fumed and then done what Lupin told him to do. The water had washed away the last of his sleep but not his pain. He shivered in the bath as the water grew cold, the ripples disappearing as their child had disappeared into the ground.

"*Haec olim meminisse ivvabit...*" he whispered as he turned the corner and saw Lupin silhouetted against the bay window. *Time heals only that which wants to heal.* He took a deep breath and went forward.

"Lupin, I'm here." He sat down in his favourite chair and Summoned an ottoman for his bad leg.



Standing with the light at his back, Remus knew his expression was difficult to read. That same light showed the lines of strain and wear on Severus' visage. He had to fight the wolf for control throw himself at his former lover's feet, weeping for their lost child. He steeled himself, calling on that vaunted Gryffindor courage to tough it out.

"You were missed at her funeral. She was so small." Remus' voice was mechanical, devoid of any change in timbre. "I looked for you, but you were gone. Vanished without a trace, Harry said. Only Luna's forethought kept me from tearing through the crowd in a frenzy." He pushed back the anger at being left alone to grieve at the burial site.



Severus looked up. The tears slowly, painfully rolled down his face as finally he let himself remember.

After Tonks, after the war had torn them asunder, something precious had come.... He'd held her as a baby, a gift from some beneficent being, an orphan who had come to St. Mungo's with needs that only a Potions master of his calibre could meet.

He'd fallen in love at first sight of her tawny hair and dark eyes. When he'd shown her to Remus, he too had fallen under her thrall.

Petitions and Potter's vociferous support had finally made her theirs. She was a healthy, vibrant child.

The only sign of her illness a star-shaped scar on her elbow.

For three years, they'd been a family: loving, laughing, together. Then it happened.

A witch, far-gone with her own madness, had snatched their child thinking the scar meant Maeve was her dead child come back, and broken her neck when she wouldn't call her Mama.

They would never have found the witch but for a memory Auror Potter submitted afterwards of her in a crowd at St. Mungo's, eyes fixed on Severus and Maeve.

He began sobbing as he thought of her, in the cold ground, alone....

"Hush, Severus, hush." Remus' arms pulled him half out of his seat and across his chest.

Their tears mingled for the first time.

"I miss her too," Remus murmured. "Her toys are still in her room, scattered about. I couldn't go back...."

They stayed in an awkward embrace until Lupin's knees cracked.

"I'm sorry, love, but I must sit or stand." He stood, Enlarged Severus' seat for two and then sat down, pulling Severus across his lap. His big thumbs wiped the tracks of his lover's tears, his own eyes red and tired.

"I missed you, Severus. Without her...without Maeve...and you, I was lost. I'm sorry it took me so long to come to you." Remus pressed a soft kiss under each of Severus' eyes and then looked deeply into them. "But you shouldn't have run. That woman tore out our hearts. We should have stood together."

Severus gulped back his sobs. He shook with the pain of losing their daughter once again. "...I was there, making her potion. I should have...."

Remus' lips stopped his words, a benediction that Snape hadn't known he needed.

"We need to be together, Severus. Maeve was a part of us, but we need to live." Remus' voice took on a pleading tone. "Look into me, use your Legilimency, to see the truth of it. Maeve won't be forgotten as long as we're here."

Letting his head fall onto Remus' shoulder, Severus sighed. "I know. But, it still hurts. It's been six years, but it could happen again. I don't think I could live if I took to another child and...and..." The pain overwhelmed him again.

Remus twisted the gold ring on his finger "That's why I'm here. I've found a sister of Maeve's."

Severus stiffened in his lover's arms and tried to pull away, struggling until he lost his breath.

"No! The unmitigated gall!" Snape's face flushed. He finally got an arm loose and swung, his hand connecting with Remus' face with a sharp crack. They both blinked, Severus' handprint vivid against Remus' darkening face.

"You once said you were mine, Severus. Do you deny me the right to build my family with my mate?" Lupin's voice was husky, fluid darkness in every syllable. He bent his head closer, nudging his nose into Severus' throat as he spoke. "You gave yourself to me, body and soul. Why will you not see that another child is another hope? I have to bring you hope." He nipped at Snape's skin and Severus felt thin welts rise from the rasp of his prominent canines.

Once more, Severus tried to hit Lupin. This time, Remus caught him in an iron embrace, nose-to-nose. Their breathing was harsh in the still room. Severus struggled against his mate's hold.

