Scarred Souls

by Arianna2017

Summary

A widowed Harry must bond with Snape in order to save his daughter’s life. Sev gains a family, for better or worse, and the hearts of two scarred souls will be changed forever.

Notes

Note from SeparatriX, the archivist: this story was originally archived at HP Fandom, which was closed for health and financial reasons. To preserve the archive, I began manually importing its works to the AO3 as an Open Doors-approved project in August 2016. I e-mailed all creators about the move and posted announcements, but may not have reached everyone. If you are (or know) this creator, please contact me using the e-mail address on HP Fandom collection profile.
Chapter 1: My Beloved

‘Prologue’

The Weasley family and Harry James Potter were all sitting together in the Maternity Ward waiting room at St. Mungo’s anxiously waiting for news about Ginny who had been in labor for the last 12 hours. Harry had been with her in the beginning but due to complications the Healer had sent him out of the delivery room to wait with the rest of the family.

Harry and Ginny had married a few weeks after the war ended and were very happy together. They already had twin sons, Albus Remus and James Sirius, who were almost six years old and now were having a baby daughter that they had already named Lily Marie. Ginny had trouble conceiving and they knew she would be their last child but were open to the idea of adoption in the future.

Harry stood up and started pacing nervously around the waiting room while running his fingers
through his messy black hair in frustration.

“What is going on in there? Why hasn’t anyone come out and told us what is happening? I should be by Ginny’s side, not waiting out here wondering what is happening to my wife and child,” Harry growled in anger.

“Harry, everything will be alright.” Hermione Weasley stood up and walked over to give Harry a reassuring hug.

“But why did they kick me out of the delivery room?” Harry demanded with tears in his bright green eyes.

Ron had walked up and was standing behind his wife looking at Harry. Seeing how frustrated his best friend was he tried to reassure him as well.

“Try not to worry, mate. Ginny is a fighter and so is my little niece. I just know they will be fine.”

“Yes Harry, Ginny has the one of the top birthing specialists in Britain at her disposal and is getting the best possible care St. Mungo’s has to offer. I am sure it’s nothing too serious and they just wanted you out of the room so they could give her all their attention,” Hermione said, giving Ron a worried look of her own.

“I don’t know, Mione, Ginny looked really tired and she was losing so much blood. I am really worried about her. What will I do if something happens to her?” Harry whispered. “Merlin, I love her so much and my life isn’t worth living without her by my side.”

“Harry James Potter! Don’t you dare speak that way! Ginny will be fine and so will Lily Marie. You’ll see... By this time tomorrow, you’ll be sitting by her bedside helping her feed the baby while the twins will be trying to figure a way to change her diaper,” Hermione admonished him with a small smile.

“I hope your right, Mione, I really do,” Harry answered. “I just have a really bad feeling about this and know that something isn’t right.”

Bill and Fleur had volunteered to watch the twins and were at the Burrow waiting for news about Ginny and Lily. While Arthur, Molly, George, Ron and Hermione came along to give Harry and Ginny their moral support. When the Healer came into the room, they all turned to face her with anxious expressions.

“How is Ginny?” Harry demanded. “When can I see my wife and baby?”

The Healer stood quietly in front of them with her hands folded together. They all knew something was seriously wrong by the sad look in her eyes. Molly started to cry and Arthur put his arm around her shoulders, giving his wife a tight squeeze.

“Mr. Potter, we’ve used every means possible to save your wife but she’s just too weak and has lost so much blood.” The Healer spoke softly while looking at Harry. “It was a very difficult birth and I am afraid that her body couldn’t handle the stress of the birth. It was too much for her. I am so sorry but she won’t make it.”

“What do you mean? What are you saying? No!..... You have to save her......please... Ginny means everything in the world to me. You’ve got to do something to help her.”

Harry cried out in anguish and fell to the floor on his knees with his head bowed, sobbing uncontrollably. Hermione and Ron tried to comfort him while trying to deal with their own pain at
the news.

“There is nothing more we can do for Ginny but make her as comfortable as possible and ease her
pain,” the Healer told him while giving them all a few minutes to accept the terrible news.

“What about Lily Marie?” Harry finally whispered lifting his head up to look at the Healer with
wounded eyes.

“Your daughter will be just fine, Mr. Potter.” The Healer answered. “She is a beautiful and healthy
little baby girl who needs her Daddy very much.”

“Is Ginny still alive? Do I have time to say goodbye to her?” Harry asked, standing up with the
support of Ron.

“Yes, but she doesn’t have much time left,” the Healer answered him then looked at Arthur and
Molly adding, “You may also want to go in and say goodbye to your daughter.”

“When Mum... Dad... Please, you go in first.... See Ginny.... I’ll wait out here with George, Ron and
Mione.” Harry told them while trying to regain his composure

When Arthur and Molly came out, George went into the room and then Ron followed with
Hermione. It was finally Harry’s turn and they all hugged and kissed each other before he walked
through the door to see his wife one last time.

Harry quietly shut the door behind him and walked over to the bed Ginny was lying in. Her eyes
were closed and she was deathly pale but looked peaceful and did not seem to be in any pain. Sitting
down on the bed beside her, Harry leaned down and kissed her on the forehead.

“I love you, Ginerva Weasley Potter.” Harry whispered kissing her again this time on the cheek and
then the lips. “You are the love of my life and I will never feel for anyone else the way I do for you
at this moment.”

Ginny’s brown eyes opened and she gave Harry a weak smile. “Harry.... My love... My life....”

“Shhh, Ginny... Don’t try and talk.... save your strength.” Harry lay down beside his wife and gently
pulled Ginny against him and held her soft body in his arms. He breathed in the sweet scent of her
and tears filled his eyes again at the thought of losing his beloved forever.

“Harry....we don’t have much time left together....” Ginny told him while kissing him back on the
lips. They were cold and Harry knew these were the last few remaining minutes they would share
together before she left him forever. “You have a daughter... Lily is so beautiful and delicate.... She’s
asleep in her crib.... Harry, promise me that you will never let anything happen to Lily and will do
anything in your power to protect her and keep her safe.... No matter what it is.... Promise me, my
love, I need to hear you tell me.”

“Ginny, you know I would do anything for Lily and our sons, no matter what it is. If something bad
were to happen to either one of them, I give you my word that I will do anything in my power to
save them and keep them safe. I promise you, my beautiful sweet Ginny.”

They looked into each other’s eyes one last time and Ginny spoke her final words to the love of her
life. “Harry..... Don’t grieve for me..... Take care of our children and find happiness..... Live your life
and find love again.... I will love you forever and all eternity. my darling Harry.... Don’t be alone and
know that I give you my blessing to find another to love.... I will always be watching over you and
our children.... Goodbye, my Dearest Harry.....”
“Ginny?.... Ginny....” Harry knew she was gone and gently closed her eyes, kissing them one at a time. He pulled off his glasses and wiped his eyes with his fists then turned his head upon hearing the sound of his baby crying for attention on the other side of the bed. Standing up, he walked over and looked down upon his little girl for the first time. He bent down and picked Lily up in his arms, carefully cradling her tiny body against his chest.

Smiling down at her and kissing her on the head, Harry said, “Hello, Lily Marie Potter, I am your Daddy. Your Mommy and I love you very much but she had to leave us and go stay with the angels in Heaven. I will be taking care of you from now on and very soon you will be meeting your older brothers, James and Albus who will also protect and look out for you.”

Walking over to the door, he opened it and called his family into the room so they could all grieve together. Then the time for healing would come the next day when Harry would be reunited with his sons and they would meet their little sister for the first time.

TBC

Stay tuned for next chapter in which it is a year later and we are introduced to Harry’s children.

Hope you liked it....
Chapter 2: Brooding

‘One Year Later’

“James! Al! Hurry up or we’re going to be late for the party.” Harry yelled up the stairs to his fraternal 6-year-old twin sons, both turning 7 in just six months, whom he could hear running around and frolicking in the bedroom they had shared together since birth.

“We’ll be right down, Dad!” James yelled back down.

“Ya, Dad, in a sec, we’re sort of in the middle of something.” Al added and then Harry heard him squeak in pain and knew that James must have kicked him in the shin to shut up and not let the cat out of the bag as to what they were up too.

Just make it quick, guys, and I had better not find another mess in your room or you’ll be grounded for a month.” Harry answered.
He could hear them whispering loudly and smirked when he heard more loud bangs and thumps coming from upstairs indicating that they were desperately trying to straighten up whatever trouble they had managed to get themselves into yet again. Harry was still not sure if he should consider himself lucky or not that his twins seemed to have inherited the same characteristics for troublemaking as their famous red-haired uncles but loved them even more because of it.

Harry smiled as he remembered the antics of his best mate’s twin brothers, Fred and George, and how Molly used to yell at them when they were younger. Sadly, Fred had been killed at the end of the war but George had managed to go on with his life and had married Alicia Spinnet. He still owned and ran Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes joke shop in Diagon Alley along with his wife and young son.

Alicia was pregnant and recently found out she was carrying twin boys which made George and the whole Weasley family extremely happy. Ron and Hermione already had a son the same age as his twins and she was also pregnant. They didn’t know the gender of the baby yet but both were hoping for a baby girl. Harry’s eyes watered as he thought of his Ginny who had passed away at childbirth just a little over a year ago.

“Dada?” Lily’s soft musical little voice called to Harry and he walked over to the playpen that was sitting in the middle of the room.

Smiling down at his youngest child, Harry answered, “Dada’s right here, sweetheart.”

Lily had managed to pull herself up by grabbing onto the side of the playpen and was holding her small arms up to Harry so he could lift her out of it. She had beautiful curly auburn hair which, though still short, covered her tiny head in little ringlets and large brown eyes just like Ginny’s and had also inherited the Weasley family freckles. She had started trying to talk at around 8 months old. The twins liked to call it baby babbling, but it was the word Dada that sounded like music to Harry’s ears. A few months ago, Hermione had told him that she had never seen such an intelligent child as Lily, which caused Harry to beam with pride. He fondly remembered his Godfather Sirius Black saying almost a similar thing to Mione in third year.

Harry had given Lily a bath, washed her hair, then dressed her in an adorable little dress that had animated images of Winnie the Pooh characters she loved so much dancing around on it as if they were alive. He had decorated her hair with numerous different colored little bows and with her short hair they fitted the picture perfectly.

“How’s my little princess?” Harry asked giving her a kiss on the tip of her nose.

She muttered something unintelligible and giggled back, giving him a smile that showed off the few little baby teeth in her mouth while trying to take his glasses off. Harry thought she looked a little flushed and felt her forehead but she didn’t seem to have a fever. Thinking that it might be a little too hot in the room, Harry murmured a spell to change the temperature slightly. He would contact her pediatrician first thing in the morning just in case she was coming down with a cold.

Harry and Ginny had built a cute little two-story cottage together on the border of Hogsmeade. It was complete with a white picket fence, a wraparound porch on which they had put a comfortable magical swinging chair that adjusted its size for the number of occupants sitting in it, a beautiful flower garden, and a huge yard for their children to play in. All the surviving Hogwarts students of the war had decided that it would be a nice idea to bring their children up together in the same neighborhood so similar homes were lining both sides of the road which was suitably called ‘Gryffindor Lane’. There was even a ‘Hufflepuff Lane’, ‘Ravenclaw Lane’ and ‘Slytherin Lane’ that all intersected off each other each with their own tree-lined dirt or graveled roads.

Harry and Ron thought it hilarious that ‘Slytherin Lane’ housed all different-sized mansions, each
trying to outdo the other, instead of small cozy cottages like their other old school mates had done. How some things didn’t change.

Harry grimaced upon thinking of Draco Malfoy and his family living there. They still had not become friends but had learned how to tolerate each other’s presence when they came in contact with one another. Thank Merlin that wasn’t too often, Harry sighed. Draco Malfoy’s two sons were just as obnoxious as he and his parents were. Harry turned his head when he heard footsteps trampling down the stairs and two little tornados flew into the room.

“James Sirius Potter and Albus Remus Potter!” Harry admonished waving a finger at his two out of breath sons. “How many times do I have to tell you.... NO RUNNING DOWN THE STAIRS! Think of the bad example you are setting for your baby sister.”

James grinned impishly up at his father and said, “Geez, Dad, cool off, you’re beginning to sound just like Grandma Weasley more and more every day.”

“Ya, Dad, you had better be careful or someone might mistake you for our mummy instead of our daddy.” Al added with a devilishly grin.

“Ha, ha, ha guys,” Harry shot back. “Think you’re so funny, do you?”

He stood there holding Lily in his arms and trying to give his sons a stern look but knew he was failing miserably and couldn’t keep his lips from twitching into a smile. Even though they were twins, both boys had their own unique differences. Of the two, Albus looked more like Harry with his bright green eyes, thin face and small stature, while James was more of a mix between his two parents. They each had Harry’s messy black hair but James eyes were hazel with green flecks in them and he was much taller and larger in size. Thankfully, none of his children had bad eyesight and therefore didn’t have to wear glasses. Harry was leaning towards getting his eyes magically corrected but since Ginny had always told him she had fallen in love with him and his rounded glasses he kept putting it off.

“Hey, dad, you had better stop reminiscing so much or we’re really going to be late for Granddad and Grandma Weasley’s surprise anniversary party,” James cautioned.

“We’ll get back to this little discussion later, boys, when we get home,” Harry promised before rushing all of them off to the Burrow and being sure to bring Lily’s changing bag along with a few of her favorite toys and doll.

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‘The Burrow’

All the guests had just left after saying their goodbyes and now only Harry and his family remained with the Weasleys’. The adults were all sitting around the extended table in the kitchen having tea and quietly chatting while the children were playing in the other room. Lily was allowed to be with them but only after Harry had warned his sons to keep a very close eye on her. It was about an hour later when Al came running into the kitchen yelling out in a frantic voice.

“DAD! DAD! HURRY! COME QUICK! SOMETHING IS WRONG WITH LILY!”

Harry jumped up so fast he knocked his tea and chair over while running into the other room with the rest of the Weasleys close behind him.

“Lily?” Harry cried, running over to his baby. She was on the floor and being held in the arms of her big brother James who had a frightened look on his face.
Harry knelt down and pulled Lily into his own arms, thankful to see her still breathing while asking, “James? What happened?”

“I don’t know, dad. She was just fine and having fun playing with us when all of a sudden she just collapsed,” James cried with tears in his eyes.

“Harry, we have to get Lily to St. Mungo’s right now!” Hermione whispered while putting her hand on his shoulder and gripping it.

Molly was checking Lily over herself and agreed with Hermione. It was decided that only Hermione and Molly would accompany Harry while everyone else stayed at the Burrow to await news about Lily’s condition.

“We’ll fire call you as soon as we have any news,” Hermione told Ron, giving him a quick kiss.

“Don’t worry, Harry,” Ron said to his friend who was now standing holding Lily and had tears flowing down his cheeks. “Lily is a fighter just like her mother was and will make it through whatever this is.”

They all watched with worried expressions as Harry with Lily wrapped securely in his arms stepped into the fireplace and disappeared with a flash quickly followed by Molly and then Hermione.

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'Spinners End'

Down in his dark and dank dungeon like basement, the tall thin shadowy figure of Severus Tobias Snape was busy working in his lab making various potions for the Healers at St. Mungo’s as well as some much needed ones for his former Hogwarts coworker, Madame Pomfrey, an extremely gifted magical Healer. She still worked at Hogwarts and by now had become famous for being one of its long-time standing matrons of the hospital wing.

He stopped for a moment to rest then stretched his long and lanky tired sore limbs, trying to regain some of the feeling back in them. His shoulder-length black silky hair was greasy due to all the chemicals and dampness in the lab. When he bent his head to ease the tension on his neck, it fell forward covering his face. While he rested, Severus placed the palms of his scarred hands on the wooden table and thought back to his years both as a student and professor at Hogwarts.

He had never forgotten the humiliation he had suffered as a student at the hands of his nemesis James Potter and his faithful sidekicks. When Severus had become a professor and Potions Master, he had been constantly ridiculed by his students for his appearance. His black eyes darkened in anger as he thought about how they all used to whisper about him and laugh behind his back.

Well, I got back at them all didn’t I? Severus thought. Oh, yes, I showed them who was boss both in the classroom and corridors. He smiled an evil grimace at the thought of how many students he had bullied during his long career including that little brat Harry James Potter, the hated spawn of his enemy, and his own silly little sidekicks Ronald Weasley and Hermione Granger.

Tossing his head backward, his hair fell aside exposing his horribly scarred face and neck, compliments of Voldemort’s pet snake Nagini.

Suddenly, his whole body shook as if he were having a seizure and he fell to the stone floor on his knees. The pain was unbearable and he nearly bit his tongue off to keep from screaming. It lasted a few seconds but was much worse than the Cruciatus Curse of which he had been subject to numerous times as a his role as a Death Eater spy for the light. Damning his own stupidity, he cursed
to himself for having been so busy that he forgot to take his anti-seizure and pain potions. Pulling himself back up on his still shaking legs by holding on to the table, he stumbled over to the cabinets in search of them. Finding the two bottles, he quickly swallowed the contents one at a time and then slumped back down to the floor to wait for the potions effect to work on his body.

After a few moments, his eyes closed and he fell into a deep and restless sleep. Severus woke screaming after suffering yet another horrific nightmare in which he was summoned by Voldemort to meet him at the Shrieking Shack. It was as if he were living the pain of it over and over again. He found himself walking into the room where Nagini was held in a suspended protective magical cage. The Dark Lord had tried to kill Severus by expanding it and placing it over and on top of him, allowing no escape.

Each time he dreamt, he kept seeing the green emerald orbs of the blasted boy who lived staring right back at him, reminding Severus of the love he had for the boy’s mother, Lily. He had given Potter his memories and then the stupid little brat and Granger girl left him lying on the floor thinking he had died. Thankfully, after Voldemort had been killed, a special team of Aurors had the common sense to check out the Shack and found him alive—barely—and got him to St. Mungo’s just in time. Although now he actually wished he had just died that day, instead of being forced to live with disfiguring scars, unbearable pain and tormenting nightmares for the rest of his life.

Potter and his friends never even had the decency to find out what had happened to his body. If they had, the idiots would have found out that he had survived. As it were, they enjoyed the publicity and attention they received, the celebrations, and then they went on with their merry little lives and to hell about Severus Snape. Oh, wouldn’t they be surprised knowing that their hated Professor still lived and was hoping for the chance to have his revenge against them for their cold-hearted callousness. Especially, Harry James Potter, oh yes how Severus would enjoy seeing his face upon hearing the news that his father’s hated classmate was still very much alive!

He was startled out of his reveries by an urgent fire-call message from a Healer in the Pediatric Ward at St. Mungo’s. Apparently, a very young child had just been rushed into the emergency ward with life-threatening symptoms for whom Severus’s expertise in potions was urgently required. Sighing, he thought it rather ironic that here he was helping save the lives of children when he had lived to torment them while teaching at Hogwarts.

Leaving his lab, he hurried upstairs to wash and clean himself up before leaving for St. Mungo’s to assist the Healer and the unknown child, while at the same time being sure he placed a strong glamour on himself so his scars wouldn’t show. Merlin forbid should he forget and then happen to frighten a sick patient with his hideous looks. If that happened, Severus was sure the Daily Prophet would have a field day at his expense and his quiet mundane life would be exposed to the whole Wizarding community.

TBC

"Thank you" to everyone who reviewed chapter 1.

Stay tuned for next chapter in which Harry finds out Severus is very much alive and he also finds out what is wrong with little Lily. Just in case anyone was wondering about Draco, he will be making a future appearance in story.

Merry Christmas everyone!
Chapter 3: The Return of the Snake

“I want to see my baby. I need to know how she’s doing. It’s been far too bloody long. Why hasn’t anyone come to tell us anything?” Harry cried out in frustration.

He was growing more agitated by the moment at not knowing what was going on with Lily. It had nearly killed him having to hand over his little girl into the waiting arms of a nurse. To make it more difficult, just as they had arrived she had woken up. When the nurse tried to take her, Lily started crying and holding on to Harry with her tiny hands, refusing to let go of him. His emerald eyes had filled with tears as he watched her being taken away from him out of sight. He had never felt so helpless in his entire life as he had at that moment.

Molly and Hermione were sitting together on the couch by the window watching Harry with worried eyes as he paced back and forth in the middle of the floor. They had been waiting for news about Lily’s condition every since they had brought her in to the St. Mungo’s Pediatric Emergency Room.
They were told by the head Medi-Witch to stay in the family waiting room of the Pediatric Care Unit while a Healer examined her. It had already been well over an hour and they still didn’t know anything.

It all held the terrible feeling of déjà vu. Memories of Ginny. The waiting. The worrying. The unknown. The helplessness.

“I can’t take this anymore. I am going out there and find my daughter.” Harry marched determinedly towards the door.

Molly and Hermione jumped up, running after Harry only to bump into him when the door to the waiting room suddenly opened and a distinguished looking Healer along with the head Medi-Witch walked in. They shut the door behind them and warded it for privacy then turned and faced the trio.

“Mr. Potter. I am Healer Carlson.” He gestured to the young father and the women standing behind him to move towards the couch. “Please have a seat. I have some important news to discuss concerning your daughter Lily.”

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Severus stood staring down with an unreadable expression in his dark eyes at the child asleep in the crib. The nurse had dressed her in one of those ridiculously cute animated hospital gowns they used only for children of the Pediatric Ward. How quaint, he thought with a disgusted look on his face.

The clothes she had been wearing when admitted to the ward had been carefully folded and left on the bureau beside the bed. There were stuffed animals placed in the crib to keep her company when she woke. Her curly locks were matted down to her small head due to the high fever she had sustained. They had managed to get it under control but her condition was still critical. He carefully watched, as the covering nurse that was in the room with them kept checking her vitals and making notes on a chart.

The whole time he was watching and waiting, his mind was busy formulating a plot, calculating vengeance. He was filled with such a deep hatred and loathing that, while contemplating his plan, Severus never once thought of the consequences his actions would cause that night to change his life and that of the other forever. If he had, he might never have carried it through. Then again, one never knew what the fates had planned for the lonely at heart.

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“Diphtheria!” Harry cried out in anguish.

Molly and Hermione were sitting next him on the couch, trying to take the news in and doing their best to remain calm for Harry. Hermione couldn’t believe what she was hearing. Diphtheria was a disease that she thought had been eradicated from the Wizarding world. It was a disease that Muggle children were still vaccinated against at a young age but was now rarely heard of anymore. There had been no recent cases reported of this deadly disease in many years.

She remembered having read in a medical journal some time ago, that large epidemics of diphtheria had occurred in the former Soviet republics, as well as Algeria, China and Ecuador. But the majority of these rare cases were due to the fact that many young children were not properly vaccinated against the disease.

The Healer had told them that since Lily was (in polite terms as humanly possible and with a rather pale face) born of a pure-blood witch for a mother and a half-blood father with Muggle blood in his
veins that in very rare instances the vaccines sometimes didn’t work properly to protect a child with such a parental background against this particular deadly strain of the virus. Healer Carlson questioned Harry carefully again on whom Lily had been recently in contact with so he could try to figure out how she had contracted the disease and from whom.

Harry was sitting with his head bowed on his knees, raking his mind for answers. He suddenly sat up with a jerk, startling everyone.

“Oh Merlin! What have I done?” Harry cried out. “It’s all my fault! I let this happen to my baby.”

“Harry, what’s the matter?” Hermione asked, laying a hand on his leg to calm him down.

Molly was sitting quietly (for once) in shock over the news concerning her granddaughter. Ginny’s little girl. The child she had given up her life to have. The joy of their life. She had never felt this old before and wished it was all just a bad dream that she would soon wake up from. Arthur would be holding her in his arms, comforting her, telling her that it wasn’t real, just a nightmare, kiss her and they both would go back to sleep in the comfort of each other’s embrace.

“What are you talking about, Harry? What’s your fault? You didn’t do anything to cause this to happen to Lily. What do you mean?” Hermione asked with concern in her eyes. She put a hand to Harry’s face and gently cupping his chin turned him to face her. “Come on Harry... Talk to me... What’s this all about?”

With his tormented green eyes searching Hermione’s brown ones, he said, “I took her to see my Aunt Petunia a couple of months ago. Dudley was there with his wife and child. She must have got the virus from her cousin.”

After the war ended, Harry at Ginny’s urging had contacted his former family to make amends. They had talked a long time and after much crying on Aunt Petunia’s part (and grumbling on Uncle Vernon’s) had agreed to finally meet again. That was when he introduced Ginny to them and they instantly fell in love with her charm and gracious beauty. Much to Harry’s surprise, Vernon took to his young wife instantly. They kept in contact over the years and months after Ginny’s death, Harry took Lily to meet them but left the boys with their grandparents at the Burrow.

“She must have contacted the virus from her cousin Simon. I remember now, he was sick with the sniffles. I just thought it was a common cold,” Harry moaned while leaning into Hermione for support.

“That explains it then,” Healer Carlson said standing up and whispered something to the Medi-Witch by his side. After giving them all an encouraging smile, she swiftly left the room to attend the task he gave her. Turning back to Harry, he said, “I have good news for you then. It just so happens, that we have a very gifted and talented Potions master at our disposal. He helps us out occasionally with special cases such as this. As a matter of fact, he is at this time attending to her in the children’s ward. This is very good news. Now that we know how Lily contacted the disease, we can start the proper treatment. Although, we will have to get in touch with your relatives and make them aware of the situation and see how your nephew is doing. I do believe though that he is not in any danger as he is Muggle born and bred. It only affected Lily like this, due to her magical inheritance.”

Sobbing in relief, the trio hugged and kissed each other while standing up together to follow the Healer from the room. They were shocked when he turned and told them to wait another few minutes while he spoke with the Potions master.

“I don’t understand. Why can’t I at least come with you to see Lily?” Harry asked.
Sighing, Healer Carlson said, “I am afraid it’s rather not that easy. You see, this Potions master I told you about is a very secretive man. He is rather a recluse and doesn't like....” Here he paused for a moment trying to think of what to say next without sounding like a complete idiot. “People and children in particular. He would rather not get up close and personal with family members and prefers his solitude. He is a professional and the best Potions master in all of Britain. I would gladly place the lives of my own family in his hands should it ever become necessary although I hope it never comes down to it.”

Snarling, Harry asked, “Then what is he doing in the room with my daughter? How can you trust him if he feels this way towards all your patients? How do you know he won’t intentionally harm Lily?”

“He is a professional. He keeps his feelings to himself and gets the job done. Trust me on this issue. He is the only man for the job. He is the only one who can save your child.” Healer Carlson tried to speak in a delicate tone as possible while trying to calm the young father down.

“I believe that Madame Pomfrey is close friends with him.” Seeing how they calmed down at that sudden bit of news, he continued, “He came to us highly recommended by her and has been helping us for many years now. Please trust me on this. He knows what he is doing and she couldn’t be in better hands. I have never lost a patient while he has been on the case. Please believe me when I tell you this, he is your daughter's only chance to survive this crisis.”

“Harry, Poppy knows him! This is good news. She never would put a patient in the hands of someone whom she didn’t trust,” Hermione told him.

“Alright, do what you have to and save Lily,” Harry said and then added in a chilling tone. “But know this: if my daughter dies there will be hell to pay.”

Healer Carlson hurriedly left the room after reassuring them he would return soon. Molly left a few minutes later, leaving Harry and Hermione alone at St. Mungo’s while she went back to the Burrow to give the waiting family members the news.

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Harry and Hermione looked up as the door opened and Healer Carlson walked in.

“Mr. Potter, please come with me and I will bring you to Lily’s room. The Potions master is waiting to speak with you privately there,” he told Harry.

When Hermione tried to follow Harry, she was stopped by a gentle hand being laid on her shoulder.

“I am so very sorry, Mrs. Weasley, but you will have to wait here. He only agreed to meet with Mr. Potter and no one else. Those were his terms. Please believe me when I say this, he was very adamant on this issue. ‘No one else. Only Mr. Potter.’ Those were his exact words.”

“Very well... if that’s how he wants it. I will wait here then,” she said.

Kissing Harry on the cheek, she told him to tell Lily they all loved her and would see her soon. Then she watched them walk out the door together and sat down to wait.

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Harry followed Healer Carlson down the long and winding corridor towards the children’s wing until they came to a door and he stopped.
“Well, here we are then. I will leave you alone now to speak with him. Once you’re ready for me to join you, just summon Lily’s nurse.” The Healer looked down at Harry and added, “Alright, well good luck then.” Then he walked away the way they had come.

Harry watched him for just a second with a perplexed look on his face, before turning to the door. Putting his hand on the knob, he slowly opened it and walked into the darkening room. As soon as he entered, Harry saw a tall cloaked figure standing with its back towards him near the crib in the far corner. Squinting, he thought it looked vaguely familiar and cautiously approached. When he got near, the figure turned and recognition hit Harry. White faced and hand quickly grabbing his wand, Harry snarled.

“SNAPE!”

TBC

Next chapter Harry and Snape have a long overdue confrontation.
A Terrible Request

White faced and hand quickly grabbing his wand, Harry snarled.

“SNAPE!”

Harry stood there, in shock, unable to say another word. He was just trying to take it all in. Snape alive? How was that possible? Harry had seen him die right before his very eyes in the Shrieking Shack right along with Hermione. They saw Voldemort have Nagini kill him.

The cage. Snape screaming. Trapped. Unable to move and protect himself. The poisoned fangs sinking deep into his flesh. Harry shuddered as the lost memories from that day re-surfaced. He felt like he was reliving it all over again. He remembered Snape’s black eyes staring into his own as he gave Harry his memories and then Snape died. Or did he?

Oh Merlin! Was he a specter come back to haunt him? Why now of all times? Was Harry losing his mind? Then the figure spoke and Harry shivered, knowing it was real.

“Well, well, well, if it isn’t the blessed savior of the wizarding world who by a great misfortune of fate lived to finally defeat the Dark Lord. The one and only, Harry James Potter, son of my former
deceased classmate who lived to torment me.” Severus sneered and clapped his hands softly. “You never would have been able to accomplish the deed all by yourself, would you, Potter? At least, not without the help of your faithful Gryffindor sidekicks and those others who called themselves ‘Dumbledore’s Army’ all doing the dirty work for you. It certainly took you long enough to accomplish the task. Didn’t it? How many innocent lives were lost over your foolishness and unwillingness to listen, learn and master what was needed to finish him off? How many families torn apart? How did you sleep at night, knowing how many died or were injured due to your conceit and lack of brains? Wait, I forgot, the Weasley family forgave you, didn’t they? That was enough for you though, wasn’t it? I could never fathom how our dearly departed Headmaster could every place the trust of all our lives into your worthless hands. What was he thinking? I believe his mind must have been going, old age and all, plus....”

“ENOUGH!” Harry furiously whispered glancing at the crib where Lily still slept. “Step away from my daughter Snape, now, or so help me God I will.....”

“What, Potter? Avada Kedavra me?” Snape hissed back. “and in front of your little brat? That’s just like you, Potter!” he spat, “taking the coward’s way out.”

Harry gestured with his wand, forcing Severus to move slowly away from the crib and keeping a very close eye on him. He was dressed in all black just like he used to wear at Hogwarts. Harry couldn’t see his face clearly yet as it was dark in the room and he didn’t want to use Lumos for fear of waking Lily. Although, he could though make out the familiar sharp outline of Snape’s large nose and the angular features of his face as he moved aside.

After Harry was confident that Snape was far enough away from Lily, he kept his wand trained on him and leaned over to look into the crib. Lily was sound asleep and looked like she was resting comfortably. He smiled and bending over gently kissed her on the forehead.

“I love you, Lily, and your family loves and misses you very much too.” Harry whispered while gently using his free hand to move the curls off her forehead. “I am here, little one. Don’t be afraid. Daddy’s with you now.”

“Oh, how simply quaint, where’s the notorious Rita Skeeter when you need her?” Snape taunted Harry. “Just what we all need, another image of the famous Harry Potter that the Daily Prophet can add to its ever growing fan page. Do you really think that she can hear you, Potter? Most likely your daughter is in a coma and will never wake up again.”

Harry gave Snape a dirty look saying, “Shut the hell up Snape! I spoke with Healer Carlson and he told me Lily was resting comfortably and will recover. I am suppose to meet a renowned Potions master who is working on her case and he is going to help Lily get through this.”

Snape snorted and tried to get comfortable by leaning up against the dresser. Harry was trying to read the cold black eyes that was all he could see clearly of him due to the light hitting them coming in from the window. It was like he was trying to keep his face hidden and Harry suddenly grew even more suspicious. At the same time, Snape was staring right back at him with his trademark look of loathing only reserved for a Potter. He was startled out of his inspection, when all of a sudden Snape spoke.

“What, not curious? Where is your famous Gryffindor courage, now that you can’t seem to find and ask the question your just simply dying to know? Surely you must be wondering by now what I am doing here and how I can still be alive? After all, you did leave me for dead and ran off with the only member of your dynamic trio with any kind of brain. Although, now that I think about it she is rather lacking in that department too just like her two cohorts.”
“That’s enough, Snape! I won’t have you insulting my family. I am not going to stand for it. I am not a child now and you are no longer my Professor. I am a grown man with a family and I don’t have to take your shit anymore.” Harry cursed back.

Snape wagged a long finger at him, “Language, Potter. What kind of father are you, swearing in front of your little one like that?”

“Shut it, Snape!” Harry snapped back, “OK, since you have so delicately brought it up, how did you survive that attack? I am curious to know and I bet you just can’t wait to throw it in my face.”

Harry paused a moment to control his anger. “After you gave me your memories, I saw you die and Hermione did too. There wasn’t much time left and we had to get out of there fast. We had to get back to Professor Dumbledore’s office without being caught so I could use his Pensieve and view your memories. The time had finally come for me to fulfill my destiny by defeating the madman who called himself Lord Voldemort, to whom you had told the prophecy to and who had been trying to kill me since I was a baby. Which by the way, in case you have conveniently forgotten, also helped contribute to him murdering my parents when the Fidelius charm was broken by Peter Pettigrew the former one toed ‘Scabbers’. It wasn’t like I had the time to perform CPR on you and anyway I thought you were dead. I remember that your body jerked and seized up then you went still. What was I supposed to think? What was I supposed to do? I thought you had been killed by Nagini. There was no way you could have survived that attack and the venom alone should have killed you anyway.”

Snape had moved away from the dresser and was walking around the room always being sure to keep his face hidden in the shadows. He stopped by the window, keeping his back to Harry, and answered him.

“I simply fainted, you imbecile. It was as simple as that. I couldn’t take the pain anymore and my body was breaking down. You can’t imagine what it felt like, not even that little bite you received in your second year could compare with mine. The venom itself was slowly killing me and I was losing blood too fast from the bites. Did it never occur to you in that thick skull of yours to inform Kingsley or another member of the Order of my plight? No? I was dead. Wasn’t I? The dreaded Potions Professor of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry had finally met his timely end, isn’t that right, Potter? I am sure that you and your band of merry Gryffindorks had many a laugh over the retelling of my gruesome death.

“Well, in the end it was a team of Aurors who were searching the shack who found me. They brought me back to St. Mungo’s just in time, where the Healers managed to stop the flow of poison running through my body and gave me blood replenishing potions. So there you have it, and here I am, alive and in the flesh. Yes, Potter, your worst nightmare has come to life and is standing here right in front of you. It’s rather a pity you never learned Occumelency and I can still read you like an open book.”

Harry’s throat was forming a big lump and he swallowed to stop from being sick. He was an idiot. Things were beginning to make sense to him now. A gifted and talented Potions master. A recluse and secretive man who doesn’t like people and children in particular. A close friend of Madame Pomfrey. Wanting to meet him alone and with no one else. Oh, freaking hell, how stupid could I have been? All the signs were there and I didn’t see them.

“Cat got your tongue, Potter?” Snape sneered. “I think you know by now that I am the only one who can save Lily and you must be wondering what I want back in return.”

Harry turned and looked back at the still sleeping Lily before turning back to face Snape with a pleading look in his eyes.
“What do you want, Snape? What will it take for you to save my little girl’s life? I’ll do anything, give you anything and payment is not an issue. You know that I can pay you whatever amount you want. Just please help her. I am begging you. Please. Severus. Please, don’t let my Lily die.”

Harry was mortified that he was crying in front of Snape, but he didn’t care. Lily was the only one who mattered and he was willing to risk anything to save her. The next words out of Snape’s mouth stunned him into silence.

“Become my bond mate for life, Harry James Potter, and I will save her life. She will live,” Severus calmly stated and then to Harry’s shock added, “Refuse and she dies. I will walk out that door right now. It’s all up to you. Your daughter’s life is in your hands now. It is your choice. What is your answer? She doesn’t have much time left and I could care less, so what will it be?”

Before Harry could respond, Severus said, “Think very carefully Potter as to what your answer will be this night. This I promise you, whatever the answer, know that there will be no turning back once the words are spoken.”

“T’ll do it, Snape!” Harry cried. “Yes, I’ll bond with you. Now save Lily!”

“Excellent, you answered correctly. Now there is only one more thing left to do and the bond agreement will be complete,” Snape promised.

“What the hell are you playing at Snape? I said I’d bond with you. What more do you want?” Harry was getting desperate and didn’t like the look in Snape’s eyes.

Drawing out his wand, Snape held it up and said with an evil grin, “Have you ever heard of the Unbreakable Vow, my dear husband to be?”

Harry gasped. The room had lightened up and it was then that he saw Severus Snape’s face for the first time since that day in the Shrieking Shack.

TBC

"Thank you" to everyone for your support and reviews.
Harry stared at Severus for several minutes without saying anything, just trying to gain control back of his conflicting emotions. He knew it was rude staring at the man, especially when he had always been subject to it himself and never liked it, but the jagged scars covering Snape’s face were grotesque and he couldn’t imagine how the rest of his body must look.

He felt sick to his stomach. Closing his eyes, Harry took a deep calming breath and opened them again. When he did, he noticed that Snape had moved his position away from the window and was now standing back by Lily’s crib.

“What...Potter?” Snape frowned at him, “Are you remembering your unprovoked attack on my Godson, Draco Malfoy, back in your sixth year? Well, it may have escaped your simple addle brain
but dittany didn’t work in my case,” he paused for a moment, “now did it?”

“Snape, I ......” Harry tried to think of something to say, to even apologize, but before he could say another word Snape beat him to it.

“We will need a Bonder,” Snape said and noticing the confused look on Harry’s face went on with a snide reply, “Perhaps Miss Granger....oh no.... forgive me for my sudden lapse of memory...it’s Mrs. Weasley now, isn’t it?” Snape stopped for a moment and went on, “Perhaps she will consent to be our Bonder to assist us in completing the Unbreakable Vow.”

“I won’t agree to this, Snape, not until you help Lily.” Harry demanded in a cold voice. “I don’t give a damn about what I promised you a moment ago, only that my daughter doesn’t die because your too much of an arrogant jackass to save her life.”

When Snape said nothing and only continued to look down his large nose at him with a smug look on his face, Harry lost control and lunged at him. He grabbed Snape by the front of his robes and started shaking him.

“You son of a bitch! Do you think this is a game we are playing? This is my daughter’s life you are so callously tempting fate with. Her life, damn you! She is the single most precious thing in the world to me next to my sons and you have the nerve to treat this like she is some sort of pawn being played in a wizarding version of Russian Roulette!”

Harry was suddenly stopped when Snape’s larger hands grabbed his and pulled them off, holding them in one hand. He yanked Harry around so that he was facing the crib where Lily was still sleeping unaware of the turmoil she was causing her father.

“Look at her, you little fool,” Snape hissed in his ear.

Harry looked down into the crib and saw that Lily was sleeping peacefully now on her back with an arm wrapped around a stuffed dragon and sucking her thumb. Her hair was no longer matted down and skin tone was back to normal, he reached in and felt her forehead only to find there was no fever.

“Does she look like she’s dying to you?”

“You’ve already given her the potions then, to save her, haven’t you, Snape?”

“Healer Carlson and I already worked together and performed the necessary potions to brew and gave them to Lily before he went to speak with you the last time. I asked him not to tell you for the obvious reasons.”

Letting go of Harry, he stepped back and away from the crib. “She is healed and will only have to stay in hospital another few days just to be sure there are no lasting side effects to her illness.”

Harry started to reach down to hold her but Snape spoke warning him and he stopped in mid motion, “I wouldn’t hold her, Potter, not yet. She needs her rest.”

Harry turned around to face Snape, tears were in his eyes and he furiously wiped them away, “Why, then?” he asked in a scathing tone, “Revenge? Hate? Because of my father and Sirius’s schoolboy bullying of you? Why, Snape? Did you get some perverse pleasure out of this by putting me through hell and letting me think you were going to let her die if I didn’t agree to bond with you? She’s an innocent child, for Merlin’s sake. How could you?”

Snape said nothing and just stood there watching Harry’s face.
“I hate you, Snape.”

“The feeling is mutual, Potter, I can assure you of that.”

“Then why make up a condition to bond?”

Severus just stared back at him, his black eyes unfathomable, and then answered, “Why, not?” Snape spat. “Oh, don’t think that I haven’t read all the articles about you through the years. Glorifying the great Harry Potter and his defeat of the Dark Lord. Seeing your ugly four-eyed face splattered all over the newspapers and magazines at every turn. All the celebrations and fan fair, it made me sick. Oh, let’s not forget, your friends were there by your side too, receiving recognition for their role in helping exterminate the former Lord Voldemort, also known as Tom Riddle, from existence. I almost threw up when they went so far as to plaster your revolting wedding photos all over the place.”

Harry saw Snape shrug his neck back and forth as if he were in pain.

“But, not even once, during all these years was the name Severus Tobias Snape ever mentioned.”

Snape stopped talking and glared back at him with such hate that Harry took a step back and bumped into the crib.

He spoke venomously. “Do you have any idea what it was like for me? Do you, Potter?”

Harry didn’t answer.

“Did you ever tell anyone the role I played in helping you defeat the Dark Lord? Did you ever share the memories I gave you? Did you explain why I had to murder my mentor?”

“Of course I did... What makes you think I wouldn’t have?”

“Tell me, Potter, did you ever re-live the events that happened at the Shrieking Shack? Did you ever wonder what happened to my so-called ‘dead body’? Did you and your so-called friends even once think to inquire about it? No. Of course not, why should you? You were to busy enjoying the limelight, weren’t you? Living your new lives free from the torment of Voldemort. Do you have any idea of the suffering I have endured since that day? No. You were only thinking of yourself and your family. Oh, never mind about what happened to the greasy git, Snivellus, Hogwarts hated Potions Professor. He didn’t matter. He was no one important. How many times did you get a good laugh with your friends over my gruesome ‘death’?”

Harry had heard enough, “I don’t know where you came up with these accusations, Snape, but none of it is true. I am not going to stand here and explain myself or my actions to you. I did what was right and have no regrets.”

Snape snorted, “Of course not. Why should you?”

Harry looked up at him and tried to read the expression in his cold dark eyes.

“Was this just a trick then, Snape? Your sick way to humble me? The conceited and arrogant Boy Who Lived. Show him once and for all what it means to be made a fool of.”

“Oh no, Potter, I expect you to carry through with your promise and become my bond mate for life.”

Swallowing and trying hard not to be sick all over the floor, Harry said, “I’ll go get Mione.”

Before he left the room to get Hermione, Harry turned back one last time to face Snape.
“I hope you know what you’re in for, Snape, because your life as you now know it is about to change forever. For better or worse, my family will become yours and I won’t allow you to bully them.”

Severus watched as the door shut an unreadable expression on his face.

*****************************************************************

“Oh, Harry!” Hermione cried with tears flowing down her cheeks and throwing her arms around his neck nearly choking him in the process. “I am so sorry.”

Harry had just finished telling her all that had transpired in Lily’s room with Snape since he had left earlier with Healer Carlson. Of course, she was happy that Lily was alright but to know how he was coerced into bonding with the man whom they all thought was dead made her angry beyond all reason. Her mind was already working in overdrive, thinking of a way to get her friend out of this mess. She knew there was nothing that could have been done but planned on finding a resolution later. There was no way her former Professor was going to get away with this no matter how much he had been through. They all had suffered tremendous losses and, though she felt remorse for what happened to him, this wasn’t right.

“Let’s get this over with, Mione, before I do something stupid.”

“Don’t worry Harry, I will find a way out of this mess if it’s the last thing I ever do.”

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Harry and Snape were kneeling down on the floor in the middle of the room with Hermione standing over them holding her wand.

“Give me your hands, Potter.”

Harry reached out and Snape roughly grabbed them nearly pulling him over face first onto the floor.

Hermione placed the tip of her wand on their linked hands and Snape spoke. “Do you, Harry James Potter, agree to be my bond mate for life?”

“I do,” Harry responded.

Harry watched entranced as a red flame came from her wand and wound itself around both their hands.

“Do you, Harry James Potter, agree to never leave me for another or give yourself to another for as long as you shall live?”

I do,” Harry whispered.

Another flame shot from her wand and linked with the previous two making a fiery chain.

“Do you, Harry James Potter, agree to care for and unconditionally love any children we may have from this bond?”

Hermione gasped and Harry’s startled eyes flew from looking at their hands to Snape’s stony face.

“I do,” Harry whispered.

A final flame shot from Hermione’s wand and joined the previous two lighting up their faces in a red
glow as it wrapped around both their joined hands.

TBC

I hope you enjoyed this chapter.

Coming up, Snape meets his new family and the sparks begin to fly. Watch out Severus, your in trouble. The Weasley clan makes an appearance and Molly isn’t happy with Snape.

Please review and let me know what you think.
Molly and Arthur were sitting at the kitchen table together sipping on some hot tea while their three young grandsons were upstairs playing in Ron’s old bedroom. George had wanted to stay with them but Molly was adamant that he go home and wait with his pregnant wife for news of Lily. Bill and Fleur had left earlier, after much persuasion by his parents, for their own home Shell Cottage to await any news.

“Arthur, what do you think is going on? Why didn’t Hermione tell us all to come to the hospital? She was holding something back; I know she was.” Molly was wringing her hands together nervously
and Arthur reached across the table to pat them.

Ron had just left a few minutes ago for St. Mungo’s after Hermione had contacted him by fire call but she reassured Molly that Lily was no longer in danger and would be all right.

“Molly, you know Hermione wouldn’t have told us that little Lily was out of danger if it wasn’t true. I am sure it’s nothing to worry about. She probably just wanted Ron by her side for a little moral support after everything that’s happened.”

Molly’s eyes searched her husband’s before she said, “No, Arthur, there is definitely something else going on and she didn’t want to tell us so that we wouldn’t be upset. At least, not yet anyway. I promise you that, whatever it is, we are not going to like it.”

Arthur was looking at her with a worried expression on his face, and started to say, “Now, Molly dear, please don’t jump to the wrong conclusions.... ”

“Arthur Weasley, don’t you dare patronize me. I know that you think I’m being a silly old woman worrying like this but just call it a mother’s intuition. Whatever is going on at St. Mungo’s, I can guarantee that it spells trouble. I also promise you this, whatever or whoever it is who’s causing my children problems, they won’t get away with it. I won’t let them jeopardize the welfare of our family, not after everything we’ve been through together.”

Molly had a determined look on her face and added, “Oh no, I won’t, or my name isn’t Molly Prewett Weasley!”

Looking at his wife, whom he loved with all his heart, Arthur shook his head but smiled and said, “Well, I knew marrying into the Prewett family would mean adventure and I’ve never been let down yet. If there is someone new out there wanting to cause our family harm, they will rue the day they ever met us and won’t know what hit them.”

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St. Mungo’s

Ron ran down the long hallway of St. Mungo’s, earning himself strange looks from the nurses and visitors jumping out of his way. By the time he finally got to the now familiar family waiting room, he was all out of breath and had to bend over to hold the stitch in his side. Just as he started to straighten up, he was almost knocked over by a small whirlwind flying into his arms.

“Ronald!” Hermione cried. “Thank goodness you’re finally here.”

Ron held onto his small wife and gently guided her back into the room so they could sit down on the sofa together. Once he got his wind back and could talk normally again Ron turned to her saying, “Alright Mione, talk to me, what’s up then? Why couldn’t Mom and Dad come and see Lily?”

Mione looked up at him and all of a sudden started crying. Ron quickly pulled out a clean hanky and wiped the tears from her wet eyes. He was getting experienced at this sort of thing now and was use to her sudden mood swings with the accompanying meltdowns. Ever since Hermione found out she was pregnant, it had become a normal way of life for him. One minute she was fine and then for no apparent reason the waterfall would start. He never knew how Harry did it when Ginny was pregnant with the twins. He only knew that there were days when he himself was ready for the loony bin and this was starting to be one of them.
“Oh Ron, it’s horrible, simply horrible. You won’t believe what’s happened. I’ve seen it with my own eyes and still can’t believe it. Oh, Ron, what are we going to do? Poor Harry! This can’t be happening. It just can’t. Not after everything he’s been through. What are we going to do? We have to do something to help him.”

“Lily is alright, isn’t she?” he asked in an alarmed tone.

“Oh, Ron, I am sorry. Yes, she’s fine. Lily is just fine.”

Ron relaxed a little bit then kissed her before saying with a laugh, “What is it? It can’t be that bad then, now can it? After all, Harry defeated old U-No-Poo, didn’t he? What can be worse than that? It’s not like Snape’s come back from the dead to haunt us, now is it?”

At this she just started crying harder and he had to get another hanky out.

“I can’t explain it. You’ll just have to come with me and see with your own eyes,” she hiccupped.

Wanting to get this mystery over with, he stood up pulling Hermione with him. Then wiping and kissing her eyes again, Ron let her take him by the arm out the door and lead them down the hallway to what he assumed was Lily’s room. Before they went in, she turned to him and asked in a near whisper.

“Ron, hand me your wand.”

Looking baffled, he said, “What?”

“You heard me. Hand me your wand. Now!”

“Have you lost your mind? Why should I do that?”

Obviously, too late, he knew that was the wrong thing to say to his wife because Hermione batted him on the side of the head with her heavy bag and snapped back, “Ronald Weasley just shut up and give it to me now,” she demanded.

“Geez, for crying out loud, Hermione, that hurt,” he whined holding his aching head and reluctantly handing his wand over into her waiting hand.

Taking it, she stuffed it in her handbag then stood on tiptoe to kiss his head, saying, “Sorry. I love you.”

Shaking his head in disbelief, he followed her into the room being sure to keep a safe distance behind.

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Harry was sitting in a rocking chair by the crib holding Lily in his arms. She was playing with the stuffed dragon and smiling up at him.

“How’s my little girl feeling?” he asked while brushing her curly bangs aside.

“I love you, Dada,” she giggled and blew him a raspberry kiss.

“Dada loves you too, sweetheart,” he answered and blew one right back at her causing her to giggle more.

“Dada funny,” Lily cried in delight.
The door opened and Harry looked up to see Hermione followed by Ron walking into the room. She cautiously looked around the room before heading over to them and smiled at the beautiful sight of father and daughter together again.

“Harry! Lily!” She gave Harry a quick peck on the cheek then reached down to pick up Lily.

Harry handed Lily over into her godmother’s waiting arms and then stood up to let her sit down. Seeing Ron lurking in the background, he went up to him and gave his ‘brother’ a huge hug which was reciprocated back.

“Ron, I am so glad to see you.”

“Hey, mate, it’s good to see you too and of course my beautiful little goddaughter.” Ron went up to Hermione and smiling at both of them looked down at Lily and began making goofy faces at her causing the little girl to go into hysterics.

Unfortunately, no one saw the door opening again until a cold sarcastic voice drawled, “Well, well, well, if it isn’t the Weasley clown come to visit the golden boy and his little demon seed.”

Ron’s eyes grew wide in shock and his hand reached for the wand that was usually sitting in its holster but was gone. Twirling around, to protect his wife and godchild, he growled, “Snape! You son of a bitch!” and then jumped at his former Professor before Hermione or Harry could stop him.

Throwing himself across the room he landed on Severus and knocked him over, starting to punch him with all his strength. Harry entered the fray and tried to pull Ron off of him but got knocked backwards by Ron’s elbow hitting him in the face. Lily started screaming bloody murder and Hermione stunned her husband with his own wand.

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“Oh, Ron, I am so sorry!”

“Ron, wake up, Ron.”

Ron heard concerned voices calling to him from a distance and he groaned wondering why he was all of a sudden lying prone on the floor. Then everything came back to him and his eyes popped open to see his worried wife and best friend bending down over him.

“Take it easy, Ron, you hit your head hard when you fell.” Harry told him helping him sit up.

“Ron, are you alright? Does it hurt badly?” a tearful Hermione asked in the background.

“What do you think Hermione, of course it does, but the thing that hurts most is my pride.” he grunted as he started to stand while rubbing his sore head with his hand.

“Oh, Hermione, for the love of Merlin, will you please be more careful the next time you decide to hit me in the head again?” he begged his wife then smiled and kissed her when she jumped on him smothering his face with kisses.

“Whoa, Hermione, slow down, will ya, I forgive you. I was just kidding. I am not mad at you. How could I be? You’re carrying my baby?”

“Hey guys, I hate to bother you when you’re making up but we’ve got company, you know. In case you’ve forgotten,” Harry said.
Thinking Harry was talking about Lily, Ron laughed saying, “Blimey, Harry, for a minute I thought I heard Snape’s voice. I must have imagined it after Hermione hit me so hard with her bag. It seemed so real though that I thought we were back in school again being giving detention by that greasy bastard.”

“You really are as stupid as you look, aren’t you, Weasley?”

It was that voice again and Ron felt Hermione’s hands tighten on his arms.

“Don’t, Ron! Please. Don’t,” she begged.

“It’s really him, isn’t it?” he asked her. “He’s alive. Snape’s alive.”

Nodding and with tears in her eyes again, she kept a hold on him as he turned his head to look over his shoulder. There standing in the far corner was none other than Severus Snape, former dreaded Potions Professor of Hogwarts. He was right glad to see the man sporting a fantastic black eye that would have made Fred proud.

Taking a deep breath, he said, “Does someone want to tell me what the hell is going on here?”

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“He can’t do this, can he, Hermione?” Ron asked for what seemed the millionth time while glaring at the dark specter now standing by the window. “Are you sure? There has to be some way out of this mess. It was purely and simply blackmail. He used the love of a father for an innocent child who was sick to get revenge. There has to be a law against that. Harry can’t marry this jerk or he’ll end up being murdered in his own bed.”

“Thanks a lot, Ron,” Harry huffed.

They had just spent the last hour telling Ron everything that had happened right up to Hermione participating as their bonder during the ‘Unbreakable Vow’. He was furious that Snape had drawn his pregnant wife into this mess.

“Ron, it’s already done and since they already took the vow the only thing left to do now is have a bonding ceremony to complete their pact. Harry can’t back out now or he’ll die. You know that.”

“Wait until Mom hears about this. She’s going to blow a gasket,” Ron said with an evil smirk directed at Snape’s scarred face.

“Let’s get this over with then, shall we?” Hermione offered.

********************************************************************

James, Albus and Timothy (Ron and Hermione’s son) were upstairs playing a game of wizarding chess, or so thought their Grandparents, but they were actually eavesdropping. They had found an old set of their uncles’s Extendable Ears and were hiding at the top of the stairs listening in on the conversation they were having in the kitchen. Whispering between themselves, they kept fighting each other for a better position so they could hear what was going on between the adults.

