

RANDY
09



Chocolate and ASPHODEL

Snipin Line Volume 2, 2009

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Snapin Line Volume 2, 2009

Cover art by *Tbranch*

Back Cover art: Two Dream by *Xterm*

⚡ Acknowledgments ⚡

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

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

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

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

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

love, co-editor lore



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

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

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

Very much love,
klynie, co-editor



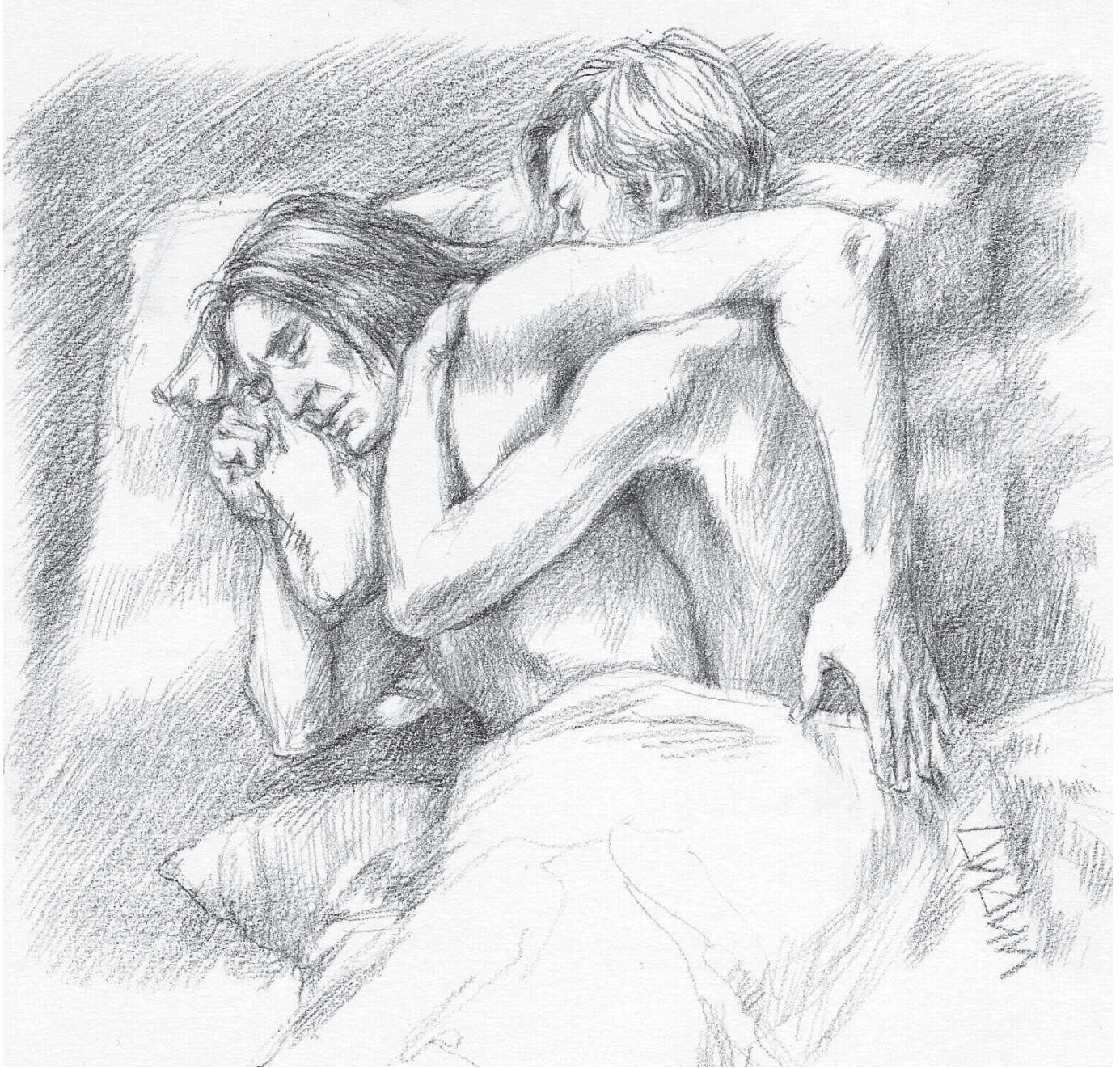
I wanted to thank all the artists who submitted their works; each art is special and excellent. It's such a pleasure to see the end product filled with lots of Snupin goodness and love. A special nod to those who helped fill in gaps at the last minute - Undun, Ellie, Diz, Rosy and Azurerosa. The zine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

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

Karasu_hime, co-editor

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Information

Rated NC-17

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

True Love's First Kiss

by Chivalric

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What?"

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

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

"Remus!"

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

"Who?" he asked. "Me?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

The thought made him smile.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What?

Him?

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Perfect reading material for a Potions master.

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

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

How arousing. How... Damn!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Moments ticked by.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What was it he'd wanted to tell him?

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

"Yes?"

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Not that he'd ever dreamed something this hot.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A double yelp rang through the room.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Voices from the kitchen. Guests?

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

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

"Where's Remus?" Tonks asked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"She hurt you," the werewolf said flatly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chivalric's Bio

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

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

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

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

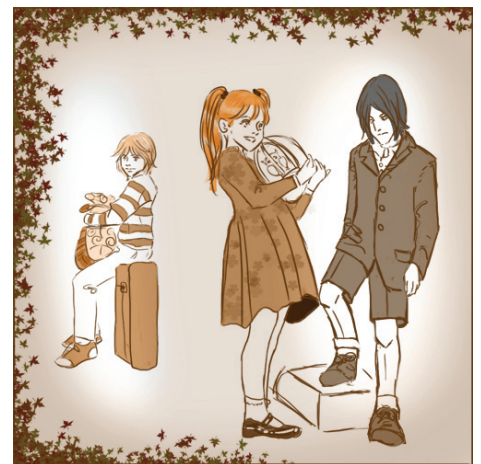
Quickly, she brushed her hand over Kingsley's bum. "Anyway, you're not mad anymore that I refused to marry you?"

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

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

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

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



Information

Rated R

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

Doors We Open and Close Each Day

by Firefly124

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

~Flora Whittemore

Wednesday, September 1, 1971

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

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

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

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

Sod that!

"Hey, need a hand with that?"

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

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

Lily was already running up behind the boy.

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

"Leave it, Lils," Severus muttered.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Is your leg all right?" Lily asked.

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

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

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

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

Warily, Severus shook his hand.

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

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

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



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

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

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

Severus pulled back and nodded warily.

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

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

“Gryffindor!” the Hat shouted at last.

Both boys looked at each other, eyes wide.

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

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

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

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

“Lils,” Severus breathed.

“What’s wrong?” Lupin asked.

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

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



“Lupin, Remus!”

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

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

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

Stunned, Severus thought about that for a minute.

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

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

“Snape, Severus!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Friday, September 3, 1971

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

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

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

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



Saturday, September 4, 1971

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Monday, September 6, 1971

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

“Hospital wing,” Lupin muttered.

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

Lupin just shrugged and picked at his toast.

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

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

“What?”

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

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

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

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



Monday, October 4, 1971

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

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

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

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

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



Tuesday, October 5, 1971

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

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

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

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

Severus snapped out of it and caught up to her.

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, Madam Pomfrey," Lily replied.

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

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

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

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

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



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

"Not hungry?"

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

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



Tuesday, November 2, 1971

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

So where is he then?

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

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

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

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



Thursday, December 2, 1971

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

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

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

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

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

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

That sent a chill down Severus' spine.

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

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

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

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



Friday, December 3, 1971

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Saturday, December 18, 1971

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Thursday, December 30, 1971

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

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

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

They looked about right.

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

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

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

So there it was. December 3. Five points.

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

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



Sunday, January 2, 1972

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

“How was your Christmas?” Lupin asked.

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

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

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

“What's wrong?”

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

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

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



Monday, January 3, 1972

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

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

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

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



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

Severus shrugged. “Just been thinking about something.”

Lupin looked a bit worried.

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

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

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



Sunday, January 9, 1972

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

Bartleby, Reynolds, and Lupin all stared at him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She rolled her eyes and pulled out her wand.

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

Bartleby snickered.

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

Severus nodded.

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

The titles of the books suddenly arranged themselves alphabetically.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Where else?” Lupin replied with a laugh.

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



Friday, March 10, 1972

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Sunday, May 20, 1972

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

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

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

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

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

It might as well have done.

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

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

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

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

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

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



Monday, September 15, 1975

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Damn and blast.

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

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

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

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



Saturday, September 20, 1975

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

But only a threat to humans. Only humans.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He's not the only one.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sunday, September 21, 1975

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Shh!" Madam Pince hissed from her desk.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"That was brilliant. Thank you."

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

"Maybe not," Lupin agreed.

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

"Of course not."

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

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

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



Monday, October 20, 1975

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"But our wands!" Potter demanded.

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

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

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

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

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

"Am I supposed to thank you?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



Saturday, November 16, 1975

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Hey!" Severus yelled.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I did slap him for it.”

“And then you got in my way.”

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

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

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



Tuesday, November 18, 1975

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

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

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

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

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

Severus nudged the packet of food towards him.

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

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

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

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



Saturday, February 14, 1976

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

“Someone sent him a Valentine,” Bartleby said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“You know what I think?” Potter asked.

“What?” Black and Pettigrew replied on cue.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“This isn’t over!” Black said.

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

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



Sunday, February 15, 1976

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

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

“Thank you, Madam Pomfrey.”

Severus heard an audible sniff.

“Madam Pomfrey?”

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

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

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

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

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

“Wasn’t going to!”

“Well then, what?”

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

He didn’t.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Damn!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Remus' growl had grown louder.

"What's that?"

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

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

The werewolf darted for the hole leading to the tunnel.

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

Confused, the wolf stopped.

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

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

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

Remus didn't move.

A few steps and Severus looked back.

The wolf hadn't moved.

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

"What in Merlin's name is that?"

"Let's get out of here!"

"I told you this was a bad idea!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

Idiot!

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Quick, grab it!"

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

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

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

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

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

The next branch caught his hindquarters and sent him flying.

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

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



Monday, February 16, 1976

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

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

recall what had happened to bring him here.

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

Oh, hell.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Led?" he croaked.

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

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

Not to mention I’ve no idea how.

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

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

“Not, it would appear, in time.”

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

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

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

“I bit him,” he choked out.

“Excuse me?” the headmaster asked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“No!” Severus cried out.

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

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

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

But he won’t be here.

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



Tuesday, February 17, 1976

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

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

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

Pettigrew, fortunately, was long gone.

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

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

Severus snorted.

He hardly needs to.

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

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

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

“Hey,” Remus said.

“Good morning,” Severus replied.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Severus shrugged.

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

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

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

“What?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“What?”

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

Severus swallowed hard. “Yes.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Remus gave a small moan in reply.

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

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

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



Saturday, April 24, 1976

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"If you don't want—" Remus started.

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

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

"I have enough," Severus replied, looking along the backs of the shops until he found the one they were looking for, angling towards its back door.

"You shouldn't have to pay it all."

"You'd be surprised what the purebloods think it's worth for me to help them bring up their marks." Severus surely had been, though not in the way he intended Remus to interpret that. "When you're working, we can split things."

Before Remus could argue any more, they'd arrived, and Severus had knocked out the code he'd been assured would get them in.

A tall, grumpy-looking old man opened the door and scowled at them both as a pungent smell nearly bowled Severus over. "Well?"

Severus pulled the bag of coins out of his pocket and counted out the amount he'd been told would be asked.

The man took the coins and looked Severus and Remus up and down. "What year are you two?"

"Fifth," Severus answered. "Are you planning to tell the headmaster?"

The old man snorted and muttered something about kettles and cauldrons as he fished about in his own pocket, finally tossing over a key and waving them in.

It probably wasn't dignified to run up the stairs like a couple of third-years being let into Honeydukes for the first time, but Severus couldn't be arsed to care.



It had gone one-thirty by the time they started sorting out whose clothes were which and scrambling into them.

"If your father sees that ridiculous grin on your face, he's really going to believe you were meeting a girl," Severus pointed out as he pulled on his boots.

"And so I did," Remus agreed. "In fact, I can say in all truthfulness that I did meet up with a girl today, and she even kissed me."

Severus rolled his eyes, though he found himself approving of the deception. It was far easier not to be caught in a lie, after all, if one never actually told one to begin with. Still, he found himself grabbing Remus for one last frantic kiss, trying to memorize the feel and taste of him.

Finally, though, they had to leave. Once downstairs, Severus tossed the key into the drop-box the inkeeper had indicated and ducked out the back door just after Remus. With a look and a nod to one another, each took a different direction: Remus for the Three Broomsticks and Severus to meet Lily at Dervish and Banges.

The air still smelled like rain, but somehow, he wasn't quite so bothered by it. Oh, his leg still hurt, not to mention all the new aches he'd picked up in places he hadn't realized he even had before, but he wasn't fussed. No foolish twinge or ache could dull the shine on this day.

Walking up the steps to Dervish and Banges, he'd just grabbed the door handle when a hand clapped onto his shoulder.

"Fancy finding you here!" Black said with a too-wide grin. "What've you been doing, Snivellus?"

Severus sneered at him, eyes darting around to figure out where he'd come from and where the other two were hiding. He stepped away from the door and planted his feet in a dueling stance.

"More like who," Potter added from behind him.

Severus forced his expression to remain bland. "Is that really the best you can do?"

"Oh, I'll bet you think you've outfoxed us," Potter said softly in his ear. "But I know. We know."

"What do you want?" Severus demanded through clenched teeth.

"Want?" Black asked. "Don't want a thing from you."

"Just a friendly reminder that we'll be keeping an eye on you," Potter said.

"Consorting with Slytherins, shagging Dark Creatures." Black spread his hands, palms up. "I'll bet that alone could land you both in Azkaban. Who knows what sort of other trouble you'll get up to?"

Severus felt every nerve in his body flare to life with the urgent need to rip Black's throat out for that. If not for the shop full of people next to them, he feared he might have done.

Just then, the door to the shop flew open, and Lily and her friends streamed out.

"Sev! Perfect timing," she said, barely sparing the other two boys a glance as she grabbed his elbow and pulled him along with her. "I found something you absolutely have to see at Scrivenshaft's."

"We're not buying it, Evans," Potter called after them.

"Sod off!" she tossed over her shoulder, adding to Severus, "You all right?"

"Never better," he muttered. "Don't need you rescuing me."

She gave him an odd look, but he wasn't about to explain. She couldn't possibly understand what her Housemates had just done to what had been the best day of his life. It took every bit of determination he could muster to pretend interest in the new batches of Ever-Changing Inks and Copperplate Quills that had Lily so excited. He didn't think she'd approve of the things he was planning instead.



Friday, June 11, 1976

Severus stared at his Defense Against the Dark Arts exam paper. He knew he really ought to move on to studying for next week's exams, but he never could help picking apart the questions afterwards. At least he had no doubts about question ten, even if he had been sorely tempted to add, "*And the sixth sign identifying a werewolf is that he was dismissed from school for no fault of his own and now has to be tutored by an Auror in training who's never taught a day in his life before this.*"

At least Remus was to be allowed to take his O.W.L.s. Good job the full moon was tomorrow so it wouldn't interfere too much.

I wish I could be there.

Remus made light of it in his letters, but there was no doubt he was tearing at himself in frustration, locked in his parents' barn for the full moon, something he'd never done in the few months Severus had spent the evening with him. It just wasn't fair.

Deciding that he wasn't going to get anything accomplished sitting under a patch of bushes woolgathering, Severus shoved the parchment into his bag and started back towards the castle. He'd barely taken three steps when he heard Potter call after him.

Severus had his bag down and his wand out in an instant, but Potter sent his wand flying, then hit him with an Impediment Jinx as he dove after it. He struggled against it, but he might as well have been chained down for all the good it did, and with his wand still a good ten feet away, all he could do was sputter at them. "Just you wait! You'll get yours, you bloody bastards!"

"Language," Black said in a falsetto voice before casting, "*Scourgify!*"

Pink bubbles frothed from his mouth faster than he could spit them out, and he started to choke.

"What's wrong with you lot? Let him be!" Lily was storming across the grass at them.

"Why should I?" Potter asked.

"Really, Evans, if you knew ..." Black let his voice trail off.

"I don't care what you bullying toerags think you know!" She put her hands on her hips. "And it's not like you haven't gone out of your way to leave enough hints what you think."

Finally, the Impediment Jinx wore off, and Severus started crawling over towards his wand while the others were distracted. Pettigrew noticed, he saw, but he seemed more interested in the show than who won, as he didn't say a word.

"How's this, Evans: I'll leave him alone if you go out with me." Potter smiled at her.

"I'd rather go out with the giant squid," she retorted.

"You really have been hanging around Snivelly too long," Black muttered.

"Shut it, you!"

Severus reached his wand and spun with it, nonverbally casting his newest hex and slicing that grinning idiot's cheek open. Half a second later, he was hanging upside down with his robes up over his face.

How the hell did he get hold of that one? Lily wouldn't have, would she?

"Let him down!"

Severus fell into a heap on the ground, only to find himself in a Full Body Bind before he could react.

"Stop it already! What's wrong with you?" Lily demanded.

Abruptly, the Body Bind was released, and Severus clambered to his feet.

"Quite the defender you've got there, Snivellus," Black sneered.

"I don't need defending by a silly Mudblood," Severus snapped, clamping his mouth shut too late.

Lily went pale. "Fine. If that's the way you feel about it."

He swallowed hard.

I didn't mean it!

"Apologize right now," Potter demanded.

"As if you're any better!" Lily yelled.