He would not love another child as he had loved Maeve! He would not.... Severus surprised himself by moaning as Remus bit down on the faint marks at the base of his throat.

The world turned red—but with desire and submission—as those teeth renewed Remus' mating bite. Struggling only made Remus increase the pressure, his growl vibrating into Severus' very bones, along every sinew. Severus felt the renewed burst of joy from being claimed and treasured that Remus' bite brought him. It didn't push aside his pain at Maeve's death, but it lightened it as nothing had since.

He began to cry again, this time a cleansing of his soul.



An hour later, Severus sighed. His neck was sore, but Remus' renewed claiming bite had soothed his spirit like nothing else could.

"The witch was mad. No one—not even me—could have kept her from hurting our angel," he whispered into Remus' shoulder. He now understood there had been nothing they could have done to keep the witch from his door; she had been mad, and that was it. "For a short time, Maeve was ours..."

They had done what they could. He comprehended it finally. They had only been Maeve's caretakers; she truly had shown them how to be a family. It would always hurt, but that was as it should be.

"Maeve will always be a part of us, Severus." Remus dried his own tears with a soft cotton handkerchief. He brushed a dry corner over Severus' cheeks as well, then pressed a soft kiss to each reddened eyelid.



Severus fluttered his fingers against Remus' ears, an erogenous zone that often had his lover ready before he was awake. He pressed open-mouthed kisses along a fuzzy cheekbone. "Take me to bed, Remus...remind me why I'm yours...." He gasped as a strong hand stroked his burgeoning erection.

Remus stood without effort, Severus secure in his arms. He looked wolfish as he took them to the bedroom.

Without benefit of candles, Remus settled his lover on the edge of the bed and stripped him with efficient hands and a shower of nipping and licking kisses. When Severus was naked, Remus stood before him and tore his clothes off, a buttonhole ripping in his haste.

"Yes, I missed you, too, my Wolf...." Severus held out his hands, cock thrusting proudly into the cool night air. "Take me...make me yours again...." He sighed as Remus climbed slowly onto the bed, stalking over the covers until he could drape himself over his lover.

Remus peppered love-bites across Severus' collarbones and his chest. Severus tried to restrain his thrusts in response to each bite. Lupin grinned against his skin as he continued to pay homage to Severus' throbbing member.

"You will always be mine," Remus said before he began suckling the dark mushroom head of Severus' cock. Severus' toes curled at the sensation of a rough tongue twisting and sliding around him. He mewed with pleasure when one of Remus' blunt fingers skirted the edges of his rosy quoit, gently pressing but not breaking through.

Lips tight around Severus' cock, Remus gently scraped his teeth along the velvety skin. Severus' exhortations became whimpers as Remus used his tongue to trace esoteric designs up and down the flesh in his mouth.

Pushing away, Remus knelt, holding Severus' legs open. "Beautiful...and mine!" he growled. He laid himself over Severus and asked, "Lubricant, love. Where?"

Severus couldn't think anymore. His body had been craving Remus for years, his spirit missing the link between him and his mate. The bond was humming from the renewed bite and now, the claiming. It took another minute before he understood and pointed to the bedside table. "There, drawer."

Wand never far from his hand, Remus found it easily and Summoned a small pot of lubricant. He uncorked it one-handed and dipped two fingers in, setting it to the side as he once again swirled his fingertips around Severus' fluttering entrance. This time, he pressed forward until he had two fingers knuckle deep. "Breathe, Severus, just breathe." He waited as Severus relaxed at the remembered sensation. Then Remus pushed the digits in until he could curl them and touch Severus' prostate.

At the first moan and twitch, Severus straightened his legs and thrust up, desperate for friction. "Take me... take me...take me...come to me!" His body was singing with each stroke and turn.

Remus' grin was almost feral as he pushed those long, long legs farther apart and then tilted his hips.

"Yes...yes...yes...yeeeeesss!" Severus' scream thinned as Remus pressed forward.

Remus' breath caught. He pulled out half his length and then slammed forward over and over until the headboard began moving against the wall. Severus folded his legs around him. Remus' howl of conquest, fingers scrambling over Severus' pale hips to tug roughly at his cock, all of it combined to reaffirm life.

They came together, much like they had the first time Severus had submitted.