When they heard the familiar sound coming from the fireplace, which signaled the arrival by floo of incoming visitors to the Burrow, the boys suddenly went quiet and listened together.
Ron came through first, followed by Hermione and then Harry. Molly rushed up to Harry and pushing a disgruntled Ron out of the way, pulled him into a tight and comforting hug.

“Oh, Harry, my dear boy. How are you? You look tired and hungry.” Molly fussed over him and pulled him up to the table, then pushed him into a chair while summoning some hot soup from the stove with her wand into a bowl that had appeared out of nowhere and placed it in front of him.

“Eat,” his surrogate mother ordered then beckoned to Ron and Hermione to join him.

Sitting down next to Arthur, she said, “Right then, now tell me everything and you better not leave anything out. First I want to know how my baby granddaughter is.”

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Molly was furious and Arthur was keeping a very close eye on her while glancing back and forth nervously at his wife and the fireplace. He had an alarmed look on his face that mirrored the ones Harry, Ron and Hermione were sharing.

“Just you wait until I get my hands on that man!” Molly hissed just as the fire suddenly flared to life and the supposed and long thought dead former Hogwarts Potions Professor, former Death Eater turned spy for the light and former member of the Order of the Phoenix stepped out of the floo and into the Weasley kitchen.

Brushing himself off, he looked around it with an air of cool disdain then seeing Arthur and Molly said, “Surprised to see me alive again after all this time?”

TBC

I hoped you enjoyed.

Please review and let me know whether you liked it or not.

The next chapter features Molly confronting Severus and the boys upstairs conspiring to make Snape’s life hell. Also featured will be the bonding ceremony and Snape moving in with Harry and his little family. The fireworks will soon be starting so stay tuned.
Chapter 7: Angry Lioness

“Severus!” Arthur greeted Snape. “Yes... why yes... of course, we were both surprised when the children told us you were alive. As I am sure you expected, Molly and I were indeed shocked to learn that you had survived that horrible attack at the Shrieking Shack. It was a tragic day for all of us.”

Arthur stopped for a moment thinking of past dark memories and demons before murmuring, “So many losses... so much pain and heartbreak.”

He waited and looked nervously at Molly before continuing, “We could hardly believe it when they told us that you lived through it and had been helping out the healers at St. Mungo’s all these years. After the war, I had gone back to work at the Ministry and assumed as did everyone else that you had been killed during the war and your body eaten by Nagini. Oh, yes, there were rumors floating around but no one ever actually believed them to be true. I mean, who would have thought that anyone could have... I mean... from what Harry and Hermione had shown us with their memories... it didn’t seem possible that you could have survived. Now I can see with my own eyes how very wrong we all were, weren’t we? Well, um, I am truly very sorry for that Severus. I am sorry... yes... but regardless of what you have been through, Harry doesn’t deserve this.”

Severus was leaning against the mantle listening to Arthur and staring back at them with his cold black eyes. He had put a glamour on himself and taken his anti-seizure and pain potions before arriving at the Burrow. He observed that Weasley was trying his best to keep a firm hand on his wife’s arm to keep her from jumping at him and his face was getting red from the exertion of trying to explain himself and at the same time holding on to her. Molly’s eyes were bright with anger and her lips set in a firm tight-lipped expression.

Severus knew she was nearing the breaking point and that it would come at any moment so he continued to watch and wait. After all, he was rather enjoying their torment as it made everything so
much more pleasurable for him. Why not, he thought, after everything he had been through and suffered all alone? The joy of revenge was so sweet that he could taste it and he reveled in that knowledge.

“How dare you!” Molly hissed. “How could you? Whatever were you thinking? He is much too young and doesn’t even love you nor you him. He has his other children to think about too for Merlin’s sake! The twins.... I will not allow this farce to go any further.... No, I won’t.... You, Severus Tobias Snape, blackmailed Harry into participating in an Unbreakable Vow using an innocent child who was deathly ill.... his baby... and my granddaughter.”

The mother lioness was protecting her cub who was sitting at the kitchen table with his friends watching the action unfold with wide eyes. Severus smiled at Molly, knowing that it would send her off the deep end and it did.

“Molly dear, please be careful what you say.” Arthur pleaded.

Shaking off Arthur’s hand from her arm, Molly stalked forward until she was standing right in front of Severus. Staring up at him, she lifted her hand and struck him hard across the face, causing his head to hit the mantle behind him from the force of her blow.

“MOLLY!” Arthur ran forward and pulled her back.

Harry had jumped up out of his chair and was already standing in front of Severus.

“Are you alright?” Harry asked in concern, lifting his own hand up with the intention to inspect the back of Severus’ head for any damage but before he could even touch it found his hand being caught and held in a tight grip then being pushed away.

“I am fine.... Do not try to touch me ever again not without my permission,” Severus warned.

Ron was still sitting with Hermione and keeping a long arm wrapped around her to keep his wife from getting up and entering the fray. The love of his life was pregnant and he didn’t want anything to happen to her or their unborn baby.

“Oh, Ron, do something... anything,” Hermione pleaded.

“They will be fine, Mione. don’t you worry,” Ron answered, patting her knee affectionately and giving her a quick peck on the cheek before grabbing a biscuit and stuffing it into his mouth while mumbling, “Let’s just watch the fireworks and see what happens next.”

“RONALD!” Hermione scolded giving him an angry look.

“Mum... Molly... please... I know you’re upset, and believe me so am I, but fighting won’t help anyone,” Harry beseeched his foster mother.

“Harry’s right, dear.” Arthur added giving his wife a kiss on the top of her head. “We need to talk together, not fight, and figure out a way to help Harry and the children.”

Molly looked up at Arthur with tears in her eyes and then turned to Harry and pulled him into a bone-crushing hug.

“Don’t you worry about a thing, Harry dear.” she promised giving him a kiss and patting his cheek. “Arthur’s right; we will work something out.”

“There has to be some way out of this,” Molly whispered. “There must be a law or something else
that we can use to our advantage to break the vow you were forced into.”

She looked at Arthur then towards Hermione but from the looks on their faces knew that they were grasping at straws.

“Perhaps I can talk with someone tomorrow at the Ministry who specializes in this sort of predicament,” Arthur ventured, giving Harry an apologetic look because deep down he knew it was too late to do anything about it. The Vow was taken and could not be undone.

“That will not be necessary,” Severus finally spoke up.

All eyes turned to look at him and he continued, “Potter and I will be bonded tonight. He knew what he was doing and what he was getting into. He made a pact with ‘the devil’ as you may call it and cannot back out now. It was his choice. Although I am sure you wish there were a way, I can assure you there is not and that you are all fools. By the looks on your faces, I can see that you all want to hex me to death but, alas, that would kill your precious Harry Potter as well and you wouldn’t want that I am sure. We have participated in the Unbreakable Vow and now the bonding ceremony will take place to complete the bond and vow between us. I have already notified the Ministry and they are sending an official over to commence in our nuptials. He should be arriving at any moment. So I would suggest you get ready now because there is not much time left and I will not be kept waiting while you all run around like a flock of hippogriffs without your heads.”

“Tonight... now... we can’t... it’s too soon. I haven’t even talked to my sons yet,” Harry blurted out in a rush.

“That’s too bad then, isn’t it, Potter? Your precious little duo of troublemakers will be in for one big surprise when they wake up tomorrow morning and find out they have a new father living in their midst.” Severus gloated seeing the angry look on Harry’s face and then added, “I am sure your brats... no wait.... I meant to say ‘our’ little hellions, will be very unhappy to learn that I, unlike their loving daddy, have a zero tolerance level for any mischievous behavior of which I have learned they have been allowed to display so flagrantly in the past. I will not tolerate it nor hesitate to punish them accordingly and swiftly for any outward sign of defiance of my authority.”

“Now just wait one moment!” Molly cried.

“Hey, you just can’t take control of my godsons’s lives like that, you snot-nosed greasy git.” Ron added. “Who died and made you king of the manor anyway!”

“You will never lay a hand on either of my sons or, by Merlin, I will hex you and the Unbreakable Vow be damned,” Harry hissed, reaching down to pull out his wand. Hermione stopped him by laying a gentle hand in warning to his shoulder.

They were startled, but not Severus, when the fireplace roared to life and an official in Ministry dress robes stepped out and into the kitchen seeing them all gathered together in the middle of the floor.

“Well, are we ready to begin the happy nuptials?” he smiled in greeting to the small group standing in front of him, not noticing the sick look on all the faces but one.

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James, Albus and Timothy had listened attentively to the voices coming through the Extendable Ears but had to give up when the other end broke off, thanks to the new kitten now living at the Burrow that was playing with it at the bottom of the stairs and tossing it around like a mouse. They had heard enough to know what was going on, at least up to the part when Grandma Weasley punched Snape...
in the face, and they hoped it was right in his big nose. Now they were walking back and forth in their bedroom, worriedly discussing what was going on below.

“I can’t believe it. Just wait until our friends find out that Hogwarts’s long-thought dead and evil greasy-haired git, Professor Snape, is alive and haunting our family. What are we going to do?” Al was running his fingers through his hair in the same manner Harry did when agitated.

“We, little brother, are going to make his life a living hell, that’s what we’re gonna do,” James promised with a dark scowl on his face. “Yes, you and I are going make Snivellus rue the day he decided to mess with our Dad and family.”

“Wow, this is going to be fun. What can I do to help?” Timothy put in, not wanting to be left out.

“You, dear cousin, can help us gather up all of Uncle Fred and George’s old Wizard Wheezes joke shop boxes in the attic including any of their other Weasley memorabilia,” James told him with a huge grin on his face and they left the room together in a rush to do some treasure hunting. Thus they remained unaware of what else was happening downstairs.

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“You may join hands,” the Minister told them and held his wand a loft whispering a prayer over the both of them.

Harry and Snape were both standing next to each other facing the Minister with their backs to the fireplace. Molly and Hermione were sitting together on a small couch Arthur had conjured up for them and were busy dabbing their wet eyes. Ron and Arthur were standing on either side of the grooms with angry looks on their faces. Severus was holding Harry’s hand so tight that it felt like the circulation was being cut off.

“Dear family and friends. We are gathered....”

Severus cut off the Minister in mid-sentence. “Oh, for the love of Merlin! You can quit with all the ceremonial formality bullshit and just get to the vows, and make them as short as you can, would you? I am getting a blasted headache.”

“Honestly!” Molly gasped.

Sputtering, “Why yes, of course, Mr. Snape, if that is your wish.”

The Minister hesitated for just a second more and when Severus added with venom in his voice, “What the hell do you think? Of course it is, you imbecile.”

“Honestly!” Molly gasped.

Sputtering, “Why yes, of course, Mr. Snape, if that is your wish.”

The Minister hesitated for just a second more and when Severus added with venom in his voice, “What the hell do you think? Of course it is, you imbecile.”

The Minister then proceeded at a much faster pace so that he could get the hell out of there and back to a friendlier atmosphere. In all his years of officiating over bonding ceremonies, he had never in his life encountered such a rude man as this Severus Tobias Snape and felt sorry for the handsome young man standing beside him.

“Do you have the rings?” he asked.

Severus pulled a pair of identical wedding bands of his robes (one was notably smaller than the other) and held them out to the Minister who blessed each of them before handing them back over rather quickly to the strange man in black.

“Do you, Severus Tobias Snape, take Harry James Potter as your lawfully wedded spouse and bonded?”
“I do,” Severus responded looking down into Harry’s emerald eyes and slipping the smaller ring on the finger of his left hand.

Do you, Harry James Potter, take Severus Tobias Snape as your lawfully wedded spouse and bonded?”

“I do,” Harry also responded taking the larger ring from Snape’s hand and placing it on his ring finger.

“Then by all the powers invested in me as Minister of Marriage, I do hereby pronounce Severus and Harry as husbands and bonded. Mr. Snape, you may kiss your husband to seal the bond.”

With a disgusted look on his face, Severus pulled a blushing Harry into his arms and kissed him harshly on the lips but not before whispering in his ear the words, “Welcome to hell, my dear husband.”

“Yew, that’s just so gross!” Ron gagged from the background.

“Oh, poor Harry,” Hermione sobbed.

Molly stood quietly next to Arthur holding his hand tightly while sending Snape a warning message with her eyes, letting him know he had better not harm their ‘son’ and grandchildren or face her wrath.

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Harry stepped out of the fireplace and into the living room of his home that he had once shared happily with his beloved Ginny to wait for Snape’s arrival. After the ceremony, Snape had told Harry that he would meet him back at ‘their’ house and then left without another word to go back to Spinner’s End to get his belongings. After much persuasion from Molly, Harry had decided to leave the boys at the Burrow with their Grandparents for the rest of the night. He had desperately wanted to go upstairs and see his sons so he could explain to them what had happened before they found out another way but Molly talked him out of it. Since it was so late, she had told him they were probably sound asleep and it would be better to just let them rest so they would be fresh the next morning when he told them the bad news.

Knowing he would get no sleep this night, Harry wanted to be sure to get up early and head back to the Burrow. He hoped to accomplish this before his twin boys woke up because he knew the twins had a very bad tendency of using the floo network without permission so they could travel back and forth between their homes. It set everyone’s nerves on edge, something they rather enjoyed. He knew James and Albus were not going to accept Snape into their family, not without a fight, and he dreaded what kind of stunts he knew they would try to pull on Snape.

He walked over to one of the many family portraits hanging on the walls in the room and stared up at the smiling image of Ginny that was waving to him and blowing kisses.

“What am I going to do my love? What have I done by bonding with Snape? What have I gotten our family into? Before you died you asked me to do anything in my power, if it came to saving our Lily’s life, and I promised you that I would never let anything happen to Lily or our sons. No matter what it was, I am pretty sure you did not expect this to happen to us. Oh, dear Merlin, I miss you so much, Ginny!”

Harry fell on his knees and began to sob clutching one of Lily’s stuffed animals that was lying on the
floor. He didn’t hear any anything until a voice spoke sarcastically a few minutes later from behind him.

“Stop being a baby, Potter, and get up. We need to talk.”

Harry closed his eyes and stood up then turned to face his new husband. Snape was standing beside the fireplace with two large trunks. He was staring down his large nose at Harry with a look on his face like he had just swallowed one of Professor Dumbledore’s sour gumballs.

Harry tilted his chin up and looked right back into Snape’s black eyes. He refused to be intimidated by his new husband. He decided at that moment he would not be the first one to speak so waited to hear what Snape had to say. He noticed that the glamour had been removed and could see the jagged scars on his face and long neck. Harry still had the lightening bolt scar on his forehead but it had faded significantly since the demise of Voldemort but he found himself sympathizing with the man.

“I want you to show me around our home, especially where the bedrooms are. I will also need a lab to brew my potions in, which will be off limits to everyone but myself, and must be far enough away from the living quarters.”

“We have a very large basement that could be changed into one,” Harry offered.

“Very well, I will check it out for myself then to see whether or not it will be sufficient enough to satisfy my requirements. If the space does meet my needs, then I will be making the necessary changes to it including placing wards around the parameters to keep out your troublesome brats.”

“Now just wait a darn minute, Snape! I understand that you need your work space and that potion labs are dangerous but there is no need to be insulting. I will be sure to keep my boys away from it, and you, especially when you’re working down there. I don’t want them harmed by anything in it either. They are not stupid, just a little bit curious, and once in awhile James and Albus do need a firm hand to keep them in line.”

“Oh, I assure you Potter, they will have just that.”

“You will not lay a hand on either one of my children. If they need discipline, then it will be I who dispenses it to them, not you,” Harry shouted.

Ignoring Harry’s outburst, Snape walked around the room inspecting it with hawk-like eyes and dragging a finger along the wall with his black robes billowing around him like there was a breeze in the room.

“After you show me around, I will decide what changes need to be made in this house. I can see just from the look of things in this room that adjustments are needed throughout and will personally see to it that my wishes are complied with by the end of this week. I will require order in our home and those who do not listen and abide by my word will be punished effectively.”

“Listen to me very carefully, Snape! You just can’t waltz into our home making threats and decide to take it over by making changes to it in order to satisfy your own individual whims. You are not living alone now and have to take into consideration the fact that there are children living in this house too. You can’t expect, and I certainly will not, that they give up everything they have been used for their entire life just because you say your word is law. It just won’t happen. I will not allow you to barge into my home and become another Dark Lord who thinks he is going to rule over all of us.”

Snape stalked up to Harry causing him to step back a few feet and bump into the sofa before falling
down on it with a slight bounce.

“You will cease your tongue or I will shut it for you myself,” he warned Harry.

Harry frowned up at him and began to open his mouth to speak when Snape wagged a long finger at him saying, “Tsk, tsk, tsk, Potter. This is my last warning. You have been warned. Open your mouth again without permission and face the consequences.”

They both stared at each other for several minutes before Snape reached down and hauled Harry up by one arm and off the sofa.

“You will come with me, Potter, and show me around the premises but do not speak until I ask you a question.”

Severus stalked out of the room with Harry following at a safe distance. It took nearly an hour to finish the tour of the house and now they were back in the upstairs hallway staring at each other again for what seemed like the millionth time that day.

Harry was getting nervous now, since they were alone, and he was at Snape’s mercy and in a way under his control thanks to the Unbreakable Vow. He suddenly thought, what if Snape wants to seal their bond further by raping him and then having a good laugh over it at Harry’s expense. That certainly would humiliate Harry more than anything the Marauders ever did to Snape. He jumped a little when Snape finally spoke breaking the silence.

“I will be taking the empty bedroom down the end of the hall.”

Harry looked up at him and nodded his head saying, “Good choice. It’s the largest one in the house, next to mine of course, and has its own private bath and balcony with a beautiful view of the flower garden. It’s private and away from the children, which is what you want.”

Snape stood there staring down at him then turned his back and disappeared down the hallway towards his new room. Harry waited a moment watching his husband, then went into his own room and locked the door behind him before falling down on top of his bed and into a deep slumber.

The sun hadn’t even risen before Harry was woken up by the loud sound of running footsteps on the staircase and which were now heading up the hall towards his bedroom.

“Dad! Dad!” James voice yelled. “Dad, get out of bed, we’re home and gotta talk to you.”

“Yea, Dad, get up, it’s really important!” Albus shouted.

Cursing, Harry jumped up and ran for the door, using his wand to open the locks and running into the hallway, but it was too late.

“WHAT THE BLOODY HELL IS GOING ON HERE?” roared Snape’s voice from down the other end of the hallway and everyone froze as Snape’s tall, dark figure suddenly appeared before them.

TBC
Stay tuned for next chapter in which the boys welcome Snape into the family. The fireworks are just beginning to start and Lily will be coming home too. Don’t worry! Snape and Harry will end up in bed but the question is when? Sorry, you will have to wait because I am going to surprise you and no one will know when it will happen.

Please review and let us know what you think. We hope you liked it.
It had been a few hours since Severus had left Potter standing alone in the hallway and he had already finished unpacking and settling in to his new private living quarters. He took another long look around the room, satisfied that everything was in order. Walking over to the double-paned glass doors that opened up onto the balcony, he went outside. It was a full moon and there were a few lone stars sparkling in the night sky. He stood there for a few minutes thinking of what had transpired over the last few hours. Closing his eyes, he tiredly rubbed them and became lost in thought.

When he had found out that it was Harry Potter’s child that had been brought into St. Mungo’s in critical condition, all Severus could think of at that time was revenge. He saw the opportunity arise by using the love of a father for his child to get even for everything he himself had lost. A life he never had and could never have. He didn’t know what had come over himself but now blamed it on his own stupidity for not taking his potions, which caused the seizure he suffered in his lab before Healer Carlson had contacted him. It led him to be irrational and now he was suffering the
consequences of his actions. He knew he was being a bastard but somehow that didn’t matter. The one thing he was sure of was that he never would have let the child die but had been so consumed with hate and jealousy for her father that he had acted without thinking.

The little girl was called Lily, named after the love of his life. If his beloved Lily had managed to survive that night so many years ago, they might have had a chance together. That is, if Lily could have ever forgiven him for his betrayal over revealing the prophecy to the Dark Lord and which had lead up to her beloved husband’s death.

Blast that thought; there was no way in hell he could ever have been the brat’s stepfather. Anyway, that was in the past and never would have happened. Lily was gone and whatever chance he might have had with her was long over, due to the wrong choices and decisions he had made with his life. At one time, he at least had her friendship and that was the most precious gift he could ever have wished for.

Tears came to Severus’ eyes, knowing that now she would never forgive him for what he had just done to her son. The son she loved so much that she gave her own life up for so that he could live. The son who had her eyes.

Turning around Severus went back into the bedroom and decided that he would take a nice long hot shower, then go to bed. He would worry about what he would do next in the morning but for now he needed sleep. Later, just before he fell asleep, Severus remembered the look on Potter’s face before he had left him for the night.

He was woken from a sound sleep by what sounded like an earthquake and loud yelling. He knew it wasn’t possible but the foundation of the house felt like it was shaking. Cursing, Severus sat up in bed and pushed his long hair out of his face. Climbing out of bed, he reached for his black bathrobe, quickly putting it on. Then, picking up his wand off the night stand, he opened the door and stepped out into the dimly lit hallway to find out who would dare cause such a racket so early in the morning.

“What the bloody hell is going on here?” Severus roared as he walked swiftly up the hallway where loud voices were coming from.

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Harry, James and Albus were frozen by the spectral figure stalking towards them. Shaking himself from his stupor, Harry stepped in front of his sons, shielding them from Snape. He held his wand out before him, ready to protect them at all costs.

“DAD! It’s Count Dracula!” Albus screeched, peeking out from behind his dad with huge eyes.

“No, it’s not... It’s the Bogeyman!” James cried.

“DADDY! SAVE US! HE’S GOING TO EAT US ALL!” They both screamed with tears pouring down their faces and hugging their dad around the waist so tight Harry could hardly breathe.

“DON’T LET HIM GET US DADDY!” James and Albus closed their eyes and stayed hidden behind Harry. “We promise we’ll be good from now on.”

Severus finally came to a halt and was standing in front of the trio looking down at them.

“Oh, for the love of Merlin, would you stop with the infernal yelling and shut up or I promise you that I will cook you both alive in my cauldron and eat you for breakfast.”

Harry looked up at him and noticed that Snape’s right eye was twitching as he scowled down at
them. His long black hair was hanging loose and fell forward around his angular pale face. He was wearing black silk pajamas and a black bathrobe that hung open around his tall lanky form. He also noticed that Snape was holding his wand in his hand but that it was not pointed at them. When Snape saw Harry looking at it, he slowly put it in the pocket of his robe.

“Now tell me, what is the meaning of this?” Snape demanded.

“Severus, I would like you to meet my sons.” Harry answered while slipping his own wand into the back pocket of his pants. Seeking a truce, even if it may be only temporary.

His eyes met Snape’s and he whispered to the boys, “Don’t worry, he won’t hurt you. I promise,” knowing Severus would hear him.

“James... Albus... This is Severus Snape.” Harry pulled both boys out from behind him and holding their hands firmly he added, “Your new father.”

TBC

A/N: Thanks so much to everyone who reviewed Chapter 7. We are so happy you like the story.

We also wanted to mention that in later chapters James and Albus will finally come to the conclusion that Harry and Snape need each other but it just won’t happen for awhile. When it does, they will be causing all sorts of nice ways to get them together.

Have a Happy Halloween everyone!
Phase One

Author's notes: A widowed Harry must bond with Snape in order to save his daughter's life. Harry’s young children scheme to bring their daddy and new father together, and form a new family, while changing the hearts of two scarred souls.

*****************************************************************************

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Title: Scarred Souls

Author: Misty Moonlight/Co-author: QueenBoadicea

Pairings: Severus/Harry

Published: 12/10/2008

Summary: A widowed Harry must bond with Snape in order to save his daughter’s life. Harry’s young children scheme to bring their daddy and new father together, and form a new family, while changing the hearts of two scarred souls.

Warnings: Romance, Drama, Angst, Alternate Reality/Universe, Sexual Situations, Hurt/Comfort, M/M, Slash, Anal, Language, Humor, possible MPreg, Bonding, Original Characters, Family, non-canon, OOC, WIP

*****************************************************************************

A/N: Hi everyone, I just wanted to let you all know that I now have a potential Beta for this story. If it works out, then hopefully, I will soon have all the chapters edited so that story flows in the right direction and you will all be happy with it.

As always, a very special “Thank you” to all who have reviewed so far. I want you to know that I do read all of your reviews and I really appreciate everyone’s support of my first Snarry story.

I hope you enjoy this chapter. I did have trouble writing it and probably repeated Snape’s thoughts too much from previous chapter so I apologize for that.

By the way, if anyone has a better name for James and Al to use other than 'Operation Snape Attack' which I know is lame, please let me know so I can use it.

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Chapter 9: Phase One
Harry and Hermione were walking together through the hallways of St. Mungo’s. Harry had left the twins, who were in a state of shock at the sudden news that Snape was now their new father, at the Burrow with Molly and was on his way to pick up his little girl. Harry had never known them to be so quiet during their short life and hoped they would be ok. Hermione had an appointment with her own healer and would be meeting Ron in the office. Today was the day they were supposed to finally find out the gender of the baby.

Hermione was nervous and had just confided to Harry that she wasn’t sure now whether or not she wanted to know if her unborn child was a girl or boy. She told him that there was something special about the anticipation of being surprised and maybe she should wait until it was born to find out. The only problem was that she hadn’t discussed it with Ron yet and didn’t know how he would feel about it. When she was pregnant with Timothy, they wanted to know the gender before she gave birth so they would be able to prepare for their firstborn properly but this time if felt different to her.

Harry told her, “Hermione, it’s your body and your choice. Whatever you decide, Ron will support you. When the day finally arrives, it all will come down to the fact that you’re the one who has carried this special little blessing for nine months and have formed a bond with it.

“If you want to wait until it’s born to find out whether you have a beautiful boy or girl, then it’s your prerogative and everyone should support your decision. Anyway, if I know Ron as well as I think I do, there is no way he would be able to keep it a secret were he to know before you the gender of your baby. He probably would go around blabbering the good news and handing out cigars to everyone he met and then you would find out too. It would be all thanks to Ron’s big mouth that your blessed little secret would be let out of the bag for the whole world to know.”

Hermione giggled and said, “You’re right, Harry. I am glad I talked to you about this. I guess I won’t know what my decision will be until I walk into that office and see Ron’s face.”

Taking hold of his arm, she asked, “Alright, now it’s your turn. Tell me what happened between you and Severus after the bonding ceremony.”

Harry told her everything including what had happened that morning with the boys.

“It was awful, Hermione. I really thought Snape was going to murder them,” Harry told his friend and then added with a sly grin, “I have to confess though that it was kind of funny. You should have seen the look on his face when Al called him Count Dracula. It was priceless.”

Hermione smiled up at him and gave Harry’s arm a slight squeeze.

“I was so worried about you being alone with him after the ceremony. I didn’t want to say anything to Ron since he was upset enough. Oh, Harry, thank goodness he didn’t do anything to hurt you. I read up again on bonding rules and regulations to see if I might have missed something important, a clause, anything that might be of help. Unfortunately, there isn’t anything and in most cases the bond must be completed by the two bonded consummating their vows.... you know... by doing....”

Harry stopped her as he could see she was getting upset and he didn’t want Mione worrying about his own personal problem when she was in such a delicate condition herself.

He put a finger gently on her lips to shush her, “Hermione, hush, everything will be alright. I won’t let anything bad happen to me or my children. Things will work out for the best. I promise. I can deal with Severus Snape in my own way. Hey, I survived six years at Hogwarts with the evil git, didn’t I?”

Seeing her doubting large brown eyes looking at him, Harry joked, “Hermione Jane Weasley, don’t
look at me like that. Seriously, Mione, you’ve got to give a guy a break sometime. It’s my male wounded pride we’re talking about here. I can’t tell my future godchild that their Mommy always had to bail me out every time I got in trouble. Just think of what that would do to my reputation.”

He placed the palm of his hand on her belly and added, “Besides, there is someone very special inside of you who is waiting to meet their mommy and daddy, who will need you to be healthy and ready for the day they make their entrance into this world. My future godchild is letting us know that you have to take care of yourself and stop worrying about me. I will not allow you to get sick worrying about my problems. I can take care of myself and my family. Please don’t worry; we’ll all be ok.”

She smiled and pulled him into a tight hug. They stood there for a few minutes, giving each other comfort in their warm embrace. Harry kissed the top of her head, “Now go and see your husband. If I know Ron, he’s worn out the carpet by now in the waiting room wondering where you are.”

“I’ll see you later then, Harry. Be sure to give Lily my love and tell her I’ll see her soon.”

“Promise,” Harry answered, then added, “Good luck with Ron too.”

He stood for a moment watching her walk away then turned down the other corridor where Lily was waiting for him to bring her home.

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Harry slowly opened the door to Lily’s room and heard laughter and voices coming from within. Healer Carlson and his assistant were in the room along with Lily’s private nurse who was holding Lily on her lap in the rocking chair. Lily caught sight of him as soon as he crept into the room.

“Dada, Dada, Dada,” Lily cooed holding out her small chubby arms to her Daddy.

Smiling, Harry walked over to her and leaned down to lift her up into his arms then kissed her on the forehead.

“Are you ready to go home now, my little princess, and see your big brothers? They’ve missed you very much and are waiting to welcome you back home.” Carefully holding her on his hip, he turned to speak with Healer Carlson and Lily’s nurses. After they were done giving him Lily’s final discharge instructions, Harry thanked them again and then they all said goodbye to Lily. Harry picked up her packed bag, looked around one last time to be sure he didn’t forget anything, and then handed Lily the small stuffed dragon she had come to love so much.

Lily waved to all of them as they walked out the door together calling out happily, “Bye, bye, bye.”

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Severus had just added the finishing touches to his new lab and stopped to admire it. Yes, he thought, this will definitely work. Pleased with how it had turned out, he decided to go upstairs and get something to eat from the kitchen. When he left, he locked and warded the door to be sure it was not broken into by Potter’s twin terrors.

He was busy searching the cabinets and trying to get familiar with where everything was. Potter didn’t own a house elf. They had been liberated after the war, but he had inherited one from his deceased godfather Sirius Black. Its name was Kreacher and he didn’t live at the Potter household but instead stayed at 12 Grimmauld Place, the old meeting site for the Order of the Phoenix, where the elf had served the House of Black and had been most loyal to Regulus Black his beloved former master. It was where the old elf was happiest so Potter being the lovable savior that he was gave him
permission to stay there. Severus had been told that Kreacher would babysit Potter’s children from
time to time, as well as help out on the holidays, and apparently enjoyed it.

Sitting down at the large oak table a few minutes later, he sipped on some delicious homemade soup
he had found and warmed up then pondered his past miseries. He had actually found out soon after
he was rescued from the Shrieking Shack, that Potter did in fact give his memories to the Ministry
officials but that they had decided not to divulge the information with the wizarding world and had
kept it a secret for their own personal reasons.

He had thought bitterly at that time, what better way then for them to let the public continue to
believe that Severus Tobias Snape had died a traitor and murderer? It took the blame off their
shoulders for having been so stupid in not believing Potter in the first place when he told them
Voldemort was alive. They all believed him to be dead so Severus decided to continue to let them
believe it and thanks to Poppy and Kingsley’s help managed to keep his secret hidden until now.
Anyway, he had always liked his privacy and preferred to live a life as a recluse alone in his own
little world that didn’t include children or anyone by the name of Potter. I have done my part for
society by helping out the healers at St. Mungo’s with my potions skills so I have no regrets.

He finished his soup and then made himself some tea. Yes, Severus purposely neglected to tell Potter
this important little bit of information, but why? He really didn’t know the answer and wished that at
the time he hadn’t acted like such a stupid old fool. He was beginning to think, that deep down,
when Potter’s daughter fell ill it became his only reason to begin living again. He wanted to believe
what he did was done truly out of revenge by forcing Potter into taking the Unbreakable Vow and
then bonding with him. The one thing he was certain of was that he had used the love of a father for
his daughter to draw him back up out of the deep hole he had dug for himself.

Damn, how much more pathetic can I be? Don’t start feeling pity for the brat and his misfits, he
growled, I still hate them. I can’t forget the fact that Potter went on with his life, took all the fame
and glory, while I suffered alone and forgotten. I will have to be sure and question him further about his
reasoning for not at least finding out what happened to my body. It should prove interesting to hear
what kind of lies he tries to get away with to make himself look better.

Shaking his head in disgust, Severus told himself, it’s my own fault that I am stuck in this situation.
Who would ever believe that I would be living in a cozy little cottage with the spawn and
grandchildren of my deceased nemesis? It must have been the seizure I had suffered that day. Yes,
that would explain my rash behavior and actions. It’s the only explanation. I was out of it and didn’t
know what I was doing. Now it’s too late. There can be no backing out and I have to make do with
the consequences whether they be good or bad and that includes the whole remaining Weasley clan.

Shit, what a mess I have made for myself. Dear Merlin, what was I thinking? Severus dropped his
head down on the table banging it and groaning in agony knowing he was in trouble.

“Ready to go home, boys?” Harry asked.

They had stayed at the Burrow for lunch and it was getting late. Harry wanted to get Lily home and
settled in. She had missed her nap and was getting a little cranky. Molly looked tired and was waiting
for Arthur, who was due home anytime, then they were going to visit with Ron and Hermione to
find out about their new grandchild.

“Gee, Dad, do we have to go?” James whined.

“Can’t we stay and live here with Granddad and Grandma Weasley?” Al pleaded.
Harry knew they hated the thought of going home and finding Severus living there. It was a nightmare for them, especially after what had happened that morning.

“Give your Grandma a kiss and say goodbye, we’re leaving now. It’s time for us to go home,” Harry told them in a firm voice.

Harry kissed Molly, thanked her, and took his children back home.

Preparing the house included checking it out to make sure everything was in order. Harry thought, ‘At least for the time being, everything was quiet…or so Harry thought.’

James and Albus had everything planned out. They had discussed it together in great detail and decided both of them were grown up enough to handle the problem of Snape. Their Dad and family depended on them and they wouldn’t let them down. If all went according to plan, and on schedule, then by the end of the week their new ‘stepfather’ would be long gone from their happy home never to be heard from again. With Timothy’s help, they had already hidden what they needed and now was the time to initiate the first phase of their plan.

“Are you ready to begin Operation Oust Snape, Count Dracula’s Demise: Attack the Bat?” James asked his brother.

“Let’s do it,” Al told him.

“You do know that once we start this there is no backing out,” James reminded him.

“James, I am not a chicken you know. I can handle this.” Al glared at his older twin.

“Good, and in case I forgot to tell you, I am proud to call you my brother,” James said with a big grin.

Severus had just come back from visiting Draco and his family. His godson had known he was alive all this time and Severus enjoyed the times they shared together. He had a long talk with him and felt much better. As he approached the modest little cottage, his new home, he silently prayed that it was empty. He didn’t want to deal with Potter or his minions right now. He just wasn’t in the mood.

Walking up the front steps, he opened the door and walked into the foyer. Right away he knew something was wrong; his feet seemed to be stuck to the floor and he couldn’t move. Looking down, he saw that he was standing in a pool of green glue and it smelled like a dead troll. Holding his nose, he heard a sound and looked up. Something was flying towards him from across the room. His eyes must be deceiving him. No, it couldn’t be he thought, but it looked like a large black bat with his face including hooked nose and all. His eyes widened in shock when he saw that it was carrying a bouncing balloon of some sort, which was hanging precariously from its claws.
“WHAT THE BLOODY HELL!” he cursed.

Knowing it was too late to get out of the way, Severus tried to cover his head with his arms and ducked down as low as he could before it reached him.

TBC

Let the games begin!

Next chapter we find out what the twins did to Snape.

Harry hears the commotion and checks it out and gets a big surprise at his front door.

But where are his boys?

Do bats have claws? I don’t know but put it in story anyway.
Incoming Message from the Big Giant Heads

Author's notes: A widowed Harry must bond with Snape in order to save his daughter's life. Harry's young children scheme to bring their daddy and new father together, and form a new family, while changing the hearts of two scarred souls.

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Title: Scarred Souls

Author: Misty Moonlight/Co-author: QueenBoadicea

Pairings: Severus/Harry

Published: 12/10/2008

Summary: A widowed Harry must bond with Snape in order to save his daughter's life. Harry's young children scheme to bring their daddy and new father together, and form a new family, while changing the hearts of two scarred souls.

Warnings: Romance, Drama, Angst, Alternate Universe, Sexual Situations, Hurt/Comfort, M/M, Slash, Anal, Language, Humor, possible MPreg, Bonding, Original Characters, Family, WIP

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Authors' note: A very special "Thank you" to everyone who reviewed last chapter and we hope you enjoy this one as well. Thanks for reading and reviewing our story, QueenBoadicea & Misty Moonlight.

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Chapter 10: Incoming Message from the Big Giant Heads

The bat dove towards him but did not strike. Instead the balloon in its claws was dropped over his head. It popped open on impact and viscous, disgustingly smelly ooze dripped down into his hair.

"Blast and damn!" Severus reached up to touch his hair—a mistake, since his fingers immediately became stuck to the mess, rendering him unable to reach for his wand.

In the meantime, the bat-thing or whatever it was had swooped back up to the ceiling where it hovered, flapping its wings and smirking at him. Its mouth opened and, to his shock, it began to speak.
“My, don’t you look ugly. Then again, it’s not really a change for you, is it?” The face may have been his but the voice was decidedly different. Severus’s ears were assaulted with a buzzing whine, part insect, part high-pitched chirp, and thoroughly annoying. “You’ve got a face that could send a thestral into convulsions and those things don’t scare easily!”

“What—? Be silent, you pathetic construct. This is my home now and I’m not going to stand here and be insulted.” Easier said than done. He jerked at his feet only to find them even more solidly glued to the floor.

“Looks like you’ll have to take it, won’t you? It’s about time you heard exactly what people think of you, you bumbling, ugly, Mudblood sack of skin and bones.”

He froze. “What did you call me?” he said in a deadly whisper.

“What’s the matter? Getting hard of hearing in your old age?” The thing spoke again, this time in a stentorian voice that made Severus’s teeth rattle. “YOU BUMBLING, UGLY, MUDBLOOD…”

Rage flared, sudden and unstoppable. Wordless and wandless magic that he was rarely able to summon tore through him and flew towards his tormentor, shattering the bat-creature into oblivion.

He grinned in malicious triumph. That took care of this childish bit of pranking. When he got his hands on Potter or his devilish spawn—he was fairly sure they were responsible for this bit of stupidity—he was going to hex them with boils until they couldn’t sit down for weeks.

His victory was short lived. The air shimmered and the bat-creature popped back into existence—along with two identical constructs. Two of the creatures began talking; the third one started singing an inane song in the same awful whining tone as the first.

“Ooh, someone’s got a temper, hasn’t he? Quite a frailty for someone who claimed wearing the emotions on the sleeves was a sign of weak people,” the bat on the left sniggered.

“This is the song that never ends…” the third head warbled, high and off key.

“That’s right, Snivellus. You always did let your rage get the better of you,” the middle one snarled.

His head snapped up. Although this bat wore the same face as the others, the voice was eerily like that of the departed Sirius Black. “Don’t talk to me,” he snarled.

“It just goes on and on, my friends…”

The first head snapped, “Oh, yeah. Talking nonstop is your department, isn’t it? Always so quick to speak and slow to think of the damage, that’s you, Snape. A gabbling tongue to go with that big nose, thin lips and teeth yellow as a canary’s ass. And you called Harry ugly! You hypocritical rat bastard.”

“Some people started singing it, not knowing what it was…”

“I object to being called a rat. I’m not Pettigrew,” he shot back with a smirk.

The second head chimed in. “Nope. You just became a Death Eater like him. How does it feel to know you became no better than the worst of the Marauders?”

Severus ground his teeth. He’d loathed seeing that shriveled, rat Animagus at every Death Eater meeting. While he’d verbally sneered at the creature, he’d never forgotten that Pettigrew had been witness to his many humiliations at the hands of Potter and Black during his school days.
The thing carried on, riding over any comment he might have made. “You’ve been painting yourself as the hero and martyr in this whole business, haven’t you? According to you, Harry wouldn’t have made it through his time in Hogwarts alive if it weren’t for your help.”

Ah, he understood now. These flying cursed objects were all Potter’s doing. If Potter could hear through these things, he would give the brat an earful. “That is correct! Dumbledore and the others were perfectly willing to let him get away with any foolishness he wanted. But he needed protecting and that is what I provided, often at the risk of my own skin.”

“This is the song that never ends…”

“For Lily’s sake,” the thing sneered.

“Just so. That brat didn’t deserve my attention but I did what I had to—for her.”

“To atone for getting her killed.”

He didn’t flinch but the thing smiled cruelly. It swooped closer, as if scenting his sudden misery.

“You didn’t really do as good a job of protecting Harry as you’d like to think, you know.”

“I’m not listening to this. I know exactly what I did to shield that feckless child and the sacrifices I made. Look at my face and neck if you don’t believe me!” It was ridiculous to be arguing with these things. But he couldn’t help it, venting himself in self-righteous fury against these creatures, against the world really, for the bad fortune he’d received because of the Potter brat.

“We were with Harry when he faced off against Quirrell? That miserable toad was inhabited by Voldemort’s spirit yet Harry wasn’t saved by you but by his mother’s love—again.”

He’d learned the details of that ill-fated encounter from the Headmaster. Albus had been infuriatingly proud of the boy, as if Harry had done something magnificent when, once again, it had been his beloved Lily’s sacrifice that had rescued him. Something in Severus’s heart hardened at the thought of it and his guilt vanished.

The thing must have sensed it because it flew back up to join its brethren. “Let’s take a look at second year, shall we? Harry faced off against a basilisk. The thing bit him and he was nearly killed. Once again, where were you?”

It was true. He’d had nothing to do with that crazed adventure. But that was hardly his fault. “The boy shouldn’t have been down there in the first place. Trust an idiotic Gryffindor to charge blindly into danger.”

“The monster had his friend’s sister and future wife, Ginny, as a hostage. He had to save her. Then again, you wouldn’t know anything about saving friends, would you? You got your friend Lily killed!”

“SHUT UP!”

“What did you do to save her after you set the Dark Lord on her like a mad dog? You went running to Dumbledore! You begged him to help! You couldn’t be bothered to lift a finger to rescue your only friend at the time. Oh no, not you, the cowardly Slytherin!”

“Don’t call me—”

“And now they’ll go on singing it forever just because…”
“You were willing to let her husband and only child die just so long as she could be saved. You are a loathsome, vile, pathetic, worthless, crawling piece of slime, unfit to be joined with Lily’s child.”

“Don’t forget whey-faced, scrawny and paler than an Inferius,” the first head grated. Evidently it was its job to detail Severus’s physical deformities while the second went over his list of failures and errors.

“Moving right along. Let’s talk about Harry’s third year in Hogwarts, shall we? He was nearly eaten alive—”

“—Yes, by that dangerous, feral Gryffindor Lupin. I would have saved him from that if that stupid boy and his two mindless sidekicks hadn’t ambushed me with their pusillanimous tactics.”

“Saved him? You were there for revenge, Snivellus! That’s what you said, so don’t deny it. If you’d wanted to help Remus, you would have brought him his Wolfsbane potion not tied him up like a hog!”

“He was aiding and abetting that mongrel Black, a known criminal! He deserved to be restrained until the proper authorities could be summoned.”

“And given the Dementor’s kiss as well?”

Severus’s lips thinned. “I was proceeding on the facts of the case as it stood,” he gritted.

“You were out for revenge and you didn’t care who got hurt. You wouldn’t even listen to Black as Harry wanted you to.”

“I don’t make a habit of doing anything that Gryffindors tell me to do!”

“Unless they’re long-bearded old men you’re going to kill.”

He would have staggered at that if his feet hadn’t been pinned so effectively to the floor.

The head grinned, exposing the yellow teeth. “Fourth year. Harry’s name was thrown into the Goblet of Fire. He was subjected to tests far too dire for someone of his age. You did nothing to protect him from the trials.”

“I was deceived by another Death Eater,” Severus began.

“Not as smart as you thought you were, huh? When Harry was restrained and his blood drawn in that cemetery, where were you? All the other Death Eaters were summoned but you were nowhere around. Voldemort was brought back, a student was murdered, Harry was nearly killed and you did NOTHING to prevent it!”

He was hanged if he’d suffer any more of this. “POTTER!” he bellowed. Where the devil was that husband of his?

“He can’t hear you, you blowhard. There’s a Silencing Charm around his room to help his daughter sleep. You’d have known that if you asked, beakface,” yawned the first head.

“What happened fifth year? Oh, yes. You got infuriated because Harry had spied on your Pensieve memory and barred him from learning Occlumency. Voldemort was able to invade his mind because you didn’t do your job.”

Severus bared his teeth. “Am I to blame for his ineptitude as a student? Potter was always a fool who
couldn’t learn the simplest things.”

“No thanks to you. You didn’t want to teach him and got rid of him at the first opportunity. So he rushed off to save Sirius and watched the man die instead.”

“Good riddance, I say.” Severus shrugged, showing how little he cared about the mongrel’s fate.

“Right. Nothing like getting Gryffindors killed to put a smile on that sallow, hangdog, colorless mug of yours,” number one threw at him.

The second dove at him, its face twisted in a rictus of fury. “You’d think that knowing all of them were dead would make you happy—Potter, Black, Lupin, Pettigrew, Lily, Albus—but not you. You have to carry your grudge to the next generation, don’t you? And now Harry’s poor children are getting threatened by you.”

“They’ll get more than that once I’m free!” he promised in a basso growl.

“What did it feel like?” the second bat asked, its voice gone deceptively soft.

“What?”

“What did it feel like to kill Dumbledore?”

It was like an icy claw had seized his heart. There was no way he was answering that charge. But the memory, never far from his mind, unspooled like a vial of water spilling across the floor.

The old man, shrunken, his face oddly grey and withered, pleading with him.

“Severus. Please.”

They had arranged it in advance; Dumbledore was going to die anyway, thanks to his moronic donning of that ring. His death now would have meaning, sparing Severus’s godson from the weight of his murder.

Severus hadn’t flinched or wavered, knowing there were Death Eaters at his back waiting to pounce if they sensed weakness.

“You have to mean the Killing Curse for it to work,” the second bat hissed. “So what were you thinking to put you in the mood, so to speak? How often you resented supposedly helping Harry because of Albus’s orders? All those Death Eater meetings you had to attend, when you didn’t know whether Voldemort would question you or torture you? Did you think about how Lily wasn’t saved, even after you begged the old man for help?”

He pressed his trapped hands hard over his hair to smother the voices. But they continued, loud and relentless. He yanked his feet, trying to pull them free of his boots, hoping to escape that way. But the tight lacings held him captive as surely as the ooze on the floor.

“Were you proud of being the one to kill Dumbledore? After all, not even Voldemort had managed that. I’ll bet it made you really popular at all the Death Eater gatherings. Did you tell your partners in crime all about it?”

Merlin, it had hurt to carry out that wretched scheme. And it had been easy to transform hurt into anger—he’d been practicing that since learning Lily had turned to that imbecile James Potter.

Anger that he was placed in the position of being Dumbledore’s murderer. Anger that he had to save
Draco from his ill-considered secrecy. Anger that he had to kill, that he’d failed, once again, to save a beloved friend.

Sod it. Gritting his teeth, he wrenched his hands free. Several strands came with the pull, causing him to grunt from the pain of hairs being ripped out by the roots. Ignoring the ghastly look of his palms covered with bits of his own hair, he reached for his wand and cast the spell to loosen the laces of his boots.

When he pointed his wand at the hovering heads, the middle one’s lips twisted in a hideous parody of his own sneer. “If you’re thinking of casting Finite Incantatem, don’t. There’ll be six of us.”

Severus hesitated. He had no way of telling if the constructs were telling the truth. But he’d already made an error. Best simply to go to the source and have the pernicious Potter deal with them. He managed to stagger free, avoiding the puddle of glue adhering to the floor, and bolted for the staircase.

The bat-things were not deterred. The pernicious trio flew after him, their imprecations, insults, accusations and insane twitterings dogging him with each step.

“POTTER!” he roared again, charging towards his bond mate’s quarters.

He bounced back as he collided with an invisible barrier. The impact was so strong that he was knocked flat on his bum.

The heads seemed to find that vastly amusing. All three broke off their verbal abuse to cackle like hyenas.

It was the last straw. He pointed his wand at the barrier and channeled all his power at it while yelling the spell to force it down. There was a satisfying “pop” and the barrier vanished.

He strode through it, the bats following him and renewing their barrage until he came to Potter’s door. He banged on it ferociously and then wondered why he should bother. He waved his wand, preparing to force the door, when it swung open of its own accord.

Potter stood there, wand in hand, blinking at him. His hair was a scraggly mess, as usual, but Severus was startled into silence by the sight of bare expanse of lightly muscled chest that met his stunned gaze. The green-eyed man was clad in nothing but a pair of pajama bottoms that hung dangerously low on his lean hips. A faint fuzz of dark brown hair spread across flat nipples and trailed in an enticing path down to the top of his pants. Sweet Merlin, when had Potter turned into such a good-looking youth?

“Snape? What is it?” He held up his hand. “Please be quiet. I don’t want to wake up Lily.”

Potter’s request brought him back to his senses. Furious at being caught staring, he pointed at the trio hovering over his shoulders. “Potter, I demand that you get rid of these things right now!” he spat.

The man peered over his shoulder. “Get rid of what?”

Severus sneered. “Don’t play stupid with me, Potter. Ah, I forget. It’s not an act with you, is it?”

Potter sighed. “Snape, you’re being more of a git than usual. State your business and then leave, all right? I’m not in the mood to put up with your nonsense.”

“MY nonsense? Your miserable spawn sic these ridiculous constructs on me and you dare to speak of my nonsense?”
“What constructs?”

“What!” He pointed again.

“This is sad, Snivellus. You know that, right? Going to Harry of all people for help.” The second head sniggered unpleasantly.

The whelp looked over his shoulder again and shrugged uneasily. “I’m sorry, Snape. I don’t see what you’re talking about.”

Severus was about to point again. Then he considered. Potter had never been able to lie to him in the past and he was certain about his veracity now. Potter truly couldn’t see the things and his blank stare meant he couldn’t hear them either.

“Well, this must be something your nasty misbegotten little brats have gotten up to,” he groused. “Just look at this!” He held up one of his hands and Potter’s mouth dropped open in a look of imbecilic confusion.

“Merlin’s beard. Is that…? Why are your hands covered with—hair?”

“That’s what I’m trying to explain to you, you half-wit! Your spawn cast some kind of spell on me! First, my boots got stuck to the floor in the foyer and then some noxious glue was dropped on me from above, completely coating my hair!”

“And that’s how you got the hair on your hands?”

“Nothing gets past you, does it, Potter?” he sneered. “Now come downstairs and see the glue if you don’t believe me!”

Potter held up his hands in a placating manner. “All right, all right. No need to get shirty. I’ll just get a robe. I’ll join you in a tick.”

Severus stood in front of the door, fuming. His bond mate had left it ajar but he had no desire to step across the threshold. The insides of Potter’s quarters were of no interest to him.

Potter came back in a short green robe that just reached his knees, hiding that magnificent chest. Severus whirled away abruptly when he realized his sudden distress for what it was—disappointment at having that view covered from him. He strode with unnecessary speed back to the barrier and gestured ironically for Potter to proceed.

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The green-eyed man stood staring down at the floor. It was completely bare, no sign of any glue anywhere. Snape’s boots were there, all right, but nothing held them to the floor. “Um, Snape. There’s nothing here.”

Severus ground his teeth together. “I’m telling you, Potter, the glue was there. How else do you think it got in my hair and on my hands?” He waved the hairy digits in Potter’s direction and was meanly gratified to see the man flinch.

“I believe you, Snape. At least the glue in the hall is gone. Let’s do something about you, shall we?” Potter waved his wand at Severus’s hair and hands and uttered the Cleaning Charm.

The hairs did not vanish. Instead the ones on his palms immediately turned a vivid, chemical pink. Severus paled and he didn’t have to hear Potter’s choked-off gasp to know the hairs on his head
were a matching shade.

“I will kill the little beasts,” he said with eerie calm.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.

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03/27/2010

Below is an alternate version of this chapter that follows more closely the original summary of story. It does not have to be read unless you want too. I had previously posted it under an alternate chapter but removed because of confusion. I may be adding these excerpts (if that's what you call them) as I write them or this could be the only one... I haven't decided yet.

Misty (Ari)

*************************************************************************

Chapter 10:

Harry was reading a book by Emily Bronte that Hermione had given him for his last birthday, called *Wuthering Heights*, when he heard shouting and what sounded like swearing come from downstairs. Quickly standing up, he put it down on the table, and walking over checked on Lily in her crib to make sure she wasn’t woken up by the noise. He then cast a silencing spell on the room as he left so she wouldn’t be disturbed. On his way out, he also decided to summon Kreacher to watch over her just in case whatever was happening would keep him away from her for too long and she woke up.

Running down the hallway, he glanced at Al and James’ room and saw the door was open but there was no sign of his boys. Pulling his wand out of the pocket of his jeans, Harry hurried down the staircase towards the Kitchen. He silently prayed that his children were not hurt and would curse Snape, and to hell with the consequences, if they were harmed.

Pushing open the door, he rushed in prepared for the worse case scenario and came to a dead halt. Harry’s eyes widened in shock at the sight before him. He stood frozen in the doorway unable to move.

“What the hell happened to you?” Harry asked, trying his best not to laugh. Knowing if he did, then Snape definitely would kill him.

Severus was standing in the foyer of the Kitchen, his feet were stuck in some kind of glue and his long lanky hair was now a startling shade of bright bubblegum pink. His black cloak and clothes were covered in a mixture of pink and green colors, but it was the green angular face and nose that caused Harry to bite his tongue, and with good reason. It suddenly reminded him of the *Wicked Witch of the East*, in the Wizard of Oz classic, that the boys loved to watch on the telly around Halloween.
There was also an awful smell coming up from the pool of green glue and Harry uttered a refreshing spell to clear the air in the room so he could breath without being sick.

“POTTER, get me out of the mess, NOW, so that I can find and murder your little urchins.” Severus demanded, pointing his wand at him.

It was then Harry realized that Snape was well and truly stuck. It seemed, that for some reason, he couldn’t free himself from his current messy (and smelly) predicament.

“Why should I?” Harry answered, “After all, you just threatened my children and are aiming your wand at me.”

Severus cursed and held his wand down by his side, whispering in a deadly voice, “I don’t know what your brats have done, but every time I try using my wand to get out of this disgusting mess it only makes the situation worse.”

“Snape, James and Al are only 6 years old, how in Merlin’s name could they have done this to you, of all people?” Harry knew his sons were behind this but didn't understand why the evil git couldn’t get himself out of it.

“Why don’t you ask them? The little monsters are hiding in the broom closet behind your back laughing their insufferable little brains off at my expense.” Snape pointed across the room with one long shaking green finger.

Harry turned, and smiled, when he saw two small black heads poking out from behind the door and then trying to push each other back inside it to hide from their daddy. Oh, how Sirius would be so proud of them he thought, then focused his attention back on Snape.

“I want your word that you won’t harm my sons first.” Harry stated in a calm voice but it held a clear warning.

“How DARE YOU, POTTER ….. Your insufferable little brats attacked me and you have the audacity, and with those damned eyes of yours, to threaten me not to retaliate.” Severus roared.