"I'd never call you that!"

But Lily had already turned and was leaving. Severus tried to push past the other two to go after her, only to find himself hanging by his ankles again with James bloody Potter asking who wanted his pants taken down.

"I told you I didn't want to see that!" Pettigrew whined.

"Here, what's this? What're you lot up to?"

Severus landed in a heap on the ground again, wondering if it wouldn't just do him the favor of swallowing him whole this time. His right leg had buckled under him this time, and he cursed the sharp pain that shot through it. He ignored the bickering until someone grabbed his shoulder and gave it a shake.

"You all right, mate?" It was Rosier.

Severus groaned as he stood up. "Never better."

"What do you let them get away with that for?"

"What's it to you?"

Rosier ignored the question. "Don't even see your Housemates around."

Severus shrugged. Most were probably in the library. That didn't mean anything.

"Look, thanks for showing up when you did, but I've got to run."

"Suit yourself."

Severus ran to find Lily and apologize.



Friday, June 18, 1976

Remus was waiting right where he'd said he would be, just out of the way of the cars coming and going from King's Cross. He wasn't doing anything quite so obvious as holding a bouquet of flowers, but he was wearing an utterly foolish grin.

"You're here," he said when Severus got closer.

"Obviously." Severus smirked at him. "Did you find a place?"

Remus flushed. "It's not the greatest, but at least it doesn't smell like goats." He looked around. "Isn't Lily going to say hello before we go?"

Now Severus could feel his own face reddening. "We had a bit of a row. She's not quite forgiven me yet, so I wasn't able to tell her you'd be here."

"Oh." Remus furrowed his brow. "Are you all right? Only I know you've been friends since before Hogwarts."

"She'll come around," he said with a confidence he didn't feel. "We'll need to stop at Gringotts. I've only got a couple of pounds of Muggle money."

Remus' brow didn't smooth. "Right then. You know, I might actually be able to get a bit of a job soon. Then you won't have to treat all the time."

"What kind of job?"

Severus hardly cared about the details, though they sounded mad. He might've lost Lily for a bit, but he still had Remus. That was enough for now.



Friday, July 23, 1976

"So he hasn't made you register?" Remus asked, eyes darting about to make sure no one was close enough to hear.

"Stop it," Severus hissed. "Nobody's near, and you're acting suspicious. Flourish'll think we're going to pinch something." Severus brushed his fingers along the row of books, stopping at *Experimental Potions Theory* by Damocles Belby. "And no, he hasn't." He shook off the sense of foreboding that fact always seemed to evoke.

"Guess it doesn't matter. You couldn't visit at ... certain times, even if I could tell my parents why you'd be safe." Remus shrugged. "Not till next January anyway."

Severus had his doubts whether the Ministry could track an underage Animagus, but he wasn't in a terrible hurry to find out. He flipped through Belby's book and added it to his growing pile.

"That one's not on my list," Remus observed.

"I fail to see why you are even taking Potions with your tutor," Severus replied.

"I think it's more to do with Kingsley than me. He says having to find eight different ways to explain things helps him understand it all better, and they do a lot with Potions in Auror training."

Severus snorted. *Poisons at any rate.*

"Doubt I'll take the N.E.W.T. Slughorn would never have let me in with an A on my O.W.L., after all."

They paid for their purchases and headed for the Leaky Cauldron.

"Too bad Lily couldn't make it today, at least for a bit of shopping," Remus said.

Severus suppressed a wince. He wasn't sure when, if ever, she'd be willing to even speak to him again, and the worst of it was he couldn't blame anyone but himself.

"Sev?"

"Perhaps another time." Severus kept his tone as even as he could. She hadn't answered any his letters, but Remus didn't need to know that.

Arriving at the gateway to the pub, Remus had a lighter book load, so he tapped out the correct sequence to open the door. As they stepped through, they came face to face with the two people Severus wanted least to see.

"Snivellus! Fancy meeting you here, and with your pet, too." Black grinned horribly.

"Been to Knockturn Alley, have you?" Potter asked.

Severus felt his lips curl into a sneer, but he flatly ignored the question. He could feel Remus tremble slightly beside him. He only hoped that was rage and not fear.

"What're you doing with these?" Black pulled at the top of Remus' sack of books and peered inside.

"There's no law against reading," Remus said, his voice even if forced.

"But there are rules against clogging up the doorways in this pub," said an angry witch behind Potter. "Move your bloomin' arses!"

Black and Potter stepped aside reluctantly. A rat darted past them and over Severus' shoe.

"Sorry, miss," Remus said as they passed.

She sniffed indignantly and stormed through to Diagon Alley.

Severus kept walking, Remus first on his heels and then by his side, and didn't look back until they were well out of the pub. When he did, there was no sign that they were being followed.

“They’re not supposed to know,” Remus said quietly. “I should’ve ordered my books by owl post.”

“Can’t be that big a secret,” Severus replied. “O.W.L. results are public record, same as N.E.W.T.s.”

Remus didn’t appear much relieved, but he didn’t pursue it, and they walked together in silence. Once they’d arrived at what had become their regular spot in Muggle London, Severus concentrated on distracting Remus as thoroughly as possible from whatever he feared from those dunderheads.



Friday, September 24, 1976

Severus shook his head at the first years in the corner who’d just broken his concentration with their idiotic game of Exploding Snap. They’d learn soon enough not to waste their time on such things. He turned his attention back to the letter he was writing.

... not as good so far. With the N.E.W.T.s two years out, some of my better customers are not as inclined to seek help. Some of the smarter ones, such as Rosier and Wilkes, obviously want to stay on top of things, but as they are the smarter ones, they require less time. I should, however, have enough by the first Hogsmeade Saturday, which was announced to be October 30 ...

He wished he felt a bit less like a soldier in some black and white film writing to his lover back home. His father watched those, apparently for the express purpose of going on about how those were real men, nothing like namby-pamby wizards, as if firing bullets from a gun were so very different than curses from a wand. No, Severus didn’t much fancy the idea of being like those men at all.



Saturday, September 25, 1976

“Watch it, mate!” Bartleby elbowed him in the ribs. “You’re about to dunk your letter in your porridge.”

Severus crumpled the bit of parchment in his fist. He’d already memorized the main parts anyway.

“Finally heard back from Lily. Why didn’t you tell me? How could you turn on her like that?”

And, of course, there was also the implied question that Remus would never ask.

“So when are you going to turn on me?”

Lily was never going to forgive him. She’d made that perfectly clear. But Remus ... Remus had to be able to

see that he’d never meant to say such a thing, that he’d never meant it. He had to understand.

Severus pushed back his chair and stood.

“Where’re you going? You haven’t even eaten,” Reynolds said.

“Got homework to do.” Severus fled the Great Hall. Rather than the library, he went to Ravenclaw Tower and up to his room, where he flattened out the parchment and read it several more times before even trying to frame a reply.



Sunday, October 17, 1976

It had been almost a bloody month since that last letter. Nearly a week since the last one Severus had sent, the one telling Remus about the next Hogsmeade weekend.

Not that it mattered. There was plenty else for him to do. Rosier and his lot were having some sort of a do at the Three Broomsticks and had invited him, for one.

Still, Severus was immensely relieved when, after the first wave of owls had delivered their assorted letters and issues of the *Daily Prophet*, a smallish, familiar owl alighted in front of him, proffering a scroll of parchment. He gave it a whole rasher of bacon, which was probably a bit much, but the owl didn’t seem to mind, simply taking the thing with it.

It wasn’t much, but it said all it needed to.

“I’ll be there.”



Saturday, October 30, 1976

Remus was waiting inside the room at the inn when Severus arrived, seated at the edge of the bed, head bowed. When he looked up, his eyes looked empty.

An icy pit of lead formed in Severus’ stomach. This wasn’t going to be the carefree afternoon he’d anticipated for the past two weeks.

Then Remus launched himself at him, fists in his robes, mouth pressed firmly against his, tongue tracing the seam of his lips, begging to be let in.

Severus let himself be pulled towards the bed, ignoring the twinge as his leg bumped the table beside it. Words didn’t matter. Only this. At least they still had this.



Saturday, March 5, 1977

Severus told himself it was just because of the full moon, even though that had never been a problem during the day leading up to it before. Remus should have been fine

until tonight. He was just worried about getting back by moonrise, even though they never stayed as late as all that.

He very pointedly did not think about how much more sparse Remus' letters had become since October. That was nothing to do with why he wasn't coming to Hogsmeade today.

And anyway, it was a chance to take Rosier up on his recurring invitation and see what that lot wanted with him.

"There you are! Pull up a chair," Mulciber said. "What'll you have?"

"Gillywater." Butterbeer was far too cloying, and he had no intention of addling his wits with anything stronger.

"So, I imagine you're wondering why we've invited you here," Rosier said.

Severus nodded warily as he looked about the group, largely composed of Slytherins, including Black's younger brother.

"You've helped quite a few of us out," Rosier continued, "and not out of some typical Ravenclaw nonsense about the noble pursuit of learning."

Severus didn't say anything. He wasn't exactly rich enough for that sentiment, but he wasn't about to admit as much.

"You realize your work has value," Rosier said. "So do we. We also value mutually beneficial arrangements such as many of us have with you already, and we'd like to see about the possibility of other such arrangements."

"Not always to do with school," Wilkes added.

Severus took in the faces around the table as he sipped his Gillywater. Several came from very influential families, including Black, who'd made it very clear he had no use for his Gryffindor brother.

"What did you have in mind?" he asked.



Tuesday, April 12, 1977

Severus closed his Potions text and stared at *Experimental Potions Theory*, which was lying open next to it. Belby had some intriguing ideas, particularly in the realm of managing irreversible curse damage by means of potions, but Severus was finding it difficult to focus on how that could be used in his essay.

Instead, he pulled out and reread the letter that had arrived at breakfast. Remus wasn't coming to Hogsmeade next week either. He hadn't even bothered to give a real reason why, though Severus had his suspicions.

Did he expect me to pine away after him and Lily and not make any other friends? He never minded when I was just taking their money.

Right. It was high time he stopped chasing after Remus like a jealous lover and simply moved on with his life. That included not mooning over him instead of doing his homework.

Severus reopened his text and picked his quill back up, steadfastly ignoring the pang in his chest as he did. He needed to finish this quickly. He didn't want it hanging over his head when he met with Rosier's bunch after dinner. At least they still had some use for him.



Tuesday, June 20, 1978

Four days. It had been only four days since Severus' last Leaving Feast. It felt as though he'd stepped into another entire life during those few days.

Father had made it clear he didn't want Severus "muckin' about the place with that fairy-boy magic" under his roof. If Mother had still been alive, Severus wasn't sure she'd have said anything. Father had worn her down too far over the years.

Just as well. Can't be seen living in a Muggle place like that now in any case.

With Rosier's help, he'd got a two-year apprenticeship with Arsenius Jigger that had started yesterday and included a flat above the apothecary in Diagon Alley.

And now this.

He looked at the manor house overlooking the graveyard into which Rosier's Portkey had dropped him. The full moon hung over it, casting an eerie silvery light over manor and gravestones alike. Severus told himself that was the reason for the strange twinge its appearance caused.

Squaring his shoulders, he trudged up the hill and used his wand to tap out the sequence he'd been taught. The door swung open revealing a room full of cloaked and masked figures. He felt naked and exposed by comparison. He reminded himself that he already knew several of the faces behind the masks, that they wanted him here, had invited him. He didn't belong here yet, but he would.

"Come in," said the one unmasked man, a striking brunet whose slitted eyes looked barely human. Power radiated from him, and there was no question in Severus' mind that this was the Dark Lord at last. "Come and be tested, and we shall see whether you are fit to join us."

Severus walked forward and knelt when he was precisely one yard from the man, as he'd been told to do. He kept

his breaths even, carefully thinking only of his eagerness to join the Death Eaters' ranks and his new apprenticeship, tucking away anything inappropriate that might see him leaving this meeting in a box rather than a mask.

"Look at me," the Dark Lord commanded.

As their eyes met, Severus felt the instant his mind was laid bare. He was walking alone into Hogsmeade, meeting with Rosier and the others in the Three Broomsticks, being tripped on the Hogwarts Express by Black, writing his apprenticeship application with Rosier making suggestions over his shoulder, studying alone in the Ravenclaw Common Room, tutoring Mulciber in Potions, dueling Black and Potter until Rosier intervened, hanging by his ankles and then dropped on his head, collaborating with Avery and the other Black on a new hex, testing it on Black's brother, entering this room and assuring himself of his place in it. Abruptly, it all stopped.

"I see you are indeed eager. And you have successfully completed the tasks I sent you through my faithful servants."

That gave him a start. He'd recognized the challenges for what they were, an opportunity to prove himself, but he'd no idea they'd come from the Dark Lord himself. Still, he didn't speak.

"Do you truly wish to join us?"

"Yes."

"Will you work tirelessly towards a return to the glorious traditions that have become so weak in recent years?"

"I will."

"Will you obey my commands without question?"

"I will."

"Give me your arm."

Severus drew up his sleeve and presented his left arm.

"Do you willingly accept my Mark, that I may summon you at need and your brethren may know you as one of their own?"

"I do."

The tip of the Dark Lord's wand pressed into his forearm, and a searing pain shot through it. He gritted his teeth so he wouldn't cry out, willing the tears stinging the backs of his eyes to dry.

The pain did not precisely end so much as subside to a dull ache as the Dark Lord removed his wand, leaving behind the infamous skull and snake.

"Welcome to your new family."

Someone tugged at Severus' elbow and handed him a cloak and mask, and a sense of satisfaction spread through him like Firewhisky licking through his veins.

"Thank you, master."

Monday, March 31, 1980

Severus held himself completely still until the echoes of his crack of Apparition faded. When he was certain that he hadn't been noticed, he allowed himself a steadying breath. As much sense as there was to the Dark Lord's plan, he was not looking forward to facing Dumbledore. There was, he suspected, every likelihood that this supposed interview was a trap.

There was no sentimentality about his choice of Apparition point. Coming to this spot first simply made sense, as it was one of the places in Hogsmeade that was most familiar to him. He touched the large stone and glanced up at the full moon. With a scowl, he yanked his hand back to his side and squashed the nascent question of where a certain werewolf might be tonight.

He made his way through the stand of trees and approached the Hog's Head, going to the front entryway for the first time. The odor of goats was as bad as he'd remembered, if not worse.

He took a seat in a corner that gave him the widest possible view of his surroundings and ordered a Gillywater to satisfy the innkeeper.

"Headmaster said t'tell you he'd be down in a few minutes," the grizzled old man said. "You're not his only interview tonight."

Severus acknowledged that with a nod as he accepted the glass and took a sip from the least filthy bit of it he could find.

After several long minutes, he began to grow impatient. Yes, he could wait for hours if he were required to do so, but that had not been his expectation this evening. Besides that, he had to admit a certain curiosity as to who else was being interviewed and whether they were after the same position.

The innkeeper had taken himself off to the kitchen just a bit ago, so Severus rose and took the stairs quietly, hoping to find out something useful.

It was easy enough to find the room being used, as a strange, gravelly voice was emanating from it. His eyes widened as he heard what it was saying.

"... vanquish the Dark Lord approaches ... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies ..."

“What’re you doing up here?” A large hand gripped his shoulder and spun him around. “Get your arse back downstairs and wait your turn!”

The gravelly voice had continued, but Severus hadn’t been able to hear the rest of what it said. There was silence and then a click.

The door to the room had opened. Dumbledore was standing there, and behind him was a very oddly dressed witch, whose glittery necklaces and oversized glasses gave her a distinctly insect-like appearance, and yet she was looking at Severus like something she’d found on the underside of her shoe. Fighting the urge to panic and bolt, Severus kept his mind carefully blank of everything save the startling woman and his own determination to succeed at his interview as Dumbledore regarded him carefully.

“I do not believe we will have our interview, Mr. Snape,” the headmaster said. “I have found it quite difficult for some years to find personnel who are able to maintain the Defense Against the Dark Arts position, and I do not think that eavesdropping, much less being caught at it, bodes well for someone wishing to attempt it.”

Severus pressed his lips together tightly but was careful to show no more than the ordinary frustration one might feel at being denied a position.

Does he not realize what I heard?

He was afraid any dignity that such a performance might have salvaged, however, was undercut by the burly innkeeper still hanging onto him.

“Off with you then,” the smelly old man said, dragging him down the stairs and pitching him out the front door so that he barely kept his feet. “To think this is the thanks I get. Ungrateful sod.”

Straightening and smoothing out his robes, Severus simply walked back towards the train station. Once well out of the way, he could Apparate back to the Dark Lord’s manor to report. He hoped that the prophetic warning he’d heard, though incomplete, might spare him the worst of his Lord’s temper for failing to complete his assigned mission.



Thursday, April 16, 1981

Severus Conjured a table and set his steaming cauldron atop it. He didn’t bother to look out over the group of faces before him. Didn’t want to know if he recognized any of them save Greyback. Wouldn’t care if this experimental potion killed the lot, save that his master would be sorely displeased to lose the army of biddable monsters he craved.

He ladled out goblets full to each of them as he’d done yesterday and would do again for the next three days.

“So it is you,” a familiar voice said.

He looked up from the cauldron at the brown-haired man in tattered robes, framed in the silver of the mask around Severus’ eyes.

“They’ll kill her, you know.”

“On your way,” Severus barked, returning his eyes to his cauldron and ladling potion into another goblet.

It didn’t matter whether the chill running down his spine was to do with the brown-haired man or what he’d said. It didn’t.