Slightly sticky—neither one had been fully conscious when they'd cast *Scourgify*—Severus tried to roll away for his morning piss and dragged his lover across the bed with him. He wandlessly cast the cleansing spell once more. Finally able to move, he hobbled to the loo, cleaned himself up, and stared into his eyes in the mirror.

"Not so sad now, eh?" he asked his reflection. Ablutions done, he went back and gazed at the man in his bed.

"Knut for your thoughts..." Remus mumbled.

Severus sat on the edge of the mattress without looking at Remus. "I'm thinking about how lucky I am at having another second chance. I'm thinking that Maeve will be watching over whatever child comes to us. I'm thinking..."

"...I'm thinking you should bring that sexy arse back here for more claiming," Remus finished. Severus looked over his shoulder to see Remus flush. "I'm sorry, Severus. I'm not being callous. I'm just glad to be welcomed into your life once more." His hand brushed over the rumpled covers to barely touch Severus' fingers. "I just want to be whole again."

"I want that too." Severus' pushed his hand across the covers, fingertips touching Remus'. "I dare say we'll be working at this for years to come."

Remus grabbed his wrist and pulled him atop his body. Severus shook his head and put away his grief for the time being. "Ah, morning wood poking into my hip. How I've missed it," Snape whispered as he kissed and bit his mate's shoulder. "Gryffindors are not the only ones to take refuge in humour."

Laughing, Remus hugged him close and rolled them over until Severus was beneath him. "I will never let you run again, Severus. It's been too long." He licked Severus' thin lips until they parted, their tongues slipping and sliding past each other as they traded tastes.

When they could breathe again, Severus leaned back, his eyes watery. "I'll never run again. It was wrong of me, and a slight to Maeve. I want you to take me to her grave. I need...I need to say goodbye properly."

Remus kissed away the tears and held Severus.

"We will. Together. Always together."

Remus made love to Severus, tenderly, reverently as the sun travelled across the sky. With each stroke of skin on skin, each lick that tasted tears and sweat, Severus felt as if they knitted themselves together once more.

∞ ∞ ∞ ∞ ∞

Their daughter had been buried near Potter's parents in Godric's Hollow. "So she's not alone," Remus had said.

"She is in good company." Severus' iron will kept his tears inside. His tone was clipped as he spoke. "Lily will take good care of her."

"Come away, Severus. The moon is rising soon and I want you near." Remus pulled him away, gently. Snape turned slowly and went into Lupin's arms.

A tinkling sound, as if a bell were ringing, made the pair turn back. Wavering over her grave, the little six-year-old witch sat and smiled at her fathers. Behind her, Lily Potter stood, a soft smile on her face. Severus couldn't stop himself, and he cried as they faded away.

When the last note had died away, Severus asked, "Take me home now, Remus?"

Remus enfolded Severus in his cloak and they Apparated away, lighter of heart, and above all, together.

Comments, like rain in the desert, are greatly appreciated.

Thank you for reading.

Latin Quotes and Phrases found at <http://www.yuni.com/library/latin.html>

Acta non verba - Action not words

Aut viam inveniam aut faciam - I will either find a way or make one

Haec olim meminisse iuvabit - Time heals all things, i.e. Wounds, offenses

Selene: {Greek Mythology} Titan goddess of the moon. All information from <http://www.theoi.com/Titan/Selene.html>

"Selene's great love was the shepherd prince Endymion. The beautiful boy was granted eternal youth and immortality by Zeus and placed in a state of eternal slumber in a cave near the peak of Lydian Mount Latmos. There his heavenly bride descended to consort with him in the night."

SELE'NE (Selênê), also called Mene, or Latin Luna, was the goddess of the moon, or the moon personified into a divine being.

bonfoi's Bio

Bonfoi's been writing in the HP fandom since 2005, starting on The Silver Snitch archives.

She has a science and engineering background—with a piece of paper that says she's a historian as well—which shows in the notes found at the end of her fics.

She often draws inspiration from classic black-and-white movies, and the antics of her cats and the singular dog of the crew. There's ever a bit of Barbara Cartland in there, too.

Her stories can be found at her livejournal (older ones) and insanejournal website and on the> archives of HP Fandom (as Bonfoi) and Skyhawke-dot-com (as sbkar).

tbranch's Bio

tbranch has been in the HP Fandom for six years. As much as he enjoys his het ships, he's never can say 'no' to Karasuhime or Lore when it comes to helping out in any way, shape, or form. They would probably would severely hurt him....or he believes. His websites for his art are at tbranch.livejournal.com or tsbranch.deviantart.com. He like Hot Tamales, they're yummy.