Snape was seething with barely controlled rage but held himself under control, knowing if he didn’t, that he would be in this sticky situation for Merlin knew how much longer. All he wanted to do, was get to his room and clean himself up. The time for revenge against the horrible little twin terrors would come later. Right now, he needed his former student to help him with his current predicament rather he liked it or not.

Potter was just standing there, looking as smug as his father and godfather had before him. 'Oh, just you wait, I will get even with all of you for this', Severus promised himself.

“FINE then, I promise not to harm our sons (too much), so get me out of this filthy mess.”

Harry was watching him with a cautious look in his eyes, and Severus cursed,

“WELL, what the hell are you waiting for then, Potter?” he demanded. “FIX THIS, NOW, DAMN YOU.”

“Boys, you can come out now.” Harry told his sons watching them while keeping a very close eye on Snape.

“Daddy, we didn’t do it, honestly we didn’t” Al stuttered.
“Ya Daddy, we were just playing upstairs in our room when we heard a huge commotion and came down to check it out.” James added.

“Potter!” Snape spat, “Your evil little hellions are obviously lying to protect their behinds.”

“Go up to your room, now, and wait for me. I will be up in a few minutes to talk with you about this.” Harry promised.

Both boys nodded, took one last look at Count Dracula (stuck out their tongues) and took off for their bedroom running.

Once they were safely upstairs and Harry heard the door to their room slam shut he focused his attention back on Snape. With a wave of his wand and muttering a few spells, Harry freed Snape and cleaned up the mess on the floor. He muttered a few more spells but couldn’t seem to restore his bond mate’s hair and skin back to its normal state.

“I don’t know what to do about your hair and skin, the colors don’t seem to want to come out no matter how hard I try. Maybe, they will wash off when you take a shower.” Harry said, giving up on trying to fix it.

Seeing the disgusted look on Snape’s face, he added, “You’re the Potions Master and expert, not me, maybe you’ll find the answer in one of the books in your lab. If not, fire call Poppy, I am sure she will be happy to assist you.”

Severus was tired and needed to take his pain reliever and anti-seizure potions before he had a fit in front of Potter. Knowing he was late taking them, he pushed Potter roughly aside and walked swiftly to the door leading downstairs into the basement where his lab was. Whispering the spell to unlock the wards he had placed upon it, he opened the door but stopped before entering.

Turning around, he faced his bond mate once more and said in a cold voice, “Don’t think this is over Potter.” he warned with a sneer before leaving the room.

Harry stood silently watching the closed door for a few minutes before sighing and closing his eyes. He gently rubbed his forehead then headed upstairs to have a long talk with his boys.

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“Did you see the old bat’s face!” James laughed, “It was fantastic just wait until we tell Timothy.”

“Geeze, I don’t know James, he looked kind of mad.” Albus mentioned with a worried look on his face. “Maybe this wasn’t such a good idea after all, I thought he was going to explode.”

“Oh, don’t be such a worry wort Al.” James offered. “Our plan is working and before you know it Count Dracula will be moving out of our home and back into his cave.”

“Did you see the look on Daddy’s face?” Al asked his brother with tears in his eyes.

Of the two, Albus was the more emotional one and was very open with his feelings. James stared at Al for a few minutes with a look of concentration on his face. Why couldn’t his younger brother be more like him, like a man, a grown-up.

“I think we disappointed him, James.” Al whimpered. “I don’t want to hurt Daddy. I love him.”

James sighed and stood up from his bed walking over to Al’s. Sitting down beside him, he put his arm around his shoulders in a sign of comfort.
“Don’t worry, Al.” James said. “Dad still loves us and will stand by us against that old geezer.”

They both didn’t see the door slowly opening and jumped when they heard their Dad’s voice.

“Well boys, it looks like you’ve got some explaining to do.” Harry said walking into the room and closing then locking the door behind him.

Severus had taken his potions and was now up in his room taking a long shower. There was an awful stench flowing up with the steam of the hot water causing him to cough and gag. He was busy scrubbing his body with a special soap but it didn’t seem to be working in removing the green from his body. He also used some shampoo with special ingredients to try and get the pink out of his hair. He had been in the hot water for over 30 minutes and his flesh was starting to wrinkle and turn bright red, which didn’t make a good combination with the disgusting green coloring still covering his skin.

Swearing, Severus turned off the water and stepped out of the stall then dried himself off. He felt an odd tingling sensation around his scalp, so he wrapped a towel around his head and patted his hair so it could dry faster. Walking over to the bathroom mirror, he used his hand to wipe the mist off of it so he could see if his hair was at least back to normal. He removed the towel and his eyes widened in horror, then he roared.

“POTTER.........................”

The enchanted mirror didn’t help matters when it spoke to him in a sickly sweet voice saying, “Dearie, what a pretty color green you are today why it complements your....”

Severus cursed and blasted the mirror into a million little pieces.

“Now, do you understand why what you did was wrong?” Harry asked his sons.

“Yes, daddy.” Al whispered. “I am so sorry. It won’t happen again. I will be a good boy from now on. I promise.”

Harry had given them a long lecture about the dangers of messing around with their famous uncles’ old boxes of experiments. He warned them they, or even Lily, could have been seriously hurt in the process.

“I love you guys very much and it would hurt me if anything ever happened to either one of you.” Harry told them giving them each a hug and kiss a top the head.

“James, your the elder so I expect you to set an example for your brother.” Harry told his oldest twin.

Rolling his hazel eyes, James answered, “Don’t worry dad, I understand and promise to be good from now on.”

“Promise?” Harry asked them both.

“Yes, Daddy.” Al answered, green eyes shining. “I promise.”

“Yea, Dad.” James echoed.

Harry had stood up, and was pacing back and forth in front of them, so he didn’t notice that James had his hand behind his back with his fingers crossed. Al saw it and quickly imitated his twin.
“Now, boys, you know that I will have to punish you for what you did.”

Harry told them in a stern voice while walking around the room checking everything to be sure they were not hiding anything that was dangerous. He confiscated several boxes and bags of hidden items and with a wave of his wand they disappeared to a safe location. He was sure to carefully check under the beds, in the back of the closet, and everywhere else he could think of where they might have hidden something else to use against Snape.

When he was sure that he had found everything that was potentially hazardous to his family’s health, he stopped his search and walked back to where the boys were sitting on Al’s bed. They were being quiet and sat next to each other, watching, and waiting for him to announce his verdict for their crime.

Harry stared at them, thinking, before speaking their sentence out loud,

“Alright boys, I’ve come to decision.” Harry told them.

Staring at him with wide eyes, they waited to hear the news.

“There will be no more broom flying, and no overnight sleepover’s with your friends or cousin, for one month.” Harry began but was stopped before he could finish speaking, when they began whinning.

“Dad you can’t.”

“Daddy, it’s not fair.”

“Please Daddy don’t do this.”

“Dad, no way, you can’t do this to us.”

“Boys, stop it, right now.” Harry warned them in a sharp tone, “Be happy it’s not worse and it will be if you don’t shut it.”

James and Al immediately clammed up and their eyes began filling up with tears.

“I am sorry boys. I don’t want to do this but have no choice. You could have been seriously hurt and I don’t want this kind of behavior to happen again.”

Harry looked at them, saying in a sad voice, “I love you both very much and have been far too lenient with you since you’re mother’s death.”

Sniffling they answered him, “We love you too Daddy.”

“Clean up your room and then get ready for supper. I’ll call you when it’s ready.” Harry said walking to the door.

Before he left the room, Harry reminded them, “James and Al, behave yourselves. I really mean it.”

Once the door was shut, James turned back to a still worried Al and whispered, “Now on to our next plan of action to oust that greasy git.”

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Harry had just got down the hallway to Lily’s room when he heard his name being screamed, or rather cursed again, by Snape.
Groaning, Harry thought, ‘What now?’ and headed towards Snape’s room being sure his wand was within easy reach just in case he needed it.

TBC

Coming up in next chapter Snape and Harry have another fight, the boys cause more trouble, and Snape has his revenge (or not). What happened to his hair?
Godrics Hollow

Author's notes: A widowed Harry must bond with Snape in order to save his daughter's life. Harry’s young children scheme to bring their daddy and new father together, and form a new family, while changing the hearts of two scarred souls.

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Title: Scarred Souls

Author: Misty Moonlight/Co-author: QueenBoadicea

Pairings: Severus/Harry

Published: 12/10/2008

Summary: A widowed Harry must bond with Snape in order to save his daughter’s life. Harry’s young children scheme to bring their daddy and new father together, and form a new family, while changing the hearts of two scarred souls.

Warnings: Romance, Drama, Angst, Alternate Universe, Sexual Situations, Hurt/Comfort, M/M, Slash, Anal, Language, Humor, possible MPreg, Bonding, Original Characters, Family, WIP

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Authors' note: A very special "Thank you" to everyone who reviewed chapter 10. As always, we value your opinions and appreciate you taking the time to let us know what you think of our story. Thanks again for reading and reviewing, QueenBoadicea & Misty Moonlight.

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Chapter 11: Godric’s Hollow

Harry had to clench his jaw hard to keep from bursting into laughter. If he started, he wasn’t sure he’d be able to stop.

The bright pink strands on Snape’s head did nothing for him. The man looked absolutely ridiculous and he felt deeply sorry that his friends couldn’t see this. Fred and George would have been hysterical.

As always, thoughts of Fred were swiftly followed by a twinge of depression and the urge to laugh died. Harry sighed and glared up the shadowy staircase. He couldn’t see them but he heard suspicious giggles from upstairs.
“Snape, don’t make things any worse,” he began.

“Worse? WORSE?!? My hair is a nauseating color thanks to your infantile offspring and these yammering heads will not stop their confounded jabber—WILL YOU BE QUIET?!?” he bellowed.

Harry stared. He didn’t know who or what Snape was yelling at but he hadn’t seen the man this rattled since that dreadful night when he’d killed Dumbledore.

Well, there was a quick solution to this problem. “Albus, James,” he snapped. “I know you’re listening. Get down here and explain yourselves.” When there was no answer but a sudden silence, he yelled, “NOW!”

Moments later, twin pairs of feet staggered down the stairs. The two boys gave exaggerated yawns as if they’d just woken up. James mumbled, “Dad? What is it? What’s wrong?”

Albus blinked at Snape. “Why’s the vampire’s hair pink, dad?” he added with a wide-eyed innocence that fooled no one.

“I think you two know. And don’t call him a vampire. Has Uncle George been giving you any experimental items from the joke shop to test out?”

“No, dad.” Albus looked directly at his father but he was sneaking sidelong glances at Snape. He was barely holding in his giggles and Harry knew he had to nip this in the bud before he himself lost it and drew down Snape’s wrath.

“Don’t lie to me, Albus.”

“T’m not lying, dad!” the boy protested, indignation replacing the false innocence.

“I suspect that he’s not lying but merely concealing the truth.” Snape’s bellowing had been replaced by the silky smooth tones Harry remembered from school. A chill of nervousness inched down his spine.

“That’s not really important. What is important is undoing this mess.” Harry pointed at Snape’s hair. “Fix this, boys.”

“Um, we can’t, dad. We can get the glue out of his hair and hands. But we can’t fix the color. George…I mean, it wasn’t supposed to happen. Did you hit him with some sort of spell or something?” James peered at his father, his freckled face once more exuding that fake innocence.

“The Cleaning Charm. It seems the glue reacted badly to it,” Harry said dryly.

“Really? Well, we didn’t know that would happen,” James murmured. He glanced at Snape only to encounter the man’s ferocious glare. He paled a little and shot his gaze back to his father.

“Potter, I am two seconds away from hexing these firstborn minions of hell…” He flinched and bright spots of red broke out on his cheeks. His eyes flicked to the side and forward again.

This time the boys did break out in sniggers and Harry’s eyes narrowed. Whatever was plaguing Snape aside from the glue and weird hair, the boys were in it up to their eyebrows. “Get rid of that glue, you pair, and undo whatever else you’ve done to him.”

James pursed his lips. Harry recognized the mutiny sparking in the hazel eyes. “Why should we?” he muttered. “He’s been a big ole prat since he moved in here.”
“Language, young man. What would your mother think if she could hear you talking that way?”

Harry said, his voice stern with rebuke.

“Well, that’s what George calls him,” James shrugged.

“Yeah, dad. You don’t like him any better than we do! Why should we do anything for him—unless…” Albus’s voice trailed off, a look of calculation settling on his freckled face.

“I am not making any bargains with the likes of you two. You will undo this damage NOW or I will make you both very sorry,” Snape hissed.

The twins glared at Snape. There was no sign of fear now, only a hatred that would have done their paternal grandfather proud. Given the way Snape was acting, Harry could understand the dislike his two boys felt for their new “father”.

“You will not speak to my children that way, Snape,” Harry said coldly. “I told you you weren’t going to bully my family and I meant it. It’s this attitude that has gotten the twins on your back in the first place. When are you going to stop picking on little kids?”

“When are you going to grow a brain, Potter?” Severus snarled at him. “I have no intention of being kind to you or lax in discipline to your ill-bred children. If you can’t get them to behave, rest assured I will.”

Harry glared at him. “How? They’re too young to be in Hogwarts. So what are you going to do? Give detention? Take points? I’m not going to let you cast hexes or curses on my children, Snape.” He gripped his wand threateningly.

“Careful, Potter. You don’t want to set a bad example for the children by having them see you attack your bond mate, hm?” He turned back to the children. “Undo this. Now.”

“Say please,” Albus retorted.

“I most certainly will not!”

“Dad is always telling us to show good manners. If you don’t, why should we do anything you say?” James pointed out. He spoke with a child’s infuriating reasonableness. It didn’t help Severus’s temper to see Potter’s lips twitch.

“I’ve had enough.” He whipped out his wand and began the curse for the Itching Hex.

A couple of things happened.

Harry darted in front of his children. His wand moved, faster than Severus would have believed, and set up a shield between himself and the Potters. The shield was so dense Severus couldn’t see through it, only a bright white circle shimmering in the air.

Harry couldn’t believe it. In spite of his demand, Snape had actually tried to hex his children. Barely containing his rage, he dropped the shield, leaped forward and grabbed the startled Potions Master. Before Snape could pull free, he had jerked them both in Side-Along Apparition.

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Severus twisted himself out of Harry’s grip the moment they landed. He sprang away, wand out, prepared to blast Potter to hell. He’d told that miserable wretch not to touch him without his permission and the man had disobeyed.
“Do you recognize this place, Snape?”

This was a trick. Potter was trying to get him to drop his guard. Severus Snape wasn’t born yesterday and he wasn’t going to fall…

“This is Godric’s Hollow. This is where I lived with my parents.”

“I’m not staying here to listen to any sentimental gibb—”

Green eyes flared with the intensity of the Killing Curse. Severus felt his vocal cords seize up and he fell to the floor toppled by an unspoken Petrifying Hex.

“I got nightmares about my mum dying. But there were never any details. Just the sound of a woman screaming and a flash of bright green light.” Calm settled over Potter’s voice like a stifling blanket. He continued as if they were at tea, without seeming to care that Severus lay on the floor like a rolled-up carpet. Severus silently swore he would get even with his wretched bond mate for this.

Potter continued talking. Severus desperately tried to think of something to drown out his voice. But the floating heads were absent now and he was forced to listen to the Gryffindor’s prattling monologue.

“Then, after my sixth year in Hogwarts, when I was hunting Horcruxes, I saw a memory of Voldemort. He was striding down the street,” Harry waved vaguely towards the front of the house.

“It was Halloween and kids in costumes were running around everywhere. One kid saw—something of his face and nearly wet himself. Voldemort thought about hexing or killing him. But he was on a mission and couldn’t be bothered.

“He walked up the drive and blew open the door of the house. My father jumped up and yelled for my mother to run, that he’d hold Voldemort off. But he didn’t have his wand.”

_Naturally, _Severus thought maliciously. _The stupid Gryffindor thought he could hold off the Dark Lord with a measly show of bravado. I always knew James Potter was a fool._

“He hit my father with the Killing Curse and then walked upstairs. My mother was there in this very room.” Harry paused. “Did he ever tell you that? About how he killed her?”

Potter was being deliberately cruel and the sheer unexpectedness of it was nearly enough to rob him of breath. But he wasn’t going to be tricked into any maudlin displays of grief or remorse.

The Gryffindor went over to the empty crib, leaning on the bars and peering into it as if confronting his baby self. “She begged him to spare me. He ordered her to stand aside. He was doing that as a favor to you, I guess. So you were still special to him back then…his very favorite Death Eater.”

“I never told anybody about that. It was too painful. I wonder if he ever told you…you know, after he came back from the dead.” Harry paused as if waiting for an answer.

He shrugged when nothing was forthcoming. “No, probably not. It wasn’t his finest moment. He killed my parents only to get blasted into a floating shell by a little toddler. Must have been humiliating.

“I’m telling you all this, Snape, because I wonder if you want to follow in his footsteps. Hurting Potters, I mean. My mum died to protect me and she would have wanted to know her grandchildren are safe. So if you can’t keep from harming them for my sake, do it for hers.”
His hand twisted in a vague gesture and Severus felt the spell on him dissipate. He scrambled to his feet, ready to hex the brat into oblivion. But Harry was already on the move and Disapparated with a pop, leaving Severus alone in the house.

Severus wasn’t going to stay here. He’d done his wretched tour of the house after Lily had died. He had ripped her signature off a letter and torn her image from a photograph that held her cherished face and the insipid mugs of her husband and child. There was nothing left for him here except this horrible memory Potter had thrust upon him.

He was not going to let a pathetic attempt at instilling guilt stop him from teaching those two little brats the lesson they deserved. Since Potter had already thwarted his initial attempt, he would have to find a subtler means of retaliation.

He Apparated back to the cottage, his wand up, all senses alert for lurking enemies. The house was eerily still and he frowned. He found his boots still intact where he’d left them and tugged them on with angry jerks. Suitably shod, he silently crept up the stairs, his wand out and at the ready to hex whoever crossed his sights.

But Potter was nowhere to be seen. He was unable to get through the barrier again and didn’t attempt to force it.

To hell with it. If the man was sulking, that was his problem. If he was hiding, well, he’d have to emerge sooner or later and, when he did, Severus Snape would be waiting for him.

But there was an abnormal hush that spoke of more than people huddling behind closed doors. Severus frowned and cast several spells to reveal hidden humans. There was nothing but he cast more spells to see through Harry’s door and those of his offspring. The rooms all appeared to be deserted.

“Looks like he’s done a bunk,” head number two said. The sudden talk after many minutes of silence caused him to start. But otherwise he gave no sign that he’d heard.

“It’s just you and us then, Cyranose,” added head number one with an asinine giggle like a mental patient of St. Mungo’s.

“Well, I for one certainly enjoyed that bit of nostalgia on Harry’s part, didn’t you? Maybe he can tell us what it was like growing up with the Dursleys! Other than the little peeks you got of his charming home life during Occlumency, he’s never discussed that with you, has he? That was another thing you didn’t save him from, you incompetent clown.”

Snape refused to look at the things, refused to respond to their caterwauling torment. He was going to take a long, hot shower; hopefully, the noise would drown out their incessant chatter. Then he was going to take as much Dreamless Sleep as he dared and go to bed. With any luck, the voices would not follow him into his slumber.

He had a pretty good idea where that cowardly Potter and his wretched offspring had flown. But he was damned if he’d show up in front of the Weasleys with his hair in the state it was in. There was no way he was giving that overbearing matriarch of theirs that satisfaction.

“Down at an English fair, one evening I was there…” The third head had found a new song, one it burbled in a high falsetto that felt like fingernails being scraped down a Hogwarts chalkboard.

“Did you see how sexy Potter looked, half dressed like that?” This came from the first head, the dreamy tone quite incongruous with its whiny stridency.
“Who could miss it? Certainly, not this lonely, miserable queer.”

“When I heard a showman shouting underneath the flair…”

“What a lucky lady that Ginny was. Too bad Harry’s stuck with this washed up, bony-legged, knobby-kneed, scrawny scarecrow with a caricature of a face.”

“I’ve got a lovely bunch of coconuts, see them standing there in the road…”

“Too bad the scarecrow is stuck with only his right hand for company tonight.”

At this last feeble sally, all three heads burst into loud braying guffaws.

Severus wanted to scream. This was what he was being subjected to? An unending barrage of moronic crueness designed to pass for wit? Those little hellions may have the sneakiness of Slytherins but their tastes were solely that of crass Gryffindors. There was no doubt what house they’d be sorted into once they were old enough to be admitted to Hogwarts.

The heads began a dizzying, disorienting dance in front of him. Swatting his hands had no effect on them; they simply passed through his flailing arms and continued bouncing around in the air in front of him.

“Greasy haired…”

“Wait! Not so greasy now!”

“Big ones, small ones, some as big as your head…”

“Over the hill, dirty old man, marrying somebody young enough to be his son!”

“What, he couldn’t get the whores of Knockturn Alley?”

He showered, the roar of the water enough to stifle the voices for the moment. Scrubbing at his hair reduced the gluey stickiness somewhat although it did nothing to fix the color.

Clad in his nightgown he grimly swallowed the draught as the bat-creatures hovered above his bed, each ceaselessly yammering in their distinctive tones.

“You wear black silk pajamas to bed? Why? Who do you think is going to see it?”

“I’m a little teapot, short and stout; this is my handle, this is my spout…”

“You know what’s the saddest thing in the world?”

“That hair on top of that scarred, hideous face?”

He would endure this. He had suffered far worse at the hands of Voldemort for far too long to be brought to his knees by the antics of a pair of juvenile delinquents. The Marauders hadn’t broken him. Albus Dumbledore’s requests hadn’t destroyed him. Albus Remus and James Sirius would get their comeuppance.

No one messed with Professor Snape.

TBC
Author’s notes: The songs are taken in part from the Keeper of Lists, May 1, 2003, “Top 220 Most Annoying Songs to Get Stuck in Your Head”. The copyrights are the property of the various owners (if any). The bat constructs are based on a suggestion from the “magical grab bag” in the Fantasy section of the National Novel Writing Month website.

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
Chapter 12: Who’s Your Stepdaddy?

Harry packed up his children and went to the Burrow. There was nowhere else for them to go, really. Grimmauld Place had been deeded to him but he had found always it too dreary and depressing. The boys needed something familiar and comfortable to keep them grounded, at least for the moment.
“Thanks for putting us up, Mum. Things at home…” Harry faltered.

“No need to explain, dear. I’m surprised you actually decided to stay there so soon after being shackled to that miserable man,” Molly admonished, albeit with a sympathetic smile.

“We can’t stay here, you know. You just don’t have the room here and it reminds me too much of…” His voice trailed off, grew tight with emotion.

Molly’s eyes teared slightly at his broken words. Her beloved Ginny had been dead for a year but she had been Molly’s youngest child and only daughter. The loss of her bright, lovely Ginevra stung her even more cruelly than it did Harry.

“Stay as long as you need, Harry. As I’ve told you often enough, you’re family. You’re always welcome here.” She leaned against the stairway and a wicked smile creased her lips. “Severus Snape with pink hair. I wish I could have seen that.”

“Yeah, it’s something, all right.”

She chuckled and left and Harry breathed a sigh of relief. Much as he loved Molly Weasley, she could be a bit clingy and he wanted to talk to his boys in private.

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Al sat on the opposite bunk and glared at his older brother. “I thought you said he’d leave,” he hissed quietly.

“Of course, he’ll leave. It’s just going to take longer than I thought, is all,” James responded, nibbling at his lower lip.

“You didn’t tell me that!”

“Didja really think he’d leave at the first kick? We just have to come up with other stuff,” James responded. “Don’t tell me you’re backing out now.”

“I’m not backing out. But he was supposed to leave. And we’re the ones who left and are stuck here.”

James shrugged. “Either way, we’re free of His Meanness. So it’s a good thing, yeah?”

“I guess,” Al said sullenly.

The door swung open suddenly and both boys jumped. Their father was standing in the doorway, looking not at all pleased with them. “James, Al. We have to talk.”

“Dad, we’re not undoing it,” Al said, his lips pinching tight.

“You have to. Like it or not, Severus Snape is your new father—”

“He’s not our father. He doesn’t want anything to do with us and we hate him!” James retorted.

Harry sighed and sat beside his eldest. Of the two, James was often the more stubborn; if Harry could sway him, he was sure Albus would follow. “Severus went through—a hard time, boys, much harder than I did.”

“Did he lose someone he loved?” Albus said solemnly.
“Yes, he did.” Harry seized on this at once. Snape hadn’t lost anybody recently, which was what Albus was probably thinking. But he had lost his only friend in Lily Evans, both before and after her death. Perhaps he could play on the boys’ sympathies this way.

“He loved someone, a redhead girl just like your mother. Voldemort killed her. You remember I told you about him?” When both boys nodded, he continued, “That made him so unhappy. He never made another friend who was like her and that made him bitter and closed off.”

Al sprang off his bed and scrambled over to where Harry sat with his eldest son. He wrapped his arms around his father. “Do you think he’s lonely, Dad?”

Harry seriously didn’t think it was that simple or even true. He’d never known a man more devoted to his solitude and harboring a more intense dislike of other human beings than Severus Snape. Yet how else could he explain the effect of Severus’s twisted history on the man’s character to two young boys? “Yeah, that’s it. He’s lonely, Al.”

Al’s mouth twisted. “So maybe that’s why he wanted to be with you…so he could get his own family.”

Again, that was the last interpretation of Snape’s motives Harry would make. But he wasn’t going to let the children know of his new husband’s intent to punish him and make his life hell. He contented himself with smiling and hugging the two boys nestled on either side.

“But why did you marry him, Dad? You don’t even like him,” James protested.

“Well, the fact is I owe him a lot. If it hadn’t been for him, I wouldn’t have survived to fight Voldemort.”

“But you don’t love him, do you, Dad? Not the way you loved Mummy?” Al said this anxiously, his green eyes wide.

Harry hugged the boy tightly to him. “No one can ever take the place of your mummy, Albus. Believe that. Your new father is a good man underneath everything. You’ll just have to be patient with him.”

James knew there was a lot his father wasn’t telling them and he didn’t believe the little he’d heard anyway. But here was a chance to glean information on the enemy and he wasn’t about to let the opportunity slip. “I’m sorry about the hair, Dad. But…if he is going to stay with us, I’d like to know what he’s like. Maybe we can get along better then.”

Harry smiled in relief and ruffled his older son’s dark hair. “That’s a fine idea, James. I can only tell you a little.”

“Like what?” Al demanded.

“Well, he really likes making potions. He’s brilliant at it, really.”

“What else?” James prodded when his father stopped.

“Um…” Harry was appalled to realize he didn’t really know much of anything about his new mate. He tried frantically to remember what he could of his days spent in detention with his hated Potions professor. “He likes to read. A lot.”

Al visibly perked up at this information. “Will he read to us? The way Mummy used to?”
James snorted at that. Harry gave him a quelling look. “He’ll be very busy, Al. He works as a part-time helper and consultant for St. Mungo’s. So he won’t have time for that.”

“What else?” James persisted. “What’s his favorite color?”

“Well…”

“What’s his favorite food? Mine’s chocolate custard,” Al chimed.

Harry racked his brains. This was becoming more complicated than he’d expected. “He’s a very private man. He likes peace and being alone a lot. That’s why you boys should be quiet whenever he’s working.”

James flicked a glance at his little brother. “We’ll try, Dad. What else?”

“Anything else you need to know about him, you’ll learn in time, just as he will be learning about us. Now go to bed, boys. It’s been a long night.” Having dodged the embarrassing question of Snape’s likes and dislikes, Harry hugged his boys again, kissed them on their heads, and got up from the bed.

James was beginning to think they’d gotten away with their earlier prank. Then his father turned at the door and looked at them sternly. “Remember what I said, boys. You’re reversing whatever you did to him and fixing his hair.”

“We can’t fix his hair, Dad. But it should wear off.”

“When?”

James shrugged. “Soon.”

“Soon?”

“Soon, Dad. I promise,” James added.

Harry sensed he wasn’t going to get anything better and decided to let it go. Severus could always wear a hairnet.

He shut the door and sighed. This had been a really trying few days for everybody although, of course, Snape had gotten the worst of it today.

Pink hair. His Mum was right; it was sorta funny. Allowing himself a chuckle at the mental image, he padded to the room he was sharing with his daughter.

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Severus was brooding over his breakfast. The Draught of Dreamless Sleep had been a mistake, he thought in retrospect. Dreams, even the usual nightmares that woke him screaming and bathed in sweat, would have distracted him from the cacophony that had badgered him all night.

The assault had been constant. The first two heads had fallen silent. But the third head had kept up a barrage of mindless, inane tunes that had lasted the entire night. Snape didn’t recognize any of the songs; they certainly weren’t part of any wizard’s repertoire. They were insufferable, meaningless and agonizing bits of aural torture. The worst part was that now some of the tunes were stuck in his head, replaying themselves like Pensieve memories.

It was a brilliantly conceived torture, worthy of a Slytherin. He wondered if he’d been mistaken about his assessment of the likely housing of the twins at Hogwarts.
The bat-things were unstinting in their critique of what they considered to be his basest follies and crimes. They knew every evil deed he had committed as a Death Eater, going over his participation in Voldemort’s mad rites with ugly relish, pointing out again and again his culpability.

It wasn’t his fault! He’d been misled and, by the time he realized the extent of Voldemort’s madness, it was too late to extricate himself. He’d had a choice between sacrificing others or himself. Good little Slytherin that he was, he had chosen to save his own skin.

Such justification didn’t help when he had to listen to the litany of his crimes. He wasn’t a cold-blooded reprobate like Bellatrix Lestrange, the madwoman who had gladly consigned her own flesh and blood to death. That bitch had been willing to kill her nephew, poor Teddy Lupin, simply because he’d been born with the taint of lycanthropy. Severus had no love for the boy’s deceased father, that cur Remus Lupin. But when he thought of the child, robbed of his parents by the war and left in the care of a relative, something inside him writhed.

How exactly like Potter’s plight it was. The heads had carped on that subject, too, bewailing Potter’s orphaned state and hissing how Severus was responsible for it. He couldn’t deny it and the guilt and shame would have swamped him in tears if he still had it in him to weep.

The verbal abuse had taken its toll. He was now mentally and physically exhausted. He could barely stay awake to eat his breakfast…and the babbling heads were there to keep him company.

“Glad to see you can fix your own breakfast. Good to know that you’re good for something.”

“It’s a small world, after all. It’s a small world, after all. It’s a small world, after all. It’s a small, small world...”

He shuddered, nearly choking on this toast. The only thing worse than the castigating duo was the bizarre song selection the third head warbled. It never seemed to run out of material and each song was more banal and idiotic than the last.

He was in the midst of sipping his tea when he heard the floo activate. Debating whether he should run to confront Potter and his hellspawn, he decided he wasn’t going to interrupt his breakfast just for them. Sure enough, he heard whispering and the tread of stealthy footsteps.

“Boys, be quiet. You remember how he reacted the last time.”

“Yeah, we know.” The sullen retort made Severus’s lip curl. Doubtless the little rapscallions wanted to run wild, shrieking their lungs out. But it seemed that Potter was keeping them in line, at least for the moment.

Deciding it was time to make an appearance, he strode from the kitchen and down the hall. He hoped to sneak up on Potter unaware, giving the man a shock. But he was thwarted by the youngest twin, Albus. The boy was casting nervous looks all around him and he stiffened when he saw Severus.

“Dad. The vam—I mean, he’s here.”

Potter turned around. He was holding the little baby girl in his arms; the child was sound asleep by her slumped posture. “Oh, hello, Snape.” He squinted at the man. “You look terrible.”

“Trust you to state the obvious, Potter. Have you managed to wring some measure of discipline out of your ill-behaved progeny or am I going to have to do it for you?”

The anger gleaming from those green eyes was gratifying—for about two seconds. Then they shifted to a kind of pity that made him grind his teeth.
"I see our little side trip yesterday didn’t have any impact.” Potter shook his head. “Never mind. I spoke to James and Albus about your hair. They said the color should wear off in time.”

“And how long would that be? I want a timetable not a vague guess, Potter,” he snarled when his bond mate hesitated.

Potter glanced helplessly at the boys. They shrugged almost in unison, an odd sight. “We don’t know, Dad,” Al mumbled.

“I think about a week,” James offered, his nose scrunching.

“That’s not good enough!” His raised voice caused the sleeping girl to stir with a soft whine. Potter shushed and petted her until she settled down again.

“It’ll have to be. Maybe you could try a glamour,” he offered.

“What an inspired notion! Why didn’t I think of that? Ah, wait, I did,” Severus sneered. “Don’t you think I would try such an obvious solution, Potter? The foul magic your little imps used on me can’t be covered with a glamour, it appears.”

“Oh. Sorry about that.” The brat didn’t sound the least bit contrite and Severus resolved to berate him when the heads started their litany again.

“If you’re so damned smart, why haven’t you gotten rid of us yet?”

The insufferable travesty with Black’s voice had a point. But he wasn’t about to voice it in front of Potter. He would find a way to divest himself of these troublesome haunts without his help. And he certainly wasn’t going to apologize to two impudent little dunderheads to accomplish it!

The third head switched to a shrill falsetto. “Just a spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down….”

He gave both boys menacing stares and silently promised them untold agonies for this indignity. Although he’d made grown men cower with that look, neither of them so much as flinched. Instead, they both gave him sly little smiles and turned back to their father.

It was intolerable to be disrespected like this. Well, he couldn’t be bothered to waste time agonizing over the feelings of little children. He had business to discuss with their father.

“I’ve decided that the basement is adequate for my needs, Potter. However, there are certain tools, equipment and supplies that I require. Here is a list.” He shoved a piece of paper at Potter. “You will go to Diagon Alley and have these delivered to the house.”

Potter didn’t take the paper. “I’m not your errand boy, Snape.”

“Do you propose that I go, instead? I’ve done my level best to keep the Wizarding world from learning of my continued existence. Hard to remain anonymous and dead to my enemies if I show my face in public, now isn’t it?” Also, there was no way Severus Snape would be caught dead with pink hair in public.

The brat’s jaw twitched. Clearly, he didn’t care to be sent on tasks for his new husband. But he snatched the paper and scanned the items. “Fine. I’ll go this afternoon.”

“What’s wrong with right now?” Severus asked with a nasty smile.
“In case you haven’t noticed, it’s morning. I’d like to have breakfast with my children if that’s all right with you,” Potter snapped back.

“Do you seriously expect me to believe Molly Weasley let all of you go without a hearty meal?” He made tut tutting noises. “The woman is getting lax in her old age.”

“Whatever. I’m still getting breakfast for the boys just as soon as I put Lily to bed.” Potter turned away from Severus and marched up the stairs. The boys trailed behind him, shooting Severus sidelong glances. There were disturbing smiles on their faces and the chattering from the voices, momentarily thrust into the background by his conversation with his husband, reminded him that the little demons had performed a spell on him that he had yet to lift.

How had they managed such a spell anyway? They were underage and didn’t possess wands. He had scoured the Dark Arts books he’d brought from his home in Spinner’s End but hadn’t seen anything of this nature listed in their places.

He needed to access a larger library than what was available on hand. There was one at the Black manor; the Slytherins there had been devotees of the Dark Arts. But he couldn’t go to Grimmauld Place. He was fairly sure it was warded against him. Then again, now that he was Harry Potter’s husband, the magical wards might allow him entry.

Grinning to himself, he prepared for his trip. He didn’t bother to let his irksome bond mate know he was going.

TBC

This chapter was written by Queen Boadicea.

Special message from MistyMoonlight:

If anyone could help me and please tell me how to italicize a word or sentence. I try using the html code thing but then it italicizes the whole chapter on me. Does it go before, after or around each section to be italicized? Once I figure this out I will be editing the chapters. Thank you for your help. Misty (Ari)
Chapter 13: “Confrontation”

“Snape? Snape, we’re going out.” Harry didn’t hear a response from his new husband. Where was he? Maybe he was in the basement with some new concoction or other. If that was the case, he wouldn’t want to be disturbed.

Harry didn’t want to take the children shopping with him. Yet he was loathe to leave them behind at his bond mate’s mercy while Snape was still angry with them.
“Why can’t we go with you?” Al blubbered. “I don’t want to stay here with Count Dracula.”

“You have to stay home with Lily,” he explained. “I can’t leave her alone.”

“Can’t she come with us?” James protested.

Harry shook his head. “She just got home from the hospital yesterday, boys. I don’t want to keep moving her around. It could make her sick again. So she has to stay here.”

He really didn’t want to take the children with him. Even after all these years, the Boy Who Lived was still a celebrity and that meant he was always bothered with a certain amount of fawning and unwanted attention whenever he was in public. So far, he had kept his children out of the limelight and that’s the way he wanted matters to stay.

What was he going to do? Ron was busy with his job. Hermione was engaged in her own research, especially regarding the bond. He could ask Molly to come look after the children. She would be all too glad to do so; her love for her grandchildren was as great as her affections for her own children.

But, considering her current antagonism towards Severus, having her here would be a bad idea. If she and Severus met again without Arthur Weasley to come between them, there would be hell to pay.

He racked his brains. He couldn’t stay here and he couldn’t bring the children with him and leaving them alone, two naughty seven-year-old boys and one toddler, was out of the question.

Then he brightened. Of course! Why hadn’t he thought of it before? “Kreacher? Kreacher!”

The ancient house-elf popped into existence. Other than a new diaper (Harry had gotten tired of the ragged thing he used to wear) and the golden locket, he was largely naked. So used was Harry to his odd appearance, he was no longer uncomfortable having him around the children.

“Kreacher, I’m going out for a few hours. Please take care of the children while I’m gone.”

The elf bowed low and spoke in his gravelly voice. “I shall be happy to serve Harry Potter.” He smiled at James and Albus. “If it isn’t Master Harry’s little boys. Kreacher has not seen you in ages. How you have grown!”

“My little girl was recently ill. She’s to have no solid foods, just milk and mild broth. Understand?”

“Of course.” Kreacher looked around. “Am I to wait upon your bond mate as well, Master Harry?”

“You know about Snape?” Harry hadn’t told Kreacher the news. How had the house-elf learned about it?

“The Black family tapestry lists you as Black’s inheritor to the estate and the name of your bond mate appeared on the tapestry yesterday. You should have told me, Master Harry. I am servitor to the Black family and should be informed of any change in the status of its heirs,” the house-elf said reprovingly.

“Oh. Well, I don’t think Snape will need your help.” He probably wouldn’t want it, either, Harry thought. If there was anyone who would hate other parties going through his private quarters, it would be Snape.

“Very well.” Kreacher bowed again. “Shall I prepare breakfast for the children, Master Harry?”
“No, they’ve already eaten. Just keep them out of trouble.”

“Dad! We’re not babies!” James protested.

Harry gave him a knowing look. “I know. That’s what worries me. I’m not concerned about Lily getting into mischief.” He nodded at Kreacher. “I’ll be back soon.”

Kreacher bowed again and Harry left through the floo, certain that the children were in good hands.

As soon as he was gone, James turned to Kreacher. “Kreacher, we need you to do us a favor,” James started.

The house-elf bowed low, although it made his joints creak. “Kreacher is here to serve.”

James nodded grimly. “Good. First off, can you tell us what an Unbreakable Vow is?”

Kreacher tilted his head. “It is a bond of grave import in the Wizarding world. An Unbreakable Vow is one that yokes one wizard to another’s wishes. They are bound to silence, obedience and servitude, much like with house-elves. However, it is far more deadly in its effects. Should the bonded wizard or witch break his word, he or she will lose their magic and quite possibly their life.”

James and Al looked at each other in horror. “Oh no,” Al whimpered. “We’re stuck with him.”

The house-elf’s eyebrows drew together. “Stuck with who, young Potter?”

“Our new stepdad,” James said with clear dislike. “Daddy had to marry him and now he can’t leave—because of an Unbreakable Vow thing.”

“That is indeed unfortunate. I had no idea that this was so.” His forehead wrinkled in thought. “Have they consummated their bond?”

Al’s nose scrunched up while he tried to understand this new word. “What does ‘consullated’ mean?”

Kreacher had been with generations of Blacks, Slytherins all, and Slytherin children became acquainted early with all the dealings of the adult world. It didn’t occur to him that other children might be shielded from such knowledge. “Have they had sex with each other yet?”

“What’s sex?” James asked.

“The close intimate uniting between spouses and those in love or lust,” Kreacher responded dryly.

The boys looked at each other uncertainly. This was beyond their limited understanding but they felt it had vaguely something to do with all the kissing and hugging they’d caught between their Daddy and Mummy when she’d been alive and the giggling heard behind closed doors when they were at Uncle Ron and Aunt Hermione’s house.

“It sometimes produces a child,” the house-elf added helpfully when he saw their bafflement.

“Oh! Like with Lily.” This was something Al could understand. He still didn’t know what Kreacher was talking about, but Daddy’s belly wasn’t big like their mummy’s had been before she had Lily. So this “sex” couldn’t have happened.

“No, don’t think so,” James responded, answering Kreacher’s question.

“Then they are not truly spouses as understood by Wizarding law. That will keep Snape from having
access to Number 12 Grimmauld Place.”

“Good,” James said gleefully. He didn’t want the greasy git to have anything to do with his Daddy and that meant keeping him out of his father’s other home. “So, Kreacher, we need a favor.”

“I live to serve. What is your request, young James?”

“Can you get through wizard wards?”

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Snape glared at the imposing, dour looking manor. The wards had refused him entry and he had been left to fume and pace on the sidewalk.

What could be the problem? He was Harry’s bond mate. The magic at the Black household should have recognized that and admitted him.

He walked down the street, ignoring the curious gazes of Muggles who wondered at his strange attire and the hood pulled dramatically over his face and hair. He would find a secluded alley and Apparate back to the wretched cottage to figure this out.

At least he’d been spared the rattletrap babbling of those idiotic heads. They’d ceased the moment he left his new home and he hoped they were gone for good.

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Harry wandered through Slugs & Jiggers with his list. He recognized some of the items from his years fumbling through his Potions classes. The rest were a mystery. He only hoped Snape would be satisfied with the quality and wouldn’t demand he make a second trip.

The proprietor practically fell over himself when he realized he had the famous Harry Potter on the premises. Harry grimaced but allowed the man to expound on the qualities and properties of the items. Listening with half an ear, he suddenly remembered his last conversation with Hermione.

“Thank you, sir. These will all be fine.”

“Do you want these delivered?” Mr. Baldwin asked.

“No, I’ll just shrink them and take them with me.” Various people would have loved to know where Harry Potter lived. But so far Harry had managed to outfox any stranger who tried to worm that information out of him.

He paid for his purchases and left the store, walking briskly, his eye out for anyone who might be a reporter. Throughout the years, they had gotten cannier about following him. But he’d developed a sixth sense about supposedly innocent looking people lurking about, trailing after him or striking up what seemed like random conversations with him. He found a handy Apparition point and took off.

He didn’t notice the slight young man who ducked out of Slugs & Jiggers shortly after him and trotted to his own Apparition Point.

*************************************************************************

Harry was very reluctant to confide in Healer Carlson after the man had conspired with Severus Snape to hide the true state of his daughter’s health. But the man had confessed he hadn’t been aware of Harry’s antagonistic relationship with Snape when the Potions master had asked him to keep quiet
about his treatment of Lily.

Harry didn’t believe that Snape would have let Carlson or anyone outside of himself and his new family aware of the bonding. Perhaps that Ministry official who’d officiated at the ceremony might have been tempted to talk. But there had been no sign in the Daily Prophet about the news. He only hoped he could ensure both Carlson’s help and his discretion.

“Excuse me, do you have something that prevents pregnancy?” He lowered his voice on the last word.

The Healer didn’t bat an eyelash. “Absolutely, Mr. Potter. There are potions that can be taking just before or after intercourse. There are even some the young lady can ingest up to a week afterwards if the woman in question is determined not to be impregnated.”

“Oh. Well, that’s good.” Harry hesitated, knowing that the next question had to be asked and dreading the man’s likely interpretation of it. “Will these potions work on males? So they don’t get, um, you know.”

This time the man did blink. “Why, uh, yes. The birthrate in the Wizarding world is so low that male pregnancies are just as welcome as females. However, there are men who don’t want to get pregnant.” A speculative gleam entered his eye. “Would you be the one taking the potion?”

“Does that matter?” Harry asked stonily.

Carlson’s face smoothed into a show of sympathy. “Of course not. Either you or your new partner may utilize the potion.”

“Good. I think I’d prefer one I could take after intercourse. How should I keep it? What would be the shelf life? Can I take them with meals?”

Carlson struggled to keep up with Mr. Potter’s questions. “I can prescribe anti-contraceptive potions that can be taken with meals or without.”

“Do you have any that will last for weeks, especially if I keep them in a dark place?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Excellent. I’ll take as many as possible.” Harry thought for a moment. “May I trust you to keep this information confidential?”

“Yes, Mr. Potter. I’m well aware…”

“No, I mean it.” Harry said harshly. “You let Snape keep you from telling me that he’d healed my daughter, even though she is my child and I was frantic to know about her welfare. I want you to swear that you’ll let no one else know about our agreement.” He pulled out his wand. “Swear that you’ll tell no one about what went on here today, not this conversation, not what I asked you for… nothing.”

Healer Carlson looked at the young man’s pale, rigid face. Something strange was going on here. He knew as little as anyone else about Harry Potter’s domestic life. He’d known of the man’s agonizing grief at the death of his wife. So who could be the significant other that necessitated the use of a contraceptive potion and why would Mr. Potter want his silence about it?

The green eyes hardened to jade and the Boy Who Lived repeated his request. Carlson could feel magic swirling in the air, harsh eddies of power and anger, and his mouth went dry. For the first time
in the Chosen One’s presence, he knew fear. Prodded by Mr. Potter, he pulled out his own wand and held it in a shaking grasp.

“I-I swear,” he whispered. A red flame shot out and curled around his wand and Mr. Potter smiled, a tense expression with no joy in it.

“Well, I think we’re done here. And, just to thank you for your help, I’ll be sure to make a generous donation to St. Mungo’s. All right?”

“T-thank you, Mr. Potter.”

With that, Mr. Potter left. Healer Carlson breathed a sigh of relief. He didn’t know what had angered the savior of the Wizarding World. He only hoped never to experience that level of power he’d just felt.

Severus Apparated back to the cottage and eased open the door cautiously. There was no glue on the floor and he breathed a sigh of relief. Realizing that he was nervous about what the twins may have been planning in his absence, his lips thinned and he strode into house with his usual hauteur. Just let those little—

“Well, look who’s back for more? Tall, Dark and Hideous!”

Severus swung around, his wand at the ready, though he knew it was useless. The heads, that had been silent and invisible, were back, hovering above his head.

“Damn, you simply don’t take a hint, do you, Snivellus?”

“Where the devil did you come from?” he snarled.

“Um, here, knucklebrain. What’s the matter? Your memory going on you, old man?” the first head snapped.

Blast. The heads apparently only appeared here in the cottage. His eyes narrowed at the realization.

Of course. It was a transparent attempt by Potter’s brats to drive him from the house. Well, they hadn’t counted on the tenacity of one Severus Snape.

“Ninety-nine bottles of beer on the wall, ninety-nine bottles of beer. Take one down, pass it around, ninety-nine bottles of beer on the wall.”

This time the other two heads joined with the third and the litany of this latest execrable tune rose in volume.

Severus shuddered. This was—horrible. There was no way he was going to stand for this. “POTTER!” he roared.

With a pop, a withered, aged house-elf appeared before him, giving him a scowl. “Master Potter is not here. Is there anything you require?”

“When will Mr. Potter return?”

“I don’t know,” the house-elf responded. “Would you care for some refreshment until he returns?”

“No, I would not,” Severus ground out. “Where are those hellacious brats of his?”
“If you refer to Master Potter’s lovely children, they are playing in their rooms. Do you wish to have them come down to see you?”

The last thing he wanted was to keep company with Potter’s misbegotten spawn. But he wanted this nonsense to stop. Without Potter to interfere, he might actually get those children to obey him. “No. That won’t be necessary.”

He silently crept to the upstairs corridor. A few strides brought him to the children’s rooms. He slunk towards the door with his usual soundless stride. Smirking in anticipation at terrifying the two, he pulled out his wand and waved it at the door. “Alohomora.”

There was no response. He tried a stronger Charm and then another when that didn’t work.

The wards surrounding the twins’s door refused to give and he recognized Potter’s handiwork in the magic vibrating through the wards. Evidently, he had shored up these spells far more than he had on his own room and Snape wondered why. Perhaps he felt his children’s lives were far more precious than his own.

After failing to get through, he settled for the simple expedient of yelling. “Open this door, you little brats! I know you’re in there. That decrepit house-elf of yours told me so. So open up!”

There was a frantic scrambling behind the door and a couple of suspicious thumps. “What? Who’s there?”

“I see you’ve inherited your father’s stupidity,” he sneered. “Have you forgotten who is sharing your living quarters?”

The door flew open, as he’d known it would. Albus stood within the door, struggling against his older brother’s grip. “Our dad’s not stupid!” Al yelled hotly.

Snape grinned and shoved his way through the door. Any wards automatically fell once the door was opened. The silly little buggers either didn’t know or hadn’t heeded their father’s warning to keep him out.

“Oi!” James yelled. “You’re not supposed to be in here! This is our room!”

He slammed the door behind him. “Your father isn’t here to protect your scruffy hides so listen to me very carefully. I won’t put up with any more of these shenanigans.” He pointed his hand at the warbling trio. “Remove these.”

Al was about to talk but James spoke up first. “Remove what?”

“Don’t play games with me, little boy.” Severus let his voice drop down low, giving it the menacing timbre that had terrified generations of Hogwarts students. “Remove. Them. NOW.”

He was met with mutinous silence. The boys stared at him, defiant but refusing to budge. Another time, he would have admired their courage. Now he was in no mood.

“So be it.” He whipped out his wand, pointed it at James and rapped out, “Legilimens.”

Images spooled through his mind. Before he could fasten on the relevant one, a spasm seized him and Severus crumpled to the floor.

He curled up, gasping, realizing too late what had happened. He had once again forgotten to take his anti-seizure potions and analgesics. The pain arched through him, causing his back to bow; his teeth
clenched as he fought to keep from screaming.

James and Al stared at the man twitching on the floor. “Geez, James, what did you do to him?” Al whispered.

“Don’t be stupid. I didn’t do anything to him. He’s sick or something.” Thoughts of vengeance vanished from James’s mind as his new stepfather trembled in obvious pain.

“What do we do?” Al asked, running his hands through his hair, terrified of this new development. What if their Daddy blamed them for this?

“We’ll call Kreacher. Kreacher! Help! Something’s wrong with Sniv—I mean, Snape!”

Kreacher appeared at once and blinked at the sight of Snape writhing on the floor. “What do you wish, young Potters?”

“Snape’s in trouble. I think he needs help.”

“Don’t bother yourselves.” The harsh voice made the boys start. Their dark-eyed tormentor was slowly dragging himself to his feet. He stood up finally and made an effort to remain upright. This close, however, there was no hiding the ghastly whiteness of his skin or the sweat streaking his face.

“What’s wrong with you?” Al asked timidly.

The man glared at them, although the expression looked less scary than what they’d seen before. “Perhaps those things you plagued me with are making me sick. You two obviously don’t know anything of magic so I suggest you dispense with them at once.”

James wasn’t so easily fooled. “I don’t believe you. This is something else. What’s really wrong with you? Are you sick?”

“Are you calling me a liar, boy?” Severus let the menace drip into his voice.

James lifted his chin. “Maybe.”

That thin hand clenched on the wand and James flinched a little. He wasn’t afraid of this man. That’s what he kept telling himself, anyway. He knew his father would punish Severus if the man tried to hurt them.

Where was his father anyway? James was worried that he hadn’t come back yet. He didn’t want to spend the night with this berk if his father wasn’t home.

“I’m not discussing this with you any longer.” The black eyes had turned to empty pools and James found himself shifting closer to his younger brother. “I demand you remove these constructs immediately.”

“We can’t,” Albus blurted.

“You cast this spell. You can remove it.”

“Actually, we didn’t,” James mumbled. “We can’t perform magic. We don’t have wands.”

Albus scowled. “Yeah. It’s not fair.”

“Life isn’t fair. When you get older, you’ll realize that. Who cast this spell?” Severus ground out, his eyes never leaving James.
“Uncle George.”

A dark eyebrow lifted. “George Weasley was responsible for this? Another of his jokes, I suppose.”

“Not really. He got it from Uncle Percy.” James figured there was no harm in letting him know the truth. Uncle George had told them no one could harm Percy since he was in an important job like Granddad Arthur.

“Percy Weasley is in on this?” Severus hadn’t had much contact with that Gryffindor once he was out of school. But he had found Percy to be stuffy but hard working and ambitious—nothing like the rest of his grinning clan. Why would he be involved in such a foolish jape?

At least now he knew where to turn to get this problem fixed. He had no wish to get further involved in Potter’s extended family. But it looked like he had no choice.

Unwillingly, he recalled Harry’s words to him before they had bonded.

“I hope you know what you’re in for, Snape, because your life as you now know it is about to change forever. For better or worse, my family will become yours.”

It hadn’t sunk in on him until now. But he realized that the entire Weasley family was in league against him. He had made implacable enemies of the whole lot.

Well, he had faced worse—Fenrir Greyback for instance. He wasn’t about to be beaten by a bunch of poor, brainless redhead Gryffindors.

Without another word to the twins, Severus swept from the room. He had to take his potions now before his condition worsened.

He hadn’t managed to cow Harry’s hellions tonight but he’d gotten the information he needed. First thing, tomorrow, he was marching into the Ministry and demanding answers from the officious Percy.

The heads followed him, cackling like loons over his most recent agonizing spasm.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
**Ministry Visit**

Author's notes: A widowed Harry must bond with Snape in order to save his daughter's life. Harry’s young children scheme to bring their daddy and new father together, and form a new family, while changing the hearts of two scarred souls.

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Title: Scarred Souls

Author: Misty Moonlight/Co-author: QueenBoadicea

Beta: QueenBoadicea

Pairings: Severus/Harry

Published: 12/10/2008

Summary: A widowed Harry must bond with Snape in order to save his daughter’s life. Harry’s young children scheme to bring their daddy and new father together, and form a new family, while changing the hearts of two scarred souls.

Warnings: Romance, Drama, Angst, Alternate Reality/Universe, Sexual Situations, Hurt/Comfort, M/M, Slash, Anal, Language, Humor, possible MPreg, Bonding, Original Characters, Family, non-canon, OOC, WIP

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Chapter 14: “Ministry Visit”

“We’re not telling Dad about this,” James said with a glare to Albus.

“But he was so sick! What if he tells?”

“He won’t tell. Whatever’s off with him, he won’t want Dad to know.” James spoke with more confidence than he felt. “Please tell me you’re still with me, Al?” The big man really scared him. But they had to be a team or this wouldn’t work.

When Albus nodded reluctantly, James turned to Kreacher. “Don’t spill to Dad, okay, Kreacher? He’ll find out Snape was in our room and think we were up to something.”

Kreacher nodded slowly. “Very well, young Potters. However, you can’t get rid of Severus Snape. Like it or not, he is your father’s bond mate. If he dies by violence, your father will die as well.”
“Really?” Al squeaked.

“That’s fine. We don’t want to kill him. We just want him to disappear,” James shot back. “He was gone for all these years. Why show up again now?”