Tuesday, August 4, 1981

Severus’ nerves sang with terror as he scanned the small clearing in the darkness, pacing around the large stone in its center, scenting the air and listening carefully for any sounds out of place. He’d taken every precaution not to be followed, but he had every bit as much reason to fear the one expecting to meet him here as those who might have dogged his movements.

Reasonably certain he was unobserved, he shifted back to human form, his eyes taking a moment to adjust to their much poorer night vision.

A loud crack and a flash of light, and his wand shot out of his hand. Severus dropped to his knees behind the stone, but not before he saw that it was Dumbledore. That wasn’t particularly reassuring.

“Don’t kill me!” he called out, thinking, *at least not until you hear what I have to say.*

“I do not plan to.” Dumbledore glared down at Severus as he straightened and stood. “What message did Lord Voldemort send with you?”

Severus suppressed a wince at the pain that lanced through his forearm at the name. “I’m here on my own account.”

Dumbledore said nothing.

“Lupin’s made it clear that you know Lily and her family are targeted.”

“Something, I believe, for which they have you to thank.”

White hot fury roiled through Severus’ veins. “I didn’t even know she’d got married, much less that she was pregnant! I would never have—”

“But it would be fine for anyone else’s child to be murdered?”

"I don't know who it is that has been informing the Dark Lord of your attempts to protect them," Severus pressed on. "The only name I've heard is 'Wormtail,' which is obviously some sort of code."

"And what is it you expect me to do with this information?" Dumbledore demanded.

"Protect them!" Severus retorted. "Please."

That last word hung in the air for a moment.

"Was there anything else?"

"Greyback suspects there is an informant in his pack." Severus drew a steadying breath. "When he finds out who it is, he will tear Lupin apart."

"Then I should think it would be very important he not find out." Dumbledore tilted his head. "I confess to some surprise that he has not already."

"Lupin's face is an open book!" Severus slammed his hands down on the stone between them. "It's nothing short of a miracle he's lasted this long. Please, pull him out."

"I do not believe that would be wise," Dumbledore replied. "Not only would that mark him definitively as the spy, we would lack sorely for the information he has been able to provide."

Severus swallowed hard. "You could find a way. You always do."

"You have made two demands so far. I wonder what you think to offer in return?"

"Information. I have access to far more than Lupin, including the precise formulations that have been used on the werewolves and my theories as to why none have worked." He straightened and balled his hands at his sides.

"Theories?"

Severus didn't reply. Dumbledore wasn't getting another scrap until he promised to keep them both safe.

"Very well." Dumbledore's eyes gleamed. "In return, I believe you might help me out of a slight difficulty. Professor Slughorn has indicated that he would like to retire, leaving me without a Potions master."

Severus' heart leapt. The Dark Lord would be pleased that he'd finally secured a position at Hogwarts, albeit not the one he'd had in mind, and such would provide the perfect opportunity to convey information to Dumbledore.

Until the Dark Lord catches me and tortures me to death.

But Remus would be safe. Remus and Lily.

Severus nodded, hardly daring to believe it.

"Splendid. I'll expect you at two o'clock on the nineteenth to review the Potions curriculum so that you may begin planning your lessons." Dumbledore turned as if to go, then turned back. "If any information you give me proves to be deliberately inaccurate, Severus, I will have no choice but to ask Mr. Lupin to resume his duties."

"That will not prove necessary," Severus replied through gritted teeth.

"See that it does not." This time Dumbledore did turn on his heel, Apparating away with a barely audible crack.



Saturday, October 31, 1981

Severus ran as fast as his four legs would carry him down the lane and past the tiny church.

An explosion shook the night, but he didn't break his stride.

Too late. Too late.

He ran into the ruined building as soon as it flickered into view, unwilling to accept what its sudden visibility must mean. The baby's screams gave him hope as he'd bounded up the stairs, past Potter's corpse.

Lily lay in a tangle of limbs in front of the cot. There was no mistaking this for peaceful sleep. He whined at her to wake up anyway. She remained motionless.

The baby calmed at the sight of him. Severus wondered irrelevantly if the child thought he was a magical plushy.

As for himself, he wasn't sure what he thought of the child. He was Lily's. She'd obviously died saving him. Severus was too numb to work out what he felt about the infant's survival, though instinct bade him check that the child was unhurt. The cot itself appeared undamaged, and the babe appeared healthy enough, though he bore a strange, lightning-like scar.

The opposite wall had blown out, all debris following it out onto the ground. Severus shuddered as he realized the Dark Lord was probably lying out there amongst the rubble. Vulnerable.

With a growl he took a running leap over the remains of the wall and onto the still form half-buried in stone and plaster. Ignoring the smell of death already emanating from the body and the twinge from his leg as he landed, he clamped his jaws around the throat and tore, gagging on the acrid taste.

A hissing sound off to one side made him whip his head around, stopping him from further pointless mutilation, but it was only a small snake such as one might find in any garden, if somewhat out of season. Severus turned back to the corpse below him, blood oozing from the gaping wound he'd created.

Disgusted, he stepped away and shifted into his human form. He gagged and spat out as much blood as he could. He quickly sent a message by Patronus to Dumbledore and shifted back. The coppery taste was still present, but somehow it did not bother him as much.

The baby began to cry again, but he couldn't bring himself to go back up there. Couldn't bear to see Lily's body again. The child would be safe in its cot. He found a spot that afforded him a measure of cover and a reasonable view of both cottage and road, then settled in to watch and wait.

Severus wasn't sure it was precisely easier to sit vigil here in this form. He still felt as though he'd been hit with an Entrail-Expelling Curse. If anything, the grief for the loss of his first real friend was even more physical as a fox than it had been as a human. But complicated emotions such as guilt and resentment that had begun to threaten during the time he'd shifted back seemed beyond him now, a state he welcomed.

No return message came. Instead, Black arrived on his ridiculous flying motorcycle and tore through the house. Severus heard him screaming as if from very far away.

Sometime later, Black looked through the gaping hole in the cottage. Severus stayed utterly still, but he needn't have bothered. Black was only looking for the same thing he had.

Moments later, Black left the cottage, babe in arms, just as Hagrid, of all people arrived. They argued, though the only information they let drop that Severus deemed important was that Dumbledore had sent Hagrid—begging the question how Black had known to come—and that Black was the boy's godfather.

Both men left shortly thereafter, Black on foot and Hagrid on the motorcycle.

Severus remained where he was. There was nothing else to be done, after all. It was over. All of it.



Sunday, November 1, 1981

He was still sitting in the same spot, staring at the house and the rubble behind it, when the sun rose. The Dark Lord still hadn't moved, for all that Severus had half expected him to.

All that talk of immortality. Just more of his lies.

There had been a flurry of activity a few hours ago. Word must have got out, and the wizards in the neighborhood had all come by to peer at the wreckage, though none had actually ventured onto the grounds. They'd all taken themselves off by now, though he was sure more would arrive later. Now the Muggles were beginning to stir in their homes, but none had ventured out yet, which made the disheveled man walking past the small church all the more obvious.

Remus.

There was no mistaking him, even before he drew close enough for Severus to catch his scent. He stopped in front of the cottage and stared at it for a long minute before cutting across the grass straight towards Severus.

Too empty of anything but pain to care, he simply watched the man approach and made no move to get out of the way when Remus drew his wand. If anything, he was disappointed that all he did was cast the spell to cancel Severus' Animagus transformation. He couldn't even be arsed to get up from the now-ridiculous position, so ill-suited to his human body.

"Tell me you didn't know," Remus demanded, tears streaming down his face, wand still trained on Severus. "Or tell me you tried to stop it. Tell me something!"

"Of course I tried to stop it!" Severus felt tears prick at his own eyes, pressure building up in his chest as all those more complicated emotions began to assert themselves. "Still gone. Dead."

He gave in at last, his body wracked with sobs. It had all been for nothing. His pleas to the Dark Lord, insinuating he wanted Lily for himself. His espionage for Dumbledore. All for nothing.

He stiffened when he felt Remus kneel pull him up and then drag him through the sickening swirl of Side-Along Apparition. But he didn't bother to take in his new surroundings, sagging into the arms that held him as his knees gave way.

"I had to know," Remus was murmuring against his hair, his own breath coming in shuddering gasps. "I couldn't hate you. But if you'd been ... I don't have to hate you."

"You should," he croaked.

"I can't." Remus lowered them both to the ground ... no, floor. He even took care to keep Severus' leg from banging against anything on the way down.

Severus thought he smelled goats. Looking around, he realized where they were.

“Dumbledore said to bring you here and wait.”

Severus couldn't imagine what there was to wait for, but he didn't argue. He was out of arguments. Out of tears. Instead, he said, “I could never hate you either.” After a minute, he added, “I tried.”

“So did I.” Remus scrubbed his hands over his face.

Silence.

“Do you think we could have done anything differently?” Remus asked. “Changed anything?”

“I tried,” Severus repeated. “It didn't matter.”

“It matters that you tried,” Remus said. “At least, it matters to me.”

Staring at Remus, Severus realized he had managed at least one thing. Whatever else he'd been up to, Remus had been pulled from Greyback's pack. Severus might not have kept Lily alive, but he had done that.

“It matters to me,” Remus repeated.

Firefly124's Bio

When she isn't reading or writing fanfiction in any number of fandoms, firefly124 can often be found bellydancing, crocheting, or in some other creative pursuit, as the Muse beckons.

- Website: <http://firefly124.insanejournal.com>
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Xterm's Bio

Xterm is primarily a lurker, who, on occasion, can be talked into taking the boys out and playing with them a bit. The fandom she participates in the most is Harry Potter, with ninety percent of the time as a crewmember of the 'Ship Snupin. It's easiest to get a hold of her at LJ (surprisingly *wink* with her user name, xterm).

Her gallery at LJ

<http://pics.livejournal.com/xterm/gallery/0000q68f> usually has her most recent work.



Caught after Curfew Chibitoaster/Littleblackbow

Information

Rated PG.

Summary: "Revenge is a dish best served cold," Lucius Malfoy once told his friend Severus. He's about to find out just how true that statement is.

Author Note: Thanks to Book7BrokeMyBrain for the fast beta, and Skitty Kat for the art.
salaams to them both

Best Served Cold

by Ellid
Art by Skitty_kat

The Daily Prophet

June 29th 2001

Special Edition

Vol. XXX

SCANDAL IN HOGSMEADE

HOGWARTS HEADMASTER IN LOVE NEST WITH WIDOWED WEREWOLF!!!!

HOGSMEADE -In a shocking development, Hogwarts Headmaster Severus Snape is alleged to be living in an intimate relationship with notorious werewolf Remus Lupin in a "love den" outside of Hogsmeade. Mr. Lupin, whose wife,

Nymphadora Tonks-Lupin, died heroically at the Battle of Hogwarts, moved to Hogsmeade last year with his young son, Theodore, allegedly to work on his memoirs

[three paragraphs deleted]

When asked for comment on this story, Headmaster Snape threatened to turn this reporter into a newt. Mr. Lupin was allegedly in wolf form and unavailable for comment, although this reporter noted that the full moon was three days ago....

Excerpt from letter to Remus Lupin from Andromeda Tonks, 1 July 2001:

...I knew you weren't good for my Dora! She's barely cold in her grave, and don't you tell me it's been two years and it's time for you to move on! She gave you a son! You should find him a *mother*, not SNAPE!!!!

You should be ashamed of yourself! I will never allow....

Excerpt from transcript of the Hogwarts Board of Governors' meeting, 26 July 2001.

MR. PICKINGILL: Do you deny that you are engaged in an illicit relationship with this werewolf?

HEADMASTER SNAPE: I deny that I am in an illicit relationship.

MR. PICKINGILL: Two men -

HEADMASTER SNAPE: Homosexuality was decriminalized nearly forty years ago. There is nothing in my contract forbidding it.

MADAME PUCEY: We have received many letters of protest. You are setting a poor example for the children.

HEADMASTER SNAPE: How so? Am I to deny myself all companionship?

MADAME PUCEY: That is not what we are saying. We are saying that living in an intimate relationship is not setting a good example for the students.

HEADMASTER SNAPE: Please note that under current law, I am unable to marry Mr. Lupin. Were that not the case, be assured that he would be living here at the castle as my spouse, not on the outskirts of town in his own establishment, and the question of an illicit relationship would not be at issue.

MR. PICKINGILL: This is outrageous! Two men - disgusting -

HEADMASTER SNAPE: It is no one's business but ours.

MR. MALFOY: Severus, Severus. I told you that this would rebound on you when you first confided in me about your feelings for this - individual. Surely you could see that there would be consequences?

HEADMASTER SNAPE: There are consequences only because someone informed the Governors and the press. Lupin and I have been involved since shortly after the War. No harm was done to the children or the school until we were outed by the press.

MADAME PUCEY: Madame Lupin -

HEADMASTER SNAPE: Tonks-Lupin. Accuracy would be appreciated.



MADAME PUCEY: - sacrificed herself so that her husband would live. One could say that this dishonours her memory.

MR. MALFOY: I must agree, Severus. My niece was never a conventional witch, but even she would have objected to being replaced by a man.

HEADMASTER SNAPE: You haven't the slightest idea what Nymphadora thought or wanted, Lucius.

MR. MALFOY: This is not about me, Severus. This is about you.

HEADMASTER SNAPE: It is about prejudice. Did we learn nothing from the War?

MR. PICKINGILL: Lucius! You said he'd go quietly!

HEADMASTER SNAPE: I beg your pardon?

MR. MALFOY: We'll discuss this later, George.

MADAME PUCEY: I'm with George, Lucius. You told us Snape would resign when his secret was -

HEADMASTER SNAPE: What? What?

MR. MALFOY: I never said that, Adelia. You must be mistaken.

MADAME PUCEY: Secretary! I demand that you read back the minutes.

HEADMASTER SNAPE: You let them write this down? Lucius, you're slipping.

MISS BAXTER-COHN: According to the minutes of the Executive Session, Mr. Malfoy stated that Headmaster Snape was, quote, living as Lupin's catamite -

HEADMASTER SNAPE: Not true. I usually top.

MR. PICKINGILL: Top? What does that mean?

MISS BAXTER-COHN: - and ashamed of it.

HEADMASTER SNAPE: Again, not true. We attended the Muggle Pride March last July. We left Teddy with his grandmother so we could go clubbing afterwards. The sole reason we have not lived together openly is because of that ridiculous morals clause in my contract.

MR. MALFOY: We don't need the details, Severus.

HEADMASTER SNAPE: No one seemed to mind when Albus and Elphias Doge were buggering each other's brains out behind Greenhouse 6.

MR. PICKINGILL: What? What?

MR. MALFOY: He's raving, George. Ignore him.

MISS BAXTER-COHN: Mr. Malfoy further stated that he was confident that the Headmaster would resign if his living arrangements became public. He then suggested several possible replacements -

MR. MALFOY: Mere speculation, I never -

HEADMASTER SNAPE: Shut it, Lucius. This is fascinating.

MISS BAXTER-COHN: - who would be more malleable and less intent on introducing reform to the house system and the curriculum.

MR. MALFOY: That is a distortion of my - Severus. Stop staring at me like that. You aren't -

HEADMASTER SNAPE: You really should have studied Occlumency when you had the chance, Lucius.

MR. MALFOY: Bugger.

Excerpt from Decision on Expedited Custody Petition of Andromeda Black Tonks against R.J. Lupin for custody of Theodore Remus Lupin, a minor child, dated 22 August, 2001.

...as social mores have changed since the Petitioner was a child, we find her objection to Mr. Lupin's custody of his child puzzling. Although we must agree that the minor child would ideally be raised by his mother and his father, the heroic death of Petitioner's daughter has made this, of course, impossible. The minor child's father is alive and clearly loves his son, and investigation has shown no evidence that he has been harmed by his father's relationship with another man.

We therefore find that it is in the best interest of the child that he remain with his father and deny the Petitioner's claim, with prejudice.

Marchbanks, W.

Excerpt from letter to the Board of Governors, dated 27 August 2001.

...Accordingly, I hereby grant the wishes of Mr. Malfoy, Madame Pucey, and the allegedly cunning Mr. Pickingill, not to mention the worthy readers of the newspapers, and resign my position, effective immediately. I have already removed my possessions, including potions ingredients and all intellectual property such as my class notes, syllabi, and research, from the school. Good luck to Slughorn or whichever incompetent fool you pick to replace me....

Letter from Remus Lupin and Severus Snape to Minerva McGonagall, Hermione Granger, Ronald Weasley, Harry Potter, Filius Flitwick, Rubeus Hagrid, etc., etc.

10 November 2001

Dear Friends:

This is not an easy letter to write. After due consideration, however, we do not believe that we have a choice.

Over the past six months we have come to realize that the Wizarding World has learned nothing about prejudice from the Dark Lord's Voldemort's reign of terror. We have been forced from our jobs, Remus nearly lost custody of his son, and our house has been repeatedly vandalized. The life that we fought for has been made unbearable thanks to the vindictive 'outing' we received in the newspapers in June.

We have thought long and hard about this, and our decision is irrevocable: we are leaving the Wizarding World. We have obtained employment and housing under Muggle identities in an undisclosed location. Do not attempt to find us or talk us out of this, as our minds are made up....

SIX YEARS LATER

Paid advertisement on or about 16 August, 2007, on the "Davina Tyson Show" on the WWN. Print versions, accompanied by appropriate graphics, appear in every Wizarding publication except the Quibbler.

DO YOU WANT TO SAVE MONEY?

We've all been tempted:

-There's a sale at Marks & Spencer. You'll have to alter the cut, but the price is so good it's worth it.

-Milk at the petrol station is cheaper than Madam Jenner's. What's the harm in buying a gallon or two?

-You've had a long, hard day at the Ministry and you don't feel like cooking. It's easy to pick up a meal at the pub or McDougall's, and your wife will be so happy!