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xterm's Bio

Xterm's bio located on page 49.

Karasu_hime's Bio

Half Japanese mother of two. I fell in love with fandom around 2004 and have been here since. Still burning passionately about Snape/Lupin, although, lately I've been known to throw in a side of Lily.

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skitty_kat's Bio

Much of what we think we know about Skitty is conjecture and deduction from the droplets of information released by her handlers. Apparently she was created and not born, moulded from clay and the tears of old men who weep for the days of the Empire. She was raised by mysterious West Country musicians who taught her the holy words to 'I've Got A Brand New Combine Harvester (which, just so you know, can summon satanic turnips when sung backwards). As Chief Unspeakable of the Ministry of Muggles (a mysterious Cardiff-based group with strange links to the local Weevil population) she has, as per the job description, committed many Unspeakable acts. She has even spoken to Gryffindors.

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undun's Bio

undun is fan artist with inconsistent quantity output, and a fan writer of even more inconsistent quantity output. undun envies those people that can create an abundance of quality art and fiction in ridiculously short time frames. undun has a penchant for Lupin and Snape but has been known to stray into Snarry now and again. Well, Snape is in both, yeah?

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Dianamoon's Bio

Diana Moon has been a fanfic writer since she was twelve, having started with cartoons & movies. She's dabbled in art since high school. In HP, her main focus is Severus Snape & enjoys finding situations for him to be with Remus. Snupin has been the one fandom in which she is inspired to write & draw. One day she hopes to publish her own fantasy books.

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littleblackbow's Bio

LittleBlackBow spends most of her time wrapped around the neck of such celebrities as Kenneth Branagh, Gary Oldman, Steve Martin, and Stephen Fry. When she is not performing her regular Tuxedoish duties, she can be found relaxing in the great white north on the back of the Minnesota state bird, sipping Mai Tais while listening to in-studio recordings of Joseph Hayden and his rockin' poppin' baroque chamber orchestra.

•Website: www.chibitoaster.com

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Parsletonguyen's Bio

Ellie is actually known as "serpenscript" and "was in the Snupin fandom for four years as both writer and artist".

azurerosa's Bio

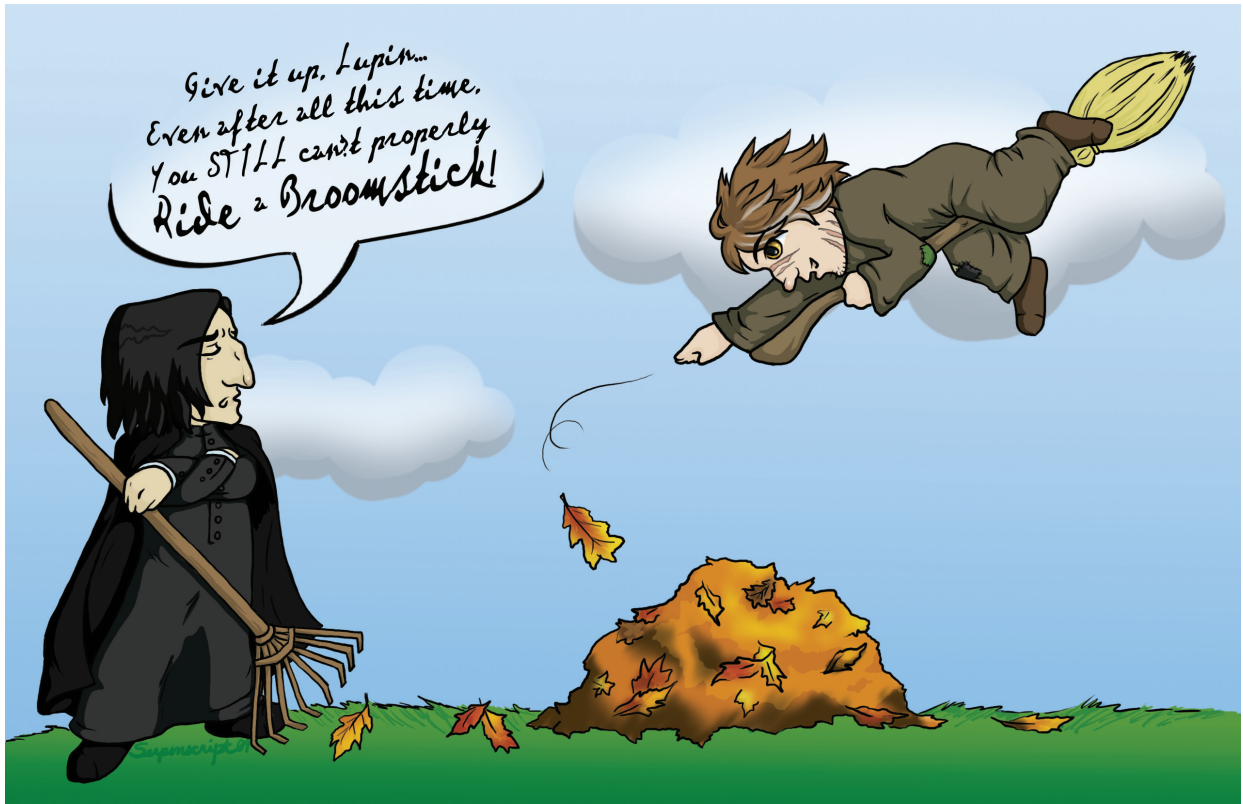
Student at NMSU majoring in Anthropology, when I'm not at school I'm being a nerd/geek of the scifi/fantasy type. Long time lurker, new author. Ij and Lj name are the same: azure_rosa