“A good question, James. Might I suggest you ask your father?” With that, Kreacher disappeared to resume whatever task they’d interrupted.

James looked thoughtfully at the spot where the house-elf had stood. They’d already questioned their dad about Snape and he didn’t believe the answers he’d got. He had heard what Snivellus had said when he’d shown up at the Burrow, just before he’d married their dad.

Al looked at his brother. “What is it, James?”

“You remember what Daddy said about this man being private and all?”

“Yeah?”

“I think it’s time someone else knew about him.”

Al grinned. His brother had the best ideas.

********************************************************************

It had been annoying for Harry to return to the cottage and not find Snape on the premises. He’d gone to all that trouble to get those supplies for the man and he wasn’t even home. It was unlikely the man would have gone so far as to thank him but a little show of appreciation wouldn’t have come amiss.

Left to himself, he shrank the contraceptive potions and hid them in a secret compartment in Lily’s crib. He hadn’t ever thought he’d need such a thing as a secret hiding place from his own spouse. But having Snape on the premises made it far too necessary. He was certain that, given his dislike of Harry’s children, Snape would never go near Lily or her crib if he could possibly help it.

More at ease, he’d questioned the twins about Snape’s whereabouts but all James and Al had to say was that they spent all their time in their room. Harry had seen to Lily and was happy to see that she was her usual cheerful self, smiling gleefully at him, eating her food and splashing water when he gave her a bath.

Of Snape there had been no further sign that evening and Harry had felt a decided relief at his absence. The mood over the dinner meal was so light-hearted; for awhile it felt as though everything had gone back to normal.

The next morning, there was still no sign of Snape and Harry felt perfectly at ease keeping Kreacher for another day. The house-elf could take care of the household chores while he relaxed. The children were still upset over having Snape around and it made him feel guilty. Perhaps time spent with them would correct that.

He would call in to work telling them not to expect them. They gave him an enormous amount of leeway; being the Boy Who Lived (even if he wasn’t a boy any longer) came with a lot of perks. They knew of Lily’s recent illness and didn’t think his request strange.

They didn’t mention Snape and neither did he. The longer this new arrangement was kept out of the papers, the better.
He would spend as much time as possible with the boys, hoping to reconcile them to Snape’s new place in their lives.

Severus roused himself early, fairly well rested after having experienced no nightmares. He had retreated to his home in Spinner’s End—just for one night. He wouldn’t allow himself to be driven from his new home permanently. He just wanted to spend one night without those aggravating voices yammering at him.

Severus Snape strode into the Ministry, his hood pulled down firmly over his pink hair. He’d considered sneaking in and rifling through the man’s files and see if he could find the damned spell on his own. However, he decided in the end simply asking to see Percy Weasley. After all, he was a member of the family now. There was no reason for the man to refuse to see him.

An idea of going to St. Mungo’s and claiming he needed help for Spell Damage had been considered briefly and discarded. The heads couldn’t be seen or heard outside of Harry’s home and he might be perceived as being completely barmy if he rattled on about voices and heads only he could hear and see.

He was reluctant to bring any outsider to Harry’s cottage as well. It was his domicile now as well and he didn’t want his enemies to find out where he was living. His caution had served him well in the past and he wasn’t about to relinquish his privacy now.

He noticed other members of the Ministry doing double takes when they saw him. There were sour looks on many faces and muttering behind his back but not a single person tried to hex him. Evidently Harry had managed to convince the majority of the Wizarding world of his innocence in the war against Voldemort. It didn’t excuse the brat not giving him the recognition he deserved.

Being led into Percy Weasley’s office required a previous appointment—at least that’s what the harried receptionist told him. “He’s frightfully busy, you know. He just got a promotion last month and he’s up to his ears in paperwork—”

“This won’t take long and I’m sure Percy can spare the time.” He had decided on a modicum of charm to win his way rather than his usual glowering menace. He lowered his voice and leaned close to the woman, a pointy-chinned creature with large grey eyes and a mousy blonde upswept do. He let one finger trail over her bare knuckles and whispered, “I’m certain a competent woman such as yourself can find a way to…squeeze me in.”

The double entendre was unsubtle but effective. The woman blushed to the roots of her hair and smiled fatuously at him. “Oh, of course, Mr. Snape.”

“Severus.”

“Um, Severus.” She smiled again and tapped a small device on her desk with a wand. “Mr. Weasley? There’s a Severus Snape here to see you.”

There was a brief silence. Then the device squeaked, “Snape? He’s here?”

“Just so, Mr. Weasley. May I have a moment of your time?”

“Now’s not really—”

“I’ll keep it short.” Ignoring Percy’s spluttered protests, Severus nodded to the enraptured blonde and swept past her into Percy’s office.
The woman’s assessment of the Weasley’s busyness seemed confirmed on first appearance. The man’s desk was covered in paperwork that he scrambled to put into some form of working order. In Severus’s estimation, it was usually the lowliest of employees who were saddled with files and forms to fill. Perhaps this promotion of Percy’s wasn’t so important, after all.

He said nothing of this, only waited until the man had cleared his desk and then sat down to face him. Without being bidden, Severus took a seat in front of the desk. It was made of hard wood, uncomfortable and unyielding. The one Percy was in didn’t look much better. Yes, definitely not as important as he thought he was.

“What do you want, Snape? As you can see, I’m a busy man,” Percy said impatiently.

Severus raised an eyebrow. “Too busy to see a member of your family?”

The man grimaced. “That wasn’t my idea and if I’d been consulted I would have advised Harry against making you part of the Weasleys, even if it’s only by marriage.”

“Oh, really? Well, you weren’t consulted and it wasn’t your decision to make,” Severus said with a smirk. Another Weasley who didn’t approve of him. Potter’s family was disgustingly loyal to that mop-headed brat.

“As a member of the family, I would have told them not to associate with you. Our family has things bad enough without admitting a former Death Eater into the ranks.” Percy gave an exaggerated shudder and edged back in his chair with a moue of distaste. “What could Harry have been thinking?”

Severus pondered that question for a moment. Percy made it sound as if Harry had married Severus freely instead of being tricked into giving his hand and making an Unbreakable Vow. If he was so misinformed, then perhaps he wasn’t as close to his family as the other Weasley children.

Percy’s criticism of Harry’s decision put him at odds with the rest of the Weasleys. That was something Severus could use to his advantage.

“I am a respected Potions master and did significant work for the Order of the Phoenix during my tenure in Hogwarts. However, I was not appreciated for my efforts.” He pretended to frown. “Your brothers were especially trying to me while I was fulfilling my duties.”

Percy sat up slightly. “You mean Fred and George, don’t you? They weren’t so bad. They just weren’t as hard-working as some of us.”

“Yes, I always admired your tenacity and dedication to your studies, Mr. Weasley. You had high marks in many of your subjects and graduated at the top of your class. Those twin brothers of yours had to drop out before they could graduate, I believe.”

The older Weasley sat up even straighter, visibly preening at Severus’s praise. “That’s right. Fred and George barely got three OWLs together. I did much better than either of them.”

“And was suitably rewarded,” Severus said, waving his hand expansively at their surroundings.

The man sagged a little and grimaced at the paperwork. “Yes. I suppose I was.”

Hmm, it appeared Percy Weasley was aware of his position on the low rung of the Ministry ladder. Perhaps more flattery was in order.

“Whatever you do, I’m sure it’s vastly more important than running a joke shop. Honestly, what kind
of profession is that for a grown man?” he scoffed.

“You’re absolutely right,” Percy said, nodding. “It’s ridiculous! They were running that shop when others were joining the fight against You-Know-Who and the family talks about them like they’re great heroes.” He stopped suddenly and a stricken look appeared in his eyes.

Ah, he was doubtless recalling his dead brother. Severus shifted his ground slightly.

“Your brother’s demise was unfortunate. I know he perished fighting against Voldemort’s forces.”

Percy flinched at the name. “Y-yes, he did. I was there.”

“I always thought George and Fred would be much less trouble if they were separated from each other. I didn’t imagine such a separation as this. You have my condolences.”

This time the man didn’t respond. He looked down to his desk and shuffled some papers as if he found their content suddenly very fascinating.

“It pains me to say this. But brother George is hardly doing credit to his brother’s memory.”

Percy’s head came up sharply. “What do you mean?”

“George has engaged in a petty campaign against a patient of mine. It’s more a nuisance than anything else, typical of his usual schoolboy pranks. Imagine my surprise when I learn that he enlisted your help in perpetrating this farce.” Percy didn’t need to know that Severus was the one afflicted.

“I never!”

“No? I have it on good authority that he learned this latest prank from you.”

“He couldn’t have. George and I really don’t talk all that much.” Percy frowned, his mind visibly working to fathom what Severus was saying. “What do you mean by ‘patient of yours’? Are you involved in medicine?”

Severus bowed his head graciously. “My potions skills remain invaluable to certain interested parties. I am occasionally called in to assist with difficult medical cases. I’m currently working on a cure for baldness among male wizards.”

This was another lie but it could become truth once he returned to his lab. Severus had noticed Arthur Weasley’s thinning hair and knew that baldness was hereditary among males.

Sure enough, Percy gazed at him with decided eagerness. “That’s wonderful, Snape!” Then he frowned. “But what does George have to do with this?”

“A man in St. Mungo’s has been recently afflicted with delusions. He claims to be followed by a talking head that jabbers to him incessantly about his appearance, clothing, eating habits, what have you. It also breaks out in annoying tunes. No one at St. Mungo’s is able to see or hear these apparitions. He was referred to me. But I was equally unable to detect the phantasms of which he speaks. By persistent questioning, I learned that your brother was the likely culprit responsible for his affliction and that he came across this particular hex from you.”

“I know what you’re talking about. But I didn’t tell George…oh.” Percy’s face went flat with dislike.

“Yes?”
“My father might have heard about it. I wouldn’t be surprised if he told George about this. He was always too indulgent of Fred and George’s idiotic jokes. He would have thought this a right laugh.”

Indeed. Severus kept his face from betraying his fury, both at this officious moron for his gabbling tongue and Arthur Weasley for passing on government information to George. So this really was a Weasley collaborative effort. Now that that had been settled, he needed to know how to fix this.

“So this is something you know?”

Percy nodded. “Yes. It’s called Regalous Fefandur’s Flying Head of Mild Chastisement. The head basically reaches into the mind of its victim and starts criticizing them. Stupid thing, really.”

“I don’t recall this Regalous Fefandur.”

“Regalous was a middling wizard from a century back and created this curse to annoy some kids who were pestering him. Just the sort of thing Fred and George would have found hilarious,” he added with a sniff.

“What was the matter? He couldn’t manage boils and blinding torment?”

Percy didn’t so much as smile. The man really was a humorless dolt. No wonder he didn’t get on with the rest of his family.

“Like I said, middling wizard. I stumbled across it because someone was using it to torment Muggles. The poor people thought they were going out of their minds. It really caused a problem.”

“So how did you solve it?”

Now the Weasley looked uncomfortable. “We couldn’t solve it, exactly.”

Severus clenched his fists in his lap but kept his expression bland. He was getting tired of dragging this story out of Percy and decided more gross flattery was in order. “If you were on the case, I don’t see how it couldn’t have been swiftly resolved.”

“Well, that was the problem. It was a curse and, like all curses, had a clause built into it. The heads only disappeared when the victim apologized to the one who had cursed him.”

Bile rose in his throat. That’s what he had to do? Apologize? To those nasty Potter brats? Never! Severus Snape apologized to no one, especially misbehaving children.

“You say the situation wasn’t solved?” he asked tightly.

“Once we knew the solution, a suggestion was planted in their heads that they had to apologize to everyone they’d wronged. It took a few weeks before they got around to the wizard who’d cursed them. Then they were Obliviated so they forgot all about the curse.”

“So it seems that the problem was solved. Wasn’t it?” he added when Percy looked uncomfortable.

“The trouble was, the curse is chronic in nature. Every time these people inadvertently insulted or harassed this same wizard, the heads popped up again. It’s a permanent problem. The only thing we could do is mark these Muggles and bar the offending wizard from the Muggle world, lest they accidentally restart the curse.”

“Then…there is no cure.”

Percy shook his head. “It’s not a disease or an illness. It was just a ridiculous prank that was popular
among Hogwarts students for a few months. The downside of it was that it made the witch or wizard who cast it a pariah while they were in school. Former victims didn’t want to associate with them and other children were warned of what they did and kept away from them. Because of that, the spell fell out of favor and into obscurity.”

“So did Regalious, I’ll bet,” Severus muttered.

“No doubt. This wizard said he’d been skimming through some old texts when he stumbled across the Flying Head curse. We didn’t find them when we ransacked his house. Pensieve memory retrieval showed him browsing in an old used-book store in Knockturn Alley. When we searched the place, we couldn’t find the book in question. They’d probably sold it or thrown it out.”

That was it. He was out of options. He could search the store himself but, until his hair regained its normal color and he could cast glamours on himself, he didn’t dare show in public.

“Thank you, Mr. Weasley. You’ve been most helpful. I’ll tell my client this. Hopefully, your solution will prove of use to him.” Before Percy could move, Severus whipped out his wand. “Obliviate.”

He left the office, after planting a few false memories of discussing a cure for baldness—not hard, since he had mentioned the subject as an inducement to conversation.

Severus swept out and was met by another fawning smile from the woman at the desk. “Did your meeting with Mr. Weasley go well, Severus?”

“Very well. Thank you most kindly for all your help.”

He left, ignoring her gushing reply. There was another matter he wanted to settle and it had to do with his non-entry at a certain manor on Grimmauld Place.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
Harry was flying at a cautious speed, just ten feet above the ground, James balanced on the broom right in front of him.

“James!” Al yelled from the ground. “Get off! It’s my turn now!”

“No, it’s not!” James yelled back. “I’ve got 15 minutes!”

“It’s been 15 minutes!”

“Stop it, you two,” Harry chided. “I know when it’s been 15 minutes and it hasn’t—”
“Potter, stop that ridiculous circus act and come down here at once.”

The cold voice came from the front door. Al started, ran away from the house and cowered near the gate. Harry scowled at Severus for frightening his child but came down. The moment his feet touched the ground, James jumped off as well and ran after his brother.

Harry sighed. In spite of their talk, the boys were still scared of Snape. He was afraid that situation wasn’t going to change anytime soon.

“Mr. Potter, I have a private matter with you we must discuss. Come inside.”

Harry paused. There was something about the way Snape was looking at him that he didn’t like.

“What is it?”

Snape looked around, his face suddenly bland. “I believe this is something we should discuss inside, Potter. I’ve no wish to draw the attention of the neighbors.”

Still the same paranoid git. Harry didn’t know what he was so worried about but decided to humor the man. Then again, maybe he was still ashamed of his hair.

Snape stepped aside with mocking courtesy. The children sidled in behind Harry, keeping him well between themselves and their new father. The moment they were indoors, Snape strode to living room. Harry noted that his hair was tightly covered by a sort of miniature hood. It hid his hair, all right, but had the misfortune of bringing his sharp-boned, big-nosed features into ugly prominence. Harry decided not to mention it.

Harry trotted after him. The boys scampered up the stairs without any prompting from him. That was good; whatever Snape had to say, it was probably best the boys didn’t hear it.

Inside the living room, he stopped dead. An elaborate tea service had been laid out. Biscuits, treacle tart and butterbeer were on one side of the table. Tea and a tray of sandwiches were on the other.

“What is all this?”

“Mr. Potter, I’d like to have a little talk with you…about our relationship.”

“We’ve had our talk about this relationship, remember, Snape? I hate you and the feeling is mutual.” Harry smirked at him. “Your words.”

Snape’s lips thinned though his face held the same blank expression. Harry was immediately on his guard. His new bond mate was up to something and something told him he wouldn’t like it.

“Please, Potter. Sit.” He waved him to the chair nearest the tarts and sat in the other one. He picked up a sandwich and nibbled at it delicately.

Harry remained standing. “Snape, what do you want? Unless you grew a new personality overnight, this is a trap of some kind. I’m not sitting and I’m not eating a bite without finding out what’s going on.”

Snape continued eating his sandwich with exaggerated care. “I merely wanted to say that I know this relationship isn’t all it could be. I’d like to start off on another foot, if I may. Please drink your tea.”

Harry glanced at the teapot. He noticed that Snape hadn’t drunk any of it and he wasn’t about to either. Snape clearly guessed at his thoughts.
“Potter, you imbecile, I’m not going to kill you. The bond binds us both. If either of us die by violent means, the other does as well.”

“I’m not worried about poisoning. You might try something else, though. You’re good at potions. How would I know what you’ve got up your sleeve?”

Snape’s nostrils flared slightly. “I am merely trying to have a civil conversation with you. Is that so much to ask? We are in this together, Potter, no matter the circumstances. I merely thought I’d try to make it more comfortable for both of us.”

“You’re a Slytherin, Snape. You don’t do anything simply to ‘get on’ with people. You made it perfectly clear that you hate me and want to make my life miserable. So what’s changed? You’ve got an ulterior motive and I want to know what it is.” Harry folded his arms. His wand was in his hand now and he was ready to use it if he needed to. He’d already come to wands with Snape and didn’t doubt he’d have to do so again.

If Snape noticed his defensive posture, he paid no attention to it. Instead he set down the sandwich and folded his hands. “I would like to consummate our bond.”

Whatever Harry had expected, it wasn’t that. His mouth went dry and a sick feeling welled up in his stomach. “I don’t.”

Snape nodded as if he’d expected Harry’s refusal. Then his eyes flicked in the air as if tracing a fly. Harry had seen him do that before. What in Hades was he looking at?

“I realize I may not be what you would want in a mate…”

“I wouldn’t wish you on an enemy, Snape, except Voldemort,” Harry said flatly.

“But the bond must be consummated,” Snape continued, clearing holding on to his temper. “Have you forgotten the terms of your Vow? You must unconditionally love and cherish any child we may have from this bond. That cannot be done unless we have children.”

“I remember what was said very well, Snape. The operative words here are ‘may have’. The Vow doesn’t state that we have to have children together.” Harry leaned towards him. “Besides, you hate children. You made that perfectly clear during our years together at Hogwarts and from the way you treat my children. Oh, wait, you call them hellions and other charming nicknames, don’t you?”

“I hate misbehaving brats, Potter, and the dunderheads I had to teach in a job for which I was ill suited. Many parents care for their offspring.”

“The way your dad cared about you?” Harry shot back.

Harry knew it was a mistake the moment he said it. Snape’s face went white and his wand was suddenly in his hand, pointed at Harry’s chest. Harry’s wand was out at almost the same time, having cast his strongest Shield Charm.

“Don’t presume that you know anything about my family just from a few brief memories you received when you foolishly thought I was dying,” Snape snarled.

“I know enough. Your dad hated the fact that your mother was a witch. Did she hide it from him, the way Tom Riddle’s mom hid her magic from her Muggle husband?”

The statement appeared to floor Snape. “What? Tom Riddle—the Dark Lord—had a Muggle father?” he whispered.
“Yeah, he did. Didn’t know that, did you, Snape? How does it feel to find out the crazed bastard you once pledged your life to was a fraud and a hypocrite?”

Shock and fury blazed out of those black eyes. Harry clutched his wand, prepared to defend himself, though he suspected this rage wasn’t directed at him.

Little by little the anger faded away although Harry didn’t relax. Snape seemed to recall his original purpose and tucked his wand back into his sleeve.

“While that is interesting intelligence, it doesn’t pertain to our conversation. I would still wish to have children, Potter…”

“I already have children, Snape, so that’s not a really big incentive for me. Besides, there’s the little problem of my preferring women, in case you haven’t noticed.” Harry waved his free hand towards the pictures of Ginny, who smiled sadly at him.

Snape smiled—or bared his teeth; hard to say which expression he intended. “That needn’t be a deterrent. There are powerful potions to ensure conception of a male wizard after only one—bout.”

“Would you let me be on top?” Harry shot back.

Snape didn’t so much as blink. “If you would prefer.”

Harry recoiled. His stomach clenched and he lost all appetite. “No thanks. Not even in the dark. It wouldn’t be like what I had with my wife.”

The man had the nerve to sneer. “Oh for pity’s sake. Grow up, Potter. This has nothing to do with love or affection. You don’t have to like someone to fuck them.”

The crude word took Harry aback but he didn’t let it shock him. “So that’s what you propose, Snape? You claim you’d care for your own children but you want to bring them into a hostile environment where their parents hate each other?”

Harry shook his head, suddenly sad and very weary. “I’d have thought you had enough of that.”

He turned around and walked away, not bothering to see if Snape would follow.

********************************************************************

The twins were avidly listening via their Extendable Ears. They didn’t trust Snivellus, even now that he was being nice to their dad.

“Consultate? Does he mean have sex?” Al whispered.

James nodded, his lips tight with anger. He still wasn’t sure what sex was but it didn’t sound like his father wanted anything to do with Snape.

“What’s ‘fuck’ and ‘con-concession’ mean, James?”

“I don’t know. Sounds nasty.”

Albus wrinkled up his nose. “He’s not doing that with our dad!” he hissed.

James grinned at him. “Then we go ahead with the plan, yeah?”

“You bet.”
Hearing their father’s footsteps drawing towards the stairs, both boys scrambled to their feet, pulling up the Extendables. They made it to their room and listened breathlessly at the door. They could hear their father come up the stairs and pause in front of their room.

They pulled out their kid’s books and pretended to read as their father opened the door. Harry smiled at the two of them but they could see that he didn’t mean it.

“Hello, boys. Sorry our ride got interrupted. Maybe we could fly again over the weekend.”

“Sure, Daddy. We don’t mind,” James said glancing at his brother.

“Easy for you to say. You got to ride today,” Al mumbled.

Their father hesitated, his eyes darting over the two of them. “James, Al, I just want you to know that you and your sister mean the world to me. That will never change, you know that?”

“Okay.” Why was their father saying this?

“Well. Wash your face and hands. We’re going to be eating dinner soon.” He shut the door quietly and left.

James heaved a sigh of relief. When Albus giggled, he stared at him. “What’s so funny?”

“You’ve got your book upside down, James.”

He stared down at the book in his hands. Al was right; it was upside down. Had his father noticed? He hoped not.

“Let’s just get ready for supper, Al.”

“Wonder what he eats?” his younger brother murmured. No need to ask who he was.

“Probably the blood of little children.”

“Ewww!”

Laughing at his brother, James raced with him towards the bathroom.

******************************************************************************

“Look who’s getting laid tonight. Not you!”

“When I dance they call me Macarena. And they boys they say que soy buena. They all want me. They can’t have me. So they come and dance beside me. Move with me, chat with me. And if I could, I’d take you home with me.”

The third head was warbling its latest ditty, an execrable song about a girl with questionable morals. When it switched to Spanish, it was equally maddening. Somehow a tune in a foreign language was just as annoying as in English.

“Snivellus, come on. Did you honestly think Harry would want you, the ugliest man on the planet? He’d have to be as insane as Voldemort even to consider it!” The second head had been keeping up a running commentary on how this whole project of his was doomed to failure. Severus had tried his level best not to listen

That hadn’t gone well at all. Potter had been disgusted at the very thought of having sex with him.
True, he couldn’t have expected the man to fall in to bed with him at the first offer. Perhaps he could threaten Potter in some way that would make him capitulate. After all, that’s how he’d gotten him to agree to the bond in the first place.

Still, threats weren’t likely to put Potter in the proper frame of mind. But what else could he do to persuade the Gryffindor pest? Severus needed to get into Grimmauld Place to access its Dark Arts library. To do that, he needed to become someone the manor wards recognized as having rightful claim.

He could create a potion that would spur compliance. It couldn’t be Amortentia. The smell of that potion was too distinctive. But he could cook up an elixir of some sort that would render Potter submissive and easily bent to his will. A little distraction and it would be easy to slip such a concoction into Harry’s food or drink. Getting the mop-headed Gryffindor to ingest it would be tricky but not impossible.

“My God, this is a new low, even for you, Snivellus. You’re going to dope Harry and then fuck him? I’m surprised you didn’t do this to Lily, you murderous piece of slime!”

Dammit, these things knew where to strike. It was indeed beneath contempt to play such a trick on anyone. But this needn’t be for procreation. He simply needed to get into Grimmauld Place. One fuck and entry would be his. He could even Obliviate Harry afterwards so the man wouldn’t know what happened.

For a true Slytherin, decency took a very distant second place to expediency. Shaking off his doubts, conscience and the chiding voices, he strode towards the basement.

TBC

A/N: The lyrics and music of "Macarena" belong to Los Del Rio.

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
Phase Two

Author's notes: A widowed Harry must bond with Snape in order to save his daughter’s life. Harry’s young children scheme to bring their daddy and new father together, and form a new family, while changing the hearts of two scarred souls.

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Title: Scarred Souls

Author: Misty Moonlight/Co-author: QueenBoadicea

Beta: QueenBoadicea

Pairings: Severus/Harry

Published: 12/10/2008

Summary: A widowed Harry must bond with Snape in order to save his daughter’s life. Harry’s young children scheme to bring their daddy and new father together, and form a new family, while changing the hearts of two scarred souls.

Warnings: Romance, Drama, Angst, Alternate Reality/Universe, Sexual Situations, Hurt/Comfort, M/M, Slash, Anal, Language, Humor, possible MPreg, Bonding, Original Characters, Family, non-canon, OOC, WIP

Chapter 16: Phase Two

The laboratory was everything he could have wished. The basement was large, although not unduly so. He had no less than three separate tables of marble, wood and bronze, a good variation for anything he might care to mix. Potter had even done a decent job in getting the ingredients and supplies Severus had ordered.

He didn’t bother telling Potter this, of course. The arrogant boy was just as conceited as his father. He got plenty of praise from the papers. He didn’t need any more puffery from his bond mate.

“Snivellus, Lily would hate you for this if she knew. Haven’t you done enough to him?”

It was pointless playing on his sympathy; Snape had none. Once he was well and truly involved with the beauty of brewing, even his pestiferous invisible companions would be pushed to the background. They could only hector, jeer and complain, after all. They could offer no true
impediment to his desires.

Severus waved his wand and the brass cauldron wafted through the air to land with a metallic thud, nearly on his toes. He frowned and stepped back. That shouldn’t have happened; his wandwork should have placed it neatly near the table so he could toss or sprinkle in the ingredients as needed. No matter. He prodded it again and, with a few more wand strokes, it wobbled to its proper place.

That was odd and he quickly checked his wards. They had not been tampered with and he was certain neither the inept Potter nor his helpless offspring could have breached them. Deciding he was just tired from the time spent popping here and there about town, not to mention the constant barrage from the twittering trio above his head, Severus proceeded with the potion.

He decided to make it a variant on Amortentia, only without the characteristic, telltale smell and opalescent sheen. He quickly reduced certain ingredients and began chopping.

He pointed at the base of the cauldron and muttered, “Incendio.”

A bluish flame flickered to life under the cauldron. A shrill voice, unlike any of the others that had plagued him of late, yelled, “Ouch! That’s hot!” and the cauldron bounced away from the flames.

Severus froze. That was definitely not normal. The cauldron fell to the floor with a tinny clang, rolled a few feet and then came to a halt. It didn’t move again.

The heads went absolutely silent. “Oi, what was all that then?” babbled the first head when it apparently regained its tongue.

“Don’t look at me. This your idea of a joke, Snivellus?”

Head number three only sniggered and giggled like a demented hyena.

Severus pointed his wand and the cauldron obediently rolled back into place—only to roll away again with a yelp as the fire was reset.

“Finite Incantatem!” he yelled.

The cauldron shuddered violently. Suddenly two human feet sprang from the bottom of it. It leapt to its feet, wobbled for balance and then began running around the dungeon.

Severus swore a blue streak before pointing his wand and trying one spell after another to stop the errant thing. It did no good; now that it was mobile, the cauldron neatly dodged his spells, yelling insults and shouting for help.

“Mudblood freak! You bastard! You sack of werewolf dung! You dirty louse! Stinking, big-nosed miserable excuse for a wizard! I’m not going on the fire again, you abusive sot! Help, help, I’m being repressed!!”

When it hopped onto the table and ran pell-mell through the herbs and plants that he had cut so painstakingly, Severus lost his patience completely. He lunged for the cauldron only to trip and fall as it jumped back to the floor, kicked him in the shins, and ran between his legs.

Severus gasped in pain as his knees collided with the hard stone of the basement floor. The heads cackled, the cauldron yelled bloody murder and his temper exploded.

“POTTER!”
“Come on, Lily. Take just a little bite for Dada. Here comes the broom zooming in for a landing.” Lily giggled and opened her mouth to take a taste of the strained peas. Like most toddlers, she didn’t care for the taste of the stuff but Harry could usually persuade her if he levitated the spoon and zipped it around her head.

Harry loved the coziness of the kitchen. It was small but serviceable and reminded him of the kitchen in the Burrow. When food was cooking, the space was filled with warmth and hominess. It was paradise to share meals here with his offspring.

That peace was shattered when he heard the unmistakable yelling coming from the basement.

“Daddy?” Al whispered.

“Go upstairs, boys. Take your little sister with you, James.” He gave the order quickly and leaped to his feet, wand in hand, just as Snape came charging up from the basement like an enraged hippogriff.

The Potions master burst into the room, black eyes wild, his face frozen in a rictus of fury. The pink hair was exposed again, jutting in wild tufts all over his head, but it didn’t diminish the terror of his look in the slightest. “Don’t you go anywhere, you vicious little heathens! I demand you rectify the shambles you’ve made of my laboratory at once!”

Harry gave a long-suffering sigh. It was just one thing after another with the Slytherin. “What is it now, Snape?”

“Your hellions have gone too far. They have violated the sanctum of my brewing room. They must be punished at once.”

Harry scowled. “Snape, I’ve told you before. You’re not going to bully my children. Just what is it they’re supposed to have done now?”

“They cast a spell of some sort on my cauldron.”

“Snape, they can’t cast spells, you know that. They’re not even seven years old!”

“Potter, I have a cauldron running around on two feet like a mad toddler and screaming that its rights have been abused! How do you care to explain it? Do you have your very own poltergeist like Peeves running amok in your home?” Snape retorted snidely. “Perhaps your furniture is infected with St. Vitus’ dance and has somehow transmitted it to my equipment!”

“What?” The image of a mad runaway cauldron popped into Harry’s mind and he shot a glance to the twins. The two had burst out into giggles at Snape’s description only to hide it behind their hands when they caught their father’s stare.

“You heard me, Potter. I certainly didn’t curse my own pottery with mobility so your brats had something to do with it!”

“James, Al, is this true?”

James shook his head a little too hard. “Dad, Al and me haven’t been in his rooms or anything. Right, Al?”

“Yeah! We didn’t do anything!” Al protested.
“They’re lying, Potter,” Snape hissed.

Angry warmth flooded Harry’s neck at the accusation. He reined in his temper with difficulty. If they were ever going to make a peaceable home together, he couldn’t fly into a rage every time Snape got out of line. “Do you know anything about how this happened to Snape?” he asked the twins, carefully rephrasing the question.

The pair huddled close together, Lily wriggling to get out of James’s grip and away from the scary man yelling at her Dada. She whimpered and began to cry.

“No, we don’t know anything about a cauldron, Daddy,” James stated, trying to get a better grip on his crying sister. It was the truth. When they’d summoned Kreacher, they had only asked him to “do something” to Snape’s private workroom. They hadn’t outlined what he should do in so many words. So the running cauldron was a complete surprise to them.

It sounded wicked, though.

“Potter, I’ve had enough. I warned you to discipline your unruly rabble and you didn’t. This is the result. They think they can run roughshod over me. Well, that stops right now.” Snape raised his wand, prepared to cast who knew what kind of spell.

“Snape, stop! Before you go condemning my kids, just ask them what they did. You could always tell when Hogwarts students were lying to you. Don’t tell me James and Albus have an advantage,” Harry taunted.

The black eyes narrowed. “Very well, Potter. But rest assured I will find out if they’re responsible and they will be punished, like it or not.” Harry nodded, reached down and lifted Lily from James’s arms.

“Were you two in my lab?”

“No,” James and Al whispered.

“Did you cast any spells in my lab?”

“No.” This time James was the only one to answer.

“Do you know who might have casts spells in my lab?”

This time the boys looked distinctly nervous and Harry’s heart sank. They were guilty of something and if he knew it then Snape did too.

The older man didn’t wait for an answer. “Who?”

“We didn’t see anybody in your lab, Drac—I mean, Snape,” Al fumbled when he caught his father’s look.

“We haven’t been anywhere near it. Daddy told us not to,” James added staunchly.

“You are not answering my question. If you two weren’t there, it was someone else.” He bent a gimlet stare on Harry. “Was it you, Potter? If there is a wizard strong enough to get through my wards, it would be you.”

“No, Snape, it wasn’t me,” Harry lashed out in irritation. “I’ve got no reason to mess around in your lab. I’ve always hated potions, thanks to you, so I’m not going to bother with it now.”
“Then your children are somehow responsible or know who is. They will tell me or I shall use Legilimency on them both,” Snape threatened.

Al’s nose crinkled. “What’s Legi-legi-what?”

“You’re not doing that to my kids,” Harry said, stepping in front of them. “I remember how much that hurt from fifth year. I’m not going to let you torture my children.”

“Legilimency needn’t hurt, Potter. It only did so because I was trying to inure you against the pain of the Dark Lord’s attacks. I promise I will be gentle with your tender-skinned, feeble brats. But I am going to learn the truth.”

Harry glanced uncertainly from him to the twins. They were mischievous and, goodness knows, they had no reason to be kind to Snape. But he didn’t think this was a good idea. “What will you do if you find out they’ve done something?”

The thin lips curled. “Not so convinced of their innocence now, are you, Potter? Don’t worry. Unlike their overindulgent father, I shall see that they get the punishment they deserve.”

“No. Before you try anything with my children, I want to know what you intend.”

“They can start by cleaning the mess in my lab.”

“Snape, how many times must I tell you? They’re only. Six. Years. Old. They can’t even clean the mess in their own room!”

“Then this will be an excellent way for them to learn cleanliness as well as discipline,” Snape shot back.

“Not if you want them to do a good job. Wait until they’re older,” Harry argued.

“Very well. If they are found guilty, they will go to bed without their dinners for a whole week.”

Harry could feel the blood draining out of his face. “No. No starving my children.”

“Don’t be melodramatic, Potter. Missing one meal a day never hurt anyone, not even spoiled, over-indulged mewling imps like yours.”

Harry’s grip tightened on Lily until she whimpered again. He forced himself to relax. “I mean it, Snape. None of my children are going hungry if I can help it. Starving someone for discipline isn’t something I’ll tolerate. Think of something else.”

Contempt twisted Snape’s face unpleasantly. But something in Harry’s expression must have convinced him the Gryffindor wasn’t going to budge. “Very well. I shall remove all of their toys.”

“No!” squealed Albus.

“It’s only fair. You ruined my possessions; I get to confiscate yours,” Snape said with a nasty smile.

“Is this because you didn’t get to consultate my Dad?” James cried out, desperate to think of something to stop Snape.


“I presume he means ‘consummate’, Potter. My, my, I can’t believe you would discuss such a sensitive subject with your offspring,” Snape drawled.
Harry glared at him. “I didn’t discuss this with them, Snape. The whole conversation was too disgusting. You actually think I’d go over that with my children?”

“Then the little snoops must have been eavesdropping.”

The twins exchanged guilty looks. “Boys, how many times have I told you not to spy on the grownups?” Harry sighed.

“But we were afraid, Daddy! We thought he was going to hurt you with sex!” Al protested.

“Yeah, he probably only wants to ‘cause he wants to get into Grimmauld Place,” James added.

Snape’s expression didn’t change. But Harry thought he saw something in the shadowed gaze. “What do you mean, James?” Harry asked, not taking his eyes off his bond mate.

“Kreacher said the wards won’t let him into Grimmauld Place until he con-consultates you with sex,” the older boy explained, stumbling over the strange word.

Snape’s face had assumed the blankness of an impenetrable shield. He gave away nothing but Harry felt something leaden drop into his stomach. “So that’s it. You weren’t interested in starting a new family. You just wanted to get into Sirius’s old place.”

Snape shrugged elegantly. “What other reason?”

“All that nonsense with the tea things and pretending to be civil—what was that? Your pathetic attempt to trick me into sleeping with you?” he snapped.

“I’m a Slytherin, Potter. What do you expect?”

Harry couldn’t speak. He was caught between disgust and despair. While he hadn’t seriously entertained the notion of sleeping with Snape, he had hoped the man was softening towards him, towards his family, towards the idea of co-habitation.

It was no use. Snape was determined to be a cruel and manipulative bastard. Harry would have screamed at him but he was all too aware of his twins anxiously standing behind him, the weight of his convalescing daughter in his arms.

“Drop dead, Snape,” he said quietly as he led his children from the dinner table.

Severus glared as they departed. Somehow he’d lost this round to Potter—again. With sudden annoyance, he realized the twins had once more gotten away with their latest prank.

Well, this would be for the last time. When they got out of line again, punishment would be swift and severe.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
Chapter 17: Fame or Infamy?

The next few days were hell. The obscene color of his hair was fading only gradually to its normal color, leaving his hair black with uneven streaks of pink, much to Severus’s annoyance. The glue had washed out completely but left his palms and his scalp itchy and dry. A cream of his own creation had remedied that problem. He dared not try anything on his hair lest it make the dye somehow worse.

The pranks continued unabated. His favorite ladle turned into a snake and tried to bite him. The herbs, plants and various potions ingredients he had gathered for his lab rotted, spoiled or vanished inexplicably. The feet on the cauldron disappeared but if he tried to brew any potions in it, they tended to react in unexpected ways. They curdled, turned unsightly colors and, in one instant, blew up, splattering a noxious smelling paste over half the room. Even with his wand, it had taken ages for the magic to dispel the rotten substance.
Even his private quarters weren’t safe. He’d gone to sleep and woken up covered in a horrid rash that left him itching savagely. He pulled his shirts from the drawers only to find that they’d been mysteriously dyed purple. His robe shrank every night so that he had to re-size it in the morning.

He made good on his threat and took away the toys from the twins. The odious brats had run screaming to their father. He and Potter had had a furious argument that had degenerated into insults and yelling, causing the urchins to start crying even louder. Fed up, his bond mate had taken his whole stinking brood back to the Burrow. Severus had bidden them all good riddance.

So now it was just he taking up residence in the cottage…and the unholy trinity. While he would never admit it, Severus found he actually missed Potter. When he was engaged in what passed for conversation with that brain-challenged Gryffindor, the noise from the heads could be tuned out somewhat.

There was no such respite now. If he remained anywhere in the house, they berated him unceasingly. The third head’s musical material never ran out. Severus wondered where the songs originated. Merlin knew he didn’t recognize any of them.

Another blow came a few days later in the *Daily Prophet*.

**BOY WHO LIVED MARRIED IN SHOCKING SECRET CEREMONY TO DEATH EATER!**

Stunned by the lurid headline, Severus found himself filled with fury as he kept reading.

*One of our reporters, a Mr. Clay Webster, was in Slugs & Jiggers when he heard Harry Potter come in to buy potions ingredients. The list was long and rather unusual, all the more so since the famous Boy Who Lived was never brilliant at Potions. Many former students at Hogwarts attested to Harry’s lamentable performance in this class, including Slytherins such as Blaise Zabini.*

“Yes, Potter was absolutely pants at Potions. It didn’t help that Professor Snape picked on him all the time in class. Potter couldn’t do anything right in his eyes.”

*So why was Harry in Slugs & Jiggers, buying potions ingredients? Could it have to do with the fact that his new bond mate ordered him to purchase them, at Harry’s expense? An anonymous tip has revealed all!*

*It seems that Severus Snape, presumed dead these many years, has been secretly alive all this while, sheltered by people in the Ministry. If Severus Snape had been exonerated in the murder of Albus Dumbledore and vindicated for his role against Voldemort during the Second War, why was he kept hidden? If he truly was a traitor and foul murderer, why was he sheltered and protected from discovery by a government sworn to protect the public?*

*Ministry officials have made no comment about this matter. This reticence is inexplicable. The war has been over for years. Why not speak out?*

*Additionally, in a heinous act of subterfuge and guile, Snape held the life of Harry’s little daughter in his hands and threatened to let her die if Harry didn’t become bonded to him. Afraid of losing his little girl, the last child of his dearly departed wife Ginevra Weasley, Harry reluctantly agreed to this Faustian bargain.*

*This was a truly despicable act to perform, especially in the light of Harry’s many attempts to exonerate the former Death Eater. Perhaps this is merely another case of a Slytherin making an unwarranted attack on a Gryffindor. Perhaps there is something deeper and more personal than old*
house rivalries.

Whatever the answer might be, it’s clear that Harry Potter, with his love for women, did not bond with Severus Snape out of love but expediency. Why did Severus Snape hate Harry so in school? And why is he so willing to perpetrate that hatred on the Wizarding World’s savior after all these years?

These reporters will be keeping a very close eye on these two. Hopefully, Harry Potter won’t suffer too much at Severus Snape’s hands.

His fingers tightened on the paper as he read the article again. Accompanying it was a blurry photo of a saturnine frowning man dressed in black, obviously meant to be of himself. He squinted as he tried to think when and where this photo might have been taken.

By the highly placed windows, this would seem to have been taken in Hogwarts. When—ah, it must have been during that wretched Tri-Wizard Tournament. He could make out Dumbledore twinkling in his usual manner and the bulging eye and leg of Alastor Moody, that is, the fake Moody, just at the edge of the picture. Harry Potter was at the center, of course, his face twisted in an unhappy frown.

He had thought Potter to be puffed up and conceited by the unwarranted attention. He shouldn’t have been in that tournament. The proper champions had been picked already by that cup and Potter had been too young. He had said so himself, vociferously, to anyone in charge who would listen. He’d been ignored and Potter had foolishly risked his life, just as the silly brat had been doing since his first day at school.

“Merlin, that’s a nasty picture of you.” He gritted his teeth as head number one commented on the old picture.

“Well, at least they got your good side, Snivellus. What am I saying? You don’t have a good side!” guffawed head number two.

“Meeskite, meeskite. Once upon a time there was a meeskite, meeskite, looking in the mirror and he said, ‘What an awful shock. I got a face that could stop a clock.’ ”

More of that insane laughter and he threw the paper down on the table in disgust.

Who could have told about his marriage to Potter? Given his position in the Ministry, Arthur Weasley would have stressed the need for secrecy to his family. Molly Weasley was angry enough to unleash the Killing Curse. But Severus had made it plain that any attempt on his life would pose a fatal danger to their precious Harry. Exposing the fact that Severus was alive would make him a target for his enemies and that would prove deadly to Potter’s life.

Percy Weasley wasn’t on good terms with his kin but he had been clear in indicating his distaste of Severus’s new association with his family. Would that spur him to speak out against Severus or keep his silence? Severus was fairly certain it would be the latter but he couldn’t be one hundred percent certain.

Potter was the likely suspect. He was angry about being bonded to Severus. But would his rage be enough to cause him to wag his tongue to inquisitive reporters?

His lips thinned. Of course he would. Potter always was a preening attention seeker. Moaning like this about his awful fate in being tied to the ugly, old, greasy Potions master would be just the sort of thing he would do.
Striding to the living room, he grabbed a handful of floo powder and threw it into the fireplace. “The Burrow!” he called and thrust his head into the flames. “Mrs. Weasley! Mrs. Weasley! Come to the floo at once!”

There was no immediate answer and he braced himself. There was nothing for it. He would have to beard the lioness in her den. He advanced into the floo and stepped into the space.

He glanced around narrowly, half expecting Potter or one of his brats to come running into the room. They did not. But the next moment, Molly Weasley entered, wiping her hands on her apron. She halted and a furious expression crossed her face. However, she spoke to him with cold civility.

“Well, Severus. This is unexpected. What did you want?”

“I’m seeking my errant bond mate. I understand that he ran to your comforting arms a few days ago.”

“He’s not here.”

He raised his eyebrows. “Indeed? Did he lie to me then? I always know he was a deceitful little sneak.”

The woman’s face reddened and her tone lost some of its politeness as the chill increased.

“He and the children left to go to Grimmauld Place. Harry will always be welcome here but he didn’t want to impose on me any more than he had to. If you like, I can send on a message by owl that you want to see him.”

“That’s not necessary. I can pen a note if you’ll be so kind as to fetch writing tools.” He waited while she fetched quill and parchment. The owl itself, a grey somnolent creature, sat almost unmoving on the table. The thing looked like it was going to sleep and he poked it sharply with the quill until it roused itself with a shake and an unoffended hoot.

He scrawled his message on the parchment, wrapped up the offending article in it, and fastened it to the bird’s leg. Severus watched the bird flap its way heavily through the window. Afterwards, he stood and stepped to the fireplace again.

“You’re quite welcome, Severus. We so enjoy these little visits of yours…like an attack of spattergroit,” Molly snapped acridly at his back.

He didn’t bother to reply only grabbed the powder and stepped back into his new home.

Grimmauld Place was not an ideal home to Harry’s mind. Kreacher worked hard to keep the place clean and tidy. But somehow shadows abounded in the place and brought an aura of gloomy depression. Molly had advised curtains in bright colors, new furnishings and an abundance of flowers. She’d recommended knickknacks too, although Harry couldn’t think of any that would fit the stark grandeur of the place.

The library, filled with Dark Arts tomes, made him distinctly nervous. He could lock the door but sooner or later the twins would find their way into it and then there’d be hell to pay. For the moment, they were too young to read anything too complicated and for that he could only count his blessings—and keep the door firmly locked and warded.
The children’s rooms and his were the only ones with any true hominess in them. Colorful hangings graced the walls and a Snitch, a leftover from Harry’s youth, darted around the twins’s room. When they had Lily with them, she would laugh and crawl around the room, trying to catch the golden flying ball.

Harry couldn’t help but feel this was an unworkable situation. Running from Snape every time they had a disagreement wasn’t an option. Yet he couldn’t push himself on the hospitality of the Weasleys forever, no matter how much they’d welcome him.

They had to reach some kind of compromise. He was unwilling to stay separated from his children just because he had Snape around but they couldn’t be in Snape’s presence without yelling at him or struggling not to cry.

There was also his job to consider. After defeating Voldemort, he had agonized about what he should do with the rest of his life. He was so rich he could spend the rest of life in idle luxury if he chose. But the job offers had come pouring in for him, the Boy Who Lived. The impression was that he could be absolutely lousy at his work and no one would care.

Harry hadn’t wanted that. When he thought hard about what he wanted in life, the idea came to him in a flash. Dumbledore had tried, in his way, to show fairness towards the downtrodden in the Wizarding world. He had extended the hand of benefactor to the half-giant Hagrid, Squibs like Arabella Figg and Argus Filch, outcasts like Firenze, Dobby and Winky and even the nearly useless like Sybill Trelawney. Could Harry do any less?

When he looked at his children, born of a poor pureblood witch and a mixed-blood wizard, the choice was easy.

Just as he’d striven to exonerate Snape after the man’s supposed death, so Harry had worked to help children born of less exalted parentage. With his father’s money, Harry had funded an orphanage for children who’d been orphaned by the war and couldn’t find anyone to take them in.

But he knew more than money was needed and so spoke out tirelessly about the plight of halfbloods and squibs. He remembered with a shudder how Neville had casually spoken about being dropped through a window by a careless uncle. How many other children of Wizarding families were subjected to the same test of their magic? And how many unfortunate Squib children had been quietly buried when the experiment failed?

Every person was valuable. No one should be thrown away just because they couldn’t perform magic or came from less than noble parentage.

Ginny had approved and kissed him soundly when he’d told her his plan. He’d thrown himself into it, glowing in the knowledge that his entire family had backed him in his plan.

Harry smiled as he jiggled Lily on his lap. She was so beautiful and her dark auburn hair reminded him so much of her mother. He wanted her to be happy, to grow up in a loving home. A happy childhood was what all his children deserved. Goodness knows he’d never had that. Why couldn’t he get Snape to realize that rearing children meant more than punishments and rigid discipline?

There was a rap at the window and he lost his train of thought. When Lily fussed, he quieted her and let her play with the stuffed unicorn he’d bought for her and placed her on the floor.

The Weasley’s owl was there, a creature so old he’d often wondered how it managed to fulfill its duties. Arthur Weasley had gotten an increased salary when his position had improved with the Ministry. He could have bought another owl if he chose. But he was loyal to this faithful creature
and was reluctant to retire it while it still had the ability to fly.

Harry opened the window and the bird hopped in and plopped down in a nearby seat. To Harry’s amusement, the fowl immediately dropped off to sleep after he removed its message.

The smile fell from his face as he read the contents.

_Potter, you imbecile, what in Hades do you think you’re playing at? I would have thought, having survived a war, you’d have learned something about discretion! Yet I open this morning’s Daily Prophet to find your name and mine emblazoned on the front page! Do you not understand that I am still a wanted man in certain quarters, that there are escaped Death Eaters and others sympathetic to the Dark Lord who would like nothing better than to see me killed or worse? I did not become your bond mate simply to have you throw my life away in this cavalier fashion! You will find a way to rectify this mess, Potter, or so help me the next time I see you I WILL hex you and no Weasley or your wretched infants will stay my hand._

Included with the letter was the offending article. Harry fumed as he re-read the message. What bloody cheek! He certainly hadn’t gone talking to any reporters, especially the ones at the Prophet! He refused to read the Prophet on principle, ever since he had seen the foolish crap they’d printed about him when he was just a student in Hogwarts. But it would be just like Snape to assume the worst and blame him!

If the public had gotten wind of Snape’s reappearance from the dead, there was precious little Harry could do about it. He could lie, of course, and state that he didn’t know anything about Snape being alive. But, thanks to Snape’s insistence in dragging in that Ministry official, who knew how many people were aware of the Potion master’s miraculous return from the dead?

He tossed the message on to the sofa while he tried to think. Contrary to what Snape thought, he wasn’t interested in seeing the man punished, not after he’d spent so much time and effort getting his name cleared. He’d see if there was anything he could do to straighten out the latest misunderstanding.

“Dada?”

He looked down to see Lily staring up at him. Her face was unusually solemn, as though she’d picked up on his worry.

“What is it, sweetie?”

“What wrong, Dada?”

“Nothing, darling. Just thinking about stuff, I guess.” He smiled and ran his hand through her soft curly ringlets. She smiled, satisfied, and sat down near his leg once more playing with her unicorn, which ran and leaped on the floor in front of her. Lily had such a cheerful nature. It took a great deal to upset her, unlike the twins.

Suddenly Harry sat up. Where _were_ the twins? Another drawback of this oversized mausoleum was that it was hard to keep track of the rambunctious pair. They could be several rooms away and he’d never hear what they were up to.

“Kreacher?”
The house-elf didn’t appear right away so he called again. The ancient Black servant took a long
time to show these days when he was summoned. Harry wasn’t sure why but he put it down to age.
Soon he was going to have to cut off Kreacher’s head and nail it on the wall beside his ancestors, as
the house-elf had often demanded. He had explained to the house-elf that he could be free if he
wanted. There was no need for such a ghastly end to his career. But the house-elf had been adamant,
falling into piercing wails until Harry had agreed to the hideous task.

It left him queasy whenever he thought about it. The twins had found all the severed house-elf heads
to be pretty cool, though.

Finally, the house-elf appeared. He bowed and rasped in his gravelly voice, “How may I serve Harry
Potter?”

“Kreacher, have you seen the twins lately? I get worried when things are this quiet. It usually means
they’re up to something.”

“No, Master Harry. James and Albus have not summoned me.”

“Well, find them and check to see that nothing has exploded in their rooms, all right? Don’t let them
put anything over on you, either.”

Did he imagine it or did a smirk crease the worn old face? “Very well, Master Harry. But I find your
children to be wonderfully well behaved. If they harbor feelings of mischief, it is not towards you.”
With that enigmatic statement, he disappeared.

That wasn’t too difficult to figure out. But, surely, with the twins separated from Snape, the
possibility for stupid practical jokes was practically nil. Still, it couldn’t hurt to be more careful.

Shoving the matter of the newspaper to the back of his mind, he decided to go in search of his
wayward offspring and hope they hadn’t set the drapes on fire.

TBC

A/N: The song “Meeskite” is from the musical Cabaret.

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
Getting new potions ingredients from Slugs & Jiggers hadn’t proved to be nearly so difficult as he’d thought. Snape still couldn’t use a glamour, not with that odious dye staining his hair, but he had been adept at sneaking around during the war. He simply waited until dark and then made his way to the apothecary shop by every roundabout means necessary. Thanks to his frequent trips, he was well acquainted with the alleys and byways winding through the area.

The man behind the counter hadn’t hesitated to provide him with the necessary articles although he’d directed searching glances beneath Severus’s hood, trying in vain to catch a glimpse of his face. He tied the packages into neat bundles and laid them on the counter. “Will that be all, Mr.–?”

“That will be quite all.”

“You don’t wish to have them delivered?”
“No, I can manage,” Severus said, allowing just the faint trace of irritability to enter his tone. He had been relieved to see this clark was quite new. He might know Severus by description but his voice would be unfamiliar. Severus felt quite safe speaking to the man in normal tones instead of trying to disguise his voice.

“Very well. The total is 3 Galleons, 12 Sickles and 3 Knuts.”

He paid and left. Because of his work at St. Mungo’s, Severus was fairly well off. He could live comfortably on what he made; he certainly didn’t need Potter’s money. But it was gratifying to have the boy running errands and paying with his own coin. Let the brat spend some of that money his conceited, over-privileged father had left him.

His walk slowed as he pondered his next move. He really didn’t want to go back to the cottage. Those heads would be waiting for him, including head number three, doubtless with new material. He’d taken to drinking a heavy sleeping draught before going to bed just to make it through the night. But it was becoming of limited use with each passing evening. It was getting so that he was even hearing those damned songs in his sleep.

So engrossed was he in worrying that he failed to notice the man crossing his path.

“Snape, you bastard! How dare you do this to Potter!” the man snarled.

With the agility that had saved his life during many a sortie, Severus dodged to the side, the hex narrowly missing him. He whipped out his wand and retaliated with the Stunning Charm, causing the man to topple to the ground.

But the wizard’s cry had alerted others. Angry shouts, insults and threats flew through the air along with several curses. Severus managed to duck every single one while firing off random spells. He heard cries of pain and imprecations while he ran but he didn’t stop to listen, only continued to shoot off spells over his back. He managed to find a clear space and Disapparated.

Landing on the doorstep to the cottage, he fumed at the undignified way he’d been treated. This was all Potter’s fault! He was supposed to have rectified this mess!

Severus sucked in a breath when he realized that he was shaking. He had survived all those years as a double agent, working for the Order while playing the helpful servant of his Dark Lord. He had learned to hide fear beyond a stony countenance and to deflect all suspicion from his person. He had done this in the certain knowledge that it was what was needed for atonement and done it without flinching.

Yet he had been glad when the struggle was over. At least, he had been able to practice his craft afterwards without having to play nursemaid to a bunch of witless, wet-behind-the-ears students. It wasn’t entirely what he would have wished. He’d had to serve in secrecy for the people at St. Mungo’s but at least it had been on his own terms.

Now he was getting his revenge on Potter and everything was going wrong. He had managed to survive trials that would have broken another man only to run from the attack of an unruly mob!

He swallowed his fury, letting emotion drain from him. Straightening himself to his full height, he marched to the front door and let himself in.

“Well, look who’s back! Welcome home, beakface! Did you have a nice time playing with your friends?”