DON'T BUY MUGGLE!

Face it. We've all bought from Muggle businesses without thinking about it. Most of us live near Muggles. Some of us are related to Muggles. It's so easy to buy Muggle without thinking about all the money we're wasting when we buy from Muggle stores, or the damage we're doing to Wizard-owned businesses and families by letting our hard-earned galleons flow into Muggle coffers.

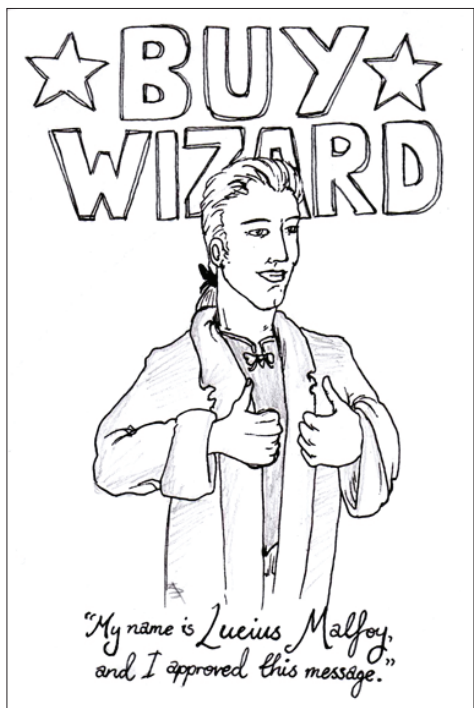
Our free booklet, "How to Save Money by Buying Wizard," will show you how easy it is to save money and support your community by buying exclusively from Wizard-owned businesses. Every sickle you spend in Diagon Alley or Hogsmeade supports your friends and neighbours, not Muggles who care only about profit. Merely send five knuts by owl-post to:

*"How to Save Money"
c/o The Traditionalist Coalition
Diagon Alley, London*

SUPPORT YOUR COMMUNITY! BUY WIZARD! IT'S TIME WE TOOK CARE OF OUR OWN!

Paid for by Malfoy for Wizengamot, G. Goyle Sr., recording secretary.

LUCIUS MALFOY: My name is Lucius Malfoy, and I approved this message.



"Gregory! Do you have the results of the latest poll?" Lucius Malfoy flicked his cloak off his shoulders and watched as it floated to the rack behind his desk. "Millicent has informed me that the pamphlets are almost sold out so it should be reflected in the numbers."

"That it is, sir." Gregory Goyle, Sr., lumbered in, a long sheet of paper trailing from his hand. "You're up three points over Madam Granger-Weasley since the Buy Wizard campaign hit the WWN. Rita Skeeter's pen portrait of the Weasleys' marriage didn't help - a lot of people don't approve of her keeping her name, even hyphenated.

"We're also seeing good results from the push polls expressing concern about her youth, especially among women. She might be a war hero, but a lot of the ladies think she should be starting a family instead of standing for the Wizengamot."

Lucius removed his gloves. They were dyed to match his top boots, which in turn matched his cloak and cane. Dressing well was so important. "Excellent point. The next pamphlet should be about how it's the patriotic duty of our women to repopulate our world after the late unpleasantness. My son's wife should be posed with a baby on the cover."

Goyle looked puzzled. "But sir, Madam Astoria hasn't had a baby yet. Everyone knows that."

“That problem should be solved in the near future,” said Lucius between his teeth. If Snape hadn’t illegally removed all his notes and workbooks when he decamped from Hogwarts, he would already be a grandfather twice over. Slughorn promised results, but so far Astoria had remained distressingly childless. “Pose her anyway. The back cover should show Granger -”

“Granger-Weasley, sir.”

“ - in Muggle clothes looking at an empty crib. The artist can alter the faces enough that she won’t dare sue.” Lucius picked up his morning mail from his blotter and automatically began tossing them into piles: correspondence to be answered personally; correspondence to be answered with a form letter and a signed photograph; bills to be forwarded to his accountant; campaign expenses to be given to his banker; the *Prophet* and its lovely, lovely poll showing him leading that too-clever girl; *Modern Magey* and its pen portrait of him as the stern but loving patriarch; Witch Weekly’s gushing look at “Luscious Lucius at home”....

One large, bulging envelope puzzled him. It was likely a gift from one of his female admirers, of whom there seemed to be quite a few. Narcissa had been somewhat miffed when the first packages arrived, and even less pleased by the gushing letters, but he’d soon set her straight. “Consider them votes, darling,” he’d said, and, as usual, Narcissa had sighed and agreed.

“Gregory? Do we have any contributors in Porthmadog?”

“Porthmadog? I don’t think so, sir. There aren’t any registered Wizards living there. Blaenau Ffestiniog, maybe.” Goyle drew his wand and cast a diagnostic spell on the package. “Seems harmless enough. It might be one of us who went underground after the War - late unpleasantness.”

Lucius frowned. For all its size, the package was too light to be a gift, the wrong color to be the weekly package of clippings from his service. It crackled slightly as he reclaimed it from Goyle and summoned an ivory-handled letter opener. Was it yet another letter requesting a private meeting? Or something else?

A bell rang over the door. Gregory muttered an indelicate word. “Sorry, sir. That’s the press signal. Someone from the *Prophet*, most likely. Should I give them a sample booklet?”

“Yes, yes.” Lucius made a shooining gesture. “Whatever they want. Offer Granger - “

“Granger-Weasley, sir.”

“Whatever. Make a public offer to send her a free copy, and one for her parents.” Lucius smiled in the way that had always made Draco snap to. “They’re Muggle dentists, you know.”

“That I do, sir,” said Goyle. He exited, muttering, as the bell rang again.

Lucius smiled to himself at the sound of voices from the reception area. Gregory had his limits, Merlin knew, but the day he couldn’t deal effectively with the press was the day Lucius retired to Malfoy Manor to breed albino house elves. It was a shame his son could barely cast a decent *Incendio*, but at least Draco had been able to keep Gregory Jr. in work at that wretched but profitable establishment. Draco himself had grumbled at stooping so low when Lucius turned the place over to him, but when Lucius had pointed out how much money had gone to legal fees, Dark Mark removal, and Narcissa’s winter wardrobe, he had seen the -

The envelope upended itself without warning, spilling out several clippings, photographs, and a single sheet of that pseudo-parchment paper Muggles used when they wanted to play at calligraphy. Some of the clippings were yellow from age, others the greyish-white of fresh newsprint. One or two were grainy photocopies. Not one of the photographs moved.

It was clearly a joke of some sort, or perhaps yet another protest against his “bigotry” for advocating for purebloods against the creeping influence of Muggles and Muggleborns on British Wizardry. Lucius snorted and was about to bin the lot when the parchment fluttered to shoulder level and a voice he had not heard in six years filled the room.

Hello, Lucius. I see that you’re doing well.

It had to be a joke. Severus had left the Wizarding World, lock, stock, and werewolf, not to mention the werewolf’s multi-coloured offspring. No one, not even Potter and his in-laws, had received so much as a Christmas card or request for money from either of them. What was going on?

You're surprised to hear from me, I daresay. The voice chuckled softly. *I simply wished to convey my congratulations on your political success.*

Lucius smiled thinly. Of course it was Severus. The spiky handwriting on the Muggle paper was unmistakable. "As well you should. Unlike you, I've always had an eye to my future. Even with the Dark Lord gone, I –"

Remus, Teddy, and I have established ourselves in the Muggle world. Except for brewing Wolfsbane for Remus once a month, I haven't used my wand in years. Oddly enough, I haven't missed it. You might consider trying it once in a while. Intellectual rigor and all that.

"Severus, Severus." Lucius shook his head at the imitation parchment. "I thought you knew me better than that, and you the clever one. Clearly you've inhaled a bit too much aconite, unless it's lack of sleep from tending Lupin's sprog."

I'm sure you've better things to do than listen to me natter on about my life. Enclosed please find a few items that might be of interest to you. You and Draco haven't exactly covered your tracks very well, have you?

Severus had never talked like that unless he had something unusually subtle in mind. Lucius leaned forward with a slight frown, elegant nails clicking against his favourite paperweight as he drummed his fingers. What the –

Please give my regards to Narcissa and Draco – or does he prefer David these days? Odd, that he chose a Welsh nom-de-guerre for his business endeavours in the Muggle World..

Severus laughed as a wolf howled somewhere in the background and a young child's voice asked Papa for another slice of orange. It was not a pretty laugh.

Oh, one more thing. You might want to share this with your campaign manager. Gregory never did think very quickly on his feet.

'Bye-bye,' as my stepson would put it. I'm sure the peacocks will still speak to you no matter what.

"Peacocks? What the devil are you talking about?" Lucius snatched up the parchment and shook it as if it might turn into Severus himself. "I'll win the election, you traitorous *Half-Blood*, and then I'll send the Aurors after you and that bloody wolf!"

One of the clippings fluttered up to eye level. Another voice, this one young and high-pitched, spoke.

Dear Mr. Malfoy, Daddy and Papa said I should tell you to read this one first. It's all about me and how your restaurant gave me tummy-ache! That wasn't very nice, you know. I was so sick that my hair wouldn't change colour for a week, and I kept throwing up all over Papa's workroom so he was very cross even though it wasn't my fault that there were mealy worms in my Kiddie Fun Meal.

Kiddie Fun Meal? Lucius jammed his pince-nez into place, hands shaking slightly. Surely Severus and his "family" hadn't found –

Another voice, husky enough that it had to be Lupin, interrupted the child. Darling, you need to mind your manners. You don't want Mr. Malfoy's solicitors to send Daddy and Papa a nasty note, do you?

-No, Papa! I'm sorry.

-It's all right, darling. Now, say good-bye to Mr. Malfoy. There's a good boy!

I'm sorry I was rude, Mr. Malfoy. I hope you win your election. Your friend, Teddy Lupin.

The clipping unfurled itself, the headline seeming to vibrate as Lucius began to read:

McDOUGALL'S MADE MY LITTLE BOY SICK!

DOVETON -Stephen Snape and Richard Lupin had no idea why their son, Teddy, kept having tummy trouble. A sturdy lad, he had been perfectly healthy all his life, with never more than the sprained ankle he got playing football.

It wasn't until half his team found small caterpillars in the French fries and hamburgers they bought at the local McDougall's fast food restaurant that they knew what was making poor Teddy and his little friends ill after games -

Lucius gaped in horror. Doveton? Why hadn't Draco mentioned that Snape and Lupin lived nearby? "That wasn't us, it was our supplier!"

Another clipping rose, this one about a protest against "factory farming," whatever that was, to be held at selected McDougall's restaurants throughout Britain. Two of the protesters, Stephen and Richard, seemed to be spouting off about how they'd been radicalised by their own experiences with bigotry and a nasty custody fight between Richard and his former mother-in-law over his son. The accompanying photograph showed two men who could only be Severus and Lupin, both in Muggle formalwear, with the caption "Stephen Snape and Richard Lupin at their civil union. The fathers are contemplating legal action against the McDougall's that served tainted food to their son and his -"

"Damn, blast, and bugger!" Lucius slammed the clipping down hard enough to make his inkwell jump. "Go howl at the moon, you unnatural beast!"

A third clipping all but thrust itself up his nose:

BOYCOTT AGAINST BIGOTRY!

Sir Ivor McKellswood, actor and gay rights activist, spoke in support of a boycott against the Doveton McDougall's. Allegations of homophobia have arisen against the owner, Lucius Malcolm, and his son David. David, manager of the restaurant at the centre of the controversy, is alleged to have called local men Stephan Snape and Richard Lupin 'a couple of f-----g poofsters' and threatened them with a stick during the monthly cleaning of the fryalator.

"Their food is dreadful, Americanised slop," said Sir Ivor, one of Britain's leading Shakespearean actors. "It's good to see British fathers care so deeply about their child. We're getting fatter and less healthy every day, and restaurants like this are the reason. We need to stand up for healthy food and British business!"

Teddy Lupin, son of Mr. Lupin by his first marriage, led a procession of schoolchildren dressed as vegetables outside the restaurant whilst Mr. Malcolm and his staff watched -



Lucius swore violently and tore the whole lot to shreds. Draco had sworn there were no wizards for miles around Doveton! What was wrong with him? Whether they used their wands or not, Snape and Lupin were powerful enough that Draco should have sensed them immediately!

“Sir?” Gregory, looking exceedingly nervous, poked his head into the room. “Miss Skeeter from the *Prophet* wants to see you.”

“Tell her I’m in a meeting!” Lucius threw his pince-nez onto the blotter and turned toward the fireplace. “I have to see Draco immediately!”

“But sir – “ Gregory hesitantly advanced into the room, a magazine in his meaty hands. “She wants a comment on this article in the *Quibbler*! There’s this picture of Master Draco in a Muggle restaurant and – ”

Lucius froze. A publicity photo of Draco in full manager’s uniform, complete with logo tie, standing outside the Doveton McDougall’s smiled up at him from the cover of the latest *Quibbler*. **EXPOSED! MALFOY OWNERSHIP OF MUGGLE BUSINESS!** pulsed red and black above Draco’s head.

“Has this hit the newsstands?”

Gregory nodded, clearly miserable. “The *Prophet* is set to run it in the afternoon edition. It was the lead story on the WWN nine o’clock report this morning.” He shrank as much as a big man could. “Miss Skeeter says that this package of clippings about tainted food at your business showed up in her post box last week. There’s this picture of Master Draco cleaning some equipment and threatening a little boy, even.”

Lucius sank back into his chair. He had enjoyed a leisurely breakfast at home, and now every bite of eggs Benedict, fried potatoes, and fresh melon was threatening to come right back up. “How much is in the emergency fund?”



“About six hundred galleons, sir, all in unmarked coin.” Gregory rubbed his hands together. “I can send out the lads to buy up all the papers before – “

“No, no. The home edition will already have been delivered.” Lucius had faced many troubles over the years, from Narcissa finding out about the dancer in Prague to a year in Azkaban. He had lied his way out of most of them, the family involvement with the Dark Lord being the great exception. This, though -

“Please Owl – telephone my son. Tell him I need to see him immediately.” After he finished flaying his worthless heir alive for letting himself be photographed waving his wand in public, he’d start planning a plausible denial. Had Hermione Granger ever been in Doveton? And did she eat at McDougall’s?

This baseless attack is clearly a desperate attempt by my opponent to -

Gregory’s assistant burst in, waving a Howler about as if it might explode at any second. “Mr. Malfoy! Sir! The Board of Governors has called an emergency meeting! Someone sent them pictures of your son at a Muggle restaurant and Pickingill wants an explanation!”

“What?”

The Howler opened and Narcissa’s voice cut through the assistant’s wailing. “LUCIUS MALFOY! HOW DARE YOU CORRUPT MY SON? THE NOBLE AND ANCIENT HOUSE OF BLACK IS RUINED! A **MUGGLE RESTAURANT**? HAVE YOU LOST YOUR - ”

“*Incendio!*” cried Lucius. The Howler disappeared in a puff of foul-smelling black smoke. Severus had sent this trash to Narcissa? The Board of Governors? “Gregory, summon my campaign staff. We need to strategize. We’ll need the press liaison, my speechwriter – ”

“What about Miss Skeeter?”

“Tell her I have no comment at this time, and then pull her financial report. Surely she needs money, those Quick-Quotes Quills cost a small fortune!” Lucius made a shooing motion toward the door. “Get everyone here in fifteen minutes, no excuses, no exceptions. That includes my worthless son!”

“What about Madam Narcissa?” Gregory was all but cringing as he backed toward the door. “She’s terribly upset.”
“I’ll deal with her later. Do as I say!” Lucius pointed his cane at the door. “Now, Gregory!”
“Yes, Mr. Malfoy! Right away!”

Lucius waited until the door was shut to pick up a quill. His owls had been bred to find those who did not wish to be found. Even if Severus and his pets were under Fidelius he wouldn’t be able to ignore this note, and then -

Angry, Lucius? The Muggle parchment, curiously intact, rose from the fireplace. *I know that feeling. You and your friends got me sacked and nearly cost Lupin his son. ‘Angry’ doesn’t begin to describe my feelings.*

Lucius shook his fist at the parchment. “Damn you, Severus! You don’t even live in the Wizarding World anymore! It’s none of your business!”

By now you’re probably strategizing your next move, that is if Narcissa hasn’t nailed your scrotum to the wall. Severus laughed his nastiest laugh. *Don’t bother. Full documentation of your involvement in all those Muggle businesses was sent to the Minister, every Wizarding magazine, the Board of Governors, your political allies, and of course your wife and daughter-in-law. I was most surprised by the Asda stock. I would have thought Harrod’s was more your style, or at least Marks & Sparks.*

All of them? Lucius, unable to speak, clutched at a lock of his hair. He was ruined, *ruined!* Draco and Astoria would be blackballed, his grandchildren (if any) would have to attend Durmstrang, the Malfoy name would be a laughing-stock....

That Narcissa might really nail his scrotum to the wall was a distinct possibility.

You once told me that revenge was a dish best served cold, Lucius. Severus sounded positively smug, damn him to every level of every hell. *Thank you for the advice. You were absolutely right.*

Good luck, Lucius. You’ll need it.