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Rosh's Bio

I've been writing for as long as I can remember, stumbling into Snupin about five years ago. It was, ironically enough, the pairing in my very first pure smut story. So it's got a sentimental value as well as an aesthetic one. I like experimenting, letting the muses go whichever way they please, so I tend towards the eclectic. I have dual love affairs with books and food, and I'm a glorified and unrepentant geek.

•E-mail: realliferosy@gmail.com



Parseltonguepen

Title: In Plain Sight
 Author: Parseltonguepen
 Rated: NC-17

Moonlight shone through the high arched windows in the castle's hallway; it turned the sallow skin of the naked Slytherin into pale marble. Remus thought his lover looked delectable the way his face burned with embarrassment even as his arousal was obvious.

Severus was glancing from side to side in unease. "Can't we move somewhere private?" he hissed. "Anyone could walk through and see me, and you refuse to share that infernal cloak--"

Remus cut his words off by wrapping long, strong fingers around Snape's scrotum and squeezing hard enough to make the warning clear. "I plan to fuck you in plain sight, against the wall in the hallway," he growled, "the cold rough stone scraping your cock and nipples while I pound into your narrow, tight arse."

"You'd better make it worth the humiliation, wolf--" He inhaled sharply, suddenly breached by a slick finger.

"Oh, I plan to make you *howl* with pleasure." The finger was joined by a second.

In the end their only witness was the Bloody Baron, who watched appreciatively as Snape wailed his release against the wall, body rocking with the forceful thrusts of his invisible lover. "More than meets the eye, I'll wager," he mused, before moving on.

Title: Differing Definitions
 Author: Rosy
 Rated: Hard R

"That is *damned* sexy."

Severus glanced up from the potion he was brewing to give Remus a dry look. "I rather doubt anyone would agree with you." He was brewing, and had been all day. His clothes were wrinkled, his apron bearing the stains of splashed ingredients, and his hair was pulled into a loose, scraggly tail after it had become bothersome. Besides that, Severus knew that he was considered to be universally un-sexy.

"By my definition," Remus purred, "you are deliciously sexy."

Severus snorted, returning to his potion. "I think Webster would wholly deny your definition."

He felt Remus' warm bulk press behind him, his fingers curling into Severus' hair and snapping the tie holding it in place. "Webster," Remus growled, trailing his tongue along the shell of Severus' ear, "can bite me."

This was not the first time Remus had suffered this delusion. He had said the same thing when he caught Severus tucked away in the window seat, reading. Thankfully, the privacy charms on the glass kept innocent passersby from seeing him pressed against it while Remus took him. It had happened again in the garden while he had been weeding. The smell of freshly turned loam and the warm sun against his wide spread legs had been a rather pleasant diversion from the onerous task.

He reflected, bent over his own worktable with Remus balls deep inside him, that he rather liked Remus' definition.