“He doesn’t have any friends,” head number two answered.
“You put your right foot in, you put your right foot out, you put your right foot in and shake it all about....

Sweet Merlin. Slamming the front door, he made his way to the basement.

Severus took a quick look around, his wand at the ready. At first glance, all seemed to be in order. Nothing had been moved. There were no utensils strewn on the floor. Cautiously, he inched into the room. Still giving sharp looks round, he pulled out his packages, expanded them to their proper size and began putting them away in the various proper flasks and jars.

Severus paused as he realized something was missing. Where were his cauldrons?

At the thought, a heavy brass cauldron fell to the floor with a loud clang, barely missing his head. Startled, he looked upwards.

All of his cauldrons were there, magically suspended from the ceiling. At his glance, they plummeted to the floor, one by one, letting out discordant bangs with each crash.

Throwing up a Shield didn’t help as the cauldrons merely banged off it and flew or rolled all over the open space. Running as fast as he could, Severus made it to the door just as the last cauldron crashed to the floor.

Again, the heads laughed like loons, bobbing around him in dizzying circles as they applauded this latest childish trick. Severus ground his teeth until his jaw hurt to prevent him from lashing out at the damned things. It only increased their delight when they managed to make him lose his temper.

This was all Potter’s fault but the man couldn’t hide forever. He would have to step from the confines of Grimmauld Place sooner or later and when he did—

The whoosh of the floo alerted him and he pulled out his wand and inched to the living room. He heard the childish treble of Potter’s brats and the lower soothing tones of the man himself. Severus paused as he listened to him reassure the little whiners.

His voice had deepened since Severus had heard him last in the Shrieking Shack. He hadn’t really taken the time to listen before now. Odd, how low and tender the man’s voice sounded. He had more patience with children than Severus had ever been able to manage. Severus was hesitant to intrude and destroy the fragile peace.

He tucked his wand into his sleeve and crossed his arms, adopting a menacing pose. There was no point in showing kindness now. It would only make those urchins believe that they had won.

The Gryffindor marched from the living room, pausing when he saw Severus standing motionless in the hallway. “Boys, get washed up and I’ll fix you lunch.” The children edged around Potter, still unwilling to get anywhere near their other father. Lily was nowhere to be seen but Severus couldn’t be bothered about any of them right now. For the moment, his business was with Potter.

“Mr. Potter, a word.”

“Not now, Snape. I just got here. Give me two minutes before jumping down my throat.”

“This cannot be delayed.”

“Fine. I’m just going to the kitchen to fix the children something, Snape. You can come along if you want,” Potter said warily.
Severus fell into step behind him. “I suppose you received my missive.”

“Oh, you mean that charming threat of magical harm you sent via owl? Yes, I did. That’s why I’m back.” He didn’t stop to talk to Severus, however, just continued marching towards the kitchen.

“Stop staring at his arse, Snivellus. The man doesn’t swing that way and, even if he did, he could do better than a gruesome old prat with scar tissue.

“Yeah, the only people who ever slept with you were the curious and the whores of Knockturn Alley. Nowadays, you couldn’t get laid in a morgue.”

“Face it, Snivellus. You’re unloved and unlovable. Harry could have anyone he wanted. Some of those people who attacked you this afternoon probably wish they were in your shoes. You lucked out when you got Harry and he definitely got the short end of the stick when he was forced to bond to your monstrous self. And stop staring at his arse!”

Severus scowled. He had not been staring at Potter’s buttocks. Though now that his attention had been called to them, he realized just how taut and trim they were, firm mounds of flesh that flexed with every step Potter took. Quite delectable, really, and in keeping with the firm muscled chest he’d seen the night his hair had turned pink.

With that mental reminder of his first humiliation, he returned to the pressing issue of his own safety. “It is a serious problem, Potter, not just for me but for you. If I die…”

“I know the drill, all right? You die, I die. No need to belabor it,” Potter hissed quietly. He began striding around the kitchen, pulling various foodstuffs from the cabinets and pantry and banging down plates and saucers.

“Apparently, there is. I was attacked in Diagon Alley today—”

Potter halted in his labors and stared at him, his eyes wide with concern. “Oh god, Snape. Are you hurt?” He stepped towards Severus only to stop abruptly, no doubt recalling his warning against being touched.

Severus sneered. “Don’t pretend to care, Potter. In any case, you see that I am fine. My attackers were clumsy and ill prepared to deal with me. Nevertheless, the experience was unpleasant and, for your sake as well as mine, best not repeated.”

The man stood unmoving and then nodded stiffly. “That’s good, then.”

“Is that all you have to say? What do you intend to do about this matter?”

Potter leaned back against the kitchen counter and stared at him, his mouth drawn into a thin line. “What do you expect me to do about it, Snape? You’re the one who thinks he’s so clever and all and I’m just a stupid dunderhead. So why don’t you come up with a brilliant plan?”

“Because this is your fault!” Severus hissed, fed up with his bond mate’s stubbornness. “You went blabbing to some reporter—”

Potter threw up his hands. “Now stop right there! I’m not taking the blame for something I didn’t do. You honestly think I want people to know that I was forced to wed an ugly, old, manipulative Slytherin who used my daughter in some twisted, sick scheme of revenge?”

“This is nothing more than you deserve, Potter, for abandoning me and leaving me to die!”
“I thought you were dead!” Harry shouted. “It’s not like I could stay to check, not with Death Eaters attacking the school and Voldemort waiting—” He bit off the words, his face suddenly tight as if he’d said too much.

Severus decided to ignore it. He had more pressing matters on his mind. “If you didn’t speak to a reporter, then who did?”

Potter shrugged. “I don’t know. Maybe that Ministry official you insisted get us married?” he sniped.

Severus thought for a moment. In truth, he hadn’t considered that possibility. He was certain he had cowed the man into silence. It was possible he may have simply infuriated him instead, causing him to run to the papers with his grievance. But the wedding had been days ago. Why would there be a delay in the article’s appearance?

The green-eyed Gryffindor had turned his back, readying the meal for his family. Severus couldn’t help but notice only three plates were set.

“Where is that little drooling toddler of yours?”

“Lily is past the age of drooling except when she’s asleep, Snape,” Potter replied coldly. “I’ve decided to leave her with the Weasleys for the time being.”

“Neglecting your own offspring, Potter? Tut tut. What would the public say if it knew its Golden Boy was shunting his child into another’s arms?”

“They’d say it was probably to keep her safe from the demonic bastard I married,” Potter shot back.

“Good one! That would make two Lilys you drove off, wouldn’t it, Snivellus?”

The heads might have been crude in their construction. But the shafts they threw were sharp enough to draw blood.

Potter stared at him. “Snape, are you all right? You look pale all of a sudden.”

“My health is not your concern, Potter.”

“Just a moment ago you were pointing out how I’d die if you did,” Potter said dryly.

“Only if I died by violence, you imbecile. Do you honestly think the bond would penalize you for my demise through natural causes?”

Potter’s lips pursed as though he hadn’t considered the possibility. Severus’s gaze fell to those pouting lips and he could feel his trousers tighten. Thank Merlin he’d worn his robes today; they hid a multitude of weaknesses. It was disturbing, these flashes of lust; the heads whispering of the futility of his desire made the emotion no easier to handle.

“In any case, that’s neither here nor there,” he said with a wave of his hand, dismissing both his unwelcome feelings and the previous subject matter. “I’m still wondering why you would keep away your youngest child, who would surely need you the most, but keep the other two spawn. Surely, they should be kept out of my clutches as well?”

“James and Al are old enough to take care of themselves,” Potter replied. “And they’re not convalescing from an illness. Lily needs stability right now, not being dragged back and forth between houses. But when—things settle down here, I’ll bring her back,” he finished quietly.
“Things will not settle down if this matter of that article is not resolved.”

Potter heaved a great sigh. “Again, what do you expect me to do about it? I don’t know who sent in that article. I can’t demand that they retract it, not when it’s the truth. Besides, the whole evil mess was bound to come out sooner or later. Did you expect to be hidden from the Wizarding World forever?”

“No, of course not,” Severus began.

“And, honestly, what did you expect would happen when you married someone you claim always has his ugly face plastered across the front pages? The *Daily Prophet* is always printing up some rubbish or other about me. It was only a matter of time before your name got dragged into it after you married me.” Potter paused and a smirk twisted his lips. “Not the brightest move of your life, was it?”

“Any possible foolishness of mine far outweighs your most intelligence move, Mr. Potter,” Snape sneered.

“So this whole situation could be put down to a combination of my so-called stupidity and your ‘brilliance.’ That pretty much emphasizes that I can’t fix it. Unless…” Potter tilted his head and his expression became sly. There was a hint of mischief sparkling about his eyes. For a moment, Severus was reminded so sharply of Lily Evans that his heart stuttered in his chest.

“Unless what, Potter? Do grace us with your no-doubt idiotic plan? It will be useless, of course, but —”

“We go out in public together.”

“What?” The interruption caused him to blink as did the suggestion. “We go out together?”

“That’s right. The news about us being bonded is out; there’s nothing we can do about that. But we can prevent any more attacks if people see us together and see that you’re treating me right.”

Snape snarled. “I’ll do no such—”

Potter acted as if he hadn’t spoken. “And we’ll have to take the children, too. People know about them and they’ll want to see how you’re acting with them.”

“If you think I’m going to suffer your children—”

“We could go out tomorrow. I’ve neglected my job long enough so I’ll have to show up at the orphanage anyway. I usually take the children with me,” Potter said thoughtfully. “You could come with us.”

Severus shuddered. It was bad enough enduring Potter’s unkempt progeny. There was no way he was dealing with the cast-off wretches from other people’s families.

Then he thought about what Potter had just said. “You have a job? At an orphanage?”

“What did you think, Snape? That I spent all my time lazing around at home, doing nothing?”

“Your pastimes are of no interest to me, Potter. But, yes, I had thought you would play the idle spoiled brat, living off your father’s inheritance.”

The glare from those green eyes could have melted a cauldron. “Well, you were wrong, weren’t you? It’s not the first time or the last that you’ve been wrong about me.”
“Spare me the melodramatics, Potter. I know everything about you I need to.”

“No, you don’t. But, once you start spending time with me and the children, I’m sure you’ll pick up a few things.”

“You forget, Potter, that I still have a follicle problem to deal with.” Snape took a hunk of his hair between his fingers. In truth, only a few of the strands still showed the appalling pink color.

“It looks like it’s almost gone. Tell you what. If all the pink has vanished by tomorrow, you can come with us.” When the man opened his mouth, Harry added, “If nothing else, being with me will act as protection. No one will dare to attack you with me around, yeah?”

Snape folded his arms. “Your plan has some merit, Potter.”

Harry smiled. “Good. And if this is going to work, you’d better start calling me Harry.”

Severus sneered again but Harry paid it no mind. Having finished setting up the meal, he called for the twins to join him.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
Chapter 19: The Orphanage

The little girl glared at Douglas. “MINE!!!!” she shrieked, with all the force her little four-year-old lungs could muster.

“Douglas, put that down,” Harry said patiently. “You know that’s Sarah’s favorite toy.”

“Bollocks,” said the five-year-old boy rudely. “Had it first.”

“MINE!!!!!”

“Don’t talk like that, Douglas. Besides, since when do you play with mermaids?” Harry said, lifting an eyebrow.

“MINE!!!!!” Sarah’s hazel eyes were tearing up with childish rage and her face was getting dangerously red.

“Give her the toy, you selfish little heathen.”
Douglas turned and stared up at the towering figure behind him. Snape could be as terrifying as any giant and he bent the full power of his glare on the little boy. The tow-headed boy went white and the toy dropped from his fingers. Sarah snatched it up, oblivious to Snape and her suddenly petrified enemy, and scampered back to her corner of the room. Snape took a small step towards Douglas and the boy’s nerve broke. With a howl, he ran to the door, crying for the caretakers.

Harry sighed. “Sn-Severus, stop terrorizing the children, all right?”

“It was your idea to drag me along to this hellhouse, Potter. Don’t complain if it doesn’t turn out to your liking,” Snape said with a smirk.

“You’re not doing yourself any good with this, you know? We’re supposed to be trying to convince people that you and I make a couple.”

“Emphasis on you and I, Potter. I’m under no obligation to play nicely with children. We’re supposed to be convincing the adult public at large of our suitability.”

Two girls came running by, giggling over some game. They skidded to a halt and veered off in another direction when Snape scowled at them.

“On the contrary, Snape,” Harry said, his temper fraying. “I have children. I work with children. The public is going to think it strange that I’d pair up with someone who obviously hates them so much.”

“We’ve had this discussion before. I don’t hate children. I merely prefer that they don’t act like rabid werewolves, incapable of being quiet or co-existing peacefully for more than two minutes.”

“You’re thinking of sheep and cows. Children have considerably more energy and wild spirits. Besides, these children don’t have the steadying influence of parents. That’s why we’re here.”

“That’s why you’re here, Potter. I’m here under duress,” Snape replied.

“And because we want people to see us together without thinking I got married to a murderous prat who bathes in the blood of newborn babies,” Harry muttered.

“Very amusing, Mr. Potter. But you’re far more likely to be the next Dark Lord than I, I assure you.”

Before Harry could think up a suitable retort, one of the caretakers, Corabett Kinderlieb, came back in, tugging along the sniffling Douglas.

“Harry, Douglas came to me with a story that your—spouse threatened him.”

She focused a hostile stare on Snape who stared back, unrepentant.

“No, he didn’t threaten Douglas,” Harry said smoothly.

“Douglas took a toy from Sarah. Severus told him to return it and he did. See, Sarah’s playing with it over there.”

Harry pointed to where the four-year-old honey blond girl was watching the toy swim in a bucket of water.

“H-he was mean to me, M-miss Kinderlieb,” Douglas blubbered.

“I assure you I never touched the boy nor threatened him in any way,” Snape said, his bored tone indicating he couldn’t care less what she thought.
“As Pot-Harry says, I told him to return the toy to that girl to stop her howling. He did so and now she’s perfectly content.”

“Make him say sorry!” Douglas snarled, his tears vanishing while his face crunched up in self-righteous anger.

Snape snarled back, showing every one of his teeth. “It will be a cold day in the Sahara before I apologize to you, you mean-spirited little tatterdemalion.”

Corabett snapped, “That’s enough!”

She turned to Harry. “I’m sorry, Harry. We’re going to have to ask him to stay in the outer waiting room.”

“But—”

“Gladly,” Snape said with a sniff as he stalked to the door. It opened and shut with a bang and the room fell silent in its wake.

As the children began whispering amongst themselves, Corabett sighed and patted Douglas on the head, speaking to him in soft, soothing tones. The boy grinned up at her, made a face behind her back at Harry and ran to pick out a worn toy from the chest.

Maybe Snape was right. Some children needed a strong hand in order to behave. But, sweet Merlin, didn’t he know any other way of dealing with misbehaving children besides scaring the trousers off them?

Corabett wrinkled her nose as though Snape had left a bad smell behind him. “Harry, what were you thinking bringing him here?”

“I was thinking that I wanted him to be a part of my life, Corabett.” Harry smiled wistfully at her.

“That doesn’t seem likely.” She gave him a sympathetic look. “I read the paper, Harry.”

His shoulders slumped. “Oh.”

“Is it true? That you were forced to marry him?” He straightened.

“No. I merely gave him my word that I would marry him. Even after finding out the truth, I had to keep it.”

“Ah, that’s right. The noble Gryffindors.” When he glanced sharply at her, she held up her hands in mock surrender.

“Don’t worry. I’m just a Hufflepuff. I suppose it’s what makes me so good with children.”

“Yeah. It makes me wonder how Slytherins manage to have offspring.”

“I’ve no idea. I suppose their parents make the arrangements. Then the female snake lays the eggs in a bed of kelp and he fertilizes them with his seed.”

Harry snorted and then chuckled. “You’re thinking about fish not snakes, Corabett.”

“Same thing.”

She reached out and laid a hand on his shoulder. When Corabett had first met Harry, she had been
skeptical about his ability to handle children. He’d been just over 18 then, newly married to Ginevra Weasley, and a bit too eager to prove himself. He was practically a child himself. What did he know about tending them? In truth, she hadn’t been sure what kind of man Harry Potter would be. Throughout his years at Hogwarts, some odd things had been written about him, articles that made him out to be promiscuous, dangerous or as mad as You-Know-Who. But he had proven to be both likeable and approachable. She’d seen firsthand how kind and patient he could be with even the most fractious of toddlers. He never lost his temper or had a harsh word to say to any of them. He had an uncanny knack for knowing which child would be best placed with which foster parent. His love for his own children was undeniable, as was his adoration for his beautiful wife. That made his marriage to Severus Snape even more inexplicable. She well remembered the man from her years at Hogwarts and knew how horrid and inflexible he could be with young children.

“Harry, are you sure you’re all right? It’s none of my business but I don’t like to see you unhappy.”

“It’s fine, Corabett. Sn-Severus and I just need to work out a few things. Our current relationship is new and so just a touch—fragile.”

Her face clearly showed how disbelieving she was about this explanation but she didn’t push. Harry slumped and she leaned her head on his shoulder, hugging him tighter, while he watched his twins.

James and Albus were absorbed in playing with another group of kids. They paid no mind to Snape’s nasty behavior or the antics of the smaller children. But they’d been really quiet for awhile now. Harry had caught them waving their arms and murmuring in soft voices while they spoke with the other children. The sidelong glances they kept darting at him didn’t ease his mind. Harry hoped they weren’t planning more monkey business. Things were tense enough in their little household without bringing in additional strife. He felt a nudge at his knee and looked down to see Sarah holding up the wet mermaid.

“For you, ‘Arry,” she lisped, her offer made all the more endearing by a missing front tooth.

“Thank you, Sarah,” he said as he took the soggy toy from her.

The mermaid twisted in his grip, tossing her wet hair so that the water splashed his glasses. He used a Drying Charm to remove the moisture and the toy smiled impishly at him. Thanks to his Muggle upbringing, magic would always awe him at some level. Having toys that behaved like miniature living people was a delight that never palled. Idly, he wondered what happened to the toys that became too worn out to play with or were forgotten as their owners got older. He would have handed the toy back to Sarah but she had already moved on to another one, a frazzled looking rabbit with floppy ears. James and Al came bounding up, coming to a halt in front of him.

“Dad, we were wondering if we could go home now,” James said.

Albus’s face twisted into a frown. He didn’t appear to share his brother’s enthusiasm but only looked at his shoes without speaking.

“You want to go?” Harry asked, surprised.

Usually, the twins were really eager to stay. Being Harry Potter’s kids meant that they didn’t get to go out much in the public. Harry was very leary of exposing his children to the kind of weird attention he’d received when he was a boy.

“Can we?” James begged.

This was odd. They should have been just as reluctant to go home as he was. With Snape flapping
about the place, the cottage no longer felt like home but a house under siege.

“If you want. It’s about time for me to go home anyway.”

The evening shift would be coming in soon and, while they appreciated Harry’s presence, having him around always made the children that much more reluctant to settle down at night.

“We can come back tomorrow, can’t we?” Al asked, wide green eyes trained on his father.

“Of course.”

“We’re always happy to have you two, you know that?”

When the boys nodded, she turned to Harry.

“Goodbye, Harry. I hope you’ll bring Lily back soon. Some of the other girls missed her.”

“Maybe in a few days,” Harry hedged.

He didn’t want to let Corabett know the true state of his home life. Snape had messed things up enough today.

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Snape was ominously quiet when they returned home. Harry was certain he would disappear into the basement to work on whatever he did down there. Instead he had hovered around the kitchen while Harry fixed supper for the boys. He seemed strangely occupied. His eyes were flicking through the air again and, once more, Harry wondered what he was looking at. Was it those things he’d been pointing at when he’d stormed up the stairs? Harry hadn’t heard him mention them again. Maybe Snape had handled the problem on his own. The silence grew to unbearable levels; it felt like something was going to explode if they didn’t talk soon.

“Something on your mind, Snape?” Harry asked.

“I take it you’ve been at this employment of yours for some time?”

Snape had adopted an expressionless tone. He didn’t seem to care about getting an answer. But if there was one thing Harry knew about him, it was that the man never engaged in pointless conversation.

“Since before I married Ginny.”

“Why such a menial role? During your sixth year, I had thought you were aiming for the role of an Auror.”

“After Voldemort, I decided I didn’t want to spend the rest of my life chasing down wizards. I was… tired of it.”

“Indeed. But why your interest in this particular field? Is it because you yourself were an orphan?” Snape was giving him a searching look.

Harry didn’t understand why he was so curious about this. But at least the man wasn’t insulting or yelling at him. Anything would be an improvement over that.

“That’s part of it. Since my second year, I saw all the damage that nonsense about being purebloods has on the Wizarding World. During my sixth and seventh years, I realized just how much of a
drawback it could be. Besides…” Harry could feel his cheeks warm and he stopped.

“What? What exactly was the deciding factor?”

Harry swallowed. Then he said quietly, “Dumbledore.”

One black eyebrow arched.

“The headmaster advised you to spend your life chasing after someone else’s infants? Strange. We had many conversations about you and he never once mentioned that he had such plans for your life.”

“Maybe he didn’t expect me to survive,” Harry said. He heard the flatness, the hint of accusation in his voice, and hated it.

Again, there was that strange flicker in Snape’s eyes and his answer was a beat too slow.

“I won’t deny the accusation. But that still doesn’t explain your choice of employment.”

“Did you ever read Rita Skeeter’s book The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore??” Harry asked cautiously.

“No. From what little I’ve heard, it’s absolute trash.”

“Well, Skeeter got Dumbledore’s motivations wrong. But she got a lot of the facts right.”

“Such as?”

“Dumbledore was involved with Grindelwald when he was younger. He got the Elder Wand from him when he defeated Grindelwald in battle.”

Snape didn’t respond. Perhaps he hadn’t known these particular facts. The stillness of his face gave Harry no hint either way. He decided to press on with his explanation.

“Grindelwald wanted to make the world a better place by having wizards rule over it. He thought their strong hand was needed to keep people in line, especially Muggles. Dumbledore…agreed with him.”

“He did? That was in the book?”

“Something like it. Then one day, there was a terrible argument. Albus, his brother and Grindelwald were involved. A wand blast was fired and Dumbledore’s little sister was killed.”

This time the shock on those pallid features couldn’t be hidden.

“Killed? Did Grindelwald—?”

“Dumbledore was never sure. He thought he himself might have been responsible. That was the cause of the split between him and Grindelwald. His sister had been kinda feeble in the head ever since she was attacked by Muggles when she was a girl. He felt responsible for not taking care of her while he was caught up in dreams of power and glory. Then he felt really guilty when she died.”

“And that was when he abandoned his stance of might making right,” Snape murmured.

Harry figured the man might have already guessed the rest of his story. But he had to make certain Snape really understood.

“A Death Eater attempting to make amends for a grievous error.”

In spite of the level tone, Harry thought he could hear the pain in the simple words.

Harry nodded. “He was trying to make up for the mistakes of his youth, his notion that only pureblooded wizards had anything to offer the world. And I looked around me and saw that some of the most powerful witches and wizards I knew weren’t purebloods at all: Hermione, Voldemort, you.”

“I’m glad you see me as part of such august company: an overachieving Gryffindor and a mad Slytherin,” Snape drawled sarcastically.

“Are you not forgetting yourself?” Harry shrugged, irritated as always at the idea that he was better than anyone else.

“I guess. But I was never as smart as Hermione or gifted as you or ambitious as Voldemort. My power isn’t anything that I ever had to work for. It’s just something I was born with, like my messy hair or my mother’s eyes.”

“Don’t belittle your gift, Potter. Such power is what enabled you to defeat the Dark Lord, after all.”

“But I realized that Dumbledore had the right idea. Everybody has something to contribute to the world. People shouldn’t be written off just because they don’t come with a high-class pedigree like a racehorse or powerful magic running through their veins. They should be judged on what they can do and what’s in their hearts. If children are treated that way right from the start, then that’s one way I can help them get a proper place in the world.”

The black eyes were searching. “That is…commendable of you, Potter.”

Was Snape actually giving him a compliment? Harry wasn’t going to push it. Best to stick to the topic.

“So why do you ask? Why the curiosity?”

“I just wondered. You seem so at ease with everyone there: the children, that Kindertot…”

“Kinderlieb,” Harry corrected.

“She was quite comfortable with your presence. Was she there when you were married?”

Harry wasn’t sure what Corabett had to do with the conversation and there was an edge to Snape’s voice that hadn’t been there before.

“Yeah, she was. She graduated about five years before my so-called seventh year.”

“So she’s older than you,” Snape mused.

“So are you, considerably more than her. What’s this all about, Snape?”

“Nothing. I merely wondered if you’d considered her as a replacement for your wife after she died.”

“No one could ‘replace’ my wife, Snape. She wasn’t a broken wand that I threw out. She was the
love of my life! I truly expected never to love or marry anyone else until the day I died! Then you showed up, out of the blue, and wrecked my life!”

Harry was on his feet, nearly shouting. Snape was staring back at him with eyes gone blank and impenetrable.

“Ruined your life, Mr. Potter? How predictably selfish and blind you are. Were you the one left for dead on the floor of a filthy shack? Were you the one who suffered agonizing tortures from a snakebite? Were you the one who had to go into hiding for years because of Death Eaters? You are still the vain, arrogant, spoiled cretin whose misadventures were the bane of my existence at Hogwarts. Evidently, your children have turned out no better.”

Harry was on the verge of launching into him again when he heard a tentative,

“Daddy?”

Harry blinked and registered that his two sons were standing in the doorway. James and Albus both looked upset; they must have heard him shouting. He tried to force down his sudden explosion of temper, although it made him feel almost physically sick, and managed a shaky smile.

“How, boys. Ready for supper?”

The boys nodded solemnly and edged closer to him. It didn’t escape his attention that they were once again avoiding Snape.

Regretting his flash of temper, he said impulsively, “Would you like to eat with us, Snape? I can set another place.”

The taller man hesitated; his eyes were doing that weird thing in the air again. Then his gaze swept to the boys and his face hardened like stone.

“I think not, Potter. I’ve had enough of ill-behaved brats for one day.”

He turned abruptly and swept out of the room. Harry smiled brightly at the children. But the silence was suddenly very daunting and they ate their meal in moody silence.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
Chapter 20: Unbreakable

The next morning, Harry was startled by Molly Weasley stepping out of the floo. She was holding Lily who immediately reached out for Harry. “Dada! Dada! Dada!” she squealed.

“I’m sorry to do this to you, Harry.”

“Sorry for what, Mum?” Harry asked, even as he reached out automatically for his little girl. She nestled into his arms and cooed contentedly, pulling at his hair.

“The poor thing has been miserable since you left. She kept on crying for you and refusing to eat. I know this is a hardship, what with him being around. But the girl really needs to be with her father.”

“It’s okay, Mum. I think things are getting better,” Harry lied. After last night’s scene, he doubted any such thing. But Snape had been gone since early this morning and hadn’t reappeared.
know where the man was but hoped for his own sake that he wasn’t in any trouble.

Molly didn’t leave immediately but stood hovering near the fireplace, her eyes darting back and forth as though expecting Snape to be lurking in a corner somewhere. “You’re sure you’re all right, Harry? I could stay for a bit, help you get sorted.”

“No, that’s fine. I was going to leave for work soon anyway and take the children with me.”

She looked a bit disappointed but nodded. “Remember, Harry dearest, if you need anything from me —”

“I know where to find you. Thanks, Mum. Say goodbye to Granny Weasley, Lily,” Harry urged.

Lily smiled and waved her chubby arm at Molly, gabbling, “Byebyebyebye!”

Molly bent towards the child and gave her a kiss, causing Lily to giggle again. With one last searching look around the living room, Molly stepped into the fireplace and vanished in a flash.

Harry sighed. Now, instead of getting two children ready for the day out, he had to dress Lily as well. At least he could trust the boys to look out for their little sister. He nuzzled Lily, delighting in her freshly washed scent, and took her upstairs.

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Severus checked the cauldron critically before lowering the temperature a fraction. It was a relief to be back in his own home. True, Spinners End lacked the capacious space of Potter’s cottage. But he could feel himself breathing freely here, away from those miserable children and the yammering trio.

Not that he’d stay here indefinitely. Potter’s home was now his as well and he was damned if the puerile pranks of his misbegotten spawn were going to keep him from what was rightfully his. It was just so lovely to be in the stillness and quiet of his old home.

He wondered what Potter was doing. Probably another trip to that orphanage with his ill-conceived children. He was glad to be spared another such disastrous outing.

But Potter would be there, surrounded by yelling, red-faced urchins—and that Kinderlieb woman.

Severus got an unpleasant feeling twisting in his gut when he thought of her. He’d looked through the glass pane of the children’s playroom after he’d left and seen that woman holding Potter by the shoulder. She’d given him such a warm sympathetic look, too. It was clear they’d been talking about him after he’d left, judging by the grimaces he’d seen on her face. Potter had likely outlined how badly he’d been treated by his greasy, ill-tempered, nasty former Potions professor.

Did the woman have designs on Potter? If she did, it was likely Potter was oblivious. He was still caught up in nostalgia over his departed wife. Still, she was a possible obstacle and Severus Snape wasn’t about to stand for it. Potter was his bond mate and it was time the man knew it.

Severus thought he’d shown the height of forbearance towards Potter, all things considered. All right, there was that moment when he’d tried to hex Potter’s firstborn. But since then he hadn’t so much as touched them or sent a spell their way.

They deserved some harsh discipline, those two. Those heads were a despicable trick and a nuisance almost beyond bearing. They never ran out of critiques about his looks, manners, behavior or his past misdeeds. He knew just what kind of man he was: he didn’t need commentary from magical creations.
He still needed to get into Grimmauld Place if he was to banish those things without losing his pride. His first attempt at propositioning Potter had failed. Time to fall back on what he did best. Hence, his current brewing project.

The altered Amortentia was nearly ready. The suspicious odor that gave away the presence of the usual potion had been done away with; Potter would have no clue that he’d been drugged. The only thing left to do was to get it into his food.

Once it was ingested, it would have only a limited amount of time for Potter to feel its effects. He needed to be there in order for his plan to work. The moment Potter tasted his drugged food, he must set eyes on his bond mate.

After last night, that might be problematic. He had made it too clear to Potter that he couldn’t stand the company of his children and the man never seemed to be far from them these days. Perhaps he could arrange a dinner for two. He would have to be subtle about it. Potter knew Severus had no interest in him romantically so he’d have to pretend he wished for more amiable relations without hinting at greater intimacies.

It couldn’t be too difficult. He had played the dutiful servant to He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named for years without the creature realizing that he was an agent for the Light. How hard could it be to trick one simple-minded Gryffindor?

His nose told him the brew had reached the proper temperature. It had achieved the characteristic sheen without the curling steam and telltale odor. This potion would work.

Then Potter would learn what a skillful Slytherin could manage between the sheets. He might not obliterate that Weasley girl from his heart. But he would show Potter pleasures of the flesh that would surpass anything that woman would have been capable of. A few hours of sexual bliss and Potter would be putty in his hands.

Of course, he would need only one bout to admit him past the wards of Grimmauld Place. But getting Potter’s cooperation for running the cottage household would be easier if the Gryffindor were under his sway. Severus didn’t stop to think why he was so interested in seducing Potter, by fair means or foul. He refused to admit to anything more than concern over contenders like that Kinderlieb woman.

He waved his wand and extinguished the flames. Carefully ladling out the potion, he filled a dozen flacons with the glittering fluid. Armed and fortified with the brews tucked into his robe, he banished the residue from the cauldron. It was not one of his best cauldrons, which was why he’d left it behind in Spinners End in the first place, but it was good enough to get the job done.

The act of brewing soothed him as usual. It more than made up for the wretchedness of the past week.

The plan would work. Potter would fall into line. The large library at Grimmauld’s Place would be his.

He felt better than he had in days. Severus smiled and the twins would have been terrified if they could have seen it. Gathering up floo powder, he prepared for his return to the Potter den.

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The riders zoomed around him, Beaters furiously batting away the Bludgers. Hovering above the chaos, Harry’s eyes darted around, looking for the elusive Snitch. He caught sight of the flash of
gold and dove swiftly after it.

The other team’s Seeker, Leonard Crumby, dove for it at the same time. Leonard was small, like all Seekers, but timid in the air. He’d suffered a couple of brutal falls earlier in the season and it had left him nervous in play, a weakness Harry knew how to exploit.

He dove too near Leonard. He could easily pull up without danger but he saw the other man flinch, taking him a few scant inches from the flying golden sphere. It wasn’t much but it was enough. The Snitch veered off its course and he was the first to follow it. Tilting his broom, he ducked slightly under it and, when he came up, the winged ball was struggling to escape his grip.

“Harry’s got the Snitch, folks! Game over!”

“Well done, Harry!”

Amid a flurry of congratulations and applause, Harry landed. In spite of catching the Snitch, the game had been a close one. Leonard might have been a nervous nelly but the other team was led by a captain as ruthless and obsessed as Oliver Wood had once been. Morgan Tallenby had obviously trained them well and Harry was grateful for it. He relished a challenge. A game easily won was no fun at all.

Morgan came over, his curly hair wildly skew from the wind. “Good game, Potter,” he said grudgingly.

Someone punched him in the arm. “Don’t take it so hard, Morgan. There’s no shame in losing to Harry Potter.”

“Yeah, I used to see this bloke play at Hogwarts,” another man—what was his name? Bruce?—said. “He wasn’t star player on the team because of his looks.”

“Good thing, too,” Ron replied, strolling up with his broom over his shoulder. “Harry was never what you’d call handsome.”

“Speak for yourself, ginger,” Harry retorted.

The good-natured banter continued while the children ran up to their parents, cheering and laughing. The twins and Timothy danced around Harry, yelling and arguing over who would get to hold the Snitch this time.

Hermione walked up to them, juggling Lily in her arms and grinning from ear to ear. She kissed her husband on the cheek. “Good game, Ron.”

“Glad you could make it, Hermione. I know you’ve been busy.” At this, Ron darted a searching look towards Harry.

“That’s why I’m here. Harry, I thought we could get together and talk.” She stared meaningfully at Harry as well.

“You want me there, ‘Mione?” Ron asked in a low voice as they walked away from the rest of the team.

“Ron, I’d appreciate it if you took the twins and Timothy to Fortescue’s. I’m sure they’d love some ice cream,” his wife suggested.

“Yay! Ice cream! Ice cream!” the boys yelled.
“Where can I bring them later?”

Harry considered. He didn’t want to go back to his cottage. Snape had been absent this morning but
he had no idea how long that would last. “Grimmauld Place.”

Ron nodded. “Can do. Okay, let’s go, boys!”

Harry waved until Ron had all the children firmly in his hold. When he’d seen them Disapparate, he
took Lily from Hermione’s arms. “You’ve got something to say, Hermione?”

“Yes, it’s about your…situation. Are you sure you want to go to Grimmauld?”

“You bet. Snape can’t get in there yet.”

“That’s right. You haven’t had sex with him yet, have you?” Harry could feel that telltale warmth
creeping up his neck. Hermione could be awfully forthright about things, sometimes. Probably the
Muggle in her.

“Let’s get to Grimmauld Place, ‘Mione. Then you can tell me your news.”

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Grimmauld Place seemed a trifle brighter today. Harry puzzled as to what could have made the
difference.

“Oh, you’ve gotten new wallpaper!” Hermione exclaimed.

She was right. The dark paneling on the walls had been covered with wallpaper featuring roses
and…ducks. He was gaping at the bizarre juxtaposition of flora and fauna when Kreacher popped
into the hallway. He bowed low to Harry and smiled at Hermione.

“Good afternoon, Master Harry. Are you hungry? Would you like something to eat? Something for
your guest and the little one?”

Hermione frowned at hearing “Master” and Harry shrugged apologetically at her. He had never been
able to break Kreacher of that particular habit and had ceased trying when the house-elf began
battering his head against walls over it.

“That would be great. Um, Kreacher?”

“Yes, Master Harry?”

“I was wondering about the wallpaper.”

“Yes, Kreacher did a fine job,” the house-elf said with satisfaction. “Your children were most
pleased.”

“James and Albus saw this?”

“Indeed. The young masters helped me pick it out. They thought it would make this place more
cheery and that you’d want to stay more often.”

“Oh, I see. It’s…good, Kreacher. Really good.” Hermione stifled a giggle. Harry didn’t blame her.
The wallpaper was ridiculous, more suited to a child’s room than to adult furnishings. But he didn’t
have the heart to deny Kreacher’s obvious pride in his work.
Sure enough, Kreacher beamed, his face dissolving into a mass of wrinkles. “Thank you, Master Harry. Please retire to the dining hall and I’ll bring you your meal.” Kreacher disappeared with a very self-satisfied pop.

Hermione followed Harry and they seated themselves in the dining room. Far bigger than any room he had back home, Harry didn’t feel quite comfortable in it. But, when Hermione pulled out the papers she’d been carrying in a small purse and re-sized them, he realized they’d need more room than what could be found in the kitchen.

Harry drew out the small bag from an inner pocket inside his robe and enlarged it. A large bag containing Lily’s diapers, food, favorite blanket and stuffed toy grew on the floor and he pushed it with his foot so that it was close by.

He waited impatiently for Kreacher to bring the meal and leave. Hermione ignored the mound of watercress and cucumber sandwiches at her elbow while she perused the papers she had with her. Harry busied himself trying to feed Lily her dish of strained peas and carrots.

“You have to understand, Harry, that these documents relate to laws that are hundreds of years old. I couldn’t always take the originals with me. So I copied the parts that are relevant.”

“And all of these…?” he asked, nodding at the mound of parchments.

“Are relevant,” she replied. She shrugged at his chagrined look. It would take ages to get through all this.

“The Unbreakable Vow is, unfortunately, unbreakable. You can’t violate it without losing your magic.”

“Would that be so bad? I’ve lived without magic for 11 years of my life. Heck, I could do without it forever if I had to.” He could move to Muggle London or even farther abroad. The notion had appeal. Best of all, it was unlikely Snape would follow. The man would dread being without the protection of his magic; Harry was sure of that.

“But there’s not just you to consider, Harry,” she said gently, nodding towards Lily. “You still have enemies out there, people who wanted Voldemort to succeed and aren’t too happy about the fact that you killed him. They might take out their anger on your children if they can’t get to you.”

“I suppose.” Truth be told, he wasn’t worried about enemies, not the way Snape was. But Hermione was right. While the majority of the Wizarding World was grateful to him, there were those who would just as easily want him to disappear or conveniently dead. There were members of the Ministry who weren’t entirely sure that Harry Potter didn’t want to seize power for himself or become another Dark Lord. It was yet another reason for taking a humble job like supervising the orphanage.

“So what’s the rest of the news?” he said, while wiping Lily’s mouth. She was making little bubbles at her lips and twisting her head away from her food.

“The Unbreakable Vow that Snape set up actually limits him in a lot of ways. He can’t access your bank account at Gringotts without your signed permission or spoken approval. If you haven’t had sex with him, he can’t gain entry to your other houses unless you take him with you. He can come and go at the cottage and make any changes there that he likes. But you can always change them back, if you want. Do you have wards up at the house?”

“You bet I do. I don’t want him getting near the children.”
“Well, I’m afraid he can get through them if he tries hard enough,” she said apologetically. “The cottage is his as well as yours.”

“I know. He forced himself through one of my wards a few days ago. It woke me up,” Harry groused, remembering how he’d been jolted awake by the forcible breaking of his magical security system. He’d thought them fairly strong yet Snape had broken through them as if they’d been made of tissue paper. He had therefore crafted even stronger ones on the twins’s room afterwards. Snape hadn’t made any attempts to breach these and he was keeping his fingers crossed that they’d hold if he did.

“Moving right along…” She rummaged through some papers. “If he dies from old age, accident, accidental injury or disease, then you’re automatically released from your vows. However, you can die if Snape dies through malice aforethought on your part. There are a number of deaths that carry an automatic death sentence for you if they’re deliberately inflicted by you or another party acting on your behalf.”

“Let me see.” She pushed the paper over to him and Harry squinted, trying to read the small lettering. “I could die if Snape dies by dismemberment, strangulation, smothering, being buried alive, hanging, defenestration—what’s that?”

“Being pushed through a window,” she answered absently as she peered at another sheet.

“Why couldn’t they just say that?”

She looked at him in exasperation. “I didn’t write this, Harry. Maybe it’s because they had to write everything by hand and couldn’t take time to scribble out long explanations.”

“Sorry. Just asking.” He glanced at the paper again. Arson, drawing and quartering, being burnt at the stake, flagellation, flaying, stabbing, bludgeoning, drowning, poisoning, mauling by tame animals, crucifixion, stoning, pressing… huh?

“What’s pressing?” For a moment, Harry got a bizarre mental image of Snape being laid out on a board while Aunt Petunia ran a hot iron over his ribs.

“It was an old penalty for suspected witches. A victim would be tied spread-eagled to stakes driven into the ground. A flat box would be laid on him, covering the ribs to the legs. Then everyone in the village would be told to lay a rock or stone in the box. The gradually increasing weight would eventually cause the victim’s ribcage to fall in, crushing the inner organs.” She shuddered. “It was a particularly nasty and prolonged death sentence.”

Harry was appalled. He couldn’t imagine the reason behind such a punishment. “Why?”

“The death was thought up by Muggles during the Salem witch trials. It would give the victim time to confess to witchcraft, at which point he or she would have the box removed and they could suffer a relatively swift and painless death by hanging.” She bit her lip, her face pale and stiff with anger.

No wonder the Wizarding World hid itself from Muggles. Harry hurried on with his reading.

“Stretching on the rack, being shot with arrows, being shot with flaming arrows… Merlin, these people didn’t miss a trick, did they?”

“Not a lot. There’s a whole portfolio an inch thick detailing Dark Arts spells that can’t be used either.”

“Betting they didn’t put down anything about him being driven off a cliff in a car or being ground up in a cement mixer,” Harry said in an attempt to lighten the mood.
It worked. Hermione snorted in wan amusement. “Well, most of these laws and stipulations were written well before the 20th century. I guess they wouldn’t take that into account.”

“Ah, so there are ways out.” He grinned at Hermione to let her know he was kidding. “How about if he chokes on a peach pit or has a fatal allergic reaction to food, plants or bee strings or whatever?”

“The first is considered accidental. You’re free and clear. The second…well, I’m not sure if wizards and witches suffer from allergies. That’s more a Muggle thing.”

“You’re probably right. No death by bee stings for Snape, then.” Harry lifted up the paper and saw at least three more sheets of parchment beneath it, each detailing the various grisly ways in which a person could die. Swallowing his bile, he decided to go through it another time.

“Ooh!” Hermione squealed.

“What?”

“I was just reading this paper. There are benefits if you and Snape have sex during certain periods of the year.”

The queasiness was returning. “Sex? With Snape?”

A hint of red stained her cheeks. “Okay, maybe that’s not a possibility the way things stand now. But it states here that, under the bond, sex during full moons that land on solstices or certain magical holidays like All Hallows, Beltane, Midsummer Night, Lammas—the so-called Witch’s Sabbaths—could have dramatic effects on your power levels. A witch or wizard could increase their magical abilities threefold. Wow, this is exacting!” she gushed, her brown eyes lighting up as she read down the page.

“I don’t really need more power, Hermione, and I’m not looking for it,” Harry pointed out.

“No, no, of course not. I just thought you’d want to know.”

In spite of himself, Harry was curious. “Is this power surge permanent or temporary?”

“Um…it’s not quite clear on that. Afterwards, the witch or wizard could use their increased power levels to attempt spells that wouldn’t be possible under normal circumstances.”

“Well, like you said, sex isn’t a possibility right now. And the last thing I want is to increase Snape’s power over me,” Harry muttered, scowling.

“I suppose not,” she said, sympathy streaming out of her brown eyes.

“The thing is…” He hesitated to mention something so personal. It wasn’t just embarrassing but humiliating in the extreme.

“What is it?” She reached across the table and clasped his hand. “Harry, you know you can tell me anything.”

“Tell her what?”

Ron came striding in, James, Albus and Timothy clamoring behind him, no doubt hyper from the ice cream. Harry tucked away the gruesome descriptions of death under other papers. He didn’t want his children to see this. They couldn’t actually read anything this complicated, but he didn’t want to take any chances.
“We were discussing the limits of the bond. There is good news.”

“Really? Brilliant! I knew you’d come up with something ‘Mione,” Ron grinned.

She smiled back but darted her eyes at the three children listening avidly. “Um, Ron, I think Lily needs to be put to bed. Would you take her and the children up to their rooms?”

“I don’t wanna go to sleep!” Timothy protested.

“Me neither!”

“Don’t wanna!”

“We know that,” Harry soothed. “But you don’t want Lily to be by herself, do you, James, Al?”

“C’mon, kids. We can put Lily to bed and then play Exploding Snap,” Ron urged.

The boys looked mutinous for a moment. But the thrill of playing against a grown-up was too much to resist. So they pelted up the stairs, Ron following them more slowly with the sleepy Lily pressed against his shoulder.

Hermione waited until she was sure the children was out of earshot. Then she raised her eyebrows at Harry.

Harry swallowed. “Snape tried to…seduce me. He wants to get into Grimmauld Place.”

The look of horror on her face was swallowed up by outrage. “He didn’t try—?”

“No, even Snape wouldn’t go that far. But I don’t think he’s going to stop there. What are my rights under the law? I mean, how long can I keep putting him off?”

Now the brown-eyed gaze was worried and she shuffled through the papers again. “I honestly don’t know, Harry. It’s not like in the Muggle world. There, a wife has the right to refuse her husband if she doesn’t want sexual relations. But a lot of wizarding law is rather medieval and hasn’t been changed since it was first formulated. If Snape tries to—force you, you can fight back. You just can’t hurt him seriously, kill him or have any recourse to the law.” When she saw his stricken look, she added softly, “I’m really sorry, Harry.”

Harry couldn’t answer. He knew Hermione felt awful but he was too sickened to comfort her. His power was greater than Snape’s. But the man was skilled in the Dark Arts as he was not and had proved he wasn’t above playing dirty. If he truly tried to force or trick Harry, what could he do?

They resumed looking through the papers for anything that could protect him but no one would have been reassured seeing the grim looks on their faces.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
The dinner was freshly prepared and lay gently steaming on the table. Snape was no gourmet cook by any stretch of the imagination; an affinity for potions didn’t necessarily translate into being a cordon bleu chef. But he’d found a battered cookbook among the kitchen shelves and had been able to whip up something edible.

He thought the steak-and-kidney pie with mashed potatoes was fairly adequate…and the tuber mash was a perfect conduit for the potion. If the potato wasn’t to Potter’s liking, the treacle tart would do nicely. That had been the one thing he couldn’t make. However, he’d found plenty in the Coldkeep.

He had given thought as to what he would do with the potion if it proved successful. It was possible to patent it and make himself a small fortune. Amortentia was good enough for stupid schoolchildren. But adults might pay very well for a love elixir that was colorless and odorless…
But he hesitated to add it when Potter wasn’t on the premises. Where was the blasted man? Severus had been here for hours now and he hadn’t returned. He couldn’t still be at work, could he? Was he shacked up at the Burrow or Grimmauld Place?

Severus didn’t want to bother calling the Burrow again; he’d only run into more of those troublesome Weasleys. Molly would be uncooperative and Arthur would dither in his useless way. If Harry were there, he’d likely prefer a meal by Mrs. Weasley over anything Severus could concoct.

“Snivellus, you rotten, twisted, sick little homunculus. Is this the sort of thing you picked up at Voldemort’s knee?”

“More likely Voldemort’s tit. The two of them are hideous enough to have come from the same nest,” said head number one.

“I told the witch doctor I was in love with you. I told the witch doctor I was in love with you, and then the witch doctor he told me what to do. He said, ‘Oo ee oo ah ah ting tang walla walla bing bang! Oo ee oo ah ah ting tang walla walla bing bang! Oo ee oo ah ah ting tang walla walla bing bang!’”

The hours passed and Potter did not return. The chorus from the heads grew louder and more penetrating with the passage of time. Finally, Severus cleared the meal away with his wand, feeling furious and aggrieved.

He’d gone to all this effort for Potter. The least the man could have done was show up.

He leaned against the banister and shook his head slowly. It was inane for him to feel put upon; after all, Potter hadn’t demanded that he cook or keep house for him. He’d done his best to stay out of Severus’s way and had tried, with that ill-fated outing to the orphanage, to rectify the debacle in the Prophet. Why then should he feel so angry with the brat?

He thought of Harry’s wounded eyes when Severus had rebuffed his efforts. The hurt and misery on Lily’s face when he’d called her a Mudblood swam into his mind. She had warned him against the evil of his new “friends” in Hogwarts but he’d ignored her, too spitefully happy that she hated his rival, James Potter.

Had her death at the Dark Lord’s hands been as Harry related? Voldemort had told Snape that she’d attacked him, that she had fired a spell at him causing him to retaliate. But Harry’s tale told a different story. His master had struck down an unarmed mother defending her child.

It hurt to think she’d died that way, that she had sacrificed herself to save her child…and he had shown that selfsame child nothing but contempt and loathing. What would Lily think if she’d seen how badly he’d served her?

Severus was unaccountably weary and he noticed with distant surprise that his hands were shaking.

Was it time…? Yes, he needed the antivenin and pain-killers. That’s what was wrong with him. He’d administer them and be his usual self in no time. This maudlin introspection of his would pass.

Dragging himself up stairs that seemed infinitely longer than usual, Severus staggered to his bedroom and reached for his potions. He swallowed and shivered as his usual self-confidence re-asserted itself.

His momentary pity was gone. When morning came, he would renew the attack. He had a dozen flacons filled with the brew. He could afford to wait.
"I put a spell on youuuuuu because you’re miiiiiiinnnnee."

Severus resisted the sudden, violent urge to scream.

Harry decided to stay at Grimmauld Place a few days longer. Hermione’s warning as well as Snape’s attempt to trick him into bed were preying on his mind and he was very reluctant to get within the man’s reach again. Grimmauld Place, while not the coziest of homesteads, provided him with a refuge from the conniving Potions master.

The Dark Arts library was useful too. Hermione was often in there, when she wasn’t involved in her work at the Ministry of Magic. She was actively campaigning for equal rights, not just among wizards and witches, but for other outcast members of society. Harry smiled when he remembered her strident efforts to free house-elves when they were at Hogwarts. They’d all been so young, so filled with reckless confidence and the clear notion of what right and wrong were.

Now he was older and his life hadn’t turned out as he’d thought it would. Things should have been simpler, but they weren’t. He and Ginny should be growing old together and enjoying themselves when the children went off to school. Now his beloved was dead and he was shackled to his horrible, old, greasy Potions master. Life really had a way of throwing nasty surprises.

What was Snape doing now? He shuddered to think about it. The man was probably rearranging the cottage to suit his every whim. Merlin knew what mess Harry would find when he returned.

Maybe he should just move out permanently and leave the cottage to Snape. He was reluctant to do that; he and Ginny had made it a home. They’d had so many happy years there, watching their little family grow. There had been celebrations, anniversaries, parties and quiet evenings spent together. It wasn’t fair that he should abandon it to that man, driven out like a fleeing refugee.

The twins seemed happy enough, although he detected signs of misery in Albus’s green eyes. The younger twin occasionally asked him when they were going home and Harry had no clear answer for him. James seemed determined to make the most of their time and Harry had his hands full keeping them from getting in Kreacher’s way or bothering the talking portraits stored in the attic.

The only respite came from their occasional outings. Daringly, Harry had taken the children to visit Muggle London a few times and the boys had been delighted. At this stage, they couldn’t practice magic, so there was little to differentiate between them and Muggle children. Their eyes had gone wide at the bustle in Piccadilly Circus. Lily had shrieked happily at being bombarded by pigeons they fed and the food and sweets had rivaled anything they could have picked up in Diagon Alley.

Riding along in fast cabs and double-decker buses had been a dangerous thrill, with the boys nearly falling out when they bent over the sides and out windows. They had been tickled at seeing the Beefeaters in front of the Tower of London. Like most tourists, they had posed next to them and engaged in silly antics to get the men to move or crack a smile.

They had picked up lovely souvenirs, taken lots of pictures and Harry had promised them they could visit again someday, when Lily was older. All in all, it had been a wonderful break.

Maybe he could make the move permanent. No matter what Hermione thought, the world was wide and there were plenty of places filled with people who had never heard of Harry Potter. Would it be so bad to lose his magic, take his children and disappear? Snape might have wanted to make his life hell but would he give up his practice and scour the Muggle world just to resume torturing his bond mate? Harry didn’t think he was that persistent…was he?
He would avoid Snape in the interim while Hermione worked hard, both in her capacity as legal advisor in the Ministry and in her private searches for loopholes in the Unbreakable Vow. He’d once said Hermione was the smartest person he knew and he meant it. If there was anyone who could figure out a way out of or around this mess, it was her. Meanwhile, he’d steer clear of his so-called bond mate.

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Harry strode into the orphanage the next morning only to stop dead at seeing Ron standing stiffly at the door.

“Oi, Ron. What’re you doing here?” It wasn’t like Ron to be at his place of work. It wasn’t that Ron didn’t like kids. But his job as an Auror kept him pretty busy. Besides, if he were coming to see Harry, he would have sent an owl. He wouldn’t just have shown up.

“Hello, Harry. Look, could we talk outside in the back for a minute?” There was an outside play area for the children to romp about in so they could enjoy sunshine and fresh air. There was a fence around it, built with money he’d donated. Harry remembered too well how Fenrir Greyback had boasted about attacking children and he took no chances.

“Sure. No problem, mate. You know the way.” Harry waved Ron ahead. The red-haired man hesitated then moved ahead of Harry. He walked unerringly to the play area and turned around.

He found Harry facing him, wand in hand. “Right. Keep your hands up where I can see them,” Harry said levelly.

“Wha-? Harry, mate, what’re you doing?”

“You’re not Ron. Ron’s never been back to the play area before. He doesn’t have a clue where this place is.”

“Harry, I stopped in before you got here and asked where this place was. I didn’t want to alarm anybody by Apparating in and waiting here.”

“On the train to Hogwarts our first year, what spell did you try on Pettigrew?” Harry snapped.

“What?”

“I’m waiting.”

Ron blinked. Then his expression became grudgingly respectful. “Very good, Potter. I must commend you on your caution. It’s good to see that you haven’t lost all your vaunted skills since the war ended.”

The voice was still Ron’s. But the barely concealed contempt… “Snape?”

The red-headed man crossed his arms and smirked. That clinched it. Ron never smirked like that and the posture was all Snape.

Harry clenched his wand, furious at the attempted deception. “What’s the idea, Snape? Gotten bored with attacking me in your own skin? You have to try using my friend’s?”

“Don’t be an idiot, Potter,” “Ron” snapped. “I’m merely trying to get you alone and didn’t want anyone seeing me at this place.”
“Why?”

“Why what? Why I didn’t want to be seen or why I wished to speak to you?”

“Both, I guess.”

“Very well. And do lower that wand. It will look highly strange to anybody looking out and seeing you.”

Harry reluctantly lowered the wand though he didn’t take it off the other figure entirely. “So talk, Snape. What’s so urgent you decide you actually want my company? And why the disguise?”

The other man’s jaw worked. It was truly weird to see Snape’s expressions on his best mate’s face. “I wished to…apologize.”

“What?” Of all the things Harry expected to hear, it wasn’t that. “Apologize for what?”