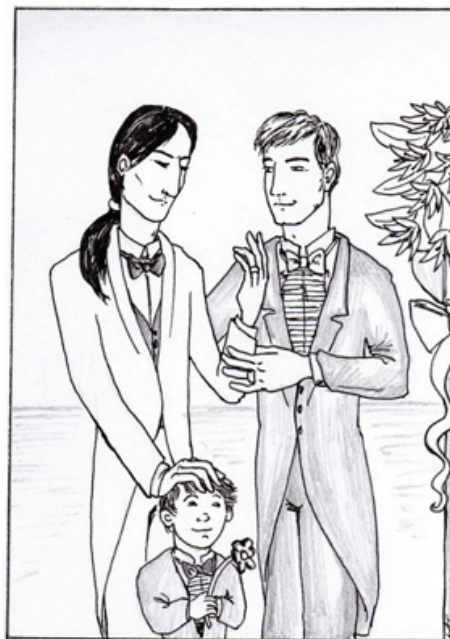
The fireplace flared green. Lucius whirled to see a tall, elegant blonde woman emerge. He managed to smile as his wife brushed soot from her shoulder.

“Narcissa? Darling, what a surprise! I wasn’t expecting you until lunch! Here, allow me - ”

“Don’t even bother,” said Narcissa in a voice that could have frozen boiling lead. She flicked a finger in his direction, and his wand sailed into her hand. “Lucius, we need to talk.”

Lucius could only nod as she perched herself on the edge of his desk and leaned forward until he could see the faintest trace of the family madness in her eyes.

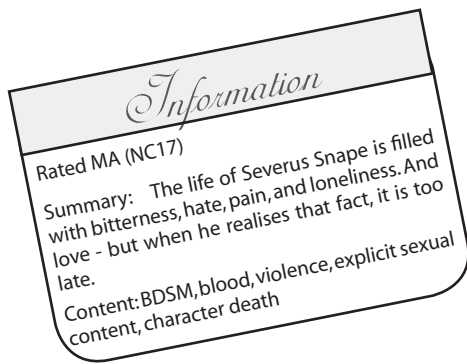
“About this packet I received from Severus this morning - ”



ellid's bio

Ellid has had a long and varied career in fandom that began when she saw her first episode of Star Trek in 1973 and immediately paired Mr. Spock with a Mary Sue. Highlights including being on the concom for Notjustanothercon in Massachusetts, a panelist for Worldcon in 1989 and Lumos in 2006, and being the only person in Harry Potter fandom to win an art award for a quilt. She became interested in Harry Potter fandom in 2003 when a friend tipped her off to McKay's Wicked Game series. Her own fics soon followed, and by 2005 she was hard at work on a long series of connected fics centering on Snape, Lupin, and their adopted son.

She lives in Massachusetts with three cats, one named Malfoy, and studies old textiles and quilting. Her favorite writers include Rex Stout, Dorothy Sayers, Lois McMaster Bujold, Dorothy Dunnett, JRR Tolkien, and J.D. Robb. She has read a huge amount of classic literature, both English and American, plus so much history that she routinely wins at Trivial Pursuit and Jeopardy! Other interests include medieval re-enactment, Nazi Germany, choral music, art, and political history, not to mention an unhealthy tendency to break into Tom Lehrer songs for no discernible reason. She hopes to write profic someday unless Malfoy-the-cat succeeds in killing in her sleep.



Broken

by Chivalric

It is half past four in the morning; I am neither awake nor asleep, and I dream, fantasise about the werewolf again.

Not that this happens often. Most times, I am too tired to dream. Equally often, I don't get any sleep at all, just doze every now and then between my tasks: spying on the Dark Lord, running errands for Albus, trying to save bloody Potter's life, and sorry attempts at teaching those insolent, annoying brats who refuse to understand that this life is not a game, but a death trap.

If I find the time to sleep, and if I dream, it is usually of torture, pain, and death. Dark dreams. I prefer to stay awake, or take the opportunity for a light slumber. Anything to avoid the horrors of the night.

Still, occasionally, I need to sleep simply to survive the next day. My body forces me, so I do, hoping I wake up in the morning and not in the middle of the night, in the darkness, screaming. No one hears me inside the thick walls. I don't want anyone with me. I don't want to share what ruins me.

Rarely, I sleep peacefully, drifting through the night undisturbed, and sometimes my mind decides to wander onto happier paths than the Dark Lord's latest kill. And if that happens — truly, far too rarely — it wanders towards the werewolf, Merlin knows why. I don't even like the man.

Right now, with my eyes closed and only one flickering candle burning low on my bedside-table, I imagine him looking at me with that crooked, half-sad, half-lazy smile on his full lips, and I wonder how it would feel to smile back at him for a change. No scowl; no sarcastic remark. Just a smile.

Would he turn his head away in disgust?

My cock stirs as it always does when I dream about the wolf. My cock, which refuses service most times I put my hand to myself, twitches because I know that behind the soft, gentle surface, the beast lingers. I saw it when I was a boy; it nearly cost my life.

I wish he had finished me when he'd had the chance.

I turn onto my back. My hand, more awake than my brain, sneaks underneath the bedcovers, seeking out my member, stroking it roughly into full hardness.

If it only were that easy when I am fully awake.

Useless, wishful thinking. I'm hard now, I want to come now, and Merlin, it has been such a long time.

Through the darkness of my bedroom, the ghost of the werewolf's voice drifts towards me, telling me meaningless nonsense about his students — for some reason, he insists on talking to me, and now, in my bedchamber, the memory of it is all I need to moan with desire.

I fist myself, fast and mercilessly, fearing my erection might subside before I can jerk off. Happens more often than not, and I am determined not to let it happen again.

To keep at least some control over my body and my mind, I force my thoughts away from the wolf and towards a scene I witnessed a few weeks back when I was in Muggle London. Two men in a dark alley behind a bar, one pressed against the wall, the other deep inside him, grunting and groaning. Live porn — I watched until they had finished, and surely, that image should be much more arousing than the memory of how the light plays on the wolf's greying hair.

My cock, though, is of a different opinion: it withers at the image of the two strangers, and I swear filthily. I am more awake now; I am sweating, and there is a lump of fear sitting in my dry, aching throat. I need this release; I need to come, and hell, why had I dreamed of the werewolf in the first place? Why had I been kissing him in this sodding, useless dream of mine, kissing him deeply, feeling his heartbeat speed up under my exploring hands, why had I dreamed about his hard, strong hands forcing me down onto my knees?

My cock twitches and hardens again.

Careful now. Gentle. *Don't mess it up again.* I think of the wolf's unique fragrance: a mixture of chocolate and soap, grass and wildfire and always that hint of tobacco although he doesn't smoke.

I moan again, raw and deep, and yes! I think when my cock grows in my fist, big and hard, and I begin wanking myself, slow at the beginning and faster very soon afterwards. I rake my free hand across my chest, rip open my pyjama top, and cruelly twist one of my nipples between thumb and index finger. It forces a yelp out of me, as does my next move, which leaves five deep, angry red scratches all across my ribcage. Pain shoots through me: it's the one feeling that proves I'm still alive and not forgotten, drowned in an ocean of madness. Pain and the promise of a climax; pain and pleasure, entwined forever in my twisted mind.

Precum wets my fingers, and my hand tightens around my cock, shooting more pain up my spine, quickly followed and maybe even led by a rush of harsh, burning lust. My back arches in anticipation of my climax, my balls tighten, and I dig my fingers deep into the soft wood of the bed's headboard, imagining how the werewolf would pin me down with his weight, move atop me, inside me.

I yell when I come, my seed soiling the bedcovers and the sheets underneath me. For a few blissful moments, I forget everything: the Dark Lord as well as Albus, Potter as well as classes and even the sound Nagini makes when she devours one of her victims. I forget my tasks and my sorrows and the constant fear that accompanies me day and night, and I sob with relief, enjoying the small gift my dream has given me.

I do not admit to myself whose name I had called out when I'd spilled, I do not even admit I had called out coherent syllables at all. *It was just a wordless scream of lust.* I vanish the mess with a *Scourgify*.

I turn to my side, pull up my knees, and shiver, for once not from cold, but from loneliness.



For a heartbeat, I don't know where I am or what happened.

Light increases my headache, I hear voices, and I realise I am staring into brown eyes, wide and shocked.

Your eyes.

My own eyes narrow as I remember that I am in the Headquarters, down in the kitchen, with Molly and Arthur around, Weasley and the Granger girl doing the washing up, and Potter sitting on a chair opposite mine.

You are here, too, and you are pale like death up to your unruly, greying hair.

What happened? I wonder, frowning, shooting you one of my coldest glares.

"Now then, Remus, did you have any luck?" Potter asks, annoyance lacing each of his words. I look at the boy and feel the familiar hate. He resembles his father so very much that it makes me choke.

You shake your head and take a step back. "None." Your clear your throat; a faint red creeps into your cheeks. "Severus is far too good an Occlumens for me," you add, turn on your heels, and leave the kitchen.

Realisation hits me hard when I see you run away from me, and I nearly gasp when my stomach twists and turns into a hot, aching knot.

Legilimency: the art of delving into someone else's mind, thus being able to see his thoughts, read his memories, turn this someone inside out as long as one liked.

Occlumency: the art of hindering a Legilimens from cracking one's walls, of pushing inside one's brain and rummaging through private memories like a careless, cruel child.

I am an excellent Occlumens, have to be, or I would have died long ago, being a spy on Dumbledore's orders. The Dark Lord is a skilled Legilimens, but over the years, I have become the best Occlumens alive, so he would have no chance of seeing anything I didn't want him to see. Occasionally, I allow my master to find an embarrassing memory or a painful one, for that matter, so he would continue to believe he has me completely under his control.

When Potter needed to learn those special arts, I was the obvious choice for teaching him, and although I tried to talk Albus out of his plan, he insisted that I show the boy how both parts work. At first, I refused; later on, I became accustomed to his awkward attempts to break inside my mind. As assumed, he was no match for me. Nowadays, I even raise my wand when he can see, when there are witnesses, and break into *his* mind just to prove my point: there's no way he will ever stand a chance against the Dark Lord if my master ever gets hold of him.

Tonight, the fact that again I saw into his mind as easily as I would open a window made the boy furious; mainly, I suppose, because I chose to look at his emotions for the Weasley girl. Tears of humiliation ran over Potter's cheeks, and that must be the reason why you got up, stepping between me and the boy. "Let me try," you said, flashing me your easy smile.

With cold disgust in my eyes, I nodded, and you raised your wand — I remember it now. Of course I didn't expect anything to happen, so I barely raised my own wand.

But then you were inside my head, you looked around, and you saw everything.

At that memory, I frown again, because that's just not possible. How could you break through my wards, cut through my defences like a hot knife cuts through butter? How was it possible that you saw into my mind? How could I have allowed you to find the one memory I never wanted to share with anyone, especially not with you: that I had dreamed of you, that I had fantasised about you being in bed with me, that I had masturbated with your image before my inner eye?

I stare at the door through which you've just escaped. *No wonder you looked sick.* Only a few moments have passed since you have unravelled my secret, since you have left the kitchen. It feels like hours, like an eternity, really, and I snort in disgust and get up myself. I need to get out of here, out of this too warm, too small room, packed with too many people and too much noise. Their words, meaningless and spoken without care, pierce my head, and I practically flee the kitchen, flee upstairs where I have a room — I would have preferred to go back to Hogwarts, but that is not an option anymore. Too dangerous, Albus argued, and unfortunately, he is right. Apart from the Order members, no one knows that I am double spying — or triple spying, if you looked at it correctly — and during the summer break, I reside at Grimmauld place.

I quietly close the door behind me; had I slammed it shut, as I wanted to, I would have broken the hinges. I am angry, and I am scared. If you tell Albus what you saw in my mind, Albus will question me, and if Albus decides he wants answers, I will need to give him answers. Admitting that I lust after you would be highly embarrassing.

I have no intention of telling anyone about my private fantasies, not even the Headmaster — I'd rather quit working for him and change to the dark side for good. After all, I've been in the Dark Lord's service for nearly twenty years now; maybe it's time to prove that I'm darker inside than Dumbledore, the old fool, would like to believe.

Pacing, up and down my room, from wall to wall. The furniture in here is sparse: a bed, small and hard, a table, a chair, and a few bookshelves. No couch; not even a wardrobe.

I wonder what you will do, and the prospect, any prospect, brings the sweat out on my face. For a small moment I try to convince myself that you haven't seen anything, that I must have imagined your intrusion into my mind, but it doesn't work; you have been there, you have seen my memories, you have *been* me, long enough to know exactly what I have been dreaming and wishing and longing for that night a few months back.

"Shit," I say to the darkness and seriously consider killing you simply to shut you up.

The knock on the door rips me out of my thoughts. "Yes?" I snap, the sound of the single word indicating clearly that I did not want to be disturbed.

"Open up." Your voice, and for once, it isn't friendly, not gentle, not caring. You demand me to open my own bloody door, and the steely subnote in those few words sends shivers down my spine.

No surprise there.

Gritting my teeth, I open and allow you to step inside. "What do you want?" I ask you the moment the lock falls closed. "Make it quick; I have no time for whatever nonsense you want to tell me."

Your eyes are burning with something I cannot identify at first; then I realise it's anger, deep, hot fury. "You want me to *fuck* you?" you hiss incredulously. "How dare you think about me that way. How dare you dream about me!"

I can smell you: the shampoo you've used, the garlic on your hands from helping Molly to prepare the salad. Earth on your shoes; candy on your lips.

I cannot resist temptation. It's been a long time since I dreamed about you, it's been a lot longer since I last sought out company, and so I take a step and brush my lips over yours.

I feel your shock; you become rigid, and I feel a smile, thin and cold, curve my lips — what else had you expected? Hadn't you just read my mind?

Before you can react, I retreat. Taking a step back, I narrow my eyes at you, see your burning cheeks, and I hate you, hate you so deeply for what you made me do simply by coming into my rooms. "Fuck off," I hiss. "Don't ever dare bother me again."

You're fast; I never saw your fist coming, but I feel it, feel you hitting me, hitting me hard. You take me by surprise and knock me to the floor, and a moment later, you kick me.

I groan; I nearly vomit. Pain shoots through my body, and then you pull me up and hit me again. My lip cracks; blood runs down my chin. On all fours I'm on the floor, the tips of my hair touches the planks, and I have trouble forcing air into my lungs.

In addition, I become hard.

No surprise there, either.

I groan once more, but not because of the pain or because your hand is gripping my neck hard enough for me to fear you'll break it. I groan because I'm turned on; I groan because I want more.

"You want me to fuck you, Severus?" you rasp into my ear; your breath is hot on my skin, and I close my eyes lest you see the desire burning in them. Yes, I want you to fuck me; yes, I want you to take me, and yes, oh yes, I want you to lose control more than anything else. There is no way this is going to happen otherwise — if you don't lose control, you will just leave my rooms in disgust.

Instead of leaving, your grip tightens, and you drag me forward, towards the bed. Face down, you press me into the mattress; your knee is in my back, holding me down, and I hear the soft, promising whisper of leather against fabric: you're taking your belt out of your trousers.

I cannot help myself: I whimper with desire, with longing. My cock is hard as it hasn't been in ages, and my clothes, just trousers and a shirt, seem suddenly too heavy for my body. I want to shed them, or rather, I want you to rip them off me and take me, fuck me, make me come so I can forget the now and here, the real life, for at least as long as it takes me to spill my seed.

"I cannot believe you showed me this memory," you growl. Your hands hold mine down above my head — *you think I did it deliberately?* — and I kneel before my bed like a crying child with my face pressed into the bedcover. You put a lot of weight in holding me down — my wrists protest, my ribs hurt from your kick, and still, I don't want it any other way.

Leather touches the floor; your belt is in your hand and I know what you will do, why you took it out in the first place.

Then you release my wrists, and I feel a rush of blinding disappointment wash through me at you taking a step back, away from the bed, away from me.

I push myself up and, still kneeling, and look at you over my shoulder.

You appear stunned, ashamed, and scared. The belt hangs forgotten in your half-limp fingers, your eyes are wide in your pale face, and you look at the leather belt as if it were a poisonous snake. You're clearly shocked at what you were about to do to me.

Shaking, you wipe your lips with the back of your hand, and maybe, it would have ended here hadn't my eyes dropped lower, hadn't I seen what you aren't aware of yet.

My arrogance, quieted for a few moments by your unexpected actions, takes over again. "Not in control of the beast?" I ask, and see with satisfaction that you become ashen at my words. "Not in control of your emotions, *wolf?*" A drop of blood runs down my chin. I don't bother to wipe it off.

You frown. "I'm not... I can't... This is not what I want," you finally bite out. "Gentle, maybe. But not like this."

I raise an eyebrow. "Of course you want it gentle. If you wanted it the brutal way, you'd be hard." My voice is sarcastic; my gaze drops to your groin where your erection is evident, pressing large and hard against your trousers. "Well. Apparently, you are not up to it, wolf. You're too soft, and far too tame."

No man likes to be called tame, no matter how gentle he is, and you are the most gentle, friendly man I know. But inside you is the beast, and sometimes, the beast needs to be unleashed.

You growl and your grip tightens around the belt's buckle. You take a breath, and for a split second I wonder why I chose you, why I trust you not to cause permanent damage, why I know that you are, despite your rage, not the monster you appear to be to the ones who don't know you.

Fast like a striking snake, you slam your fist onto my chin. My head snaps back, I taste blood, and I fall back onto the bed — again, I hadn't anticipated your actions, and somewhere in the back of my head I am surprised at this. Am I not always able to foresee how others act and react? This seems not valid where you are concerned.

You lose control just like that, and you don't use your fists to hurt me: you whip the belt across my back, again and again, not saying a word, but with a steady, tantalising rhythm that takes my breath away.

My shirt rips open; the belt cracks the skin on my back. I yell out of surprise; I yell because it hurts. I yell because of the lust each slap causes, wonderful, strong, mind-claiming lust that pushes my every-day-horrors away and make me harder than I've considered possible.