“I’ve treated you badly and I wished to make amends for it.”

Again, not what he expected to hear. “Make amends how?”

“I propose a dinner—for just the two of us at your cottage.”

“We’ve tried eating together, Snape. The first time, you wanted to sleaze your way into my bed. The second time, you made it clear you found my children totally unbearable. Why should I decide I want to eat with you alone now?”

“As I stated, I wished to apologize. I also want us to start afresh. You wanted to show the world we could be a couple. I wish to make that a reality.”

He seemed sincere. But it was hard to judge when he was in another man’s skin. “So why did you feel you had to look like Ron to ask me this?”

“Frankly, I didn’t believe you’d let me approach or even listen if you saw it was truly I.”

Yes, that made sense. He was keeping clear of Snape and the other man knew it. Gotta hand it to Snape; he knew how to overcome obstacles. Guess that’s what him such a good agent in the wars against Voldemort.

“You’re right. But I still don’t know that I want to be alone with you.” An idea struck. “Then again, we could make this work.”

Triumph flared briefly before wariness shadowed the freckled face. “What did you have in mind?”

“You want us to be a couple. You also want us to be seen together—in public. We still haven’t quite fixed that mess with the Prophet. So, instead of a dinner at home, let’s dine out at a restaurant. My choice.”

Now “Ron” looked decidedly unhappy. “But I went to all the trouble to prepare a home-cooked meal, just for us,” he grumbled.

“Sorry, Snape. It’s too late to play the aggrieved housewife.” Now it was Harry’s turn to smirk when he saw the man’s fists clench with ill-concealed anger.

“Very well,” Snape ground out. “I accept your terms.”
“Don’t look so gloomy. We’ll have a grand time.”

“Where will your children be?”

“James, Albus and Lily will stay at home with Kreacher. If anything goes wrong, I’ll have him contact Molly.”

Severus looked vastly relieved. He had probably worried that Harry would want to bring his insufferable children along. “Where do you want me to meet you, Potter? I assume I’m not to show up at the Burrow or Grimmauld Place.”

“I’ll meet you at the house. Tonight at seven.” Harry glanced back at the building. “Did you want to come in and help me with the children?”

Snape sneered. Again, it was weird to see Ron’s face twisted in such unfamiliar expressions. “Not likely, Potter.”

Harry shrugged. “Suit yourself.” He marched back into the building—but only after seeing Snape Disapparate first. There were some people you just didn’t turn your back on.

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“She wore an itsy bitsy teeny weeny yellow polka dot bikini…”

“Seriously, Snape. It doesn’t matter what you wear. You’ll still look like death warmed over.” Head number one loomed over his shoulder, staring at the assemblage of funereal garments that made up Severus’s evening wear.

“Don’t you have anything that won’t make you look like the inside of a dog’s arse, Snivellus?”

“Says the original hound himself,” Severus snapped as he perused the contents of his wardrobe.

“You know, I’m not actually Sirius Black, so that’s a stupid comment to make. Not one of your best comebacks, Snivellus!”

Ignoring them, Snape chucked off his towel and began to dress. The sight of his naked body provoked catcalls and comparisons from a candy cane bleached of color to a walking Inferius but he was determined to thrust them out of his mind for the evening.

Potter’s decision to dine out had merit, after all. He would be free from the jeers and taunts of these maniacal constructs for at least one evening. And he could drug Potter at some public venue just as easily as at home. In fact, a public setting would provide even better opportunity. All he had to do was wait for a moment’s distraction—say, the timely interruption by one of Potter’s many public fawners—and he would tip a flacon into the man’s wine or food.

Now if only he could get dressed in something suitable for a night out. Well, it wasn’t as though he needed to wear something seductive. Soon, Potter would believe him the most irresistible person in the room, no matter what he wore.

Bolstered with self-confidence, he chose an old but comfortable green long-sleeved shirt. He found a pair of silver cufflinks his mother had once given him as a present and fastened them. Satisfied, he pulled a black jacket embroidered with silver over the whole.

Severus perused himself in the standing full-length mirror. A glamour hid his scars and his hair had been washed and brushed until it shone. He didn’t resemble any figure of beauty but at least he was
well dressed for a change and in Slytherin colors. It was all he needed to boost his confidence.

“Still going through with this plan, Snivellus? Mind you, I get your motivation. The only way anybody would sleep with you is if they were drugged…or unconscious.”

“You know, if you were going to use Polyjuice this morning, why didn’t you pretend to be Gilderoy Lockhart? That way Harry would have something attractive to look at for a change.” Head number one did a tumble and roll in front of him, obscuring his sight of the mirror.

“I’m too sexy for my shirt, too sexy to get hurt. That’s right, too sexy!”

Severus ground his teeth. Potter had better be on time for a change or he was going to hex these heads. He didn’t care if they came back tenfold. Anything, just to get a little peace and—

“Snape? Are you here?”

“Finally,” he muttered as he tugged the jacket shut and buttoned it.

He descended the stairs and halted.

Potter was standing there. He wore a dark green dinner jacket over a white shirt so blinding it was like a flare in the soft light. The jacket was perfectly fitted, molded to his body so that his form was perfectly outlined. Harry would never be a broadly muscled athlete like Viktor Krum. But he had filled out since his childhood and his clothes emphasized the handsome young man he’d become.

Abruptly, Severus remembered the all-too-brief sight he’d had of his bond mate, half naked and deliciously rumpled from interrupted sleep. Harry might not have been homosexual but Severus certainly was and the twitching in his trousers was a startling reminder of that fact.

Potter was staring at him too, green eyes gleaming behind the round lenses. The brilliance of them was undeniable—like Lily’s, only not. This was not some pathetic stand-in for her but a unique individual, exquisite in his own right.

“Snape? Wow. You look…good.”

“Eloquent as ever, Mr. Potter.” Severus regained his voice at the same time as his composure and descended the rest of the way. Deciding it couldn’t hurt to flatter Potter a little, he added, “Your appearance is more than adequate.”

Potter rolled his eyes. “Whatever. Shall we get going?”

“Where are we going?”

Potter grinned at him, a gleeful expression that made Snape tense. “It’s a surprise. Just wait and see.”

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.

Author's Note: I wanted to let everyone know that we will soon be changing the summary of story to reflect new path it is taking. Thanks for your patience, Misty (Ari).
Dinner and a Show

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Title: Scarred Souls
Author: Misty Moonlight/Co-author: QueenBoadicea
Beta: QueenBoadicea
Pairings: Severus/Harry
Published: 12/10/2008
Summary: A widowed Harry must bond with Snape in order to save his daughter’s life. Harry’s young children scheme to bring their daddy and new father together, and form a new family, while changing the hearts of two scarred souls.

Warnings: Romance, Drama, Angst, Alternate Reality/Universe, Sexual Situations, Hurt/Comfort, M/M, Slash, Anal, Language, Humor, possible MPreg, Bonding, Original Characters, Family, non-canon, OOC, WIP

Chapter 22: Dinner and a Show

Outside the cottage was a long car, the kind Severus recognized as belonging to the Ministry. He halted and shot Potter a suspicious glare. “What is the meaning of this, Potter? Is this your idea of a joke?”

The Gryffindor shot him a look, part impatience, part exasperation. “Crap, Severus, will you stop being so paranoid? I thought Ministry escort would be a good idea. Your enemies won’t dare to attack and the public will see the two of us as a cozy couple.”

“Or think you’re having me taken into custody.”

“Not if I’m in the back seat with you.” Without another word, Potter walked to the car. The silent driver opened the door for him and then waited for Severus.

With a much put-upon sigh, Severus seated himself beside Potter. The door was shut and they pulled soundlessly away from the curb.

“Now will you kindly tell me where we’re going?”

“It’s a restaurant in Muggle London.”
“Muggle London?” Severus felt betrayed. He had no prejudice against Muggles per se but this was not what Potter had promised.

“Relax, Severus. The great thing about this is they won’t pose any danger to you.”

“And no benefit either,” Severus rapped out. “Potter, did you forget one of the purposes of being seen together is that the Wizarding World would see how well we are supposedly getting along?”

“I don’t doubt the information will get back to the Wizarding World, Severus,” Harry replied calmly. “And if you want to start showing your good side, you might try calling me ‘Harry’,” he finished, nodding towards the driver.

Severus merely scowled and settled back into the cushions. Harry sighed and glanced at him wistfully before staring out the window.

The minutes crawled by. Severus noted how the scenery changed subtly, the vibrant colors of the wizarding community fading to the somber hues of the Muggle world. When they pulled up in front of a restaurant, modest looking but with bright light streaming from its windows, he was startled to realize they’d arrived.

Harry hopped out of the car and waited, eyebrows raised. “Coming?”

Very soon, I hope. Severus hid a smile and joined his unwitting bond mate.

Inside the restaurant were many people dressed in ordinary, dull Muggle clothing. Once again, he questioned Potter’s insistence on bringing him here. How could the anonymity of Muggles redeem him in the eyes of the Wizarding World?

A waiter came over to their table. “Hello, I’m Louis. May I take your order?”

Harry smiled at him. “Thanks. What do you recommend?”

The man smiled back, his eyes lingering on Harry’s lips. “Weell, I’m partially to the steak, myself. It comes with your choice of side dish—potatoes, one of seven different salads, sugar snap peas, baby carrots.”

“Fine, I’ll have that with potatoes. Medium well done, please. Severus?”

“I’ll have the sole and Caesar salad,” Severus said dryly. It didn’t escape his notice that the waiter remained firmly focused on Harry. The scrutiny wasn’t blatant but it was there in the dilated pupils, the faint flush on his cheeks, the gaze that swept surreptitiously over Potter’s form. Lovely, Severus thought sourly, even Muggles fawn over the Boy Who Lived.

As usual, the Gryffindor was completely oblivious to it. It was strange, really. He’d always thought Potter to be nothing more than an attention-seeking glory hound like his father. Yet there were times when he didn’t seem to notice how people stared at him with admiration.

Not that the attention was undeserved. Severus had to admit that Potter looked rather—enticing this evening. In the light from the wall sconces, he was shown to be quite handsome, flushed with health and possessing the good looks that were bestowed on the fortunate who were blessed with youth, strength and good parentage.

The green eyes were gleaming in the indoor lighting. They reminded Severus once more of Harry’s mother, the long-lost friend and sole shining star of his own boyhood. Something twisted inside him when he thought of his scheme to drug the youth. Perhaps it would be best to continue as Harry
wished—with the honest desire to become better acquainted. Surely that would be enough to achieve his goal of—

“Harry?”

Severus looked sharply behind him and stiffened in anger. That meddling woman from the orphanage, Corabett Kinderlieb, stood there. She was peering over his head, smiling at Harry. A stocky man of about forty was by her side, unobtrusively attired in a plain linen Muggle suit.

“Corabett? Hi! Good to see you!” Harry grinned at her but there was a nervous quality to it. “Howya doing, Owen?”

“Can’t complain, Harry,” said the man. Severus noted that the man had a faint Germanic accent. Hmm, that explained the foreign last name. His idle curiosity vanished and turned to outrage when they took a table—right next to theirs!

Severus darted a furious glance at his bond mate. Potter had known this woman would be here. This so-called meeting was nothing more than a staged attempt to meet with this insipid creature. The fact that she had a man with her didn’t make a damn bit of difference. She was obviously a shameless cheat, no better than Harry himself.

“What is she doing here, Potter?” he hissed so they wouldn’t hear.

“It’s Harry, remember? Smile, Severus. If anyone can take back a good report of us together, it’s Corabett.” He turned towards the others. “Owen, this is my bond mate, Severus Snape. Severus, Owen.”

Owen glanced at Severus, seemed to weigh him soberly with pale blue eyes. They reminded Severus unpleasantly of Gilderoy Lockhart’s. “Pleased to meet you, Severus.”

His lips thinned. On a first name basis already, were they? “Hello,” he said tightly.

The abruptness of his answer didn’t go unnoticed. An awkward silence fell. Then that female leaned over from her table. “Harry, it’s good to see you.”

“Thanks, Corabett. How are things with you and Owen?” Harry said easily, turning towards the other couple.

Owen grinned at him, a vacuous expression that made Severus clench his jaw. “It’s very good, Harry. Corabett and I have great news.”

“Really?” Harry sat up straighter. “What is it?”

Corabett blushed. “Owen, we agreed to keep it a secret.”

“Come on, Cora. We’ve told your folks and mine. We’ve told the neighbors. We’ve done everything except take out an article in the *Prophet*. And it’s Harry! He can keep a secret.” He leaned towards Harry. “Cora and I are having a baby.”

“Wow! Congratulations, you two.” Potter grinned and the brightness of it was like a lantern. Severus was stunned by its radiance and instinctively leaned closer, like a plant seeking the sun.

Potter turned that charm of his so easily on to others. Why couldn’t he show something of it to his bond mate? For a moment, he envied Corabett and her fat-faced husband as he hadn’t envied anyone since James Potter had snatched Lily Evans from his side.
The Gryffindor had shifted his chair closer to their table, still grinning like a fool and wishing them all the luck in the world. “You’re really blessed, Corabett. I know you’ll both be really happy, Owen.”

The man flushed, the ugly red color spreading over his cheeks like a wine stain spilled on the tablecloth. Severus would have sneered but he couldn’t think of a thing to say that would bring him gracefully into the conversation.

While he sat there, fuming, a waitress brought their orders. Potter paid only scant attention to the food, seeming to prefer blathering on with the crass pair at the next table. Finally, Severus could stand it no longer.

“Harry, eat your steak before it gets cold,” he growled.

Potter glanced back at him, blinking as if he’d forgotten Severus was there. “Oh, thank you, Severus.”

Owen looked up from his menu, his eyes darting between the two of them. “So, Harry. Have you two come here before?”

“No. It’s our first time together. Your wife recommended this place to us.”

“Did she? She’s got great taste, my Cora.”

The woman blushed. It suited her no better than her pudgy husband. “Owen, you’re only saying that because this is your favorite place.”

“I take it you two come here quite often?” Severus asked. They looked startled, like they hadn’t expected him to speak. What was he, an end table?

“Oh yes. Owen is Muggleborn so he’s really fond of Muggle food and preparations,” Corabett burbled.

“My own family used to bring me here for meals when I was old enough to be allowed in public. They’d bring me back on my summer holidays. I always had a good time here. I always told myself if I ever got married, I’d bring my wife back here.” The watery eyes looked adoringly at the woman seated across the table and she smiled back at him. For a moment, it was as if they were the only couple in the place.

Potter leaned back from the pair. There was a flash of pain in his look, like that of a starving man in a cage, staring at food that was placed just out of his reach. Those changeling eyes that could never hide their expressions flicked at Severus and then down towards his plate.

Coming out of their amorous daze, Owen turned towards Severus. “So, um, Severus. What are you working on?”

Severus lifted an eyebrow. “Working on?”

“Harry tells us you spend a lot of time in your lab. I wondered if you were working on anything in particular.”

Severus was about to inquire what business it was of Owen’s when he caught Potter’s warning glare. Right, they were supposed to be a loving couple. He struggled to maintain a civil tone. “I’m working on a cure for baldness in male wizards.”
“Really? The Muggles already have something like that.”

“Do they?”

Owen nodded. “It’s a small blue pill with an interesting side effect.” He leaned close over the table. “It arouses and increases male potency,” he whispered with a wink.

Severus could feel himself flushing. He wasn’t a prude by any means. But he had never heard of such a thing and felt foolish knowing that this man had. Rallying himself, he asked, “Does it work on wizards?”

Owen sat back and shrugged. “No idea. But I suppose if a wizard did try it and found it worked, he wouldn’t necessarily advertise it.”

“Have you ever had to use it, Owen?” Severus said dryly and was meanly gratified to see Harry glare at him. He ignored it.

The man flushed again, this time with embarrassment. “No! Of course not.”

“It’s just you were so delighted with your announcement of having a child that I thought there might have been some difficulty about conception.”

“Severus,” Harry hissed, his voice low with anger.

Severus gave him a mock innocent look. “What? I’m as happy as anyone that they’ve managed to conceive. The population of the Wizarding World is grievously low, as you know.”

“This is actually our third child,” Corabett said, her voice frosty with dislike.

“Oh. Congratulations.” The woman’s brown eyes hardened like stones and her mouth had pursed up like a drawstring bag. She and her husband turned from him and settled on eating their food.

Thank Merlin. At least now he’d be spared any more asinine attempts at conversation.

Potter was giving him a deadly look, the green eyes darkened with anger, but he didn’t say another word. He only stabbed into his steak with a viciousness that suggested he wanted to do the same to Severus.

For the most part, the man had spared him the childish bouts of temper Severus had known from his youth. Actually, Potter had been remarkably forbearing since their entire handfasting had begun. It made his own behavior seem even nastier, by comparison. Severus didn’t care to think that way so he firmly banished the errant thought, concentrating on his own meal.

After all, he wasn’t the guilty party here. Potter had known this woman was coming here, had probably set it up with her in advance. If his purpose was as innocent as he’d claimed, he would have told Severus about it beforehand. Since his bond mate was willing to be so devious, there was no reason for him to take the higher ground in this matter.

They were finishing dessert when Severus realized he’d yet to use his potion. He had to find a way to divert Harry. When the postprandial coffee was brought, Severus casually shoved his spoon so that it fell near Harry’s foot.

“Blast. Did you see that, Harry? Where did it go?”

Harry ducked his head beneath the tablecloth and Severus swiftly tipped the potion into his bond
mate’s cup. He leaned back just as Harry came up with the spoon. A careful monitoring of the other table showed the Kinderliebs were fully engrossed in their meal; they’d noticed nothing.

“Here you go.”

“Thank you so much.” He rubbed it on his napkin and sipped his coffee, careful not to watch Harry too closely.

He was aware when the potion began to work. Harry’s eyes seemed to glaze over and his face acquired a faraway expression. “Severus? Um, I know I’ve never said this before but…thanks for agreeing to come here with me.”

“You’re quite welcome, Harry,” he murmured. He was a little disappointed. Wasn’t the man going to gush over him? Well, this was an altered version of Amortentia; doubtless there would be changes in its effects.

“I mean it. You’ve been a brick all evening and I’m really grateful for it.”

“No need. This is for our mutual satisfaction. I want to be vindicated in the public eye and you wish for more amicable relations at home.”

Harry nodded, the light catching the dark strands of his hair. It didn’t seem like such a horrid mess now. It shone with dark blue highlights wherever the light hit. Those grass-green eyes were radiant as a meadow in high noon. Harry himself almost seemed to glow.

Severus frowned. He shouldn’t be having such thoughts about his bond mate. This potion couldn’t somehow be affecting him as well, could it?

He dismissed the idea. However, he nearly spewed out his coffee when he felt a hand sliding up his leg under the table.

“You know, you really are very attractive. Such lovely silky hair and your eyes! So penetrating and smoldering,” Harry murmured, licking his lips.

“Thank you, Harry. That’s very generous of you.” He grabbed Harry’s hand as it slid into his lap.

“And your voice…so sultry. It’s sexy, really.”

Harry smiled again but it lacked the glow he’d given so freely to that boring couple. His expression had acquired the mushy fatuousness of a lover. Severus’s stomach clenched at the sight of it.

Severus glanced to the side to see the Kinderliebs watching this display of public affection. Owen’s eyes were bulging in surprise. Corabett wore a far more disturbing expression of suspicion.

That settled it. Severus had to get out of here before Harry decided to attack him.

“That’s quite enough, Harry. Perhaps we should take this somewhere more private.”

The emerald eyes lit up. “Really? Wonderful! Let’s find a private place and we can Apparate back to the cottage.”

“What about the driver of the car?” Severus pointed out.

“Car?”

“Yes, the Ministry car.”
“Oh, even better! We can cuddle in the back seat.”

Severus barely resisted a shudder. Cuddle? With Potter? Severus hoped this was a side effect of the potion and not the man’s normal presexual behavior. “Perhaps you should get the check and then we’ll leave.”

Harry’s smile grew even sappier, if that was possible. “Anything for you, Severus.”

Exiting the restaurant proved problematic. Harry couldn’t seem to keep his hands off him. When Severus sharply rebuked him, the man pouted but refrained from pawing him—much.

The driver in the car asked, “Where to now, Mr. Potter?”

“Back to the cottage,” Harry said, before Severus could stop him.

“The cottage? Why not Grimmauld Place? You won’t have to travel to see your children in the morning,” Severus suggested.

“But the mansion is so dreary,” Harry whined. “Wouldn’t you prefer the cottage? It’s so much cozier and homey. And you’re already living there so you won’t have to travel.”

And those dreadful constructs would be waiting, ready to shriek recriminations and rebukes. There was no way he could be able to perform his conjugal duties with those things watching. “Ah, but I don’t want your children to worry where their father is. Grimmauld Place will be fine.”

Harry heaved a sigh but obeyed his suggestion. “Number 12 Grimmauld Place, driver.”

“Yes, sir.”

Harry’s hands began running up and down Severus’s arm. “Oh god, Sev. You’re really firm here, aren’t you? I can’t wait to see what the rest of your body looks like,” he murmured.

“Harry, not now,” Severus gritted. “I’ve no wish to put on a show for the driver.” He clasped Harry’s hands tightly so they wouldn’t wander. Harry sighed in bliss and leaned his head against Severus’s shoulder.

Grimmauld Place. Those children would be there. They were bound to suspect something if he showed up with Harry clinging to him like Devil’s Snare.

Well, let the little urchins scream if they wanted. Harry would be solely focused on him. After they’d fucked, Severus could come and go at Grimmauld Place as he wished. Harry could block the floo, of course, but he would be granted all the rights of a Black and no one could bar him from the premises. He would dig through the library, come up with a countercurse for those pesky flying homunculi and then the little brats would pay.

Severus glanced down and was startled to see Harry’s eyes peering pensively at him. “You look even more handsome when you smile, you know that?” he whispered.

Before Severus could move or answer, he brought one of Severus’s scarred hands up to his lips and placed a soft kiss in the palm. Grasping it in his hands, he shut his eyes again and appeared to sleep.

Glad for the silence, Severus stared sightlessly out the car window, his mind racing with a thousand thoughts.

TBC
This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.

Author Note: Hi everyone, I am sure by now you all have noticed that the story is taking an entirely different direction than when I first started it. As I mentioned before, this is now a joint collaboration effort and QueenBoadicea has kindly taking over the writing and direction of story. I recently changed the summary under story description from my original one but not yet under individual chapters. I may change it again not sure. This story will also now be featuring Harry/Seme and Sev/Uke. I hope that means Harry/top and Sev/bottom because that's what's going to happen. If I have it wrong, please let me know.

Thx,

Misty (Ari)
The manor seemed quiet when they arrived. No children about, no grotty little house-elf in evidence. Good. Maybe they could get through this with a minimum of delay.

“Lumos”. Severus peered around the hallway cautiously. He didn’t need much light to see but wanted to make sure the coast was clear. Then his eyes narrowed.

“Potter, why is there wallpaper with ducks and roses covering the walls?”

“Hm? Oh, it was the children’s idea. They thought it would make me want to stay.”

Severus could feel his lips curling. Letting his children decorate—really, Potter needed to take a firmer hand. “Well, I think it’s an excrescence. You will remove it as soon as possible.”

“Okay. Can we have sex now?”

“Daddy?”
Severus sighed in exasperation. There went the hope of avoiding Potter’s demon spawn. Potter had just stepped close to him as the twin urchins came barreling into the hallway. They skidded to a stop when they saw their father, his arms wound around Severus.

“Daddy? What’s he doing here?” James asked, his whole body bristling with hostility.

This was too delicious. Having the children see their father like this was proving to be an unexpected bonus. Severus smiled maliciously and purred, “Your father and I have been reconciling our various differences. As you can see, Harry has become quite—attached to me. It would be best if the two of you kept to your rooms for the rest of the evening.”

“He’s right, kids. Run along to your rooms.” The dazed Gryffindor didn’t so much as look at the children. He favored Severus with a dazed smile and nestled happily in his arms.

“What?” Albus stared from Severus to Potter.

“Are you deaf as well as stupid? Your father and I wish to be alone. Now if you’ll excuse us…”

James ran forward and grabbed his father’s leg. “Daddy! Don’t go with him! Daddy?”

“Not now, James,” Potter responded absently, running his hands up and down Severus’s arms before pulling him close. Before Severus could stop him, the man had brought his head down for a deep kiss.

Well, well. Severus’s smile of triumph was swiftly obliterated by the artful sucking at his lips. Potter’s mouth tasted of the juices from the steak and the bitterness of coffee and sweet chocolate cake mixed. It was a heady banquet and Severus shut his eyes, basking in the heat and aroma.

Whatever else Potter had learned in his years since Hogwarts, he had become an expert kisser. The plump lips sucked and drew at him in a way that caused a definite tingling low in his belly. Severus was hugging him close, getting lost in his warmth and masculine firmness, when he felt a hard kick to his shin.

He pulled back with a snarl to see green eyes eerily reminiscent of his bond mate’s glaring at him. “Get away from our dad!” Albus screamed.

“Yeah, leave him alone!” James yelled, pulling at his father’s coat. Potter would not be budged in the slightest, only continuing to give Severus a sappy smile.

“That is enough!” Severus roared. He drew his wand. “Petrificus Totalus!”

The boys toppled over, lying stiffly on the floor. Severus wondered how his bond mate would react, given his protective attitude towards his children. However, Potter merely glanced curiously at the frozen pair. “Severus, that wasn’t very nice.”

“Well, neither are your spawn, Potter.”

“Aren’t you going to call me Harry? I like it when you do that,” the green-eyed man murmured, looking up at Severus from under his lashes.

Well, that wasn’t too much to ask, especially since the potion was making Harry so biddable. “Harry. Might I suggest we dispose of these two before carrying on with our business?”

“I would prefer to think of it as pleasure,” Potter sighed.
Severus smirked. “When I start with you, you’ll know I mean business.”

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It had taken no time at all to put the children to bed. Kreacher had appeared briefly, stating that Lily was asking for her “Dada” but Harry had spared no time at all for her. He’d impatiently asked Kreacher to put the toddler to bed and that had been the end of it.

Now they were in one of the older rooms, belonging to neither Regulus nor Sirius Black, thank goodness. Severus had warded the door against intrusion and thrown up the Silencing Charm, since it was unlikely Potter retained enough presence of mind to do so.

The chamber was sumptuous, reeking of pureblood wealth, finery and privilege. The furniture was lovingly polished antiques dating back at least three centuries while the bed was an elegant four-poster big enough to hold at least three people comfortably. A luscious Persian carpet in Slytherin green and silver graced the floor, so thick Severus knew his bare feet would sink into it up to his ankles once he removed his shoes. A massive gleaming ebony wardrobe inlaid with silver held Potter’s clothes and shoes.

Out of keeping with all the rest was an old battered trunk, resting on the floor and pressed against the wall. It didn’t look like anything a Black would have deigned to have in his bedroom. Severus could only assume it was Potter’s and wondered at his keeping such an old worn-out piece of luggage.

Not that he had much time to note anything but cursory details; Potter appeared determined to get them both naked as quickly as possible. The Gryffindor’s Muggle attire was being yanked off and tossed in the direction of an ornate chair next to a writing desk. He had pulled off his shoes and socks and kicked them underneath the bed.

Severus refused to treat his own clothing so cavalierly. But neither did he wish to delay. He wasn’t entirely certain how long this Amortentia variation would last, though it likely would have run its course by tomorrow.

He unbuttoned his jacket and hung it up in the wardrobe. His shirt was following it, until he found his hands encumbered by Potter’s hands sweeping up his chest.

“Mmm, look at this. Your skin is so smooth and white.” Before Severus could stop him, Potter leaned forward and ran his tongue in a long swipe over the exposed skin.

Severus jumped and trembled at the warm flesh trickling over his. It had been so long since anyone had touched him intimately, he was momentarily shaken. “Potter, please,” he gasped.

“Harry.”

“Harry, I—”

Harry wasn’t listening. He slid the shirt off Severus’s shoulders so that it fell behind him and sank gracefully down at his feet. Severus watched numbly as the man deftly unzipped him and caressed the silken black boxers that lay beneath.

“Oh god, Severus. This is so wicked. Black silk. It fits you so perfectly. I can see every bump and ridge…” Harry leaned forward and mouthed the bulge tenting the thin material.

Severus staggered, falling back against the wardrobe door. He had known the potion would make the man mad for him but he hadn’t been prepared for this level of enthusiasm. The youth was decisive in his actions and completely lacking in shyness about what he wanted. Severus heard
himself whimpering as the sucking grew more forceful, the blood rushing south until he was completely lightheaded.

Fortunately for him, Harry pulled back, his lips parted and those bewitching eyes fogged with artificial desire. “Did you like that?”

He swallowed and struggled to regain control over his senses. “Y-yes, very much. But I don’t want this here, Po-Harry. There’s a perfectly serviceable bed just a few feet away.”

“You’re right. You’ll have to excuse me. I’ve never been with a man before. This is all so strange and new to me.” Harry blinked and puzzlement shone briefly in the dimmed emerald gaze.

Severus reached down and drew Harry up for another lingering kiss. He wanted to banish doubt from the man’s mind and the new surge of guilt from his own. Harry was not homosexual; the potion was forcing behavior on him that he’d never otherwise entertain.

For a moment, Severus wished it were otherwise. He wanted Harry to look at him with honest desire, to want him, Severus Snape, not be the helpless prey of Severus’s own selfish want.

Harry wound his arms around him, pressed his own throbbing cock against Severus’s length, and the guilt retreated, pushed down deep into his consciousness.

The lithe youth sat on the bed and squirmed out of his remaining clothes. For the first time, since that brief glimpse he’d had of the naked 17-year-old Gryffindor before he plunged into the lake after that damned sword, Harry was fully naked before him and Severus greedily looked his fill.

Harry was shorter than he by a few inches but compact, without an extra ounce of flesh anywhere. The shoulders were firm, flowing into supple arms, corded and flexing with muscle. His skin was a golden tan, only a little lighter on the chest and hips, making Severus wonder just what scanty clothing Harry wore when he walked in the heat of the sun. The chest was covered with the sparse sprinkling of the dark hair that he remembered, fanning out like rounded wings, barely covering the flat, oval nipples peeking from them. It swirled down in a long line over the ridged stomach until meeting a thick, wiry bristling of darker hair over Harry’s prick.

The cock itself—lovely. It reared up proudly from the nest of hair, not too thick, but of a very impressive size and already leaking its shiny fluid. Severus’s mouth watered as he stared at it and he reached out and cupped the pliant flesh in his hand.

Harry mewled and arched up into his grip. “Oh! Sever-us! Feels so good!” he whimpered.

The last of Severus’s guilt disappeared. No matter what Harry’s true feelings, he knew he had it in him to make this a truly memorable encounter, one that Severus would look back on fondly if not with true happiness.

Harry brushed his hand away. “Not yet,” he gasped. “I want to see you, touch you.”

His bond mate watched avidly as Severus shucked off his trousers and then laid his hands over Severus’s own. “Let me,” Harry said softly.

Curious, Severus lay back on the bed, his head resting on the pillows. Harry was crouched next to him, facing the headboard, as he caught the edge of the boxers. Severus lifted his hips slightly so that Harry could bring them all the way down. He did not know who gasped as the heated air in the room met his bare genitals.

Harry’s eyes seemed to trace every inch of Severus. “Look at these legs. So firm and strong. And
hardly any hair…” he murmured, trailing his fingers over Severus’s leg. His breathing sped up as the mere touch of those calloused fingers left gooseflesh in their wake.

“And your hips are so powerful. Your arse…such a lovely handful,” Harry whispered. He suited action to word when he curled his fingers around Severus’s hipbones. Severus hissed when the fingers dipped curiously into the crevice of his arse. They cupped, rolled and kneaded the flesh of his cheeks until he was squirming in the bed.

“Enough, Harry,” he gasped.

“Nope. Not nearly enough,” Harry moaned and he leaned forward and kissed Severus again. This time the kiss was greedy, forceful, as Harry’s tongue gained entrance. He nipped at Severus’s mouth, let his lips trail all over the narrow face beneath.

Then his hands were seemingly everywhere, running over Severus’s shoulders, carding through his hair. Severus cried into Harry’s mouth when his nipples were pinched and rolled between the rough fingers.

“Harry, squeeze them again. Twist them like you just did,” he rasped.

Harry obeyed. The drug made him so wonderfully compliant but somehow that thought was far away from Severus’s mind now. All he wanted was for those Quidditch-calloused hands to keep touching him just like this. When Harry grasped his cock, squeezing it in a steady, relentless rhythm, he groaned and clutched the younger man tight.

Harry lifted his head. His cheeks were flushed and the first traces of sweat were beading on his brow. “Merlin, you look so hot, Severus. I love your paleness and dark hair; it’s such a beautiful contrast. Your nips are so bright pink and I like it that you’re not too hairy. I can’t wait to see you shoot all over this white skin.” He swept his free hand down Severus’s front and licked his lips as if already imagining what Severus would look like, painted with his own seed.

The mental image startled Severus. Harry wanted to see him…? Great Merlin, the man wanted to be on top. It wasn’t at all what Severus had thought would happen but, seriously, what had he expected? Harry’s sole sexual experience would be in the dominant position and that desire wouldn’t necessarily change because of a love potion. And Severus couldn’t honestly say that he minded…

“Accio lubricant,” he whispered and a small tube came flying from his discarded trousers. He caught it and mutely extended it to his partner.

Harry grinned foolishly as he uncapped it. “Ooh, you came prepared. Good for you.” He leaned forward for one more open-mouthed kiss. When their lips parted, he whispered, “Tell me what I need to do.”

“Coat your fingers with it. Use more than you think you’ll need,” Severus whispered. He distantly wondered how he could feel so calm. He knew it wouldn’t last.

He talked Harry through it, his voice faltering as Harry inserted one finger and then two in the tight passage. Merlin, it had been too long…

“God, Severus. You’re so tight, so hot in here.” His fingers slid farther.

Severus’s head slammed into the pillow at the first touch to his prostate and he shrieked unashamedly as Harry’s tentative probing became more forceful, harder, working him until his hips were bobbing in the man’s hands.
“Oh, does that feel good?”

Good? The word didn’t even begin to describe it. Harry’s merest touch was sending sensual rapture spiraling through his skin. Severus was going to come, just from this.

“H-Harry, dear God. You…you have to stop,” he panted.

And the man did. In fact, he pulled out so quickly, Severus could have wept at the abrupt cessation of pleasure. “I knew it. I’m hurting you. I’m so—”

“Don’t apologize, you idiot,” he hissed. “Slather this on your cock. More,” he demanded, breathing heavily as he watched Harry touch himself.

Severus guided Harry into position as he spread his legs wide, curling up his buttocks slightly. It was undignified, his legs waving in the air like this, but exposed to a Harry bespelled by magic it wouldn’t matter.

Harry climbed on top of him, guiding his cock to Severus’s anus. Both men hissed when the young man made the first tentative thrust. “Don’t stop,” Severus whispered when Harry hesitated.

And he didn’t. What Harry lacked in experience, he made up for in curiosity, in the way he stroked any part of Severus he could reach, in the way his body quivered and drove harder into Severus, until both men were gasping for air.

The potion evidently released Harry from all his inhibitions. He fucked Severus with all the exuberance the older man could have wished. Every powerful thrust nailed his prostate and Severus cried out with each inner touch. The heavy bollocks were rapping against his arse and that sensation too was incredible, causing him to writhe and curl his body up to meet Harry’s.

Severus’s head fell back and he groaned as he thrust up against the man shagging him with such vigor. It seemed an eternity since he’d allowed himself the bliss of knowing male flesh pressed against his own. The heat of Harry sliding inside him was indescribable. The impending release coiled in him, ready to be unleashed as the lean body surged over and in him. It couldn’t get better than this.

Then Harry proved him wrong.

“Ssshhaarrssssahhhhsa,” he hissed.

It was as though he’d been hit by a bolt of lightning. Excitement ran through Severus like a whip lashing his skin. He shrieked, clutching Harry’s shoulders so tightly there were sure to be bruises by morning.

Harry didn’t realize…oh god, he couldn’t possibly know what hearing Parseltongue did to Severus.

Whenever Voldemort had spoken the snake language to that damnable, provocatively beautiful familiar, his voice had held a caressing sound to it that he showed at no other time. There would be a gentleness to the Dark Lord in those moments and a fleeting kindness that he never displayed to anyone else.

Nagini had been the only one Voldemort could trust absolutely. It stood to reason that he would lavish all his affections on her and her alone. Therefore, Severus had grown to associate the sound of Parseltongue with love and the flickering of the Dark Lord’s tongue when he spoke it with the few erotic, lust-filled sessions he’d had in Hogwarts when he’d been younger and not nearly so homely.
The hissing continued unabated, Harry driving hard and faster between his thighs. Severus desperately wanted to maintain some kind of control, to hold himself aloof, but when those sounds left Harry’s mouth, it was impossible. His heart thundered so violently, it felt like it was leaping out of his chest. He was losing himself in the feel of bristly hair and hard muscle pressed against his body, in the cock plunging deep into the core of him.

“Sssshhaarrshharrrra.” Sweet Merlin, what was the man saying? Did it even matter? Given Harry’s drugged state, it was likely some kind of endearment or comment about what he was feeling and—

The sibilant noise came again and Severus lost all restraint. He began swearing, sobbing fitfully, begging Harry to fuck him harder, even if it killed him.

“Harder, fuck, Harry, shit, don’t, don’t stop, please.” He grabbed the man’s head and kissed him roughly, lapping at his lips and forcing them to open. Their tongues tangled and Harry sucked as though trying to pull Severus’s tongue from his mouth.

His bond mate was pounding into Severus now, hard enough for the headboard to rattle repeatedly against the wall, the thudding a counterpoint to the banging in his chest, the roaring in his ears. The sex had reached a feral intensity, with Harry releasing sharp bursts of Parseltongue with every plunge into Severus’s body and his own answering ecstatic cries.

Severus knew he’d be bearing the marks of this tomorrow, knew that there would be soreness deep inside curable only by potion. He didn’t care. All he wanted right now was that Harry keep touching him, stroking him everywhere and speaking that exquisite, alien tongue.

Harry ripped his lips away. “Hssshhsiiilllissh,” he whispered, his eyes glazed, stroking over the scars lining Severus’s face and neck.

There was a strange warmth in Harry’s voice when he said this. It was that sweetness that undid Severus completely. The waiting orgasm slammed into him with the force of Cruciatus and he flung his head back and screamed.

Harry rocked over him a few more times, seemingly oblivious to any pain he might cause. Then he gave a choked cry and came, deep within Severus. His entire body shuddered before he collapsed on Severus’s chest.

Slowly Severus unwound his limbs to lie flat on the bed. His legs were trembling from the tension of being twined around Harry’s back and his throat felt raw from all the harsh breathing and screaming that had been torn from him. His toes ached from curling and uncurling. In fact, all of him was one stretch of post-sexual discomfort. He hurt but in a good way. Severus smiled lazily and kissed Harry on the ear nearest him.

Delicious languor was stealing over him. Severus knew he shouldn’t sleep now; he could wait until Harry slept and then slip out to look at the library. But, really, how likely was it he’d find the information he sought in one night? It was possible he’d need several days to ferret out what he needed. He might as well just rest here for the night…enfolded in Harry’s arms.

Harry pulled himself to the side but kept his arm draped over his bond mate’s chest. He smiled and cupped Severus’s face in his hand. “You really are beautiful, you know that?” With that, he closed his eyes, nuzzled against Severus’s neck and began to snore.

Just like that, the post-coital bliss disappeared, snuffed out like a blown candle. Severus felt as if he’d been turned to ice as the reality of the situation reasserted itself.
His scars were hideous; he knew this. If he didn’t hide them with a glamour, people paled in shock and children screamed at the sight of him. Even Harry had been appalled when he’d first seen the ghastly cicatrices covering Severus’s face and neck.

Harry felt nothing for him, not really. All that had just passed between them—the endearments, the sex, the compliments, Parseltongue, the exquisite tenderness of Harry’s touches—was solely the result of the love elixir. The only thing real about it was the ache that was spreading through Severus, inside and out.

With a whisper, he banished the stickiness coating his chest and thighs. Something was prickling behind his eyes but he paid it no heed. He lay awake for a long time, staring at the ceiling, while his bond mate breathed lightly at his side.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
Harry stretched sleepily. He smiled, oddly contented. His body was loose and relaxed in a way he hadn’t known since Ginny’s death. For a moment, he was blissfully happy and he wasn’t sure why. He was in his own bed and—

The euphoria evaporated. He sat bolt upright, sheer horror echoing through him. He remembered everything.

Last night, he’d suddenly found Severus Snape the most fascinating and beautiful creature in the world. He’d taken him home from the restaurant, brought him to the bed and then… He trembled, shooting a glance at the other side of the bed. It was mercifully empty but that didn’t help banish the images that were churning in his mind.
Rage and sickness bubbled in him and the sickness won out. Harry clapped his hand over his mouth and ran towards the bathroom. He barely made it to the loo basin before puking up the remains of last night’s meal.

How could he have done something like that? How could he have defiled his dearly departed wife’s memory by having sex with Snape, of all people? It had to have been a spell or—

Oh shit. Snape had drugged him. He’d drugged him and then taken him to his bed like cheap whore. That bastard! That total and utter prat!

Harry staggered to the mirror and shuddered. His hair was a tangled mess, even more than usual, and he could see black-and-purple bruises of fingers on his shoulders. There was a red mark on his neck and scratches on his chest and arms, clear proofs of the wild sex he’d had last night. He barely resisted the urge to vomit again.

A small healing charm banished the marks and healed the minor contusions. But it couldn’t scrub the memory out of his mind. Harry jumped into the shower and ran the water as hot as he could stand it. It didn’t matter if he turned red as a lobster; he had to scour away every sign of what had happened last night.

He scrubbed harder, bile rising in his throat. It wasn’t just the sheer immorality of having been doped and taken advantage of; it was the memory itself. Snape hadn’t been awful to him while Harry was under the influence and he could have been. Harry had been so stupidly besotted with the man, he would have done anything Snape asked, including crawling naked over glass shards and tacks.

But Snape had been… Kind wasn’t the word he was looking for. Passionate. Eager. Out of control. He could still recall how Severus had looked, the obvious desire in his onyx eyes as he’d touched and explored Harry as Harry had touched and explored him.

The man’s expressions while he’d been fucking him… Merlin, Harry hadn’t thought Snape could look like that. The Slytherin’s face, flushed, open mouthed and panting, had been so crazed. Ginny hadn’t ever been so abandoned, not even during the heady first months of their marriage.

The Slytherin Potions master, so haughty and icy, had cried out for Harry’s touch. He had begged Harry to shag him rotten, had screamed out Harry’s name more than once, as if he couldn’t get enough of him. It was like the man had actually wanted him, not just used him.

His jaw twitched. That was a stupid idea. So what if Snape had experienced sexual satisfaction? He still hated Harry. Why else would he do something like this?

Harry finished his shower but he still felt unclean. Snape was going to pay for this.

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Severus tilted back in his chair and scrubbed at his eyes. Several large books lay at his elbow. None of them mentioned Regalious Fefandur or his ridiculous curse.

He’d been up until about seven this morning, going through the old tomes. He’d wanted to rouse the house-elf for a light breakfast or at least a stimulating tea but didn’t dare lest the beast wake Harry, something he was reluctant to do.

In spite of the time spent sitting in a hardwood chair, Severus’s body couldn’t forget the blissful moments he’d spent with his sleeping bond mate. The man had been so enthusiastic, so avid for Severus’s touch. True, it was just the potion’s influence, but he couldn’t help wondering if Harry would be as fiery if he weren’t under its power. His cock twitched faintly, definitely interested in
going another round with the Gryffindor.

It was pleasant to fantasize, especially since Severus didn’t allow himself to indulge in it often. He was too pragmatic for that.

Shelving the memory for the moment, he stood, feeling the vertebrae in his spine pop. He might as well call it a day. Hopefully, he could get back to the cottage before Potter awoke.

He had just stepped out of the door when the fist came flying out of nowhere, catching him in the eye.

“YOU SHIT!”

The blow was so swift and hard and completely without warning that Severus’s head snapped back and he toppled to the floor.

Harry stood over him, shaking all over, emerald eyes sparking with fury, both fists clenched as if about to strike Severus again. He was wearing little more than a dark blue bathrobe. It had fallen upon with his violent moving towards Severus, revealing a pair of tight Y-fronts. If he weren’t in so much pain, Severus would have appreciated the delectable picture Harry made.

Severus struggled to sit up, wincing from the agony blooming in his face. It seemed that Harry had picked up some bad habits from the Weasleys. Severus just hadn’t expected a physical assault. With his rotten luck, he’d be sporting another black eye.

He should have Obliviated the man and wondered that he had not. “Good morning to you too, husband,” he drawled.

“Get up, you sack of grindylow droppings,” Harry snarled.

“So you can assault me again?” Severus wordlessly Summoned his wand and pointed it at Harry. Harry bared his teeth and his own wand snapped out. The former Death Eater and Boy Who Lived faced each other, wands at the ready. The air sparked with the repressed magic just waiting to be unleashed.

Severus rose carefully to his feet. He had been hoping to have an amicable conversation about last night but perhaps that was too much to hope. A suffocating sensation, very like despair, welled up in him before he ruthlessly squashed it.

Well, he’d always known how to push Harry’s buttons and was certain he could gain the upper hand. “Really, Potter. I don’t see why you’re so upset. A good time was had by all and this was the objective, was it not? For the two of us to get along better?”

“Through gradual understanding and conversation, not with a filthy potion! What is wrong with you, Snape? Are you completely amoral?” Harry snapped.

It seemed there was to be no reasoning with the man. Severus didn’t want to resign himself to the man’s hatred, but what choice was Harry giving him? “Potter, what else do you expect of me? I’m a Slytherin. And I hardly got bonded to you out of love or friendship. I made that very clear to you,” he said coldly.

Harry’s lip trembled. Merlin, had he actually reduced the boy to tears? Severus felt no flash of triumph but before he could pursue his advantage, Harry continued, his voice gone deathly quiet.

“My mother was lucky to lose your friendship, Snape. You probably would have drugged and raped
her if you’d stayed together.”

The words were like a slap in the face. Severus couldn’t believe Harry would say anything so hurtful. Any idea of calming the other man was lost as he immediately retaliated. “I don’t see why you’re so upset, Potter. I certainly had no complaints last night and I was the one being fucked, in case you’ve forgotten.”

“You think that makes any difference? I didn’t want you last night. I was drugged! It doesn’t matter if I was the one on top; this wasn’t what I wanted and you took advantage of me!”

“This is so like you, Potter! Whinging and complaining how awful life is for you, you, you!” Severus snarled. “No matter how the circumstances, you and I both got what we wanted out of the situation. It was pleasurable and there was no harm done. I certainly can’t say the same about the many times I was forced to endure the Crucius because of Lord Voldemort’s displeasure. You have no idea what I suffered on your account to keep you safe from his clutches and did I get any thanks from you? You got all the glory and the adulation of the Wizarding World. What did I receive?”

He drew in a long breath. “Well, last night I got just what everybody else wanted—a taste of the Boy Who Lived.”

There was a thin white line around Harry’s mouth. His wand shook. But when he spoke again, his voice had gone flat, without a hint of emotion.

“I don’t know what you want with Grimmauld Place, Snape, and I don’t care. I just hope whatever you’re looking for is worth losing every bit of trust I ever had in you.”

“Believe me, Potter, I shall live very well without—”

Suddenly, Severus’s back arched and he let out a cry of pain. Unable to stop himself, he fell to the floor again and began convulsing, racked with agony.

“Snape?” The Gryffindor’s face was twisted with suspicion and then alarm. “Snape!”

Snape wanted to talk to him, to tell him to go to the cottage and get his antivenin potions. But his teeth were clacking like castanets and he was unable to form a single word.

Harry knelt by his side and tried to hold him down even though he was shaking violently. Managing to grab hold of Harry’s robe, Severus stared him in the eyes, willing him to understand. “Look at me…”

Harry saw images unfolding: rows of bottles filled with an unknown potion neatly lining Severus’s shelf in his cottage bedroom. There was another vision, slightly blurred, of Severus himself falling into a fit and then draining one of the bottles.

The scenes faded away abruptly, leaving Severus ashen and still on the library floor.

“Snape? Snape!” Harry shouted but his bond mate had fallen unconscious.

He didn’t know what was wrong with the man but figured he hadn’t a moment to lose. Harry decided not to waste time calling for Kreacher; he got the distinct impression that the house-elf didn’t like his bond mate. He recalled all too vividly Kreacher’s dislike and betrayal of Sirius. He wasn’t about to leave the Potions master in his dubious care.

Harry levitated Snape to a couch in the living room and ran to the floo. Snatching up a fistful of glittering powder, he called out the address of the cottage and stepped into the flames.
When Albus and James awoke, they didn’t bother getting dressed but rushed to the bedroom door. The humiliation of being picked up like little babies and dumped in their room was awful. But it didn’t hurt so much as how their own daddy had ignored them and watched Count Dracula hit them with a spell. It was like their father had become a different person and it scared them deeply.

They tried the door. It had refused to budge last night but this time it opened. They both jumped when they saw Kreacher standing there, holding their little sister. Although Lily was not very big, Kreacher’s bent frame made him look almost the same size as he tried to control her squirming body.

“Young Potters, where is your father?”

“He’s not here?” Albus asked, his voice high pitched with worry.

“He is not. I have checked his room and the adjacent chambers and the attic. He is not to be found and Miss Lily is fussing and refusing to eat unless her father shows.”

The twins looked at each other uncertainly. James didn’t know what was going on. His father was acting weird and he suspected it was Snape’s fault. “Is Snivellus still around?”

“If young James refers to Snape, I don’t know. But I will look—after I have served breakfast for you all.”

The boys could barely concentrate on what Kreacher put in front of them although they were so hungry they ate all their breakfast without fussing. Lily whimpered but Kreacher managed to coax her to eat a little soft egg and banana.

“Maybe Daddy went back to the cottage,” Albus murmured to his brother.

“Without us? Why would he do that?” James asked.

“I don’t know.” It didn’t make sense to Albus. Their father had been so weird last night and now he was gone without telling them. Had he abandoned them and run off with their stepdaddy? The thought of losing his father as he’d lost his mother almost made Albus cry. But he didn’t want to seem like a crybaby in front of his brother.

Kreacher tilted his head. “I hear something, young Potters.”

“You do? I don’t hear anything.”

Kreacher’s large ears flapped. “I have something of an advantage,” he said dryly. “Come with me, young masters.”

They followed Kreacher, too worried about their father to laugh at his bandy-legged gait while he struggled under the weight of their sister. They approached the massive living room and found the door ajar. Signalling Kreacher to stop, they held their breaths as they listened to the sounds coming from inside.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
The Bath

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Title: Scarred Souls
Author: Misty Moonlight/Co-author: QueenBoadicea
Beta: QueenBoadicea
Pairings: Severus/Harry
Published: 12/10/2008
Summary: A widowed Harry must bond with Snape in order to save his daughter’s life. Sev gains a family, for better or worse, and the hearts of two scarred souls will be changed forever.

Warnings: Romance, Drama, Angst, Alternate Reality/Universe, Sexual Situations, Hurt/Comfort, M/M, Slash, Anal, Language, Humor, possible MPreg, Bonding, Original Characters, Family, non-canon, OOC, WIP

Chapter 25: The Bath

“Snape? Snape, can you hear me?” Harry placed his fingers gingerly against the man’s neck. The pulse was reedy and far too fast for his liking. He wondered if he should get someone from St. Mungo’s to help. He’d have to if this stuff didn’t work.

Inside his pocket were ten vials of the mystery potion Snape had sent him to fetch. He didn’t know what they did or how much the man needed. But he thought it best to take as many of the glass bottles away as he could carry.

Harry had found the bottles in Snape’s room. He wondered briefly that he was able to get into the place so easily; he’d have thought Snape would set up such elaborate wards that he’d have to fight to get through them. But he’d swiftly put it out of his mind when he thought of the Potions master lying so deathly still.

What was wrong with the man? Obviously, his condition must be something chronic if he had potions ready to be administered. But what could the problem be? And why hadn’t he ever mentioned it to Harry? Goodness knows, Snape had no problem firing off salvos at Harry just because his life had been rotten while Harry’s had turned out so wonderfully. Why would he keep quiet about this?

The questions could wait. Now he was kneeling beside the sofa, trying to rouse the unmoving
Potions master. He’d never seen Snape look so ghastly. A film of sweat lay over his face, his skin was the color of chalk and his scars shone a sullen red against his face and neck. Harry wrinkled his nose as a sour smell emanated from his body, one he was very familiar with from changing Lily’s diapers. Snape must have soiled himself.

The man wouldn’t be happy when he awoke to find himself lying in filthy underwear. But there was nothing for it. Getting the potion into Snape was his first priority. “Enervate,” Harry thought. He’d grown quite proficient at wordless and wandless magic but thought it best to keep this hidden from his bond mate. He preferred to have some advantages over the man.

Snape’s eyes flicked open. It was as though the man had been only pretending to sleep and now had abandoned the pretense. But his faltering words belied his apparent alertness. “Pot-ter. My potion…”

“Right here, Snape.” He held up the vial. The man reached up a trembling hand but it was clear he was in condition to hold it without dropping it to the floor.

“Here, let me.” Snape’s answering glare was feeble and Harry ignored it. He eased Severus up and uncapped the vial. He held it to his bond mate’s lips and watched as it trickled down his throat.

Snape blinked and then shoved Harry aside. “Well, it seems you’re good for something after all, Potter. I wonder that it took you so long. Then again, you were probably hoping I’d die in the interim. It would be an easy way to get rid of me without the public being any the wiser.”

That was certainly a fast recovery. How swiftly Snape reverted to his typical nasty persona. Harry could feel a muscle in his jaw bunching. “You’re welcome, Snape. I’m so glad you didn’t swallow your tongue while I was gone.” He tilted his head and stared at the empty vial in his hand. “What’s wrong with you anyway?”

“That’s none of your business, Potter.”

“Oh, I think it is. Or is death by illness acceptable under the terms of the Unbreakable Vow?” Harry shot back. Truly, he had been terrified for the man when he saw Snape’s unconscious state just now. But he knew the man would reject any kind of sympathy. Best to act like he didn’t care.

Snape smiled coldly. “You wish to know what ails me, Potter? Very well. I am suffering the aftereffects from Nagini’s bite. Had you bothered to come to my aid after my collapse in the Shrieking Shack, perhaps I might have made a complete recovery. As it is, I am in continual danger of systematic breakdown if I don’t take regular doses of the antivenin that I have prepared for myself. Another curse I can lay at your door.”

Harry was appalled. He’d known Snape to have been scarred. But this was news to him. “You’re still suffering from Nagini’s bite? But that was years ago, Snape! Why haven’t you gotten better?”

“Believe me, more intelligent minds than yours worked at the problem, Potter. You needn’t trouble yourself with it at this late date. Now kindly move aside.”

“I’m sor—”

“Spare me.”

Snape swung his legs unsteadily off the couch. An expression of horror flickered over his face and Harry realized he must have felt the new moisture in his trousers. “Do you want any help bathing?” he asked innocently.

The man’s face flared white with rage. “Potter, you imbecile. You couldn’t perform a simple
“Cleaning Charm?” he hissed.