I dig my hands into the bed sheets, fearing you might stop before you've finished what you've started and because I need something to hold on to, something to keep me on my knees so I don't slip towards the ground. Dimly, I wonder if my wards are up or if the noise goes beyond my room, telling the others that something is amiss, forcing them to interfere.

I don't want anyone to interfere. I want you to go on, and surely you do, you whip me hard, you're shredding my shirt, and now you drag my trousers down and whip my arse and my thighs until blood runs down my legs. I can hear you pant, gasp, swear under your breath, you're not yourself anymore and I know you will regret each single moment in an hour or so.

Right now, you enjoy it, maybe even more than I do.

Suddenly, you stop, and I hope, beg that you do the right thing, and yes, you bend over and grab my wrists

once more with an iron hard grip. With the belt you bind my hands behind my back, immobilising me, and finally, after an eternity of dreaming and longing and far too few guilty wanks in the small hours of the morning, I hear you drop your trousers and I smell your arousal and then you're atop of me and I feel your cock, slick with precum and blood, at my entrance.

You don't take me slowly; you thrust inside me with brutal force, ram your cock into me with one long, hard push that makes me yell again. Burning pain; blinding lust. You bury yourself inside me up to the hilt, you move fast, fuck me hard and deep, and it is perfect. Your hands land on my arse and pull my buttocks apart and I cannot think anymore, just feel you fucking me and I let you and perhaps we both yell with lust, frustration, hate and desire.

I feel you dig your teeth into my neck; you draw blood. I cannot hold it back anymore — the pain subsides and the lust takes over, and I come, spilling in long, violent spasms, experiencing the best orgasm I've ever had in my sodding, lousy, worthless life.

You pump inside me a few more times before you come yourself, your hands digging deep into my flesh and your forehead resting between my shoulder blades. I feel you shudder, I hear you take a shaky breath, and then you withdraw your still half erect cock. You slump to the floor, gasping, too exhausted to speak.

I cannot move; my back hurts like hell, my arms are still bound, and my pushed down trousers restrain me from getting my legs underneath me. It seems like an eternity before you get up and haul me onto my bed, before you take back your belt, before you cover my body with a blanket. I don't mind, and I don't care: I am in sync with the world and with myself. I hear my heartbeat and sense my blood rushing through my veins, singing of satisfaction and triumph.

I take a brief look at you; you just stuff the suspiciously red belt into the back pocket of your trousers. "Wipe the blood off your mouth before you go," I say, and close my eyes again. "I assume you would prefer no one saw you with dripping fangs."

I nearly smile when you pale at my words.

You leave me behind, bleeding and beaten, you close the door silently, and I know you won't come back, not voluntarily. You are disgusted at the fact that you've let the beast out, that you allowed the wolf to rule your mind.

You leave me behind, and I know you will try with all your might to forget what has happened whereas I, for a

change, will sleep peacefully tonight, deep and dreamless.

I'm sated.

I'm alive.



The next few days, I make sure to move carefully. My back burns — my arse does, too — both from the slashes as well as your forceful intrusion. It does not matter. I have salves for both problems, and in another little while, I will be healed, the pain as well as the lust becoming nothing but a memory. Only the scars will remain.

I am as cold and nasty as I always have been towards you, I treat you as if you were non-existent, and I do so for your own sake. I don't want to break you, not yet.

Occasionally, when you don't know it, I look at you, drink in your posture, your voice, the way your neck is exposed when you bend over a book or an essay. Sometimes, I see you watching me, and I see you shiver.

It does not matter. If I decide that I want you, I will just come and take what's mine.

My master is growing more and more crazy, more and more brutal the longer it takes him to win this useless war — as if there really were a difference between a pureblood and a Mudblood, as if it would matter who lives and who dies. I cannot even remember how many have been killed, Muggles and wizards and witches and even some of my own former students, stupid brats that they are, trying to fight instead of run. Under the skin is just flesh and blood and bone; in death, we all look the same, but this monster of epic measures just doesn't understand this most simple truth. He wants the world cleaned of all human beings, of everything that is alive, immortal himself, unable to die, unable to understand how useless and stupid his attempts are.

Breathing, eating, talking — this life that resembles death more than anything else makes me sick, and I try to pull away from it, try to bring some distance between me and everyone, everything else to keep functioning, to remain able to bring this bastard down for good.

It works for a while, but it comes at a price, and the price is my sanity. Not that I would have much left of it; sometimes, I truly believe I've gone as mad as the Dark Lord. I'm incredibly careless with my health, I don't give a damn about my students; I provoke my masters — both of them — hoping they will finally end my misery by killing me.

In order not to lose my mind completely, instead of dying, I begin longing for a spark of real life; I begin longing for the wolf in you again.

Silently, I open my door; silently, I wander down the corridor, wearing nothing but an old pair of linen trousers and an even older shirt. Barefoot, with the clothes hanging loosely on my too-thin frame, I knock on your door, not entirely sure it is a good idea but knowing that it is the only idea that might bring me back to my senses. I wonder if you are at home; I wonder if I will be able to tighten my grip on you.

The door opens a crack. You peek out as if you were frightened of me and I know I have to make you angry fast, or you will slam the door shut in my face. So I scowl at you and ask with my lowest, meanest voice if you've had lovely dreams recently and if those dreams make you wake up hard.

You pale. Through the curtain of my hair I see you hold your breath and ball your fists. I have to steady myself against the doorframe, or I will force entry to your rooms.

I don't need to. With a nod, you let me inside. The sound of door closing behind the two of us is like a promise.

You stand near the wall, and I quickly take a look at your room. Although it's as sparsely decorated as my own, it's cosy, the books piled high on your desk, and there's a couch, big and soft and cushioned invitingly.

You stand with your hands dug deep into your pockets and I realise I cannot let you know why I need you. I will not tell you about my nightmares, I will not talk about the immense pressure I'm under, and I definitely won't spell out aloud how twisted I really am, that I need to be brought to my knees before I can forget this so-called life long enough to find some peace. When pain rules my mind, nothing else can bother me. When wounds are cast, I do not see my mad master's eyes anymore. In the end, I just hope I will get what I need: peace of mind for a little while.

You stare at me. "Why are you here?" you ask, pretending to be angry, but I can hear the catch in your voice.

I remain silent.

"Look, I'm sorry for what happened last time." You sound nervous. "I lost control. This... thing... took me by surprise. It won't happen again."

My arms had been crossed over my chest; I let them drop to my sides. "I want you to do it again," I say quietly, nearly inaudible. My voice is soft, tender even — universes away from my usual snarl.

You gasp. "What? You can't be serious! I will never, ever touch you again, I won't... I *can't* do that again. How the hell can you ask that of me?"

You sound outraged at my request, hurt that I assume you to be so weak as to give in to your deeply-buried need to hunt and — eventually — to devour your catch.

And you sound turned-on.

I knew it. From the moment you beckoned me inside your rooms, I knew you wanted me, wanted me badly enough to accept my conditions. I sense that the power you soon might have over me makes you drunk, and I know you are like a fish on the hook, unable to escape, unable to break free again. To someone else, it might look as if I am submissive, but ultimately, I am the one in charge.

I wonder if you know that, too.

"I won't do it. Leave, Severus." Hard words, spoken with determination.

I first drop my gaze, and then I lower my head. Earlier on, before I came to you, I took a shower, scrubbed my skin and my teeth and my hair and now the black strands fall over my face, long and midnight-black, obscuring the smile that plays on my lips. If I decide that I want you, I will make you take me, and now, I do want you.

Slowly, I sink to my knees. I bend my neck, and with a small shake of my head, I have my hair part, feel it brush along my cheeks and know you can see the pale bruise of the bite mark, left there the last time we met in private, left there by your teeth not too long ago.

I hear you gulp; involuntarily, you take a step towards me.

Closing my eyes, I bend my elbows, bring my arms behind me, and cross my wrists at the small of my back; my fists ball as if I were bound. It costs me more than I care to admit, giving myself over, relying on you, trusting you not to kill me for my insolence and past sins, despite the hate you surely harbour for me.

"Please," I whisper, and you are lost.

Another step, and another, until I feel the heat your body emits. You are close; you look down at me, and I am sure your heartbeat speeds up at the sight not because you think I am good-looking or a good fuck or because you — *Merlin, what a ridiculous assumption* — like me, but because you want to beat me. You have the power to do so, you know you want to dominate me, you know you want the wolf to rule. I must look like prey, and that thought makes me moan in anticipation of what will

follow. Already the world outside slips away. I belong to you for the time being. I am not in control, I have no decisions to make.

Your orders, unlike others, will bring lust, not just pain. Your orders, unlike others, will not crush me, but set me free.

My knees hurt, but I do not try to get up. As long as I am in your rooms, your will rules, not mine. I long to have the load of responsibility taken off me, if only for an indescribably small amount of time.

"Get up." Your voice is harsh.

I do as you order, and I don't raise my eyes. My hands are still crossed behind my back, and although they are not bound, they feel bound to me. I moan, soft and quiet.

"Take your clothes off."

Hesitantly, I do as you order. I shed my shirt; I let my trousers drop to the floor, step out of them, and stand in front of you with my head hanging low and my breath coming in dry gulps. I feel heat flush my cheeks; I do not like being naked, and you know it.

You walk around me, your eyes fixed on my body. I can feel your gaze as if you were touching me. I sense your surprise at how I look underneath my armour, my robes — beyond pale and with limbs too long, bones too fragile, hips as narrow as a teenage boy's. I'm too thin, sinewy, at best, emaciated even in some ways, due to mal-nourishment, lack of sleep, and a constant onslaught of nearly unbearable tasks for more than two decades.

My embarrassment deepens with each passing moment. This is a different sort of pain, but it hurts nevertheless. Your gaze will leave scars as surely as your belt has; but then, how will I remember when I am back in my own bed, accompanied by nothing but emptiness? Scars are proof that I haven't dreamed it; scars are necessary to help me remember that I didn't imagine you touching me.

You step closer; I can feel your breath on my naked skin when you look at my back and the telltale signs your belt has left.

Blood rushes out of my face and into my cock; I harden fast.

"Look at me," you order, and I fight with myself — I don't want to look at you, but right now, I am in your hands. I have offered myself to you, I have granted you the right to order me to do whatever you want, and so I raise my eyes, show you my face. I am cruel, but occasionally, I can be fair. Maybe you'll decide after one glance into my

black soul that this is not what you want. If this is the case, at least I have given you the choice.

Moments pass, and you don't even blink. It seems as if my soul doesn't scare you enough to run from me whilst you still have the chance: instead of running, your breath catches in your throat and you try to kiss me.

I turn my head away, and your anger flares up like a bushfire — I have offended you by refusing your kiss. With a swift move, you kick my legs off from under me, and I hit the floor, hard.

I groan — this is what I wanted to happen.

You hear it.

You wear shoes, and I feel the hard sole on my neck; you press me down to the ground as if you were about to crush a beetle under your heel, and I can nearly feel the power flooding your mind, drowning any coherent thought. You will lose control again, and the thought makes my cock bob and my arse clench in anticipation and I cannot suppress the strangled cry emerging from my throat.

You don't order anymore, you dig your hand in my hair and rip me up and smash me against the wall. You are behind me, and a moment later your arm locks around my throat, strangling me, making it exquisitely clear who is top and who is not.

Your grip tightens, and I lose my ability to think. Lack of air lets small stars explode in front of my eyes, and if you hadn't held me upright, I would have crumpled to a boneless heap on the floor. My mind, what is left of it, focuses on my burning lungs and on my cock, crushed against the wall, and is that me, whimpering for more?

You release the pressure, just a bit so I don't suffocate, and your hand slips between my buttocks, your fingers seek the hole, circle it, stroke it. I press my arse against your hand, and instantly, it is gone. Instead, you touch my cock, squeeze it, hard enough to force tears out of my eyes. You stroke me, lazily, and then you brush your thumb over my cockhead.

This is better than I have imagined in my wildest dreams.

Suddenly, your fingers are back on my entrance, and they are slick. When you have summoned a lubricant I cannot recall, but without warning, you push inside me, two fingers at once whilst your arm is still restraining my breathing. With each slow push, you loosen your grip, then you hold, and tighten your muscles until I cannot breathe anymore, and this makes me even harder, and you push a bit deeper, bring me to the brink, but before

I can come, you allow me to get some air in my abused lungs and retreat again, and I whimper, and my face is sweaty and wet because this is true torture — perfect, delicate, expertly performed torment.

Who would have thought you are capable of this?

You are not losing control; instead, you play me as artfully as a musician plays his instrument, dominating me, pushing me into obedience just like I wanted you to do. I am half mad with desire already when your fingers push just a little deeper and begin stroking along an especially soft, sweet spot inside me I hadn't even known was there. I yelp; I freeze. I push back; I impale myself on your fingers, and I hear your soft, triumphant chuckle: your arm around my throat and your fingers up my arse strip me off my rationality, take away my sarcasm, my intelligence, everything that I am outside of your room.

My body moves of its own accord. My hips buck, I frantically try to bring myself off and swiftly, you slam your elbow hard against my temple. I grunt with pain; I sway. More stars explode before my eyes, and this time, not because of lack of air.

"Don't move!"

Your words are my order. Although I so very much need to come, I still my movements. I cannot feel you anymore — you have stepped away from me, and the thought of you leaving me like this, pressed against the wall, my cock dripping precome, my arse slack for your cock, strangles me. Harshly, I gasp for air, my body is shivering and burning beyond my control. My legs tremble in despair; I lean my forehead against the wall, praying that my poor attempt not to move is good enough for you.

A spell binds my hands, wrists, and forearms to the wall, another one is like a clamp around my waist: now I couldn't even move if you'd allow me to, and the sensation of being so completely at your mercy forces me to beg. "Please fuck me," I hear myself rasp. "Please, fuck me, please fuck me, please, please fuck me!"

"You want my cock up your arse?" Your voice is silky in my ear, like sweet poison. It drops right into my soul.

"Yes!"

"Why?" you ask, moving closer. You are naked, I can feel your skin against my back and then I feel your cock sliding along my backside. You are hard, and I wish I could turn so I could see how large you really are before you take me.

"Tell me why!" Slowly, you press the tip of your cock at my entrance; I know you won't continue before I find an answer for you.

"I... need this." I bite out the words. "You can make me forget."

You don't ask what I wish to forget; my answer seems sufficient for you.

Slowly, you enter me, even slower, you begin to fuck me, as I have asked, begged you to do, and it feels so good I have to dig my teeth into my upper arm to keep myself from screaming out my lust.

I come long before you, but you don't care. Instead of retreating once my lust is stilled, you use me for your own desire, your hair brushing along my shoulders with each of your thrusts. You are lost in your own world, and I can do nothing but stand there with spread legs and my buttocks spread even wider by your hands, my seed trickling down my groin, serving as your fuck toy.

I am yours, entirely yours, and this simple fact along with your deep thrusts makes me hard again. When you loosen the binding around my hips, when your hand finds my cock, your grip surprisingly gentle, I moan with delight — I hadn't expected a second climax, I hadn't considered the possibility that this double sensation of getting fucked and wanked would be so utterly delicious. I certainly hadn't expected you to take care of me beyond your own needs.

You press yourself against me with your full weight, and I feel your cock push even deeper inside me than before. I hear, but don't understand, the words you rasp into my ear when you come, and then I come, too, for the second time tonight, spilling over your stroking fist.



When my senses drift back inside me, I find myself lying on your living room floor, released from the spells that had held me bound to the wall. Your arm is my pillow, your embrace is my blanket, and I can feel soft kisses getting gently trailed down my neck.

I tell myself that this is unimportant, that I just allow you to pretend a bit of tenderness would make you less the beast. I try to persuade myself that this here, the moments after the last bit of afterglow have vanished, is important for you, but not for me.

How wrong I am.

Your heart is beating strongly against my back; you are warm, sated, and sleepy. I can only assume that you would like to stay like this for a little while longer, that you enjoy, even need the peace after the battle as much as you enjoy and need the battle itself, and so I do not move.

Cradled in your arms, I become aware for the first time of the possibility that this might turn into something a bit more complicated than a mere sexual necessity.



I would like to pretend that from then on, we set up a routine, but frankly, nothing we do fits to that description. Whenever I knock on your door — and I have to restrain myself from not doing so on a nightly basis — and whenever you decide to open, what happens inside your rooms is far too strange to be described as routine. Each time is different; each time, I cannot believe afterwards that I allow you to do to me whatever you like, to live out whatever fantasy you might have. I am like an addict chasing after yet another high, and you are my drug, my sweet release.

Sometimes, you refuse to open; sometimes, I sense your urge to break out of this. When that happens, I wonder if my hook is really as deeply dug in your flesh as I hope it is, and I turn and go back to my own rooms until a few days later, my need gets the better of me and I come back — and you, luckily, thankfully, open your door again. I believe that you open up simply because you get hard whenever I as much as look at you across the room, dropping my wards and allowing you to look behind the mask I wear all the time, unless I am with you, a willing prisoner in your realms.

Towards the end of the summer, I begin to suspect that there is more between you and me than I care to admit, and I wonder what I should do about it. Of course I could stop knocking on your door; of course I could find someone else to give me what I need. There are enough people out there who are experts in inflicting pain; I've used their services before.

On the other hand, our arrangement is convenient and allows me to keep up my other tasks without anyone getting suspicious. We've never talked about it — we do not talk at all — but I assume you know I am a double spy, being in Dumbledore's service. Or at least you hope I am — I cannot see you taking care of me if you really thought I'd be a true follower of the Dark Lord.