“I was more concerned with getting your potion into you. I also figured you wouldn’t want me performing any magic on your body without your say-so,” Harry retorted.

Snape glared but didn’t refute his statement. He pulled out his wand and muttered the Cleaning Charm.

Harry folded his arms. “Don’t think we’re finished with our earlier discussion, Snape.”

“We most certainly are, Potter, unless you want to take another punch at me. I don’t advise you to try it.”

Harry sprang to his feet and began to pace back and forth. “I just don’t get your motivations. You hate me. You don’t want anything to do with my family. But you seem determined to shoehorn your way into my life. The cottage isn’t enough for you so you decide to force entry into Grimmauld Place. Why? This was Sirius’s home! I figured you’d hate being here.”

Snape shrugged. “Just because I despised your dogfather doesn’t mean I hate this place. It’s quite roomy and comfortable.”

“And the cottage wasn’t?” Harry narrowed his eyes. “You were in the library this morning.”

“Very observant, Potter. Yes, that’s what the room full of books is called,” Snape replied sarcastically.

“And the cottage doesn’t have a library like that. What is so important in that library?”

“Potter, my reasons are my own. I’m certainly not about to tell you.”

“It’s something to do with the Dark Arts, isn’t it?”

Snape folded his arms and didn’t bother answering.

Harry fumed. He wished he were skilled at Legilimency. There was no chance he could browbeat his bond mate into telling what he wanted to know. But whatever Snape wanted, it had to be bad if he were poking around in books relating to the Dark Arts.

“It must be pretty important for you to have sex with someone you hate,” Harry continued, hoping to get a rise out of him. “Or was it a dream come true to have me fuck you up the arse?”

There was a stifled gasp from outside the door. Harry’s head snapped towards it. Before he could move, Snape hissed, “Alohomora.”

The door swung open to reveal Kreacher, Lily, James and Albus. The boys jumped at being suddenly exposed. Kreacher’s expression was unreadable but Lily grinned at seeing her father. “Dada! Dada! Dada!” she yelled, waving her chubby arms.

“Boys, I thought I told you not to eavesdrop,” Harry said. Heat was spreading up his ears. Great Merlin, just how much had they overheard?

“We were worried, Daddy. Last night, you were so weird,” Al whined. James tried to peer past his father’s body to look at Snape.

“Your father is fine, as you can see,” Snape murmured. Harry stiffened as he came up behind him and wound his arms around his waist. “In fact, he was quite stellar. Weren’t you, Harry?” he
smirked.

It was Harry’s turn to glare and he shoved Snape in the chest with his elbow. He was shocked to see the taller man stagger backwards and sway as if he were going to pitch to the floor again. Harry reached out to grab him and locked his hands around Snape’s upper arms. It wasn’t enough to stop his backwards momentum and they both fell to the carpeted floor, Snape grunting as Harry fell on top of him.

The position was too reminiscent of last night’s sexual bout and Harry knew Snape remembered it at the same time he did. He scrambled back, flustered, and was surprised to see a red flush across the sallow cheeks.

He tried not to read too much into it. The man was probably just startled at finding himself on the floor again.

Harry scrambled up. He wanted to pull Snape to his feet. But the man waved him away angrily and made his way to the door with a stiffened gait. He pointedly ignored the children who cringed out of his path.

Albus made a face. “What’s that smell?”

“It smells like poop,” James offered, also sniffing.

Lily giggled. “Poop! Poop! Poop! Poop! Poop!”

Snape threw Harry a ferocious glare. “I see your children are still the same ill-behaved urchins. You’re far too soft on them, Potter.”

“Snape, unless you want me to drop you on the floor right now, in front of my kids, you’ll keep a lid on it. Cleaning Charms can only do so much. It smells—looks—like you need a proper bath. Do you want any help getting up the stairs?”

The familiar sneer was back. “I can manage quite well without your help, Potter. I’ve been doing so for the past several years.”

“Glad to hear it. I don’t want to have to touch you more than I have to,” Harry retorted.

Snape opened his mouth and then closed it with a frown. Harry had no idea what he was thinking now and, frankly, he didn’t give a toss. This whole morning was getting off to a bad start and he just wanted to get it over with.

The children ran into the living room and Kreacher handed Lily to Harry. He dismissed the house-elf and the Black servant disappeared to fix Harry’s breakfast.

“Daddy? Why did you leave us last night?” Albus whined, poking his father in the shin.

“Did you and Snivellus have sex?”

James’s blunt question wasn’t doing his circulation any good. Harry hoped he wasn’t flushing as badly as he felt.

“Don’t call him that, James,” he muttered.

“Well, did you?”

He juggled Lily and prayed Kreacher would bring his breakfast quickly. As if hearing his thought,
the house-elf reappeared and handed Harry a big plate of eggs, bangers, mash, toast and pumpkin juice.

It was only after the house-elf left again that Harry felt calm enough to answer. “Boys, I wasn’t quite myself last night,” he hedged.

“I’ll say,” Albus muttered.

“Snape and I are—working out a few things. We went out so we could talk and not fight so much when we’re together.”

“But you were fighting just now,” James pointed out.

Harry sighed. Sometimes his eldest was too reasonable for his own good. “Differences take a while to sort out, James. Snape—made a mistake last night and I got caught up in it. I’m sorry if I ignored the two of you because of that. It won’t happen again.”

“Promise?” Albus demanded.

“Promise.” It was a promise he meant to keep. He felt disgusted with himself when he thought of how shabbily he’d treated his own children last night. It wasn’t his fault but there was no way he could bring himself to tell them the sordid details.

But how long could he hold out against a treacherous, devious bastard like Snape? There was no telling what the man would do to Harry if he’d stoop this low. Harry wasn’t safe here and that meant the children weren’t either.

Harry made a decision. This morning, he was going to head to the orphanage, as usual. If Corabett had any questions for him about last night’s spectacle, he’d tell her that he’d wanted Snape. He didn’t want to lie to her; the woman had turned out to be a real friend. But telling the truth would only get Snape in hot water with the rest of the Wizarding community if they got wind of it and it was Harry’s life on the line as well as his bond mate’s.

No matter how much of an effort he made, Snape was determined to make his life hell. If Snape wanted the Black manor so badly, he could have it. Harry was done trying to befriend the man. From now on, Snape was on his own.

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Severus was fuming, resting his trembling frame against the bathroom sink. Who the hell did Potter think he was? So what if Severus had tricked him? They were supposed to have consummated the bond days ago. Access to the Gryffindor’s body was his by right. Potter should just consider himself lucky that Severus hadn’t held him down and taken him by brute force.

When he thought of the things Potter had said, the vicious underhanded blow that he’d dealt, rage bubbled in his veins. He wanted to hit something. He wanted to hurt somebody. Harry and his brats had better keep out of his way; otherwise he would hurl vicious curses at them.

He threw himself on to the small bath bench set conveniently next to the tub. He was always out of sorts after taking his potion. But today there was a peculiar rawness to his nerves that he couldn’t account for. His stomach was churning and the brackish taste of the antivenin had yet to abate. Perhaps a relaxing bath would help.

He thought of the humiliating sensation of waking up to find his trousers soaked with his own effluvium. If he hadn’t been so shaky from his convulsion, he would have blasted Potter for
witnessing his embarrassment. As it was, he was glad to get away from him, away from them all.

Why the hell did everything happen to him? He hunched his shoulders in self-pity and began to strip himself with shaky hands.

Severus eyed the filled bathtub. The water looked rather deep, more so than he was used to.

“Do you require any help, sir?” the mirror asked.

He scowled at the ruined face reflected in its surface. His eye was getting purple; he’d need to put salve on it before it became worse. “No, thank you. I can manage,” he said curtly.

Potter had told him that he was leaving Kreacher if he needed anything but he was damned if he was calling that house-elf for help. Gripping the edge of the tub tightly, he lowered himself as carefully as he could into the bath. Satisfied with his safe progress, he leaned back against the tub end, stretched out his legs and allowed himself to relax.

The cottage had been adequate for his needs. But, compared to the Black manor, it was a veritable shack. This bathroom, for instance, was the size of the basement lab he’d set up in Potter’s home, spacious and lined with tiles that were real inlaid stone rather than the thin, shiny stuff in the cottage. The tub was black stone, designed to hold in the heat of the water longer, and the fixtures were solid silver. He stretched out even farther, his chin barely resting above the water.

Now that he could come and go freely in Grimmauld Place, was there any hurry to head back to the cottage? He could receive summonses from St. Mungo’s just as easily from here. The Black dungeon would be far more spacious than the cottage basement, should he choose to start brewing here, and there was that capacious library, filled with more books than he could read during his lifetime.

His bond mate was the only fly in the ointment—well, him and his children. It was simply intolerable that Severus had to deal with another generation of Potters. Perhaps, if he was sufficiently cruel, he could drive the other man back to the cottage. He wouldn’t be bothered any more, not by squalling infants, pestiferous children or those animated heads. It would be bliss.

Wouldn’t it? In spite of this morning’s vicious scene, Severus couldn’t help the warmth that flooded him every time he thought of the previous night’s ecstasy. Last night had been sublime. He would dearly love to repeat the experience.

The more Severus thought about what he did, what he had wanted to happen and what had actually occurred, the more he found himself fighting a losing battle between his own satisfaction and growing regret. It hadn’t been rape, but it hadn’t been anything else. Harry’s anger was justifiable; his own actions were not.

Would he wish to stay here with Severus on the premises? Harry’s first loyalty was to his children and secondly to the Weasleys. Severus’s actions of the previous night were unlikely to win Harry over to his side. But would the younger wizard uproot his family yet again just to get away from Severus? What if Harry did? What would Severus do then?

He sighed and shifted in the tub. It wasn’t like him to be so uncertain in his plans. Yesterday, he’d carried through on his original intentions and been soundly rewarded. Why feel remorse now?

And last night had been good. Bloody brilliant, in fact. Even if he hadn’t topped, the other position had brought sexual bliss far beyond anything he’d ever known in his life.
A rare smile creased his face as images from last night replayed in his mind. Severus shifted once more, letting the water slide across his skin. He was regretting turning away his bond mate. Perhaps if he’d pretended to be weaker than he was, he could have had Harry bathing him right now. It would have given him the perfect excuse to have that exquisite firm body close to his, to feel those hands caressing every inch of his skin. He licked his lips as he recalled Harry’s touch, the sound of his voice, that perfect luscious frame and the enthusiastic way he’d plundered Severus’s arse.

Trailing his hand down his chest, he closed his eyes and thought of Harry stroking his cock. The man’s touch would be more considerate now, less hurried. He brushed his fingers lightly over his cock and felt it fill, saw the water become agitated as it stirred beneath the surface.

Severus tightened his grip. “Yes, that’s it,” he muttered.

“Did you say something, sir?”

He opened his eyes and glared. He’d forgotten that blasted mirror. Picking up his wand, he hexed it into silence. He cast a Silencing Charm on the room for good measure.

Now where was he? Ah yes.

Harry was gripping Severus’s cock, slightly loose at the base and firming to a tight seal as he stroked over the tip. His pace was getting rougher, faster, just the way Severus liked it.

“Enough,” Severus muttered. “I want you to suck me.” Severus reached for the soap, slathering his prick. It wasn’t quite the same as a hot, wet mouth around him but it was close enough. He closed his eyes, picturing the messy-haired head descending over him…

Harry lapped at the tip, forcing down the foreskin with his tongue. Those plump lips were sucking at him, pushing lower over his shaft with every inhalation. Severus forced himself not to buck into that hot suction. But the man was just too good.

The Gryffindor was pulling at Severus’s sack. His touch was strong but that’s how Severus wanted it now. Then Harry pulled away, giving him that insufferable grin, the one that showed his white teeth and accentuated the sparkle in his eyes.

Those eyes were looming over Severus, the glint in them quite different now. Severus gasped, thrust up his hips, as Harry’s warmth once more made its way inside him.

The bathtub water was churning, in danger of slopping over the sides, but Severus didn’t notice. He was thoroughly engrossed in the fantasy that was gripping him.

Harry was hissing at him, the tongue flicking out to lap at his skin while Parseltongue flowed from his mouth. Severus had never understood the language but he tried to imagine what Harry might be saying.

“Bring your legs up, Severus. Fuck, so good. You feel so tight around me. Love taking you like this, fucking you, branding you. You’re mine, you hear me? No one else gets to see you like this.”

“Oh, Merlin. Yes! Fuck!” he gasped. His hips were pumping without letup, unashamedly. Harry’s hands were grabbing his wrists, forcing them above his head while he drove into Severus with almost brutal strokes. The wrinkled nutsack he’d barely glimpsed last night was smacking his arse in lusty rhythm.

He saw the green eyes darken with some nameless emotion, felt the sinewy body tense over his own. It was almost real, too much and not enough. Severus gave a garbled cry and saw the water bubble
as his release shot out of him.

Severus fell back against the heated tub wall, panting mightily. Oh…damn. He’d had excellent wank fantasies before but this had been splendid. The only way it could have been better was if Harry had been there with him.

That settled it. In spite of this morning’s debacle, Severus had had a glimpse of heavenly delight. He’d be a pretty poor Slytherin if he didn’t try to repeat what had proven to be a very pleasurable encounter.

He stepped out of the tub, drying himself off briskly. When he next confronted Harry, he would be calm and relaxed. He wouldn’t let the man bait him, no matter what he said. Severus would worm his way back into Harry’s confidence…and, hopefully, into Harry’s bed.

He looked into the mirror again and frowned thoughtfully. Even before Nagini’s attack, he had never been considered handsome. The scars didn’t help. Harry no longer gazed in disgust of Severus’s disfigurement but neither did he care to linger on his face.

He could keep his hair clean and dress better, as he had last night. But Harry couldn’t expect him to change too much. He was what he was and he hadn’t survived as long as he had by being nice. However, a little concession to courtesy couldn’t hurt.

Feeling like whistling, but resisting the urge, Severus toweled off and prepared for a leisurely day in his new home.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
He stood hovering between the two beds for a long while, watching his boys sleep. The twins were so adorable like this. It was easy to forget what mischief makers they were when they were awake. Harry pulled the covers over their necks and tiptoed from the room. Lily had fallen asleep hours before but he went to check on her anyway. After the diphtheria scare, he was still reluctant to have her sleep away from his side. But Molly had told him it was high time Lily got her own room. So he had placed her in a chamber adjoining his.

The cottage was quiet now. Harry found it unsettling to have such stillness around him. He much preferred hearing the laughter and noise of his children, friends and family. Silence gave him far too much opportunity to think.

Whatever Snape was searching for in Grimmauld Place, it wasn’t occupying as much of his time as Harry hoped. He sent messages to the cottage but Harry pointedly ignored them, keeping company with his children and frustrating the Potions master’s attempts to communicate. So far the man hadn’t tried coming physically to the cottage but Harry had blocked the floo, just to be on the safe side.

He didn’t understand Snape. One day the man made it clear just how much he loathed Harry. Then he doped him up in order to have sex with him. Afterwards, without showing the tiniest signs of remorse, he made it clear it was just an act of expediency, designed to gain him access to the manor.
on Grimmauld Place. Now he was attempting to talk to Harry.

Why? Why the sudden urge for discussion? What did the man want to talk about? Potions ingredients? Proper child care? The weather? Getting his name in the papers? Out of the papers? Whatever it was, Harry wasn’t interested. The less he had to do with Snape, the better. After all, it was the Slytherin who made clear the terms of their arrangement. When Harry had tried to make matters better, Snape had pulled a fast one. As far as Harry was concerned, he washed his hands of the matter…and his bond mate.

What really shook Harry was the sex they’d shared. It had been…wild, more so than anything he’d ever done with Ginny. He’d known awkwardness, certainly, but no fear, nerves or real hesitation. It was all due to the potion, of course. Even if Snape taunted him about how much he’d liked it, Harry would never, never, NEVER do anything like that of his own volition.

But that didn’t explain Snape’s reaction.

The Slytherin had said he would bottom if Harry had wanted it. He had thought the man was kidding. Guess he had been wrong.

Harry couldn’t get the images out of his head. The man had been like a beast, screaming, cursing and begging for more. Those sallow cheeks had been flushed red, the black eyes flaring and burning with heat. When Harry closed his eyes, he could feel those supple legs binding him around the thighs, making it impossible for Harry to escape even if he’d wanted to. Afterwards, Snape had held him close, giving him a soft kiss on his ear.

Harry had been under a drug. There was no such excuse for Snape’s behavior. So underneath his scheming, he’d actually…wanted Harry. Which was something that Harry simply didn’t get.

The next day Snape had been his usual sarcastic self. He had sneered at Harry…but he’d also claimed to enjoy what had happened. He was so offhand about it too—all of which meant that Snape was gay. He must have been for a long time.

So his marriage to Harry meant…what? Was it more to him than a means of revenge and a matter of convenience? Had he actually lusted for Harry all along or had it happened gradually? Maybe he was homosexual but what had happened with the drug was simply Snape’s way of taking advantage of the situation.

Harry didn’t want to think about it. But late at night images of Snape’s naked body, rangy and powerful, that deep voice screaming with passion, would worm into his mind. It preyed on him far more than he would admit to anyone, even under Cruciatus.

It was insane. He had believed he would go to his grave with Ginny’s touch being the last erotic tenderness he knew and had been content to have it so. Then why was he stroking his daughter’s hair and remembering how soft Severus’s had been?

Harry snatched away his hand, appalled. He was even more sickened to realize he’d thought of Snape by his first name, the first time he could recall doing that. Harry swallowed and retreated from his daughter’s room.

He badly wanted to go downstairs, dig out a bottle of fire whiskey from the alcohol cabinet and drink until he collapsed. The prospect of such oblivion was so tempting. But he couldn’t get out of control like that, not when he had his children to take care of and nourish.

It was times like this that he missed his friends the most. Oh, he could still see Hermione and Ron.
when the situation called for it. But they had all grown up and forged their own lives. He’d had Ginny and then the children. Ron and Hermione had had little Timothy and were expecting another baby. Getting together was no longer the easy matter it had been when they were children in Hogwarts.

But he could talk to Hermione, couldn’t he? It was only fair; she’d been the one to officiate when he’d taken the Unbreakable Vow. She had already taken such trouble looking up the ins and outs of such bonds. She’d want to know about this latest development, especially since it involved another of his properties.

It would force her to hide it from Ron, though. He didn’t like the idea of having Hermione keep secrets from her husband. But, if his hot-tempered mate found out about how his bond mate had doped and duped him, the redhead go spare and Severus might well develop a permanent set of black eyes.

Harry grimaced. Shit. He’d thought of him as “Severus” again.

He was thinking all too much about Se-Snape. He wasn’t sure he could let Hermione know how the man was weighing on his mind. He couldn’t begin to think what she would say about it. She and Ginny hadn’t been related but both had been the only daughters to their respective families and had considered each other as being the sister neither had ever had. Would she think he was betraying Ginny if he admitted to naughty notions about his former Potions professor?

That fire whiskey was seeming more tempting by the minute. Perhaps he’d take one—just one—for Dutch courage and then floo-call his bushy-haired friend.

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“Harry, what is it?” Hermione settled back in the comfortable chair. Before he would tell her anything, Harry had insisted that she be taken care of first, getting her those chocolate biscuits she loved, a hot cup of tea and propping her feet up on a cushioned ottoman. It was very sweet of him to be so solicitous.

But she could tell he was very nervous about something. His hair was even more rumpled than usual. He’d immediately blocked the floo after her arrival, stating only that he wasn’t taking any chances. Chances against what?

“Hermione, are you okay? You’re comfortable, yeah?”

“Harry, I’m fine. But I’m going to get dizzy if you don’t stop walking around like that,” she chided gently.

“Sorry.” Harry sat down in an adjacent chair. Then his legs started jiggling.

Oh dear. “Harry, do you want something to drink? That might steady your nerves.”

He let out a bark of laughter. “No. I already had one, thanks. If I take any more, I might not be able to stop.”

“Is it that terrible?”

“When you hear what I’ve got to say, you’ll want a stiff one, too. Too bad you won’t be able…” He gestured vaguely at her rounded belly.

“I doubt it will be that bad.”
“I fucked Snape.”

She blinked. “Um. What?”

“I fucked Snape. Sorry, pardon my French. I shagged Snape.” Harry laughed wildly, making Hermione wonder if he’d had more than the one drink.

This was definitely not what she’d expected to hear. “What? You had sex with…Snape? Why?”

“He drugged me!” Harry shouted. Then he glanced at the ceiling and forced himself to speak more quietly. “He drugged me, Hermione. He doped me up with something like Amortentia. Then I took him home and practically mauled him in bed.”

Hermione could feel herself starting to shake and set down her cup down on a nearby end table. “You’re joking.”

“I wish I were.” Harry got up and began pacing again, his face set into grim lines.

A surge of white-hot anger ripped through her, so strong she could barely breathe. She’d never known anything like it, even when she thought Buckbeak had been killed, even when she’d learned of Sirius’s death. The closest she ever got to such emotion was a kind of righteous anger when she witnessed injustice or had heard Malfoy calling her a Mudblood.

“That bastard.”

“Yeah, you got it,” Harry mumbled. He plopped on to the couch beside her and buried his head in his hands.

“Harry, I’m so sorry.” He mumbled something inaudible. “What? I’m sorry. I didn’t hear that.”

Harry lifted his head. His anger had melted away. Now he looked truly miserable, disappointment and a hint of something else darkening the green eyes.

“I thought he was trying to get to know me better so we wouldn’t have to be enemies, circling around one another like sharks in the water, waiting for the other to strike. So we went out together for dinner at a Muggle restaurant.”

“And?” she prompted.

“Corabett and her husband Owen showed up. I knew they went there regularly. In fact, Corabett had said she’d be there that same night. So I thought it would be a good idea to have her see me and Snape together, have her spread the word that he wasn’t such a bad bloke. Snape didn’t see it that way. He thought it was a set-up.”

“Well, technically, Harry, it was.”

“I know! But it was meant to be a good thing. Dinner at a restaurant in the Wizarding World would have been the same, except that I’d be worried someone would take a shot at Snape. In a Muggle setting, there’d be far less danger of that happening. I thought it would be a good way of relaxing.”

Hermione frowned, picturing the scene in her mind. “It sounds like Snape was upset about Corabett. Do you think he drugged you because of her or is it what he intended to do all along?”

“He must have planned it from the start. He brought the potion with him. When I confronted him about it, he just said that he was a Slytherin and I shouldn’t have expected anything better.”
She reached out to touch him on the shoulder. “Harry, I’m so sorry this happened.”

“So am I, Hermione.”

“I never thought Snape would do anything like that.” No matter how mean the man had been in school, she’d thought he had some sense of honor.

“And I never expected to have my life ending up like this: me locked in a hateful marriage with my old Potions master.”

Hermione said nothing. She didn’t know of anything she could say that would make it better. The law was not on Harry’s side. The only thing she could do was provide comfort.

“It would be easier if he just stuck to being an arse. But he pretends one minute to want to be on better terms and the next he reverts to being the greasy mean-spirited git who used any excuse to dock house points. It’s like he’s constantly trying to keep me off balance.”

“Really? That doesn’t sound like the Snape I remember.”

“Maybe he’s gone barmy from Nagini’s bite,” Harry mumbled.

“Nagini? What does she have to do with this?”

“Oh, I didn’t tell you that part. The morning after we…you know…Snape had some sort of fit. He fell down, went into convulsions and then passed out. I had to give him this antivenin potion when he woke up.”

“Antivenin?”

Harry nodded. “I think that’s what it is. Accio Snape’s potion.” A small vial came winging into the room and slapped into Harry’s palm. He extended it to her and Hermione surveyed the contents curiously.

“How long has Snape been taking this stuff?” she asked.

“He says he’s been on it since he was rescued from the Shack and treated for his injuries.”

That didn’t sound right. Hermione knew people suffered from snakebites in the Muggle world. She hadn’t heard of anybody who needed to take medicine for years afterwards to relieve the symptoms. Granted, Nagini wasn’t your ordinary snake. But Arthur Weasley had been bitten by her and he didn’t suffer from convulsions and blackouts. What was going on here?

“Harry, what’s in this potion?” she asked, jiggling the vial in her palm.

He shrugged. “No clue. I had no idea he was even on this stuff.”

Hermione rolled it in her hands in a considering fashion. “Do you mind if I keep this?”

He waved his hand. “Go ahead. I don’t think he knows how many I took from the cottage.” He looked at her quizzically. “Why do you want it, Hermione?”

“I’m not sure. I think it should be analyzed.”

“But he’s a Potions master. If it was dangerous, he’d know.”

“Just humor me, Harry.” She tucked it away in an inside pocket. Changing the subject, she asked,
“How are things otherwise? How are the boys and Lily?”

“They’re fine. The boys really don’t like Snape and they’ve never gotten along. I think they were playing nasty tricks on him the first few days he was at the cottage. Hopefully, they’ve stopped that since he’s no longer here.”

“He’s not here?” She looked up at the ceiling. Given Harry’s distress, she’d thought that Snape was lurking somewhere on the premises.

“He’s at Number 12 Grimmauld Place. Since the two of us… he’s been free to come there whenever he wants.”

“I’m sorry, Harry.”

“Well, you told me that’s what would happen if we slept together. I just didn’t think he’d want it that badly. I should have been more careful.”

“What does he want at Grimmauld Place?” It had to have been pretty important for him to go to such lengths as subjecting Harry to a drug.

“Again, no clue. He wouldn’t tell me when I asked so it’s probably not a good thing. I just hope he’s not planning on hexing anyone.”

“If he were, I wouldn’t think he’d need to dig into the Black library. Snape has probably forgotten more hexes and curses than we’ve ever learned.”

“Well, maybe where Snape is concerned, a little more knowledge never hurt…especially when you’re hurting the other bloke,” Harry muttered snidely. “The weird thing is…” His voice trailed off and he looked really puzzled.

“What?”

“Ever since we had our row about what he did to me, he’s been trying to get in touch. Sending owls, trying to get through the floo. I set up Anti-Apparition Charms all over the place, so he can’t get in that way. He has to walk to the front door and I don’t think he’s willing to risk it. He’s still Mr. Unpopular, you know.” Hermione was distressed to see Harry’s mouth turn up in a bitter smile when he said that.

She turned things over furiously in her head. “Harry, I think if Snape wants to talk, you should try to meet him halfway.”

“I don’t want to talk to him, Hermione,” he responded tightly. “I tried talking to him. I tried having a nice, civilized dinner with him. He used it as an excuse for rape.”

“Harry, I’m not excusing what he did,” Hermione said patiently. “But if it seems like he really wants to talk—”

“No, he really wants to use me again. Maybe he didn’t find what he wanted in Grimmauld Place. Maybe he needs something in his bedroom…more of those potions, maybe. I don’t know and I don’t care. I’ll just bundle up his things and have them sent to the manor. He can have the place, if he wants it so bad. I’ve never liked it anyway.”

“Harry, you’re not being very mature. Sirius left the place to you,” she scolded.

“I’ve tried maturity. It’s a losing battle with Snape. He insists on feeling sorry for himself, as if he’s
the only one who ever suffered, and taking out his petty grievances on me. The worst of it is he keeps blaming me for how shitty his life’s turned out to be.”

“That’s not fair.”

“That’s Snape.”

Silence fell after that retort. Hermione glanced at Harry as he stared broodingly into the inactive floo. In the dim light of the room, he seemed so much older than her Ron did. Hermione had some idea of Harry’s awful home life; she’d seen how his adopted family treated him when they came to pick him up at Kings Cross Station for the summer holidays. Ron had told her of one harrowing time when he’d rescued Harry from his room after he’d been locked in like a prisoner.

She suspected matters were far worse than she’d been told. But Harry never let on how really bad things had been for him. If he hadn’t told her, it was unlikely Snape knew. Perhaps if he had, the man wouldn’t be so inclined to think the worst of Harry.

“You’re welcome to stay the night if you want,” Harry murmured, interrupting her train of thought.

“No, that’s okay. I told Ron I’d only be gone for a little while. He wanted to know what you wanted so late at night. But, since I didn’t know, he didn’t push.”

“What will you tell him?”

Harry sounded casual but she’d known him too long not to be fooled. “I won’t tell him about what happened between you and Snape after the restaurant,” she said quietly.

His shoulders slumped in relief. “Thanks, Hermione. I know it’s a lot to ask, keeping secrets from your husband—”

“No need to explain, Harry. I know about Ron’s temper. He wouldn’t take this at all well and I don’t want him going after Snape.”

“Yeah. He’s a good mate but he can fly off the handle pretty quick.”

She smiled at him. Her husband’s temper was fierce but it sprang from protectiveness and loyalty and she couldn’t fault him for it. She just didn’t want Harry getting hurt because Ron lost his head and hurt Snape—or worse.

“Well, I must be going.” On impulse, she leaned over and kissed Harry on the head. “It was good seeing you, Harry.”

“Even under these circumstances?” he asked wryly.

“I’ve seen you under worse,” she reminded him.

“Yeah, I guess.” He stood up and hugged her. He saw her to the floo and she braced herself for the familiar whirlwind journey. She hoped this late night confession had helped Harry. But she very much feared that nothing she said would be enough to lighten the misery she saw in those dull eyes.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
Daddy Sevvie

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Title: Scarred Souls
Author: Misty Moonlight/Co-author: QueenBoadicea
Beta: QueenBoadicea
Pairings: Severus/Harry
Published: 12/10/2008
Summary: A widowed Harry must bond with Snape in order to save his daughter’s life. Sev gains a family, for better or worse, and the hearts of two scarred souls will be changed forever.

Warnings: Romance, Drama, Angst, Alternate Reality/Universe, Sexual Situations, Hurt/Comfort, M/M, Slash, Anal, Language, Humor, possible MPreg, Bonding, Original Characters, Family, non-canon, OOC, WIP

Chapter 27: Daddy Sevvie

Draco waited while his house-elf hefted the teapot. “More tea, Severus?”
Severus waved it away. “Thank you but no. I could do with something stronger.”
Pale silver eyebrows lifted. “Really? It’s only ten o’clock in the morning.”
“I am in need of liquid fortification,” Severus muttered.
“Can’t imagine why,” Draco offered with a slight smirk. “Cognac, then?”
“Yes, thank you. I would be most grateful.”

After it was brought, Draco dismissed the house-elf who disappeared without a word and poured the liquor himself. It was one of his finest and he shared it with only a select few. The Malfoy scion settled himself gracefully again in the overstuffed chair and eyed his former Potions professor curiously. “So what brings you here, Severus? Trouble on the homefront?”

Severus managed not to wince. He was the master at hiding his emotions. He needed Draco’s help but he didn’t want the younger man to know how badly rattled he was by recent events.
“I have a favor to ask, Draco.”

“What is it, Severus?” The blond-haired boy leaned forward. This close, Severus was able to note Draco’s receding hairline. That reminded him of Percy and his promise of a baldness cure. Here was another wizard who could benefit from his expertise and he carefully noted that fact to himself.

“Would you say that you are in my debt for the protection I gave you during the war, Draco?” Severus asked levelly.

Draco stiffened slightly. “You know I am, sir.”

“Then I would like you to make a monetary donation in my name.”

Although the younger Slytherin appeared only mildly intrigued, Severus knew he had his attention. In all the time they’d known each other, Severus had never once asked the Malfoys for money. They might not know the true nature of his finances but they had to know he wasn’t as wealthy as they.

“You want money from me? Correct me if I’m wrong, Severus, but isn’t that bond mate of yours rich?”

It was Severus’s turn to look surprised. “Why would you assume anything of the sort, Draco? You know how shabbily Potter dressed during his school years.”

“Yes, that was odd, that,” Draco murmured, tapping his fingers thoughtfully on the chair arm. “He used to wear clothes far too large for him and I never saw him getting presents during Christmas holidays.”

“So why do you say that Potter is rich?”

Draco shrugged elegantly. “Father did a little snooping into the Potter background, back when he thought it would be useful for me to be in Potter’s good graces. They were pureblood wizards for years, a family line almost as old as ours. They’d amassed quite a bit of money. Merlin knows why he did so, but there was no reason for Potter to dress like a beggar.”

Severus knew that James Potter had been well off but he had no idea of the true extent of his wealth. Perhaps that was something he should look into when he had the time.

“Well, this is meant to be a kind of surprise for my husband. So I can’t very well use his money, can I?”

The eyebrows lifted again. “A surprise for Potter? I’d say that sounds sweet but this is you we’re talking about, Severus. Why would you feel the need to butter up Potter? From what I saw in the paper, you hardly got married because of mutual affection, now did you?”

Draco had always been very bright in school. His sharpness had not abandoned him as he matured. He was a credit to Slytherin House.

Very well. It seemed that Severus was going to have to divulge a little personal information. He wouldn’t tell Draco the entire details of his sexual misdemeanor; shame had been swift to follow and he felt ill every time he thought about it. It wasn’t anything he wanted to share with an outside party.

“Harry and I recently had a falling out.” He saw Draco’s surprise at hearing Harry’s first name though the younger man swiftly concealed it. “It was actually quite a bit of a row and now he’s angry at me. I heartily regret the error and wish to make amends. Unfortunately, he is avoiding me or is always with his children. If I show him the error of my ways, it can’t help but draw him out.”
“And you believe that money will do the trick?” Draco shook his head. “Look, I don’t think much of Potter and you have my sincere condolences in getting married to him, whatever your reasons were. But I don’t think he can be bought by money. Merlin knows he was never impressed by how much my family had when we were in school together,” he groused.

“I’m aware of that. But I wish the money, not for him, but for a charitable institution of which he is quite fond. The gesture will be enough to sway him favorably towards me. I only need you to donate it to the institution in my name.”

Draco sat back in his chair, smug admiration evident in his smile. “That’s a really good idea, Severus. Nothing impresses Gryffindors like flashy noble gestures.”

“Then you’ll do it?”

“Gladly.” Draco Summoned a handsomely bound leather checkbook from a desk drawer. “How much would you think is sufficient?”

Severus named a sum and Draco signed it over without flinching. He asked for the address of the orphanage and sent it off via a large eagle hawk.

This would work. Harry’s heart couldn’t help but be swayed by this magnanimous deed.

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Severus nervously brushed his fingers over the magically shrunken package in his pocket. He’d had no luck getting to Harry in the cottage. He only hoped a direct confrontation would work and that his bond mate wouldn’t feel threatened by his appearance here.

Throwing back his shoulders, he strode to the orphanage and pulled open the front door.

The receptionist at the front desk remembered his previous disastrous visit, judging by her grimace. “Mr. Snape, if you’ve come to visit Harry, you’ll have to stay in the waiting room until he can see you. We have quite a few families queuing up for adoption today and we can’t take time for personal visits without appointment.”

“I understand. But this is really important—”

“Is it an emergency?”

He hesitated. Technically, it wasn’t but this woman didn’t need to know that. “It’s a rather pressing matter and it concerns the orphans.”

She lifted an eyebrow. “Does it?” she murmured unimpressed. “Well, just have a seat and I’ll see if he can come to the front desk.” She scribbled on a piece of paper and sent it winging through the closed doors. Severus tried not to look at the animated clowns and balloons painted on the walls; it was too reminiscent of that garish wallpaper at the Black manor.

The moments passed and Harry did not appear. But the Kinderlieb woman emerged. She was clearly flustered at seeing Severus there and her expression was a strange mixture of wariness and welcome. “It’s all right, Iris. I’ll handle this.”

Severus’s lips thinned. He had no intention of being “handled” by this woman. “If I may see Harry…”

“I just wanted to thank you, Mr. Snape, for your donation to the orphanage. It was most…” She
clearly struggled for an adjective that was neither too gushing nor dismissive. “Unanticipated,” she finished.

“Thank you,” he said dryly. “If I might see my husband…”

“Yes, well…” Now she looked distinctly uncomfortable. “Harry said that he’s going to be very busy. He can’t spare time to see you today.”

“I believe I would like to hear that from him,” he replied, allowing a trace of coldness to seep into his voice.

“And I believe she told you I was busy. But as usual nothing matters to you but getting your own way, right, Snape?” Harry snapped. He had swung open the door behind Ms. Kinderlieb, in time to hear the last bit of their conversation. Now he stood against it, arms folded, his whole body vibrating with repressed fury.

She laid her hand on Harry’s arm, a gesture of such easy familiarity that Severus inwardly seethed. “Perhaps you should hear him out, Harry. Mr. Snape has recently—”

He stared at her incredulously. “Since when are you on his side, Corabett? The last time he was here, you made it very plain that you would be happy never to see him around children again. And he didn’t exactly make a good showing at the restaurant, did he?” This last shot was accompanied by a glare in Severus’s direction.

Damn Potter for airing his dirty laundry in public. Severus was very aware of the receptionist pretending to be busy at her desk while hanging on every word. “I would prefer it if we could take this inside. Please,” he gritted out when Harry opened his mouth again.

The Gryffindor hesitated. “Fine,” he muttered grudgingly, at last. “Guess it has to be important if you’re bothering to be civil.” He waved the man inside and stepped back to allow Corabett to pass.

Corabett gestured for them to come into her office, a small enclosure with a large window, magically crafted to be one way so it allowed her to watch the children without being observed in turn. Severus turned to her. “If you’ll excuse me, Mrs. Kinderlieb, I’d like to speak to Harry alone.”

She hesitated and then gave a small smile when Harry nodded at her. “Before I go, I’d like to thank you again for your generous funding, Mr. Snape.”

The green eyes widened and then narrowed. “What funding?”

“He didn’t tell you?” she asked, surprised. “Mr. Snape recently donated 10,000 Galleons to the orphanage. It’s a great deal of money and the orphanage could certainly use it.”

“Did he?” Harry’s tone was flat; he practically reeked of disdain.

The woman nodded. Then she seemed to notice for the first time the tension between the two men. “Well, I’ll leave you two alone, shall I?” She quickly left and the door clicked shut behind her.

As soon as she was gone, Severus hit it with several locking, warding and silencing spells, which Harry watched with amused exasperation. “I don’t know what you’re worried about, Snape. We hardly require that level of security around here. They’re just children.”

“Humor me, Harry. I don’t want to run the risk of the children hearing anything untoward.”

Harry leaned against the desk and folded his arms. “So what’s this about a donation?”
Faced with the man’s obvious dislike, Severus wasn’t so sure of his ground now. But he wrapped himself in the blank impassivity that was his trademark and began.

“I have been thinking over our last conversation. You were quite right to be annoyed with me—”

Harry rolled his eyes. “The man thinks I’m annoyed,” he muttered. “You are the master of understatement, aren’t you, Snape?”

“Perhaps it was not the best way to win your affections. I can only state that my need was pressing and I simply couldn’t think of any other way to gain entry to Grimmauld Place.”

“I would have brought you there if you’d asked, Snape, if you’d just let me know how important it was to you. You didn’t need to—do that to me,” Harry responded evenly.

Severus blinked. Would Harry have done so? In truth, he never even considered that possibility. He had assumed the worst and proceeded accordingly.

“I suppose I wasn’t certain. I couldn’t risk your refusal.”

Harry’s lips thinned with dislike. “No, I suppose not. So why are you here? Did Kreacher die? Do you need me to come back and play house-elf?”

Severus wanted to snap at him. But he was hardly going to make his case by being nasty. “I was trying to make amends, I suppose,” he replied evenly.

Harry smirked. “Is this some new plot, Snape? You’ve extended the olive branch before, remember? You actually think I’ll take you seriously now?”

“The donation is quite real, Potter. You may check with Mrs. Kinderlieb if you don’t believe me.”

“I do believe you. I just don’t trust your motivations.” Harry got off the desk and strode towards the door. “And let me tell you, if you think you can fix this problem by throwing money at it, you’re really stupid.”

Severus snarled. “No one calls me stupid, Potter.”

He was answered with a thin, triumphant smile. “Potter. That says it all right there, doesn’t it? You may pretend to be nice but you show your real feelings all too easily.” The smile vanished, replaced by an expression of open distaste. “You don’t want to get close to me, Snape. You want to use me. I don’t intend to be used. Not again.”

Gesturing at the door, he demolished the locking spells without a hint of strain. So swiftly and neatly was it done that Severus was astonished. He tended to forget what a truly powerful wizard Harry was. He wondered what Harry might do to him if he ever became truly incensed.

Giving him a mocking wave, Harry waited for him to leave. Severus stepped out, eyeing his bond mate cautiously all the while.

The children had been napping. But now a few of them were waking up. The older children, including James and Albus, retreated to a corner and immediately began playing Exploding Snap with a worn deck of cards.

The younger of the orphans were digging into the toy chest he’d seen on his earlier visit. Spotting Douglas, Severus made his way over to the tow-headed boy. Harry might not be impressed by the money. But the package he’d brought with him would show he had the best intentions at heart.
But the toddlers had spotted him and a few started to whimper. Douglas gave a wail and scooted away across the floor. “MISS KINDERLIEB!! COUNT DRACULA IS HERE!”

He shot a scowl across the floor and witnessed James and Albus ducking their heads back to their game. The twins must have passed on that execrable nickname. He would dearly have liked to hex them for that but managed to get a grip on his temper. He couldn’t afford to let the little brats get to him, not now with Harry watching his every move.

He paused to unwrap the package he was holding. It was a stuffed lion, complete with rolling eyes and snapping jaws, courtesy of a sophisticated Motion Charm. He would have preferred a snake but this was Harry he was attempting to appease; his own sensibilities weren’t important.

The lion twisted in his hand and lightly leaped to the ground. He was about to present it to Douglas when a little redheaded girl came crawling from among the other toddlers.

Lily pounced on the lion and cooed. The toy wriggled in her arms and curled into a ball like a real cat would have done. When it began to purr, she smiled up at Severus and buried her face in its fake fur.

The other children had noticed this by now. They advanced no Lily, crying out in childish babbles their excitement at seeing a new toy, one that wasn’t battered or ragged with excessive wear. When they tried to pull it away from her, she whined and edged close to Severus.

He bent and picked her up, seeing her close up for the very first time since her diphtheria. Her eyes were a soft brown like her mother’s. He thought her hair a dark auburn like Ginevra Weasley’s as well. But it was easy to see something of her grandmother Lily in the childish features.

She watched him, wide-eyed and without fear, sucking on one ear of her stuffed plaything. When she reached out to grab his nose, he jerked out of her reach but settled for letting her twine her grubby fist in his hair. “You are quite as insolent as your brothers, aren’t you?” he murmured, but without heat. She grinned at him and snuggled on his shoulder.

“Snape?”

He turned to see Harry observing them, his eyes darting between his captive daughter and his bond mate. A sharp glance revealed the twins had abandoned their play and were also staring at him. James had a mutinous look, as if he were preparing to attack Severus for daring to touch his little sister.

They really were a protective bunch, weren’t they? He couldn’t blame them. Hadn’t he tried to protect little Lily’s namesake?

This was one of Lily’s grandchildren, a child she had never lived to see. Lily, James and Albus were Harry’s children, born of the boy he had sworn to protect…and he had served the grown Harry very poorly indeed, simply because the messy-haired orphan had had the wonderful life Lily Potter née Evans would have so wished for her only child. The realization stuck him like a fist, leaving him shaken and oddly weak.

“Sheepee?”

“Lily,” Harry said quietly and Severus started. He’d been so engrossed in his thoughts he hadn’t realized his bond mate had drawn closer to him. “Lily, this is your new Daddy, Severus Snape.”

The ear popped out of her mouth as her lips screwed up. “Da-da?” she said in uncertain childish tones.

Harry said, “Daddy Severus.”
“Dada…Sevvie.”

Severus scowled. “That’s Severus.”

“Sevvie,” she burbled.

“Sev-er-us,” he growled impatiently.

She grinned, thoroughly unfazed by his apparent ire. “Sevvie! Sevvie! Sevvie! Sevvie! Sevvie!”

True mirth turned Harry’s green eyes into sparkling emeralds. “Daddy Sevvie, it is.”

He glared, which only caused Harry to grin wider. “There is no way I am standing for such an imbecilic nickname, Potter.”

The man shrugged. “What are you going to do, Snape? She’s only a toddler. This is as close as she gets. Her pronunciation will improve as she gets older, no doubt.”

“It had better,” he growled but he couldn’t be angry when the red hair was nestled so trustingly against his shoulder. Then she squirmed and he set her down so she could play with her lion unencumbered.

While the twins went back to their game and Lily crawled after her plush toy as it raced around the floor, Severus sat next to his bond mate on a nearby chair. He cleared his throat. “If I have not said it before, Po-Harry, I regret my actions of the other night. Not for what happened itself, but the way it came about. It was—not my intention to hurt you.”

Harry gazed at him steadily. “That’s really not enough, Snape. Would you accept an apology from me if I had done that to you?”

Severus sagged a little. No, he couldn’t say he would. He wasn’t the forgiving sort.

The other man sighed. “I can’t say that I forgive you, but today was a really good effort on your part. I do…appreciate it.”

With that, Severus had to be content.

The rest of the time passed agreeably enough. Harry and he conversed without further argument, even if they kept the topics to innocuous subjects. The Gryffindor was far from completely at ease with him but Severus felt as though a milestone had been passed.

Draco had been wrong. The way to Harry’s heart was not with money but through his children. He’d been a fool to think otherwise but he promised himself to remember it in future.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
“And you say he brought her that toy?” Hermione asked, when she was comfortably settled. Ron was still at work but he had promised he would meet her and Harry in the outdoor café as soon as he got off. In the meantime, she and Harry were enjoying a moment to themselves.

Hermione was even rounder with her advancing pregnancy and Harry had to help her into her seat. She was flush with the vibrant glow of impending motherhood—or maybe it was just sweat. Being a witch brought many benefits. But, in this timeless condition, she was just as vulnerable to mortal aches and discomforts as any Muggle woman.

Their children were seated around the table, James, Albus and Timothy chattering in high-pitched voices, enjoying the warm sunshine. Lily was holding on to her lion, smearing both herself and it with the ice cream Harry had fed her. Since her stepdaddy had given it to her, she had become inseparable from it, carrying it everywhere, even clutching it in her sleep.

When he next saw Severus, Harry thought he’d tell him that. There had been such a soft expression in the man’s face when he gazed at Lily; Harry wondered if Snape were even aware of it. It reminded him of how the man had looked after sex…and he’d better stop that line of thinking right now.

Aware the Hermione was waiting for an answer, Harry said, “It was kinda funny, really. The other
kids were scared of him, but Lily came right up to him and started playing with her toy. When he picked her up, she didn’t even squirm.”

“I guess she’s not so easy to scare,” Hermione said fondly, beaming at the little girl playing with her furry toy.

“He seemed really different. He’s in one of his ‘kinder and gentler’ modes, I guess. Don’t get me wrong; I’m not complaining. I’m just wondering how long it will last this time.”

An uneasy expression flickered in her brown eyes. “Hmm.”

“What? What is it, Hermione?”

“Maybe nothing.” She flicked a glance at James and the others and Harry caught the hint. Whatever she had to say, it wasn’t something she could talk about in front of the children.

“Hey, kids. Do you want to visit with Uncle George and Aunt Alicia when we’re finished?” Harry asked.

The boys cheered. There was nothing they liked so much as rummaging among the magical items carried in Uncle George’s joke shop. Harry knew it would keep them happily occupied and oblivious to all else while they studied the latest in magical practical jokes.

“I’ll send an owl for Ron to meet us there,” Hermione said as Harry helped her up again after leaving money for the food.

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The Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes joke shop always did brisk business and never more so than when the end of school term drew near. The march of hot weather and the promise of time spent away from the watchful eyes of teachers meant that young children and their frazzled parents came forth in force. This was one of the rare places that Harry didn’t mind being seen in public since his appearance always brought in customers to George’s shop.

“Oi, Harry! Good to see you!” George yelled, causing several people to turn around. “Keep your hands off those, you!” the one-eared Weasley snapped to a little boy handling some rather strange looking spheres with a mass of wrinkles all over their surfaces. The boy dropped the object hastily and his mother dragged him away, her face pink with embarrassment.

“What do these do, George?” Hermione asked curiously as she picked up one of the balls.

“They’re stink pellets. Just dunk them in water or suck them in your mouth until they’re wet with spit. Then roll them under your desk and they create an almighty ghastly smell that drives everyone from the room, effectively canceling class. They dissolve quickly, too, so teachers can’t find them and figure out who did it.”

“Ew,” Hermione said, wrinkling her nose.

“I want one of those!” James exclaimed.

“Me too!” shouted Albus.

“Oh no, you’re not,” Harry said sternly. “I don’t want your rooms reeking of insect repellant.”

“It’s not for—” Albus began, only to have James elbow him in the ribs.
“Not for what? Or should I say who? You weren’t planning on using this on Snape, were you?” The boys shifted guiltily. Harry sighed. “Haven’t I told you two to stop pulling pranks on him? He’s your stepfather now and we’re all going to have to get along. You saw how nicely he treated Lily, didn’t you?”

The boys glanced uncertainly at their baby sister, held in their father’s arms. She hadn’t been afraid of Snivellus and he had been nice to her. They just didn’t trust the seeming peace. So they shrugged and after a moment wandered off to look at the new arrivals in George’s shop.

George waggled ginger eyebrows at Harry. “Trouble with the missus, Harry?” he chuckled.

Harry turned red. George didn’t know about him shagging Snape, did he? He’d only told Hermione and he was sure she wouldn’t gossip if she hadn’t even mentioned it to her husband. He decided George was just having a go at him and he’d best take it in the spirit it was meant. “Very funny, George. This is Snape we’re talking about. I knew from the start that marriage with him was going to be rough.”

“You have my sympathies, mate. See anything in the store you like?” he added, waving his arm to indicate all the colorful items lining the walls and shelves.

“No. I’m a little old for all this stuff. Keep an eye on the boys, though. You never know what they’ll do if left alone with all this temptation.”

“Got it, Harry.” George wandered over to see James, Albus and Timothy talking animatedly about some new trick or gimmick they’d spotted in the bins. George’s little boy was there as well, proudly pointing out particular items they might like to try.

Hermione guided Harry over to another corner of the store, far away from prying eyes and ears. Harry cast Muffliato just to be on the safe side.

“What is it, Mione?” Lily dropped her lion and began to fuss. Harry Summoned it and gave it back to her before she could cry.

“I had that potion sample you gave me analyzed by someone trustworthy in St. Mungo’s. I didn’t tell them where I got it,” she added.

“And?”

“It’s got some truly alarming properties. The flora in it aren’t too dangerous separately. But taken together, over an extended period of time, they can produce serious side effects. They’re really not meant to be ingested for more than a few months.”

“But Snape has been taking them for years!” Harry said with alarm.

“I know and that’s what’s worrying me. I think the potions are reacting negatively with Snape’s system.”

“I don’t get it. Why would he take something that would make him ill?”

“He probably doesn’t realize that it is. If he made this potion himself right from the beginning and didn’t trust anyone else to brew it, then he assumes that it’s fine. But the potion you gave me isn’t exactly an antivenin. It’s to help with seizures and pain. However, it doesn’t effect an actual cure against snakebite, at least not one from a magical familiar.”

She spoke with animation now, warming to her theory. To Harry it was like seeing her back in
Hogwarts, giving a lecture on some point of magic that had caught her interest. “You see, Nagini was no ordinary snake and her venom wasn’t like that of other snakes. Remember when Arthur was bitten? The wound wouldn’t heal at first no matter what the people in St. Mungo’s tried. They even resorted to Muggle remedies.”

“I remember. But Arthur did get better eventually.”

“Yes, and I think I know why. He was found very quickly after he was bitten, thanks to you. So his treatment came before he could be too greatly affected by Nagini’s poison.”

“Which means what?”

“I believe—and mind you, it’s only a theory—that Nagini’s venom acted like that of werewolf saliva. It effected changes on the body’s systems. If a victim was found and treated quickly after infection and the bite was not too severe, then they could recover quickly. If not, then their system underwent a radical change, one that made them resistant to ordinary treatments.”

“And that’s why Snape was so ill, going into convulsions,” Harry whispered, remembering the spasms that had afflicted the man and the frightening stupor he’d lapsed into afterwards.

Hermione nodded. “If this stuff can’t cure him, it might actually be making him worse. How does he seem after he’s taken it?”

“I only saw him drink it the once. After he took it, he was his usual nasty self, bitter and out of sorts. But this is Snape we’re talking about and I just assumed it was nothing out of the ordinary. I was wrong, wasn’t I?” he finished glumly.

“Harry, you’re not to blame for not knowing. Snape has always been ill tempered and, if he hid his seizures from other people, no one else would notice anything was wrong either.”

“But you suspected something. All I had to do was mention what happened to you and you sussed out right away that something wasn’t cricket. I always knew you were the smart one.” She turned pink but he could tell she was pleased. “So what do I do now, Mione?”

“You have to talk to him, of course. Let him know that whatever he’s taking isn’t working to cure him. In fact, he probably needs to check himself into St. Mungo’s and get a more specific medical work-up to see just how much his bodily systems have altered throughout the years. Then he can get started on a new medical regime, one that can alleviate his symptoms even if it’s too late to manage a cure.”

“That might not be easy. He’s back at the manor on Grimmauld Place.”

“That’s right. You told me he wasn’t at the cottage when I visited you,” Hermione said thoughtfully. “But, if you’re getting on better with Snape, why hasn’t he moved back?”

“He told me that he didn’t want to push matters just because we had one civil conversation at the orphanage. He seemed sincere but when I think about how eager he was to get into the Black library…” Harry’s voice trailed off before he blurted out, “Merlin! Maybe this is why he wanted the library! He knows he’s sick and he’s searching for a cure!”

The brown eyes looked doubtful. “Really? I wouldn’t have thought a library devoted to the Dark Arts would have anything beneficial to human beings in it. I still think you need to talk to him, Harry, if only to tell him that you know something’s wrong and you’re willing to help.”

Harry sighed. When Hermione was right, she was right. “Fine. I’ll tell him, Hermione. I just hope I
encounter the good Snape and not his evil twin,” he muttered.

“You can try having dinner with him again,” she ventured. When she saw Harry flush, she added contritely, “Maybe not.”

“Not if he’s cooking,” Harry groused.

“You’ll just have to catch him at a time when he’s in a really good mood.”

“The only time Snape is in a good mood is when he’s brewing and that’ll stop soon enough if I interrupt him,” he pointed out.

“Harry, this potion isn’t just affecting Severus physically. It might be having an effect on his mind as well. He’ll do as you say if you point out he might go as mad as Voldemort if he’s not careful. You’re just going to have to risk his bad temper.”

“You’re right. How bad could it be? Don’t answer that,” he joked. “Thanks for your help, Mione.” He hugged her one-handed, mindful both of Lily and Hermione’s protruding belly.

“No need to thank me, Harry. It was actually rather fun.”

Only Hermione would think learning about potions would be “fun”. Shaking his head, Harry canceled the spell and walked through the store, looking for his other children.

He was going to have to beard the snake in its nest. Somehow he would have preferred facing Voldemort again.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
Severus gave the potion another stir and looked at it critically. The hair restorer salve was coming along nicely. It had formed into a glittering purple, with green tints sparkling in the depths of it. The wild juxtaposition of color reminded him of a certain long-dead Headmaster. The thought caused his lips to twitch faintly.

He wondered what Albus would have thought of his arrangement with Harry. Doubtless, the old man would have disapproved of the way he’d gone about maneuvering Harry into this position. But Albus had always tried to get the two of them to cooperate. So what if this wasn’t quite what the ancient wizard had envisioned?