Why do I think about that now? I have enough other things to do; I cannot afford wasting time with idle wishes. There's a question at hand: should I keep you or should I drop you? Keeping you might become dangerous if you decide you want more than the occasional fuck; in this case, I would have to Obliviate you, and that is always a tricky thing to do when there are so many memories to be erased. I might do permanent damage to your brain, which could result in someone having a deeper look into your private thoughts. They might even find out about me, and that, of course, is unacceptable.

Better to keep things as they are. Better to keep you.

I stretch; my shoulders ache from hours of potions brewing. I haven't seen you in two weeks as I've been running errands for the Dark Lord.

I realise that I need to relax, and that you are the one man who can make me forget the entire world.

Frowning, I have to admit that I need to at least hear your voice, maybe catch a glimpse of your face. Whatever there is between us, it has grown stronger, and it scares me, in ways.

I finish the potion I've invented, write down the formula, and force myself to take a shower before I go and knock on your door. Anything to calm me down a bit — apparently, the prospect of seeing you after such a long time makes me nervous.

You open up immediately, you practically pull me inside, and I see you have awaited me: more candles than usual are burning, a sweet, fresh fragrance lingers in the air, and you do not waste any time by asking me what I want. Immediately, you grab me by the shoulders and push me into the middle of your room.

I do not resist you. I never do.

Silently, with a knowing, crooked smile on your face, you stand in front of me, and I wonder what you have in mind for tonight. My cock is getting hard; it never takes long when I am near you.

You pull something out of your back pocket. It fits into your hand and before I can wonder what it might be, you open your hand and a black, silken band falls out. You dangle it in front of my eyes; you smile. "Put it on," you say — order — and of course, I do what you want.

The blindfold is cool on my face. Made of silk and magic, it practically becomes part of me once it touches my skin. No way I can take it off without your allowance; no way to see through it as long as I wear it. There is only blackness, and there are the small sounds you make when you move.

I can hear you breathe, so you must be near me. I expect you to order me to get undressed — it's been a while since you had me strip in front of you, and the memory of your command voice makes my throat dry with longing.

Minutes tick by, and you don't say a word. I want to shift. I want to push my trousers down, I want you to take me — nothing happens. I do know you are still there, but you could have fallen asleep by now so quiet you are.

When you talk, you do so right into my ear, and I nearly jump. I hadn't heard you getting that close. "Will you do what I tell you to do?" you murmur, and I nod. Of course I will. I always do.

"Then cross your arms behind your back and leave them there until I tell you otherwise. Do not speak; do not move. Understood?"

I nod. Yes. And I cross my wrists at the small of my back like I have done before, offering myself to you once again.

When your fingers open the first button of my shirt, instinct tells me to push you away — this game has rules, and one rule is that you have to force me, that you have to make me surrender with brutality, embarrassment, and harshness. You undressing me as gently as a lover would do is neither. But the rules have changed in the past weeks. Now, only one rule is valid: your will and your word. If you want this game to be played more gently, so be it.

I hear my clothes drop to the ground and the buckle of my belt hit the wooden floor; the sound makes me shiver. Will you whip me again, will you draw blood, or will you leave me standing here forever, naked, without granting me release?

I do not know how long I have to wait before you continue, but when you do, you touch me with warm, silken fingers.

I become rigid. I do not want to be touched, not like that, not tenderly, but you have ordered me to stand still, and I have to obey.

Your fingertips circle my navel and wander over my ribcage. They stroke my nipples, and a moment later, your tongue, rough and wet, rasps over them.

Wrong, this is wrong! Tenderness does nothing for me, I want to tell you, but you have forbidden me to speak, and so I remain silent.

And my nipples harden, and my cock does, too.

How strange.

You touch me, caress me; you step around me, and your fingers follow the scars on my back, the ones you have left, and that brings the first moan to my lips.

You never go anywhere near my cock or my arse, and finally, I realise that this is still torture, sweet, tender torture, and that you are not only an expert, but that you know better what I need than I do myself.

Slowly, my resistance against your touch first withers, then dies. Now I want you to touch me; I want your gentleness, and half expect that you can read my mind and do just the opposite.

You don't. "Behind you is the bed. Take one step back and sit down."

Surprising, how hard it is to move when blindfolded — hesitantly, I stagger backwards. When I am seated, you step right in front of me and you say, "Open the belt of my trousers and take my cock out. Suck me. Taste me. Make me hard."

My mouth drops open. You have never allowed me to touch you before — you have always been behind me. Of course I obey, as I will finally get the chance to feel your cock, to measure it, to find out if it is really as big as it feels when you fuck me.

You taste sweet and wild at the same time, and it doesn't take me long to get you hard. Actually, your cock is already half stiff when I take it out; my lips and tongue and my fingertips do the rest. Your hands are holding my head tightly, level with your groin, but you don't force me and you don't move — you let me do as I like, for the first time ever, and strangely enough, I enjoy it.

You are large; you are hard, and I want to make you come, want to swallow your seed. I want to see you sated. The thought is arousing enough to make me whine in the back of my throat.

Of course this is not what you have in mind. "Lay on the bed," you order hoarsely and withdraw from my mouth — could it be that you were closer to your climax than you care to admit?

Your bed is soft, the sheets warmed by a spell. It feels odd not to lay on the ground or to be pressed and taken against the wall — a bed won't leave scratches, a mattress won't cause bruises.

I feel you getting into bed; I feel your hand on my skin, slipping lower, and finally, you touch my cock. I sigh deep and contentedly.

"Grab hold of the bedposts with both hands and don't dare let go. Understood?"

Of course I do. Instead of ropes or cuffs or spells, you use your words to bind me.

"And now draw your knees up and spread your legs. Spread them wide; I want to see you before I touch you, and want to taste you before I fuck you."

I blush at that, but the harsh groan is mine, too — I am embarrassed as well as aroused. Your wishes in combination with your commanding voice turns me on beyond reason, and lying on your bed, smelling your fragrance on the pillows under my head, with legs spread wide and you lazily playing with my balls drives me crazy. "Fuck me!" I want to yell, but I don't — I must not talk, I must not let go of the bedposts, and therefore, I don't.

Kisses on the insides of my legs; kisses on my lower abdomen. Your tongue, circling my navel; your tongue, licking my cock, my buttocks, my hole, your tongue, hard and eager, pushing inside me and I cannot believe

how wonderful it feels. I would have come hadn't you stopped at the last possible moment.

I sob, just like that, sob as if you had beaten me senseless.

"Do you want more?" you ask, out of breath, and I nod. Of course I nod — how could I not want more, how could I want you to stop now?

Metal, cold and surprising, touches me. You place something on my chest, you rub it across my throat and over my lips and along the blindfold that covers my eyes. "That's a cock ring," you say as casually as if you were talking about the weather. "You will wear it — it's designed to prolong your orgasm. Actually, it will hinder you from spilling until I take it off. Do you want to see it?"

I cannot even nod, but you understand nevertheless and take off my blindfold. Momentarily, the candlelight is too bright, but then my eyes adjust and I see the ring you hold in your hands and which will go around my member in another moment. In addition, I can finally see your cock, and when you run your hand along your fully hard length, all I can do is lick my lips, trying not to show how much I want, need you inside me.

You laugh softly, quite obviously not offended by my visible desire. The ring in your hand seems to call out for me and swiftly, you slide it over my cock down to the base, where you tighten it with a spell.

I gasp. The combination of leather and metal on my burning skin feels strange, marvellous, and it shows once more the dominance you have over me — you will be even able to control when exactly I will come. It has happened so very fast, and now you order me to watch whilst you settle between my legs. One hand strokes my cock, swollen, pulsating, and standing upright like a flagpole. The fingers of your other hand first dip into a lubricant and then you spread the creamy substance over your cock. The sight alone would have made me spill hadn't my ring prevented it.

Subtle pain; exquisite torture.

Your hands move: one along your length, the other one between my legs. You slip two creamy fingers inside me; slowly, you move, and of course you find my pleasure spot with dreamlike security. I am so very close to my climax, but I cannot come, I cannot find release because of the ring, and you just go on until I writhe underneath you like a fish on dry land, my teeth clenched, groaning hoarsely every time you spread my hole a bit wider. Maybe I go mad; maybe you can see it in my face when it is too much, because eventually, you remove your fingers and let me feel the tip of your cock.

"Watch me take you." Your voice is just a whisper, and I watch, obeying your order and my own need to see our bodies joined. I see you enter me, I see the need in your face and then I feel you inside me. Greedily, I meet your thrusts. Very soon, you hit the centre of my lust and I cannot remain quiet again. I howl, unable to articulate words, and anyway, you have forbidden me to speak.

You fuck me for an eternity, far longer than usual. Sweat is dripping off of your face and onto my chest, and I believe, truly believe you will never stop moving, you will never allow me to come and then, suddenly, totally unexpectedly, something snaps, somehow, something deep inside me breaks and I let go of the bedposts and pull you into a tight embrace. Briefly, I sense your surprise, but I know that this is how you want it — intense, close, without force, I know it as surely as I know your name. You never wanted to hurt me; I even believe you never understood why I needed the pain along with the pleasure.

I don't need pain anymore to feel alive; I don't need scars to believe this is real. I only need you.

There are no rules anymore, and this is no game any longer. There is no 'you' and 'I', only a very strong 'us', and therefore, I follow my instincts and wrap my legs around your waist, I move with you, and when I dig my fingers into your back, when my mouth finds yours, when I kiss you for the first time and you kiss me back I feel your joy at my actions and see the hope flaring up in your eyes that this might change into something that benefits us both, not only me.

You smile. "Severus," I hear you whisper, and then you deepen the kiss and thrust hard inside me and finally, you vanish my cock ring. I rasp your name, over and over again and come in long, shuddering spasms like a man in a fit whilst you hold me close, hold me safe. We are one, and I take you along with me, over the edge, into oblivion.



I wake up in your arms because the Mark calls for me. The Dark Lord wants to see me, and I have to obey him.

I would have rather stayed with you.

As quietly as possible I slip out of bed, leaving you behind, fast asleep. I dress, I force the smile off my face, and I refuse to brush my lips over yours not only because it might wake you, but because I need to put some distance between you and me. I must face my mad master with the usual coldness in my heart; if I kiss you, if I as much as allow my eyes linger on your sleeping body for one more moment, I won't be able to do so.

Something has changed, but I am not yet sure what it is.

The Dark Lord awaits me in Malfoy's mansion, and he is furious: once more, Potter has escaped from one of his traps, once more his plan hasn't worked out. As there is no one else he can blame, he decides to blame me, simply because he can't accept the fact that it is the boy's destiny to best him.

It is nearly boring to see how predictable the Dark Lord has become. He plots; he fails; he strikes out.

Tonight, I am in the centre of his wrath, which is nothing new, but hasn't happened in a while. Usually, he prefers to torture his lesser followers, believing that I am too precious to be hurt. Tonight, though, he is too furious to think about my value. He wants to bring me to my knees, and surely, before long, I am on all fours before him.

I welcome the Cruciatus like an old friend. I can handle the pain, and I mainly yell to please my master. The torture won't last long; the Dark Lord is not a man who wastes his strengths in useless tasks, and torturing me is useless: he knows he won't find any proof I helped the boy escape.

"Legilimens!"

Apparently, my master is more angry than I have foreseen. It is the first time that he combines the Cruciatus Curse with Legilimency on me, and I find the result most disturbing. The pain rips through me and makes it hard, nearly impossible to concentrate, to obscure his attempts to read my mind.

His mind in mine feels icy and slimy. Like rotten maggots, his searching thoughts creep through my memories, and involuntarily, I shudder — this is bad, very bad, and when he tightens his mental grip on me, when he strengthens his Cruciatus Curse and breaks a few ribs by doing so, a rush of fear washes through me, strong enough to make me plead for mercy.

The Dark Lords finds the memories I present him: memories of Lily, of crimes I've committed in his name, of my loyalty to him. He finds my hate for Potter, and he doesn't find anything else.

I spit out some blood and hope this will be over in another few moments; I have no idea how long I can stand this.

The curse rips me apart. My own screams sound loud in my ears, and when I feel my master's thoughts strengthen, I know someone else casts the Cruciatus so the Dark Lord can fully focus on his task to unravel all my secrets. Why he thinks I have more to hide than I care to admit I

do not know, but it is obvious that today, his intention is to break me in order to find out what I hide from him.

Unbidden, the memory of your sleeping face drifts through my mind and suddenly, from out of nowhere, I know what has changed between you and me. Cold dread rushes through me; icy fear captures my heart. I push you as far away as possible, bury the memories of you and me in the back of my head. The Dark Lord hasn't seen you. But it was close, and I try to flee, try to escape from my master's wrath and his probing thoughts because if I don't, my game will be over.

How blind I have been. I should have known; I should have been aware of the possibility of falling in love.

I'm still on all fours and the cracked ribs make it hard to breathe but thinking is surprisingly easy given the circumstances. Right now, I still manage to feed my master with useless memories. In another few minutes, though, if he decides to continue, I won't.

I'm surrounded by my fellow Death Eaters; through the darkness I can see their robes swirling up the dust. I can only assume that someone has vocalised his mistrust in me, and that the Dark Lord, mad with anger because of his failure to capture Potter, has decided to put a bit more effort into torturing me.

I don't care. What I do care about, though, is you. Why did I not see that each time I came to your rooms I allowed you to see a part of me no one else had ever seen before? Why did I not understand that each time I begged you to take me, you broke through my defences, took away my armour, one layer after the other, until nothing but my fragile heart was left?

Why had I not foreseen that in falling in love with you I have put you as well as myself in grave danger?

Only moments ago, I was thinking of you, remembering waking up in your arms after a night of dreamless, sweet sleep. Now, with my master's thoughts in my mind, I have to deal with the consequences: there are many memories of you and me, too many, actually, to hide them all. In another few minutes, I won't be able to withstand the combination of Legilimency and the Cruciatus Curse. He will find you, and he will understand what you mean to me — that you mean everything to me — and you will be lost. Weakened or not, close to his downfall or not, the Dark Lord will come and take you, he will torture you, and he will kill you.

Unacceptable.

I make a decision, quick and cold-hearted. This has to end now and here — I cannot keep two secrets at once, not secrets as big as mine. I must protect you as well as

Dumbledore's plan to bring down the Dark Lord; I must hide my love for you as well as my true loyalties, or you and the cause are both doomed to death and failure.

I even see the irony. Had you only been my method to get rid of the tension that built up after years and years of neglecting my needs, had you indeed been nothing but the fish on my hook, my master would have understood, and wouldn't have touched you, as he would have seen you as the tool that keeps me functioning.

But you aren't a tool, never have been no matter how much I had tried to believe you were. And my master does not understand love, can neither accept nor tolerate it.

On a low, subconscious level I am glad I don't have time to rip out my love for you, which I would have surely done had there been more time.

The Dark Lord dives deeper into my mind, and for the first time ever, he finds memories I didn't want him to see: memories of my failures, memories of tears shed at Lily's grave, memories of talks with Albus. Nothing too grave; nothing that would give me away.

Yet. Because now, he knows I do have something to hide, and he doubles his efforts to break me.

I must admit, I didn't expect to die on Malfoy's dining room floor, surrounded by Death Eaters.

I cannot direct his thoughts any longer; I cannot hide my memories any more. My attempts to hide my memories become obvious: I have no other choice but to bring up my wards, to throw him out of my head. It is the only way to keep my secrets; it is the only way to keep you safe. He didn't know I can block him out; he doesn't know yet that he won't be able to break through my wards again, not with all his power.

I sense his disbelief and his shock. The Cruciatus Curse stops; silence all around me. All that can be heard are my attempts to get some air in my lungs. My eyesight is

obscured by blood running into my eyes, I stink of sweat and pain, and the Dark Lord knows I am a traitor.

I know what will happen now. Briefly, I regret that I cannot say goodbye to you.

"You betrayed me, Severus?" the Dark Lord asks, disbelieving, calculating.

Excited.

"Of course, my Lord." I cough and have to wrap my arms around me for being able to speak, but manage to put a mocking tone into my voice. Even I don't crave to suffer longer than absolutely necessary, and mocking the Dark Lord is a certain way to make him kill me fast.

Stupid, really. As much as I have wanted to die not that long ago, I would now prefer to survive this sodding war. On the other hand, taking my precious secrets with me is not the worst choice I have ever made.

Only you can break through the walls I have built around me; only you did so, repeatedly. Only you have ever touched my heart. Only you hold my soul in your hands.

From far away, I hear my master cast another Cruciatus; apparently, he already injured me more profoundly than expected.

More curses: my fellow Death Eaters join my former master. My bones break; I feel my skin ripping off my frame, and I cannot stop screaming. I consider it appropriate that some of the spells that hit me I have invented myself.

My lungs fail to service; my heart stutters, stops, takes another hesitant beat, and stops again. I am sprawled over the floor, covered with my blood, and I hear my fellow Death Eaters laugh at the sight.

I smile; in another few heartbeats, I will die with your name on my lips.

Remus.

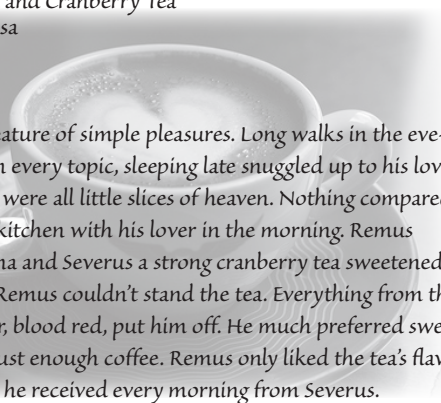
Title: *Of Mocha and Cranberry Tea*

Author: *azurerosa*

Rating: *pg*

Prompt: *mocha*

Remus was a creature of simple pleasures. Long walks in the evenings, debates on every topic, sleeping late snuggled up to his lover on the weekend were all little slices of heaven. Nothing compared to sitting in the kitchen with his lover in the morning. Remus always had mocha and Severus a strong cranberry tea sweetened by fresh honey. Remus couldn't stand the tea. Everything from the taste to the color, blood red, put him off. He much preferred sweet chocolate with just enough coffee. Remus only liked the tea's flavor in the bitter kiss he received every morning from Severus.



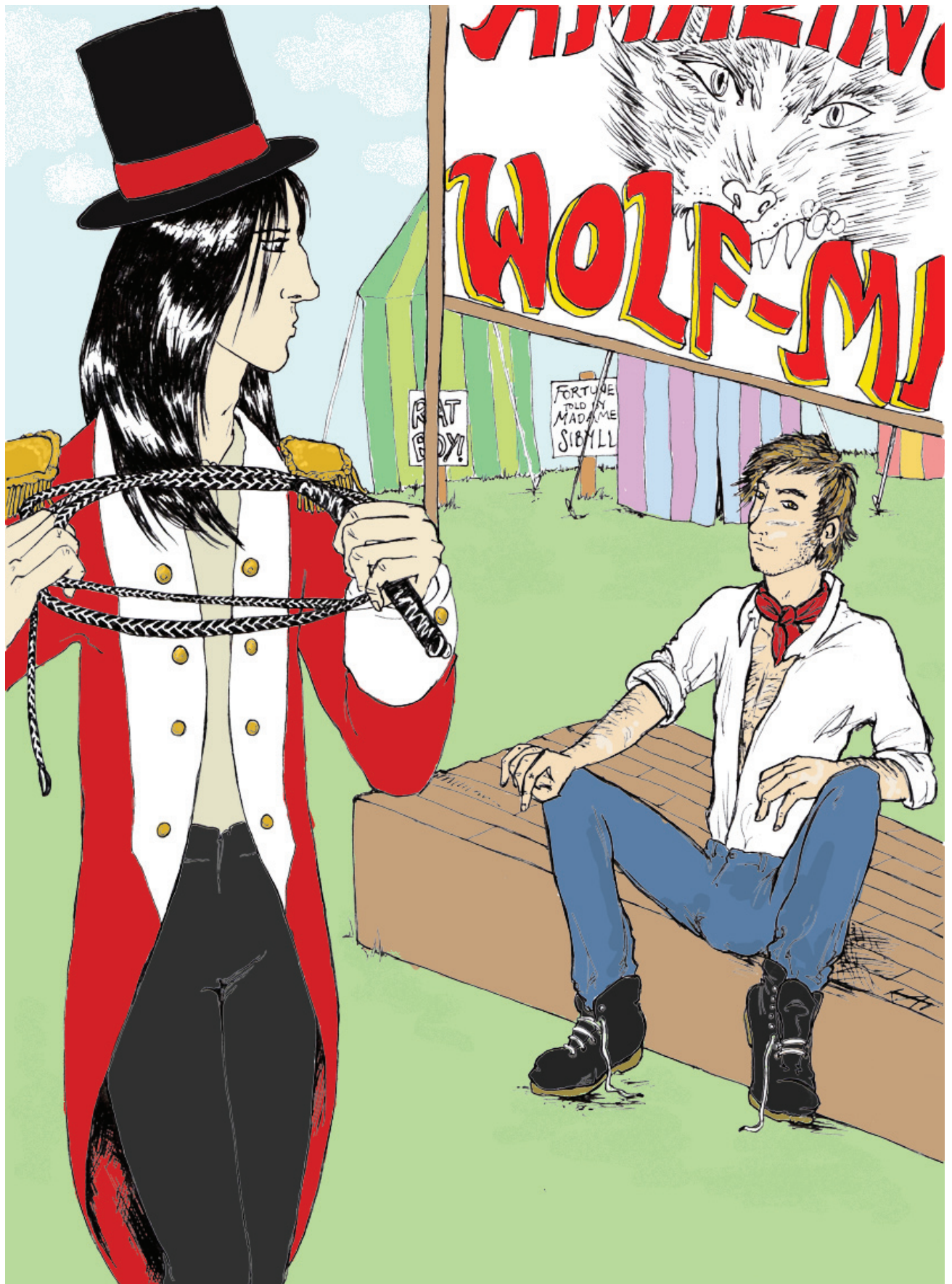
chivalric's Bio

I was born and raised in South Germany; I live at the lake of Constance with one son, one dog, and several cats. In October 2007, I stumbled into fandom and found a home. At first, I only wrote HG/SS; meanwhile, I have a real big thing for slash in general and Snape/Lupin specifically.

•E-mail: icefire55@googlemail.com



karasu hime 09



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."

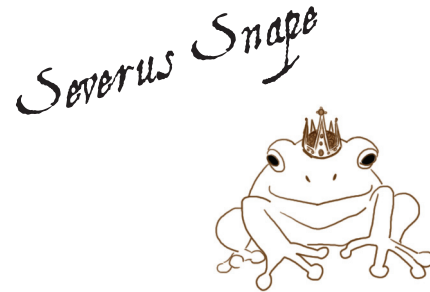


A year later, Severus wrote his last column as "E. Prince"; he answered two last questions and then bid his readers farewell.

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



Art by Xterm

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."

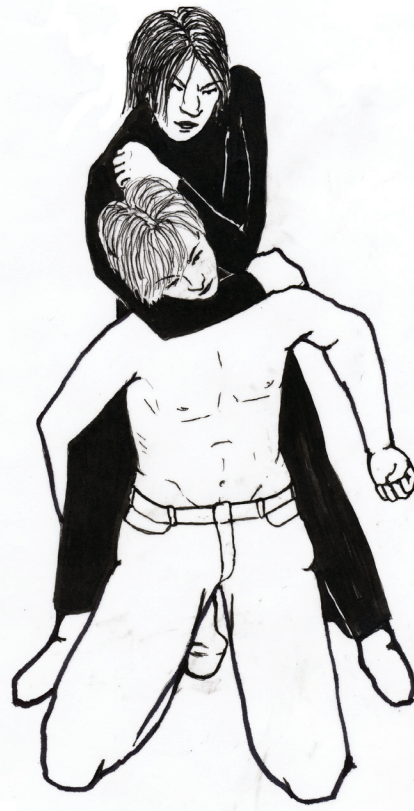
"Oh, stuff it, Lupin. Do I look like I'm complaining? Don't get sanctimonious on me now." He sighed. "However, bed does sound like a good idea." He stood and started walking towards the doorway. Then he turned and looked at Lupin over his shoulder. "Well? Are you coming?"

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.

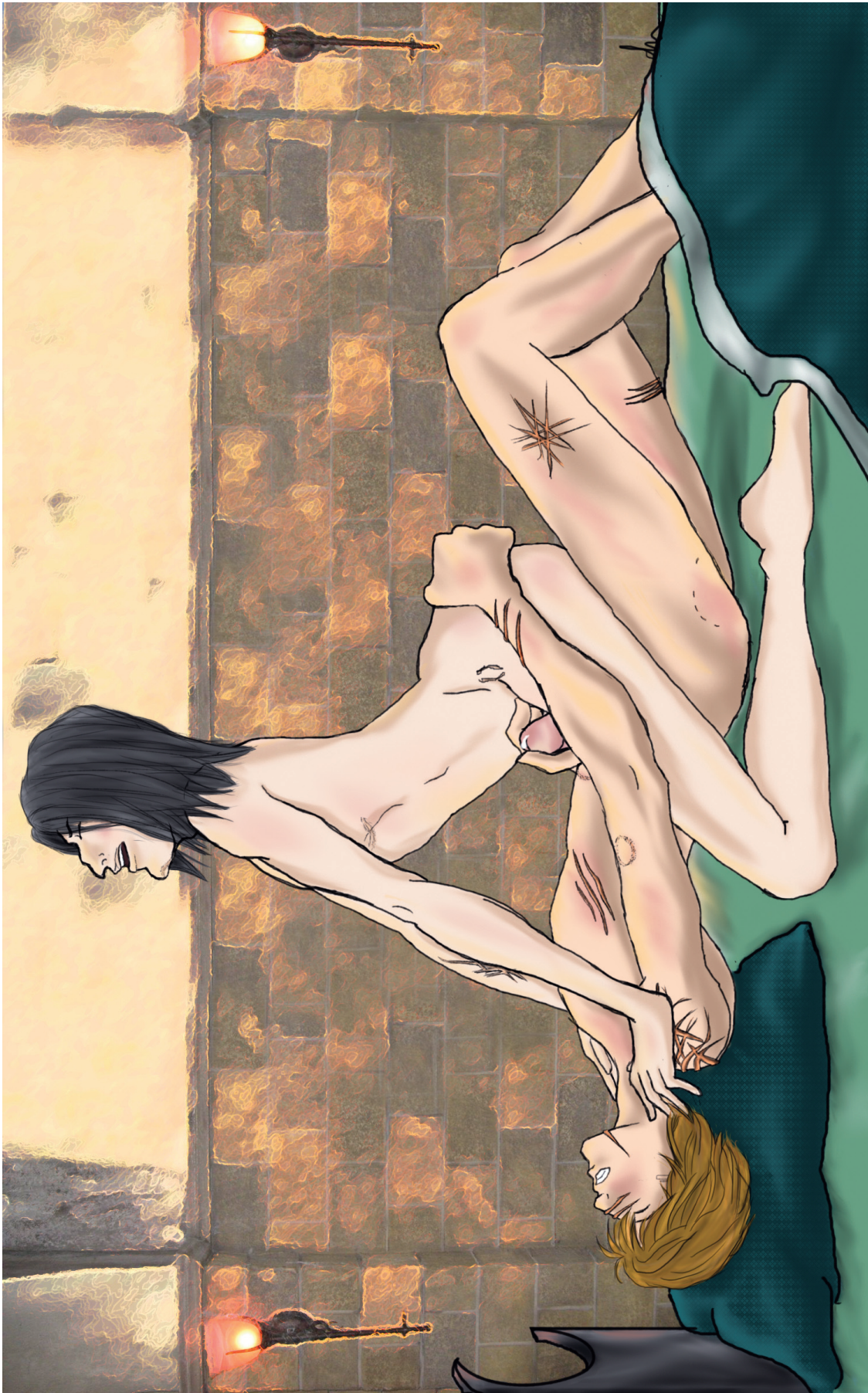
Dungeons — master’s Bio

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.

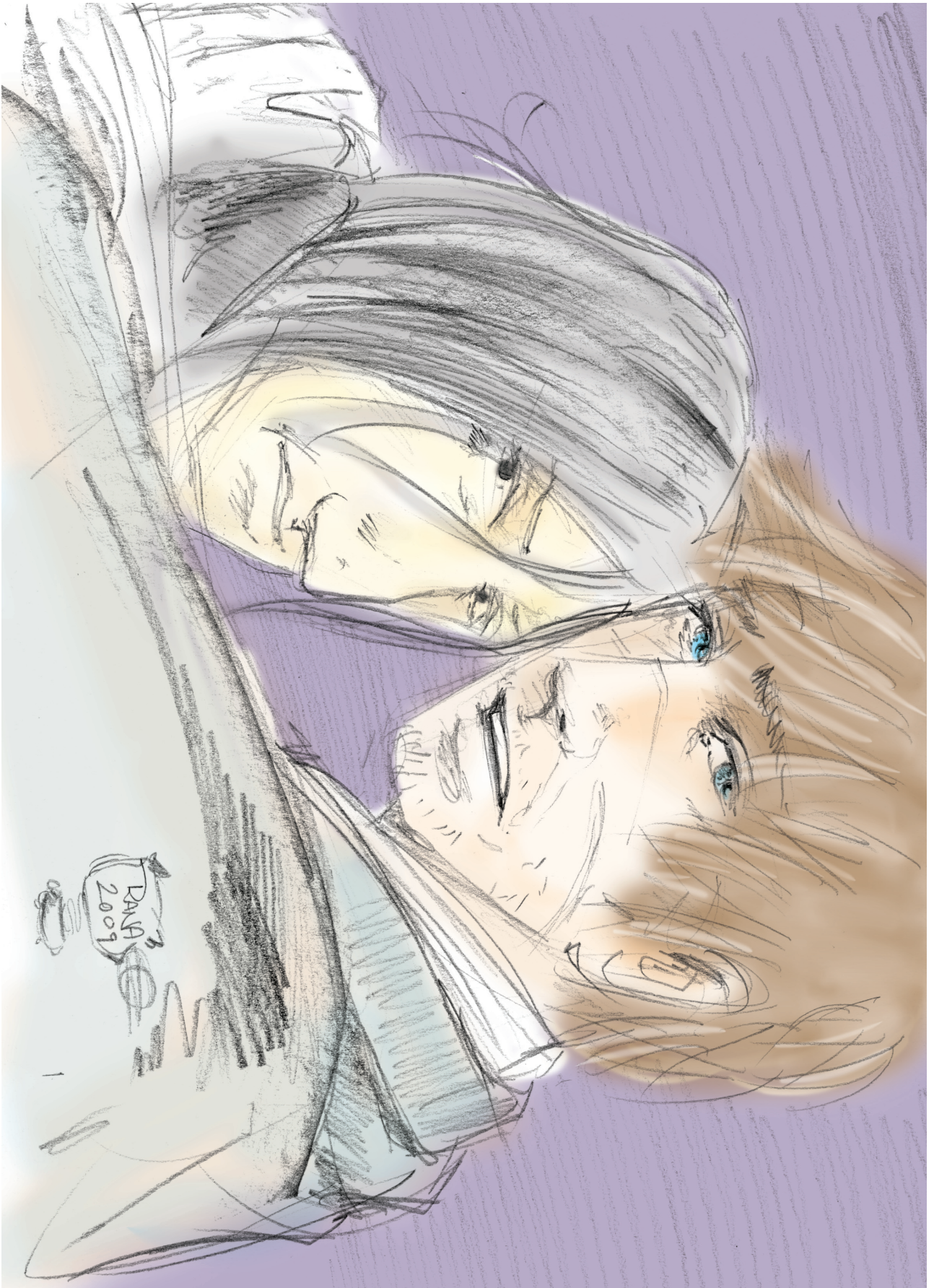
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With or Without You by Diana Moon



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

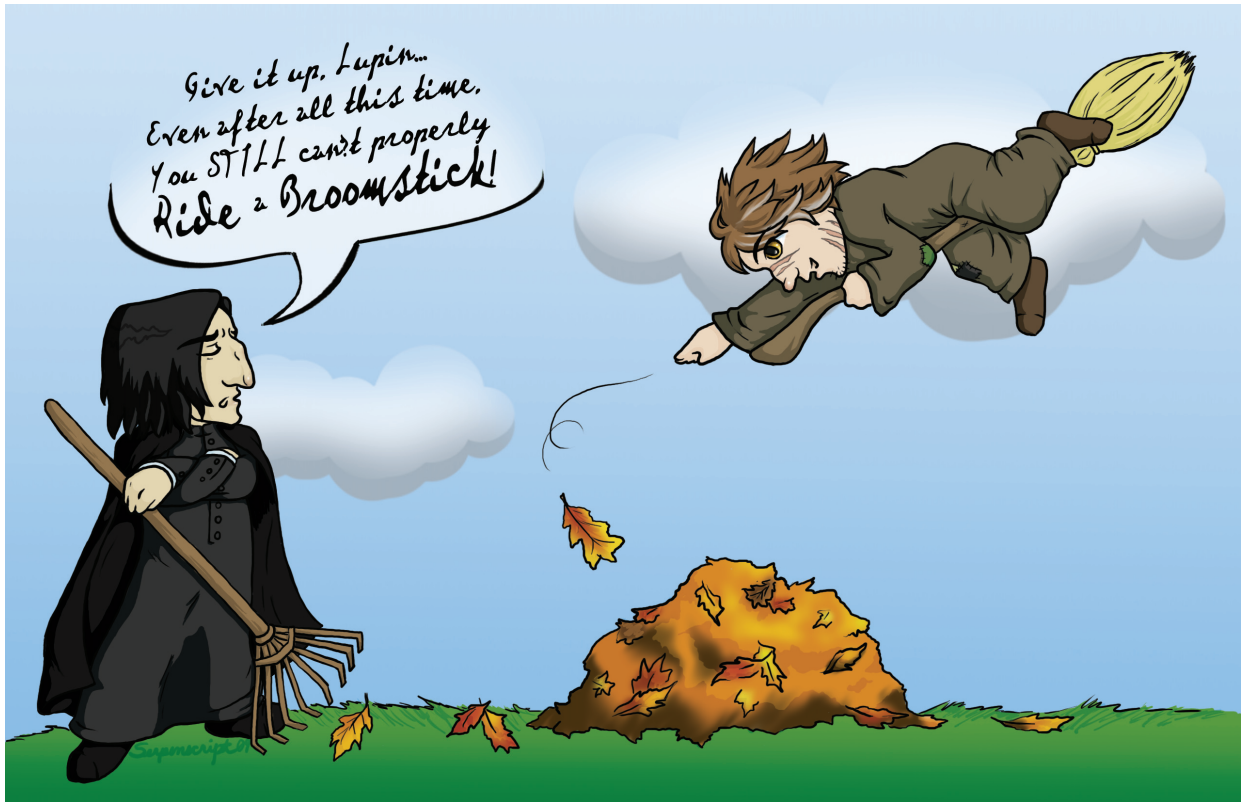
Student at NMSU majoring in Anthropology, when I'm not at school I'm being a nerd/geek of the scifi/fantasy type. Long time lurker, new author. Ij and Lj name are the same: azure_rosa

•E-mail: azurerosa@gmail.com

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.

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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.