Such justifications hardly helped him sleep at night. Those damnable heads would have considered it new fodder and he didn’t intend to give them the satisfaction by showing up at the cottage now.

Where was Harry anyway? His grand gesture had been three days ago and the man had yet to appear at the Black manor. Harry had courage—no matter how often Severus had sneered at Gryffindor tendencies, he could not fault the man for that. So why would he take so long to show himself after the tentative truce they’d established? Was he waiting for an invitation?

The purple and green concoction shimmered again but this time it wasn’t the potion causing the effect. For an instant, the whole room appeared to waver, the shining instruments blurring, as if the
whole of it were underwater. Severus shook his head to clear his vision, but that made the dizziness worse and this time it was occupied with a sudden surge of bile in his throat.

He stumbled to his workbench and collapsed upon it. Bending his head between his knees, he took deep lungfuls of air, letting them surge in and out, until the incipient queasiness subsided. He raised his head cautiously and relaxed when the contents of the room and his stomach seemed content to stay put.

What had just happened? Did he need his potion again? No, it was too soon after the last draught. Besides, the need had never been preceded by vertigo. Perhaps he had simply spent too much time brewing in an enclosed space; the fumes must have risen to his head. A little rest and a meal and he’d be perfectly fit in no time.

“Kreacher! Kreacher!”

The ancient house-elf appeared, complete with that ostentatious gold locket it constantly wore around its neck. Severus didn’t know why Harry allowed a house-elf to sport such a ridiculous and obviously very expensive piece of jewelry and he’d never cared to ask. At this moment, he found it particularly offensive, its Gryffindor gold ridiculously out of place in the sober dungeons.

“Yes? What does Harry’s bond mate need?” Even though he was shorter than Severus by quite a few feet, the gnarly servitor managed to give the impression that he was looking down his nose at him.

Severus also did not miss the inference. Not once had the house-elf ever alluded to him by name or the honorific “Master”. He was “Harry’s bond mate” as though he were nothing more than a possession of the messy-haired Gryffindor. Even house-elves were disgustingly loyal to the Boy Who Lived.

“I require a meal to be prepared. Nothing too heavy—fruit, sandwiches and tea will suffice.”

“Eating alone as usual then? What a disgrace this is, having a filthy Mudblood taking up space in the Black home. Perhaps he will die soon and Master Harry will have his home back,” Kreacher mumbled to himself.

“That is enough. Fix me that meal, bring it here and then take yourself off.”

The elf did not bow or acknowledge his request. It simply Disapparated.

Severus sighed and settled back to wait. No doubt the disrespectful thing would take its good time before fulfilling his command. Since he’d had the Black home to himself, Kreacher always dragged his heels when it came to dealing with Severus’s requests. When he did perform his set tasks, he did so with an ill grace and that constant conspicuous muttering under his breath.

There was another pop and Severus blinked. Had he slept? He didn’t remember closing his eyes and he wondered at the ache he could feel in his joints and the thickness in his head.

Kreacher was staring at him, a sour expression on his face. “Your food,” he muttered and dropped the laden metal tray with a clang on the bench beside Severus. He went with another pop.

Severus glanced at the plate. The fruit was a bizarre mixture of shriveled grapes, bruised overripe peaches, whole unpeeled oranges and withered, dry looking pineapple slices with the pointy skin still adhering to them. The sandwich held strips of fatty bacon, beef tongue and sodden grayish sauce that oozed on to the plate. He picked up the tea and frowned in distaste to find that it was cold.
When he poked the sandwich, the smell of it wafted to his nostrils and he gagged at the wave of nausea that followed it. Before he could move from the spot, he vomited the entire remains of his breakfast on the dungeon floor.

His body clenched in unstoppable waves as more food came up. Finally, he was shuddering in dry heaves. Several unbearable minutes passed before he was able to stop.

Waving his wand, it took him three tries before he could Banish the entire sloppy mess on the floor and even then the dungeon stank evilly. If he didn’t leave right now, he was going to regurgitate his entire digestive tract.

Severus wiped his forehead, dismayed to find it clammy with sweat. This was more than disgust at the food or need of his potion. He’d been feeling out of sorts for a few days now but had attributed it to overwork. Now he was worried it was something else.

Here was a dilemma. He didn’t dare take his potion; it might exacerbate his mysterious illness. But he couldn’t go too long without it lest he fall into convulsions.

He could take the floo to St. Mungo’s or Apparate. But he didn’t trust himself to wind up at the proper destination, given his shakiness. Who knew where he might land? He might even Splinch himself and that hadn’t happened since he’d first learned to Apparate as a teenager.

Perhaps all he really needed was rest. If he could get himself upstairs and into bed, then he would recover and put this ghastly episode behind him.

But the brew simmering in his cauldron…it needed decanting and it couldn’t wait. He needed to test it (perhaps he’d try pouring it on the head of that damned house-elf) and for that it had to be placed properly within its containers.

Painstakingly, stopping every few minutes in order for the aching and nausea to subside, Severus managed to fill several bottles, even though his hands shook, slopping the potion back into the cauldron repeatedly. Making sure to lock and ward the dungeon, he staggered up the stairs. Feeling too weak to make the journey to his upstairs chamber, he managed to get to the couch in the copious living room.

He collapsed on it and swung his feet up. Without even bothering to remove his boots, he sank into an exhausted slumber.

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Harry opened the front door cautiously, wand at the ready. There had been no responses to his owls and he had no idea what kind of mood Snape would be in. The man had seemed in a good mood at their last encounter in the orphanage. But that had been days ago and, after Hermione’s theory behind Snape’s Jekyll-and-Hyde act, he wasn’t about to take any chances.

There was nothing, not even the appearance of Kreacher. There was no sound and his grip tightened. Snape was a superb spy and Harry was certain his old habits hadn’t failed him. The Slytherin could be lurking in the shadows, ready to fire off a hex at him. Harry silently strengthened his Shields and advanced farther into the house.

Still nothing, not a whisper or flicker of movement. Not for the first time, he was glad that he’d gotten rid of that portrait of Walburga Black. The madwoman’s picture would have doubtless given away his arrival by now if he hadn’t.

Deciding to risk possible hexing, Harry called, “Snape? Snape, where are you? We have to talk.”
Still nothing and now Harry was getting decidedly nervous. Was the man brewing? He’d hate to disturb him if that was the case. But they had let the silence drag on far too long. Whatever lingering ill feeling between them could wait until Harry saw that Severus was taken care of properly.

“Snape?” It looked like he’d have to search for the man. Given the size of the Black manor, that simply wasn’t practical. “Kreacher? Kreacher!”

The wrinkled house-elf appeared in the blink of an eye. It made Harry wonder why the elf was so slow at other times. “Master Harry calls? It is good to see Master Harry. You have not been here—”

“Yes, yes, Kreacher, I know.” The house-elf had a tendency to ramble. It was a good idea to cut him off right at the start. “I’m looking for Severus Snape. Do you know where he is?”

A brief crafty expression came and went on the creased visage. “Kreacher has not seen Harry’s bond mate since Kreacher took him a small luncheon in the dungeon.”

That sounded like truth. But what was Kreacher not telling him? The house-elf might not be able to lie to him but he could hide valuable information. “How did he seem when you saw him? Was he well?”

Kreacher tilted his head as he considered. “He had just finished brewing something in a cauldron. He was likely in good spirits. But he did not tell me the state of his health.”

That wasn’t good enough. He reached out and grabbed a bony shoulder, albeit as gently as he could manage. “Kreacher, take me to Severus Snape,” he commanded.

They appeared in the capacious living room. It took Harry a moment to find his bond mate, stretched out apparently sleeping on the living room couch. “Snape?” he said softly. He approached him and laid a hand on his arm.

The man did not stir. That did it. Something must be wrong if he was able to creep up on a man with such catlike reflexes. “Kreacher, Severus Snape is ill. I’m going to floo and get some help for him. Wait here in case he needs help,” he added sternly.

The house-elf retreated to a corner, sat down on the floor and gave Harry a cool look. He never once looked at Snape.

It was late in the evening. He wondered if Madam Pomfrey would be at her post. Then again, students got injured at all hours of the day. He threw the powder in the fireplace and called out, “Hogwarts, Infirmary!”

The fire turned green and he stuck his head in it. Peering around, he didn’t see anyone at first.

“Hello? Madam Pomfrey? Are you there?”

The plump woman came bustling into sight, her wimple and gown as spotlessly white as ever. In spite of the years that had passed since he left Hogwarts, the woman seemed no older than ever and a warm surge of affection bloomed in Harry’s chest to see her trustworthy smiling face. “Hello? Oh, Harry! Is that you? It’s wonderful to see you, my dear. It’s been simply ages!”
“Hello, Madam Pomfrey. I have a favor to ask.”

She looked mildly surprised. “A favor? What can I do for you? Are you sick or injured?”

“But me. It’s Snape. He’s fallen ill and I don’t know what’s wrong with him. I was hoping you could help.”

Her face creased in grim lines. She didn’t appear surprised. “What exactly is his condition?”

“I’m not sure. He’s been taking some kind of potion for his snakebites. I think it’s made him really sick. He’s lying on the couch and he won’t wake up.”

She clucked her tongue. “This was bound to happen. The man **would** insist on dosing himself!”

“You knew?”

“Of course I knew! I was here when they brought him in from the Shrieking Shack. His wounds were worryingly slow to heal but once he grew strong enough to get out of his bed he insisted on taking off. I suspected he was treating himself after he left my care. I just knew no one could suffer that type of injury and stay on his feet without some kind of artificial aid.”

“Well, he’s unconscious on the sofa. I didn’t want to rouse him without your being here first. If you’re around, he won’t be so quick to dismiss any help.”

“Good thinking. Step aside, Harry.”

She emerged from the floo and spelled herself free of the soot. She peered at the still figure and began running diagnostic scans over the prone body with her wand. “Hmm. Hmm. Oh dear.”

“What? What is it?” Harry asked in alarm.

“Um, I’m not quite sure. Actually, I’m reasonably sure but I’ve seen this so rarely…” She resumed humming and performing more tests. As her wand hovered over Snape’s abdomen, Harry saw a pale yellowish ball of light forming in the air. The light appeared to pulse faintly like a heartbeat. He’d never seen anything like it.

“What’s that thing? What’s wrong with him?”

She turned and gave him a very odd look. “Harry, you know that I’m not really inclined to believe anything I see printed in the **Prophet**.”

“That’s…good.” What did that rag of a paper have to do with anything?

“That was the first I’d read that you and Severus were…married.”

“And?” Harry was practically grinding his teeth. He was in an agony of worry. Why was she dragging this out?

She took a deep breath and made a visible effort to order her next sentence. “Knowing how poorly the two of you got on in school, I was rather shocked at the news that you were bonded. Reading how Severus employed a dirty trick to get you to agree to it was less surprising, sad to say. I’ve known how difficult he could be, though I never thought he would stoop to such depths.”

“It near flattened me too, just knowing that he was alive,” Harry responded. He still didn’t know what this had to do with Snape’s illness.
“There was no responding article in the paper from you refuting those claims and, based on my memories of the two of you, I remained convinced that your relationship was one of mutual dislike.”

“Is there a point to this?” Harry nearly shouted.

“Given your feelings toward each other, I’d like to know how Severus wound up pregnant.”

Harry didn’t think he’d heard aright. Pomfrey had said Snape was…what? “Did you say he’s…?”

“Pregnant, yes. About two weeks’ gone by the state of that glow.” She waggled her wand and the floating sphere brightened in intensity to a fiery flare for a moment before subsiding to the butter yellow glow he’d seen previously.

Harry knew he was gaping foolishly but he couldn’t help it. Snape had demanded that he love any child produced of their marriage. But Harry still thought in Muggle terms. In his mind, it didn’t seem possible for a male wizard to give birth. Yet here was Madam Pomfrey claiming Snape was two weeks up the spout!

“But…how…I mean…how can a male wizard…?” he spluttered. “How can he have a baby? He doesn’t exactly have the right equipment, does he?” The heat flared up his skin. That had come out a bit blunter than he liked.

Poppy didn’t seem to mind. “Magic enables him to gestate the baby. As his time approaches, a vagina will manifest itself, enabling him to give birth to the child.”

Harry sat down hard in a chair. “Oh. Merlin. He is going to go spare when he hears that,” he whispered.

“Perhaps I should make up another room as a nursery, Master Potter.” Both Harry and Pomfrey jumped. Harry had quite forgotten that Kreacher was sitting in the room, still as a statue. The house-elf was grinning from ear to ear, the malicious expression from fifth year one that Harry had hoped never to see again.

The older woman apparently hadn’t seen him at all. “Goodness, that’s the oldest house-elf I’ve ever seen,” she said, staring at the feeble looking elf.

“He’s all right. And he’ll help with my bond mate, won’t he?” Harry stressed. Kreacher sniffed in disdain but subsided.

“Harry, you still haven’t answered my question.”

“Well, um, it’s kinda personal. Snape and I had dinner one night, we came home and…” He trailed off, smiling, and made a vague gesture with his hands, implying the rest.

He really didn’t want to go over the wild night that had followed. Let Pomfrey think that he’d lost his head or he and Snape had buried their differences. She didn’t need to know about the drugging.

Harry only prayed that the truth never came out to her. She’d be furious with Snape and that was one scene he wanted to avoid.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
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Title: Scarred Souls

Author: Misty Moonlight/Co-author: QueenBoadicea

Beta: QueenBoadicea

Pairings: Severus/Harry

Published: 12/10/2008

Summary: A widowed Harry must bond with Snape in order to save his daughter’s life. Sev gains a family, for better or worse, and the hearts of two scarred souls will be changed forever.

Warnings: Romance, Drama, Angst, Alternate Reality/Universe, Sexual Situations, Hurt/Comfort, M/M, Slash, Anal, Language, Humor, possible MPreg, Bonding, Original Characters, Family, non-canon, OOC, WIP

Chapter 30: This Isn’t What I Had in Mind

Evidently that was all Pomfrey needed to hear. Now that she knew what was wrong with Severus, she became quick and businesslike.

“He’s soaked with sweat. So we’ll need to get his clothes off him and bathe his body. Since you and he have already been intimate, I assume this won’t be a problem for you,” she added, staring coolly at Harry.

He thought his face was warming but he managed to nod without looking away. Pomfrey began rattling off a series of instructions and he sprang into action.

He filled the tub in the second largest bathroom on the second floor. That would make it easier to reach the man’s body. Harry then stripped his bond mate using magic. He could have commanded Kreacher to do it but he didn’t trust that Snape would be safe in the house-elf’s hands.

He looked at the ashen body floating in the water. Pomfrey had advised him to let Snape wake up naturally on his own. He clearly needed rest and natural sleep was the best way to give it to him.

Maybe it was best that Severus wasn’t awake for this. The man would have insisted on bathing himself or made any number of snide insinuating comments while Harry did it.
“Okay. I can do this. It’s not like I haven’t seen him naked before,” he muttered. Using a small charm to make sure the taller man didn’t sink into the tub, Harry began methodically washing him from the feet upwards. As the moments passed, he began to relax minutely.

Without those dark eyes glaring at him, Harry was free to explore his bond mate’s body in a way he hadn’t anticipated. The feet were narrow and slender, with delicate toes almost like fingers, reminding him of the man’s hands when he prepared potions during class. He’d often admired the way Severus’s hands moved, even if he could never have brought himself to tell him so.

The legs were long, sleek and supple; the memory of how he’d brushed his hands over them and commented on their strength caused his face to flush. He tried to thrust thoughts of his uninhibited sexual encounter with the man out of his mind. But it was impossible. Every brush of the washcloth, every soft inch of flesh, every bob of the flaccid cock in the water pulled a vivid image from his memory.

He pushed himself to complete the job, managing not to linger on any part of Severus’s body. When he got to the man’s hair, however, hurry was out of the question. The strands, fanning out in the water like a lily pad, demanded that he pay careful attention to make certain they were as thoroughly clean as the rest of him.

Harry couldn’t help carding his hands through the strands, breathing heavily as each individual hair coiled around his fingers. It was incredibly sensual, far more so than touching his bond mate’s body was. He cupped Severus’ skull, soaping carefully to remove any tangles. The hairs clung to him, like Severus’s hands had clung to him, pressing the man’s body against Harry’s, while frantic begging had poured from the Slytherin’s mouth.

To his embarrassment, Harry’s cock hardened in his trousers and he wished he’d thought to wear wizarding robes. He willed it away by thinking of the most disgusting potions ingredients imaginable, like flobberworms.

The man in the bath gave a soft groan and Harry started, sloshing liquid out of the tub. He immediately Banished it with a Drying Charm and levitated Severus from the water. Working with a brisk efficiency that would have done Madam Pomfrey proud, he managed with a few twists of his wand to get Severus dry, dressed in a body-length nightshirt and floating out the door. The man was in his own bed, blanket tucked up to his chin, without any jostling whatsoever.

Severus knew something was wrong. He was waking up much too slowly and a lethargic sensation was dragging at his body like he’d trekked up a mountain in improper shoes and now his every muscle was paying the price.

There was another person hovering in the vicinity. Severus could sense the unknown watching him with unnerving attention. He wanted to Summon his wand but was aware that the movement would betray his awakened state. A hand was laid over his, warm and moist to the touch. He just barely kept himself from flinching at it.

“Severus? Are you awake? Answer me. It’s me, Harry.”

Well, who else was it likely to be? That voice definitely didn’t belong to the house-elf and Kreacher wouldn’t have called him by his first name in any case.

“All right, Severus, we need to talk. I thought you wanted me to but you haven’t responded to any of my owls.”

Owls? Harry had sent messages? He hadn’t seen any. His suspicion immediately turned to that
pathetic excuse for a servant. So great was his fury that he nearly missed what Harry said next.

“Um, something has come up with you…something really…well, I’d rather tell you while you’re awake. If you’re shamming, that’s not very mature and it’s not going to help either of us. So, please, if you can hear me, open your eyes.”

Severus wanted to continue with the charade just a little longer, in the hope that Harry might reveal his true feelings. But the man had become obstinately silent and he decided it was time to have that talk for which he’d been impatiently waiting.

He stretched his arms and legs slightly, the way he’d observed other people did when they awoke. His eyes fluttered open and blinked at the light. He let his eyelids droop again, to give the impression of rousing lethargy. This gave him the opportunity to peek at Harry without allowing the man see into his eyes.

His bond mate looked good, a tight Muggle T-shirt stretched across his pectorals, bringing the muscles into soft relief. The inner vision of Harry’s naked body looming above his own was so sharp, desire trickled over his skin in a wave like he’d been submerged in a stream of rain run-off.

He was going to get aroused and that simply wouldn’t do. It was safer to look into the man’s eyes and Severus did so. The answering smile was so brilliant it was as if the sun had come out.

“Good, you’re awake.”

“You’re stating the obvious.” Severus stopped, dismayed at the hoarseness of his voice. It sounded rusty from disuse. How long had he been sleeping? Or was this from something more ominous than sleep?

“Don’t talk too much. I found you passed out on the couch. Severus…” Now Harry looked really nervous. While he didn’t mind having Gryffindors off balance, there was a clenched sensation deep in Severus’ stomach that told him this wasn’t going to be good.

“Spit it out, Potter. Melodrama doesn’t suit you.”

Harry started speaking really fast as though the news would be easier that way. “Um, I got Madam Pomfrey here—”

“What? Potter, you really are an idiot!” he grated. “Just because you found me sleeping on the couch, you decide I need medical attention?”

Harry hurried on, clearly irked by his anger. “You wouldn’t wake up and, after what Hermione told me, I got scared…”

“Oh, another of your Gryffindor playmates has been dragged into this mess, Potter? If I find a sea of ginger hair waiting for me downstairs, I am going to hex you!” Severus croaked.

“Well, you shut up and let me finish?” Harry didn’t yell but he was very close to it. “I told Hermione about your convulsions and she insisted on analyzing that medicine of yours. She said it’s dangerous to be taking it for so long the way you’ve been doing. I wanted to get in touch with you right away and warn you.”

He ran his hand through his hair, messing it up even more than usual. “But the twins picked up Dragon Pox from George’s little boy and I had to get them tended to. I couldn’t watch over them myself because I’ve never had it and adults are susceptible if they haven’t been infected in childhood. I sent you owls about what Hermione told me and warning you to stay away from the cottage. Since
you never came, I assumed you got them. But you never answered either so…” His voice trailed away and green eyes flicked over Severus’s face and body.

Harry had been worried about him? Enough so that he’d called on people to help him: Poppy Pomfrey, Hermione Granger-Weasley. Well, he couldn’t fault him for that. At least his bond mate was looking out for him. But there was a deeper worry in those green eyes, one that had Harry glancing repeatedly at his stomach.

Severus wanted to hit the man but he really didn’t feel up to it. “Potter, you remain as transparent as ever. Obviously, there’s something else that’s bothering you.”

“You’re pregnant, Severus,” Harry blurted.

Severus stared at him. The news was so ridiculous he was stunned into silence. Harry didn’t look crazy. But why would he say something like this?

“Did you say that I’m…pregnant?” Severus asked faintly.

Harry nodded. His eyes darted to Severus’s abdomen again.

Bile suddenly surged up. He clapped his hand over his mouth. To his horror, gagging noises bubbled in his throat.

Harry seemed to understand. His wand came out and a bucket appeared in thin air. It barely landed on the floor next to the bed before Severus heaved into it. Thanks to his earlier bout of nausea, little came out except a thin spittle. But that didn’t negate the shudders racking his body.

A hand was stroking down his back and another held back his hair. This was awful. The last thing he desired was for his bond mate to see him so weak. He wanted to lash out and scream at Harry to get away. But he lacked the strength. Severus sagged back on to the bed and dimly registered that Harry was wiping a warm damp cloth over his face.

“It’s okay, Severus.” The murmuring voice was calm and restful; he could detect no censor in it. When he fastened bleary eyes on Harry, he saw no amusement at his pain. Instead, there was a glow of sympathy and a kind of awe he didn’t understand.

“Leave,” he croaked.

“What? Wait, Severus, we need to talk about this.”

“I said LEAVE.” He put as much ferocity into his glare as he could manage.

Wounded reproach appeared. “Fine. I’ll—just get Pomfrey up here to look at you.” Harry stood up stiffly and marched towards the door. He gave Severus a single unreadable glance before letting it shut quietly behind him.

Good. Severus much preferred Poppy’s bustling efficiency to misplaced pity. He had wanted Harry here but not like this.

Merlin’s balls, why did everything happen to him?

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Poppy was disgustingly pragmatic about the whole affair, more so than he wanted. “Severus, Harry’s a healthy young man and you’re not old…at least not for a wizard.”
“I know that!” he snapped.

“Then I can’t see why you’re at all surprised that you got pregnant.”

“I’m not surprised. It’s just that this is highly inconvenient. It doesn’t fit in with my plans at all!” he groused.

“Pregnancy rarely does unless the couple has been trying for it.” She must have noted the rigidity of his features. “Oh dear. Are you telling me neither of you wanted this to happen?”

“Potter did promise to love any children from our union unconditionally,” he murmured evasively.

“Well, I don’t see the problem then. I know Harry will make a wonderful father.” She said nothing about his own abilities in that sphere.

“There’s another matter. I understand you’ve been taking some experimental potion to relieve the pain from your snakebites. Don’t give me that look, Severus Snape! Harry was quite right to tell me. You may be a fine Potions master but that doesn’t equate to knowing everything about how the human body works!” she scolded.

“I think I know my own body better than you do, woman!”

“Oh, so falling unconscious and violent mood changes resulting from your medicinal intake are perfectly acceptable side effects, are they?” she retorted scathingly.

“The medicine merely needs adjusting, that’s all,” he muttered.

“There will be no ‘adjusting’, as you put it,” Poppy snapped at him. “You’re not going to be taking it at all! It’s having an adverse reaction on your physical and mental well being and there’s no telling what it will do to your child.”

His child. There was something very final in the way she said it, with a far more convincing tone than Harry had managed. The Gryffindor had mentioned his pregnancy like it was a miraculous event, akin to the hatching of a phoenix egg. But, for Poppy, it was clearly business as usual.

He swallowed and sagged back against the pillow. “Very well. I won’t take the potions. But the pain from my wounds needs to be dealt with,” he pointed out.

“You shouldn’t be feeling pain at all, not after so many years. I’ll have to consult with other medi-wizards and medi-witches to get a better grip on the problem.”

“I refuse! Other people can’t be trusted with this kind of sensitive information. Merlin’s beard, woman, you know that I still have enemies out there, people who would be only too delighted to strike when they know I’m defenseless!” He tried to push himself up from the bed only to be forced down by her firm hand on his chest.

“Goodness, I’ve never met a man more paranoid than you! Well, there was Alastor Moody, but I was never personally acquainted with him—thank goodness,” she sighed. “Severus, do you really think anything can happen to you here in a fortified Slytherin mansion, with Harry at your side? He’ll take care of you. You should have seen how worried he was when he brought me here.”

“Potter’s state of mind—”

“Why do you insist on calling him Potter, Severus? And he was calling you Snape,” she mused, staring at him quizzically. “It was my belief that the two of you had buried your differences, given
He opened his mouth and then hesitated. She thought he and Harry were romantically involved? Then Harry hadn’t told her about Severus’s ignoble actions that had resulted in his very unwelcome state. His bond mate had remained silent, shielding him from Poppy’s righteous anger. That uncomfortable, uneasy emotion—shame—coiled through his stomach, leaving him almost as sick as before.

This wasn’t Harry’s fault. It was his own. He had drugged the boy, gotten swept up in the ecstasy of the sex and failed to take the proper precautions. If pregnancy had resulted from their actions, he had expected Harry to be the one afflicted. He’d been truly hoist by his own petard and he had no one to blame for it but himself.

“You’re right, Poppy. I haven’t been quite fair to Po-Harry. This whole situation has thrown me rather badly and I’m afraid I took it out on him.”

She nodded, mollified by his explanation. “That’s quite all right, Severus. You wouldn’t be the first carrier who blamed the spouse for getting her pregnant. You wouldn’t believe the stories I’ve heard of women screaming at their husbands while in labor, declaring that they’ll never let the men touch them again.”

A wave of dizziness, akin to horror, swept through him. He was going to have to go through labor? He wasn’t going to spared anything, was he?

Poppy noted his distress. “Severus, trust me. You’ll be fine. Male pregnancy is rare but not unheard of among wizards. I’ll instruct Harry on everything he needs to do. You’ll be in good hands.” She patted him on the shoulder. He made no reaction to it, still reeling at the horrid image of himself undergoing labor pangs.

“Shall I send Harry in? He was looking rather low when he told me to come up, poor lamb. I hope you haven’t been too hard on him, Severus.”

Hard on Harry? Was she forgetting Severus was the one who was pregnant here? Even though he was the one in discomfort, everyone insisted on pouring sympathy on that damned Boy Who Refused to Die!

The abrupt shift in his feelings from shame to fury, and about the same target, left him shaken. Perhaps Harry and Poppy were right; such extremes of emotion were not normal, certainly not for him.

He swallowed his pride. “Poppy, Harry has told me that he brought my difficulties with my potion to Mrs. Granger-Weasley’s attention. It might be prudent to allow her assistance in this matter.”

“Excellent notion, Severus. Well, I must talk to Harry. Don’t fret. You’ll get through this just fine.”

“I’m glad you’re so sanguine about the matter,” he muttered, allowing his petulance to show.

She merely smiled at him and patted him on the shoulder again. The patronizing gesture made his teeth ache but it was easy to ignore when the Gryffindor came barreling in almost before she’d opened the door. Had the man been eavesdropping? No wonder his children were so ill behaved if this was the example Potter—no, he had to call him Harry, didn’t he?—set for them.

Severus closed his eyes, trying to get his yawning emotions under control. They flew open again when he felt Harry’s hand stroking along his face. “Severus? I’m going to take care of you. I just have to make a few arrangements with my children. I can’t leave them at the cottage alone and
shuttling back and forth between my two homes isn’t practical. I’ll keep them out of your hair as much as possible,” he added hastily.

That was the last thing he wanted, tripping over those Potter urchins. Well, there was nothing to be done about it, he supposed. “Just as long as you keep them out of my room, Po-Harry.”

There was that blinding smile again. If he didn’t know better, he’d think that Harry liked that he was pregnant and that simply couldn’t be. Hadn’t the man stated he was perfectly happy with his family as it was?

It seemed his bonded state with Harry was going to be one endless round of surprises and shocks to the system. You would think his time spent with a maniacal Dark Lord would have enabled Severus to handle anything. Then again, pregnancy had never been something Voldemort could have thrown his way.

Severus settled back in the cushions. Harry and Poppy were discussing arrangements of some kind or other but he couldn’t be bothered to put in any commentary. He drifted away, only vaguely aware of them tiptoeing out of his bedchamber.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
“Boys, how would you feel about another baby brother or sister?” Harry asked cheerfully. At least, he hoped he sounded cheerful.

He was seated at the supper table with his children. James and Albus had their own chairs and Lily was in a high chair where she was involved in throwing peas, which Harry levitated back to her plate before they fell to the floor.

They really needed to get started moving their essentials to Grimmauld Place—again. But he felt it was a good idea to prepare them first.

He was a little startled when Albus’s face immediately lit up like a Christmas tree with fairies flying about it. “Are you going to have a baby? Like Mummy did?” Al said excitedly.

His older son’s reaction wasn’t as favorable. “It’s because he had sex with you, isn’t it?” James muttered, his hands curling into little fists.

“What? No, no, I’m not pregnant, boys,” Harry said hastily.

Now they really did look confused. “Kreacher said if you had sex with Snivellus, then you might have a baby,” James explained.
That house-elf. Harry was going to sit him down one day and have a few words with him about the things he was saying to his kids. “James, Al, I’m not the one who’s pregnant. It’s your new daddy, Severus.”

Al let out a squeak and stared at him wide eyed. James looked only slightly less gobsmacked. Harry smiled, hoping they would see this as good news.

“James, Al, we’ve all been one very happy family. A new baby will only add to that joy. Think how happy your mother would be, if she knew.”

“If Mummy were here, we wouldn’t have Snape as a stepdaddy,” James shot back with a scowl.

Hard to argue the logic of that. “Severus and I are getting along very well now, James. And soon we’ll have another addition to the family. I hope you two will be as kind to him or her as you’ve been to Lily. You do love your little sister, don’t you?”

Al nodded slowly. James didn’t. He only frowned and stared down at his plate. It hurt Harry that he wouldn’t meet his eyes, as though his oldest son blamed him for this.

Harry sighed. What a mess this all was. They had to get to Grimmauld Place and he would have preferred that his children be understanding about it, if not turning handsprings. But they had disliked Severus from the very beginning. Why should that change now?

“We’re going to have a new baby soon and we all have to be very nice to Severus.”

“Do we have to call him that?” Albus mumbled.

“No. You can call him Papa.”

“Or Daddy Sevvie,” James replied with mocking innocence.

“James, be nice. Severus is going to need a lot of care and attention in the coming months and I want you boys to behave and be on your best behavior. No more tricks and no pranks. Promise?”

Albus nudged his brother. “James, maybe Snape’ll be nicer to us if he gives us another baby.”

Both James and Harry stared at him. Harry honestly hadn’t thought of that. He couldn’t see Severus’s temperament being improved by the trials of pregnancy and childbirth. But if fatherhood (or was it motherhood?) didn’t mellow him, nothing would. Breakfast continued, with both boys firing eager questions at Harry.

Later, when they were packing their necessaries, Harry fervently hoped that they would leave behind anything they might have obtained from George, but he didn’t kid himself. He would have to go through their belongings discreetly after they were asleep or at play elsewhere.

While he was packing up Lily’s few possessions, he laid his hand upon her crib and started. How could he have forgotten—the contraceptive vials he’d hidden beneath her crib where Severus was unlikely to find them? He hadn’t needed to use them and had pushed them to the back of his mind. But Severus…would he want them?

Harry fished out the vials and stared at them, neatly lined in the padded flat case. The thought of the child Severus was carrying had left him more dazed than anything else. He didn’t feel the tender, fatherly concern and love that had welled up in him every time Ginny had told him she was expecting. To tell the truth, Harry was more stunned by the revelation of Severus’s pregnancy than anything else.
So would he grieve if the child were lost? More importantly, what did Severus feel about it? Would he want to keep the child? In spite of what he’d said the first time he’d told Harry of his desire for a child, Harry didn’t believe for one minute that had been the Slytherin’s intention. Access to Grimmauld Place had been his plan all along and he’d gotten it. He had just received more than he bargained for.

Hearing of his pregnancy had been as shocking to Severus as it was to him. It was very possible the man didn’t want a child, certainly not one he’d have to carry to term.

Harry picked up a small glass vial and rolled it thoughtfully in his fingers. If he was going to do this, he’d do it right. He certainly wouldn’t drug Severus the way the Potions master had done to him. He would present Severus with a choice. What happened then was up to him.

Replacing the vial, Harry shut the case with a snap.

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Severus was well enough to move around the next morning. However, there were no requests to rush to St. Mungo’s and he felt it best to take time and consider the implications of this latest development.

He had heard, distantly, the shrill cries of children hastily quieted by their father. Harry had returned and it seemed he was keeping his word about corralling his unruly spawn. Severus sat into a particularly ornate Louis XIV chair and tried to order his thoughts.

He needed his potion to offset the agonies. But he couldn’t take it and his next dosage loomed near. If he went without it, he’d be in pain and unable to perform any more brewing. If he took the potions, he might harm the child or lose it altogether.

Would that be so terrible? The Vow had demanded that Harry cherish any children born between the two of them. But having been exposed to the man’s hellacious offspring, he had reconsidered that scenario. It was a matter that required careful consideration.

On the plus side, he had Harry’s complete attention and likely devotion for the next nine months. It would be delicious to have the man running around on Severus’s errands, fulfilling his every need and catering to his every demand. The downside was dealing with the twins…and his own little infant, once the child was born.

His ruminations were interrupted by a timid knocking on the door. It came from too high up to be one of the children and he minutely relaxed. “Enter.”

Harry came in. He shut the door behind him and hit it with several Locking and Silencing Charms. Severus raised his eyebrows. His bond mate was being unusually wary. Could it be because of his children or was he worried about someone else?

“Severus, you’re up. Glad to see it. Are you feeling better?”

“Much. Potter, I would prefer it if you didn’t waste time on meaningless niceties.”

“Right. Well, this is rather hard for me to say…”

“Are you worried I will hex you? I will refrain from any such signs of temper. But I insist you get to the point. And do have a seat. It’s very irritating to have you hovering like that.”

Harry sighed and sat on the bed. Then he apparently thought better of that, got up and sprawled
gracelessly in another chair. “It’s like this. After the bonding ceremony, Hermione told me about some of my rights as your bond mate.”

When he stopped, Severus snapped, “And? I’m sure she regaled you with all the horror stories.”

“She did. She said I didn’t have to agree to any physical intimacies but that I didn’t have any rights under the law if you forced me into it.” The younger man swallowed, his face suddenly tight.

Severus said nothing. He didn’t need to. Harry was so transparent; it was obvious he was remembering their one night together. Hard for Severus to forget, too, seeing that he was bearing the result of it.

The Gryffindor continued. “So I decided to prepare against that situation, if you ever did force me to have sex with you. I went out and got these.” He reached into his pocket and pulled out three small vials.

Severus inspected the pale brownish-gold liquid inside and went still. He knew what that liquid was.

Harry’s face set in grim lines. “That’s right. Even if you wanted me to love children of this union, there was no way I was bearing the child of a rape attempt. So I took precautions—just in case.”

Silence rang through the room, a dreadful one filled with unspoken tension. Severus almost wished Harry would yell at him as he’d done the morning after their night of potion-induced passion. Anything would be better than this mute accusation.

But he was used to silence and stillness. And there was more that Harry wanted to say to him, wasn’t there? There had to be a reason he would reveal the lengths he had gone to keep from bearing Severus any children.

When he could bear it no longer, he murmured, “Why are you telling me this?”

Harry swallowed, his Adam’s apple bobbing. Now he looked a lot less sure of his ground. “You’re in kinda the same boat I would have been in if you’d forced me. And I wanted to know if you wanted…to keep this child,” he finished in a stumbling rush.

That was the very question that had been on his mind before Harry appeared, wasn’t it? However, he wasn’t about to reveal how eerily their thoughts had followed the same paths.

“Having second thoughts, are you?” he asked, his lip lifting in a sneer. “I should have known your offer to take care of me yesterday was nothing but a hollow sham.”

The man flushed but didn’t back down. “If I’m having second thoughts, then you must be, too. Don’t tell me that you woke up all dizzy with anticipation about the upcoming bloat, aching back pains, hunger cravings, loosened trousers, swollen ankles, lactating—”

“WHAT?!” Lactating, oozing liquid through his robes like a leaky cauldron?!? His stomach dropped in sheer horror at the idea.

Harry smirked at him. “What did you think you’d be feeding the baby with? Did you expect magical baby formula was just going to drop out of thin air?”

“Breastfeeding is a ridiculous notion, Potter. This is the modern age. It’s perfectly permissible to bottle-feed infants.”

“The modern age? Sure, that’s why wizards still use quills and parchment,” Harry retorted. “In any
case, bottle-feeding the baby after it’s born won’t prevent you from getting man boobs while you’re gestating.”

Severus shuddered. He unconsciously spread his hands over his chest, envisioning his pectorals enlarged to three times their normal size. Suddenly the prospect of getting rid of the—thing—growing inside him was seeming very attractive indeed.

The Gryffindor seemed to guess his thought. He laid the vials down on the dressing room table. “You can take just one of these safely up to a month after conception. After that, you run the risks of massive bleeding and infection. If you’re going to do this, do it before then. Remember—you only need to take one,” he stressed.

Harry hovered for a moment, his expression oddly bleak. Then he seemed to come to a decision. He marched quickly towards Severus and squeezed his arm. “No matter what you decide, I’ll stand by you, Severus.”

The Gryffindor gave Severus a nod and silently left the room, after disarming the various spells he’d laid on it. When he opened the door, he looked sharply both ways as though expecting his infernal children to be waiting just beyond it.

The door shut and Harry’s jolting presence gone, Severus stared in silence at the glittering tubes lying innocently on the table. If he wanted, he could brew his own contraceptive and it would likely be far more effective than these. But, for the early stage of pregnancy that he found himself in, it was probable that store-bought abortifacients would be more than adequate for the job.

As if sleepwalking, he walked over to the table, reached out and picked up one of the shiny glass tubes. Just one swallow and this burden would be lifted from him. One swallow and the woman troubles Harry had outlined in such gruesome detail would be expunged like so many Banished cauldron ingredients.

But there was no reason to rush his decision, either way. Harry had told him he had a month from the time of conception to make up his mind. Even if he lingered too long, there were other stronger, if riskier, potions he could take that could relieve him of this unwanted parasite growing within him.

Severus sat on his bed, still clutching the vial in his hand. This was not something to be done in the space of a moment, an afternoon or even a week. He was no foolish Gryffindor, to act on impulse, without thinking. He would consider this from every angle and weigh the positive and negative aspects.

Harry would help; he’d said so. And he could watch his bond mate’s interaction with his other three children to see if a child was truly something he could bear for the rest of his life.

He used his wand to conjure a soft cloth. Taking a deep breath, Severus opened the drawer to the dressing room table and laid the vials within them, wrapped in the fabric that would protect them from breakage.

Then he went downstairs to confront his new family.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
The next few weeks were…tense, more for the withdrawal of hostilities than the renewal of them. The boys, forbidden to play tricks on Severus, didn’t know how to treat him and stayed hidden in their room, mostly. Severus didn’t act like anything was out of the ordinary. He continued to brew and withstood Madam Pomfrey’s occasional visits and Hermione’s chattering presence with tolerance if not grace. He made no mention to Harry about his condition.

Harry didn’t know what to think. He didn’t understand how Severus could be so calm. He was sure if he’d found out he was pregnant, he’d be all kinds of crazy about it.

Had Severus taken the contraceptive and neglected to tell Harry about it? No, Poppy did a diagnosis on him whenever she came and said that both baby and, um, mother were doing fine. Severus glared whenever she used that word but she had pointed out he was the one carrying the baby. What other word fit?

Severus became more demanding as the days passed. The Potions master treated him the way he would a delinquent student undergoing detention. It was on the one hand comforting, as though they had fallen into their old roles of teacher and student. Yet it was unsettling because Harry knew they couldn’t continue that way.

It didn’t help that Harry had his own troubles to bear, not that Severus ever seemed to notice. For
someone who was so watchful, he could be damned self-involved.

There were times when Harry could shrug off the man’s tunnel vision. But this morning…

Harry lay in bed and stared at the ceiling. It was inevitable that this day would come around. But he wasn’t prepared. He couldn’t face it. Maybe he could just lie here and hope the hours would fly by without demanding anything of Harry James Potter.

There was an imperious banging on the door. Harry clenched his teeth, hoping Severus would go away. But the man didn’t take the hint. The banging continued and then he felt the man’s magic as he tried to undo the wards.

Harry dragged himself out of bed and got rid of the wards. The door swung open and his bond mate marched in, already immaculately dressed, not a hair out of place.

He clucked his teeth. “Really, Harry. Lying abed so late? You have no excuse. Shouldn’t you be making ready for work?”

“Severus, I really don’t feel—”

Severus ignored him, pulling out a lengthy piece of narrow parchment. “I have a number of items I vitally need. St. Mungo’s informs me there is an unusual bout of Dragon Pox going around. They have found my remedies to be far superior to what is typically used by their staff and asked me to make up more of my vaccine. You will go to Diagon Alley after work and get these items for me.”

Harry ground his teeth. “Why don’t you get them yourself?”

The taller man raised his eyebrow in that insufferable way of his. “I spent several hours last night brewing, which is why I need more supplies today. I could take Pepper-Up potion and make the trip myself. But Poppy advised me from dosing myself too often now that I am ‘up the spout’ as she so delicately put it. I thought I could rely on you to do this. Was I mistaken?”

“No, it’s just—”

“Good. I’ll see you this evening.” Severus tossed the parchment carelessly on the table and exited the bedroom as abruptly as he had entered it.

Harry clenched his fists. He wanted to yell. He wanted to throw something and scream at the walls.

It just wasn’t fair that he had to put up with this shite. Shouldn’t he be allowed to wallow instead of tending to the needs of one selfish, nasty, inconsiderate, former teacher who seemed to think his bond mate was nothing more than an errand boy?

Harry sucked in a dragging breath and his shoulders slumped in defeat. It wasn’t Severus’s fault really. The man was pregnant and he needed help. He couldn’t be expected to understand or feel Harry’s pain.

After all, it had been over a year and he wasn’t a child. But it still hurt and nothing would make it better. Maybe getting out was a good idea, better than lying in bed feeling sorry for himself. It might take his mind off—things.

So here he was in Slugs & Jiggers trying to get those bloody stupid ingredients Severus insisted he needed so badly. Harry squinted and silently cursed the man’s spiky writing. He muttered, “When he gets better, he can get his own feck—”
“Well, look who’s here! Harry Potter!” The shrill voice made him stiffen and Harry barely suppressed a groan as the avid, bespectacled face of Rita Skeeter thrust itself into his vision.

“Mr. Potter, it’s such a surprise seeing you in public these days. That husband of yours keeping you busy at the home fires, I expect?” she purred, fastening her eyes greedily on Harry.

“Great Merlin, woman, hasn’t anybody crushed you yet?” Harry snapped. His rising voice caused other people in the store to turn around and the usual whispers about him started circulating.

Rita’s smile decayed a little. Miraculously, she had managed to keep her Animagus status hidden from the Ministry. But she was aware that she stood in front of someone who was in a perfect position to expose her secret to the Aurors if he so chose.

“Mr. Potter, I mean no disrespect to you,” she tempered. “Your bonding with Severus Snape is old news by now and no one faults you for it. Death Eaters are so very devious…”

“This Death Eater was working for Albus Dumbledore, Skeeter, lest you forget. Without him, the whole wizarding community would now be under Voldemort’s iron fist. So you might want to show a little respect before printing stories about him that neither he nor I have bothered to confirm.”

Her smile returned, sharklike in its intensity. “Since you’re here, Mr. Potter, I’d very much appreciate getting your confirmation and input. How is your marriage to Severus Snape working out? Is he still the cruel taskmaster many students affirm he was in Hogwarts? How does being his husband compare to the loving relationship you had with your dead wife, Ginevra?”

Beside him, he could hear the spectators surrounding them gasp while those nearest wore looks of sheer horror or pity. Only Skeeter remained indifferent to the reaction she had caused…or maybe this was just what she was hoping for.

Resisting his first impulse to hex her, Harry stared her in the eyes and spoke as evenly as possible. “My marriage to Ginny was everything a happy husband could want. There can be no comparisons to any other relationship, no matter how wonderful. If you’d ever gotten married, you’d know that, Ms. Skeeter.”

He smirked. He would probably regret what he said next but he couldn’t resist. “Then again, who’d want to marry you, you little insect?”

With that, he marched to the counter to pay for his purchases.

There was a stunned silence behind him. Then people began laughing and cheering. No doubt many of them were just as offended by Skeeter’s nasty attitude as they were at her articles.

He kept his features as rigid as possible. But inside he was shaking. Most days he didn’t think about Ginny, a realization that suddenly appalled him. Hearing her name said like this, right out of the blue and on this day of all days, struck him so hard he almost fell gasping to the floor.

He couldn’t make a scene like that, not in front of that loathsome woman. He wouldn’t give her the satisfaction. Harry paid for his purchases and walked out as steadily as he could, ignoring the persistent questions from the clinging reporter.

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The cemetery was very solemn. In spite of the bright sunlight that spread across its grassy acre, Harry somehow felt cold. He shivered, wrapped his arms about himself and marched to the granite stone that still stood upright after only one year.
Ginny’s final resting place had been set in the Weasley family plot. Arthur and Molly had stated it was perfectly all right if Harry wanted to have Ginny near his parents. But somehow that hadn’t seemed right to Harry. Ginny had been a Weasley long before she ever became a Potter and the Weasleys name was as good as his. He had insisted she be laid to rest among her ancestors.

When he had said that, Molly Weasley had burst into grateful tears that had lasted well over half an hour.

“Hello, Ginny. It’s me.” He paused. “I don’t know if you can hear me. But I just wanted to talk.”

He absentmindedly cast a Cleaning Charm. In moments, the gravestone shone like it had been newly planted. “I’ve been married to Severus Snape.” He snorted. “Yeah, I know. Sounds crazy to me, too, when I say it out loud. ‘Course, it’s more like being an indentured servant than a marriage.” His voice got softer. “It’s nothing like what I had with you.” He rested his hand on the stone.

“Harry? Harry Potter?”

Harry turned around, furtively reaching for his wand. The voice, partially excited, partially timid, belonged to a man who appeared around his age. His expression—eager, open and guileless—made him seem fairly harmless. He stood a little closer to Harry than he liked, however, so he kept a grip on his wand and smiled blandly at the stranger. “Can I help you?”

“Harry, it’s me! Colin Creevey!”

“Colin?” Harry recognized him, now that he was looking carefully. Merlin, it had been years since he’d seen the other boy. Time had done little to Colin, except that he was taller, thinner and somehow more fragile looking than he’d been in Hogwarts. The mousy hair and pale blue eyes remained the same, however.

The man’s face lit up, his puppyish adoration undimmed in spite of all the passing years. Years ago, Harry would have cringed at the sight of it. Today he felt numb to it all. Still, it was nice to see some things didn’t change.

Colin came closer. “It’s good to see you, Harry—though I guess the circumstances aren’t the best, eh?”

“No, they’re not.”

The conversation died for a moment. Colin shuffled his feet, his hands jammed into his robes. “So…I read the news in the *Prophet*. You know—about your marriage to Severus Snape.”

“Yes?” The whole Wizarding World knew about that; it was old news. What did Colin have to say about it? The monumental unfairness of it? Harry got a lot of that unwelcome sympathy too, usually from heartbroken women who had entertained hopes of becoming the next Mrs. Harry Potter.

“Tough break that. I remember what he was like from school. Vicious bastard,” Colin spat.

Right, that was a bit rum. Colin suddenly reeked of hostility and unease skittered across Harry’s nerves. “Things are a little better now. He’s not quite as bad as he was in Hogwarts. Teaching didn’t really agree with him.” Harry cleared his throat. “Well, it was nice talking to you, Colin…”
The younger man blurted, “I know this isn’t a great time, but I was wondering if you wouldn’t mind having a pint—with me. Just for old times sake.” Blue-gray eyes peeked up from behind a fringe of fair strands.

“I’m sorry, Colin. Thanks for the offer and all but I really have to get going home.”

A flash of anger sparked in Colin’s eyes. It was gone so quickly, Harry wondered if he’d imagined it. The younger Gryffindor’s face creased in a tight smile. “Sure. No worries. See you around, Harry.”

“’Bye, Colin.” Harry walked to the gate. He didn’t hear Colin behind him but he felt the man’s gaze trained between his shoulder blades the entire walk.

He left the packages on a long shelf in the corridor for Severus to find. Then Harry ran to his room.

He threw himself on to the bed, laid his head in his hands and soundlessly began to cry. He wanted to wail but wouldn’t let himself. If he did that, he’d break down completely.

Finally, the tears ceased. He’d probably do a lot more crying before this day was through but for now he was calmer.

Harry stared at the dresser near his bed. Standing on a small easel was a miniature portrait of Ginny. The youngest Weasley daughter was vibrant and shining with health with her twin babies held in her arms. The image smiled at her former husband.

“God, Ginny, won’t it ever get any easier?” he murmured.

Her smile faded until her expression matched his. He reached out his hand to touch the picture. Behind his eyes, he could feel tears stinging again.

Severus studied the various items carefully. Why Harry hadn’t bothered to bring them to the dungeon was a mystery. He could have at least sent the house-elf and spared Severus the trek up the long winding stairs.

Most of the items were there. He frowned when he saw the Manticore venom was missing. Severus had written out a very clear list. Was the brat illiterate along with his other deficiencies?

He shook his head wearily. Perhaps Slug & Jiggers had been out of the item. It was certainly possible. He should give Harry the benefit of the doubt before assuming the worst of him.

Feeling a bite of conscience (really, a most disagreeable sensation these days), he marched up the stairs. He rolled his eyes to find Harry’s door unwarded. Again, the man seemed to have no sense to protect his own skin. He took the lack of wards to be an invitation to enter and swung open the door —

—To find Harry hiding his face in his hands. The man lifted his head when Severus entered but seemed to stare through him blankly. His eyes were suspiciously red. What was bothering him now?

“How are you feeling?” Harry asked dully, breaking the silence.

“I’m quite well, Harry,” he stated stiffly. His feelings of magnanimity flew out the window. “You
neglected to pick up Manticore venom.”

Harry eyed him steadily. “No, I didn’t. The store didn’t have any. I sent out an order to have it delivered by owl as soon as possible.”

“Ah, well, that’s good then. It’s very gratifying that you’re thinking for once.”

An awkward silence fell. “Are you—are you in need yet of your potion?” Harry asked quietly.

“Not yet. Thanks to the help of your friend, Mrs. Granger-Weasley, I have been working on a milder form of analgesic. If anything goes wrong, I’m certain you will be able to get me swiftly to safety.”

“That’s good.” The blank stare resumed. Harry seemed about to say something. Then he apparently thought better of it. “I’m sorry about the Manticore venom, Severus. It should be arriving in a few days. Do you really need Hermione’s help? I could assist in the lab if you’d like.”

“Certainly not, Potter. I remember your ineptitude from school.”

“Fine,” Harry said flatly. “Guess you’re on your own, then. Hermione’s busy at her job; she can’t always take time off to take care of your problems.” His expression had turned sullen. Green eyes wandered over to his bedside table.

A picture of Ginevra Potter sat there. She blinked at Severus but didn’t speak. After a moment, she moved out of the frame, leaving an empty space behind her.

Severus looked back just in time to see the wistful, tender spark in Harry’s eyes vanish. His bond mate seemed to curl in on himself, lose all the vitality he had manifested just moments before.

“Harry, I’ve wondered…why do none of your pictures of your wife ever speak?”

“Ginny and I said all we needed to when she was alive. I don’t need to have her talk to me now,” Harry murmured. “And it wouldn’t be her, anyway.”

Harry had so much love to give, but not to him, it seemed, unless he were under the thrall of a potion. It wasn’t fair that people like the Weasleys, his old school friends, his children, even the oafish Hagrid, should come in for so much of the Gryffindor’s affection yet Harry had none to spare his own bond mate.

He knew Harry hadn’t quite forgiven him for his recent trespass, though some might consider it minor compared to his older crimes. What could he do to rectify matters?

He cleared his throat. “Harry…I was wondering whether I could join you and your children this evening for supper.”

“You want…you want to eat with my family?” Harry gaped. To his credit, he composed himself quickly before Severus could make some withering comment about his moronic look. “Of course. That would be great. I’ll…tell the twins.”

Warn them, you mean. Severus merely smiled, the action oddly tight on his face. Harry didn’t appear to notice.

Harry was staying and he would tend to Severus’s needs. But Severus realized he wanted more than arid duty from his bond mate. He wanted those green eyes to shine on him as they had before. He wanted to take a place in Harry’s affections, not be merely an obligation.
He was leaving the room, deep in thought, when Harry spoke again. “Um, you can leave off your glamour, you know. I don’t mind the scars and it’s about time the children knew what you really look like.”

“That is good advice. I’ll see you at the table,” Severus murmured and eased himself from the room. Once outside the shut door, tension he hadn’t been aware of easing from his shoulders. He didn’t know why but this small concession felt like a victory.

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“Daddy?”

Harry scraped at his plate, ignoring Albus. Whatever the malaise was that plagued him, it still persisted, casting a gloom over the entire repast.

He had been distant throughout the meal. His children were affected by his palpable misery and were uncharacteristically mute. Even little Lily seemed to divine Harry’s mood. She threw her food, fussed and whined. Harry fed her but with sad smiles that seemed to hover on the verge of tears. This was one of the most depressing repasts Severus had ever known and he could recall Death Eater meetings where someone wound up dead at the end of the meal.

“Daddy? Aren’t we having cake?”

Harry’s eyes slowly came into focus. “Cake?”

“The choc’late cake. For dessert.”

“Not today.” The man’s voice was harsh, so much so that the boys flinched.

“But—”

“Drop it, James. Not today. Maybe…you can have cake tomorrow.”


“Don’t kick your brother, Al,” Harry said automatically.

Albus leaned towards his brother and whispered furiously in his ear. The hazel eyes went wide. James darted a fearful look at his father and they twins returned to their meal in uncharacteristic silence.

Severus thought hard, his eyes digging into Harry’s face, as he probed the mystery behind Harry’s maudlin mood. He wanted to ask but the closed expression on Harry’s face and the lowering tension at the table forbade it. He desperately wanted to lighten the mood but couldn’t think of a thing to say.

At times like this, Severus truly felt the weight of his inadequacy when dealing with others. How was he to bridge the gap between himself and the Gryffindor whom he had made his mate?

Much as he was loath to do so, it seemed he would have to ask—the twins. How to get them alone without alerting their father was the trick.

Well, there was only one way Severus knew to get children quiet and still in one place. “How would you boys care to come down to the dungeon tonight? You can help me while I brew.”

The twins froze. Harry appeared to come out of his stupor because he turned a bewildered stare on
Severus. “What? You want them to help you?”

“What? Nothing too taxing. But they can handle a few light chores while I prepare the base for the Dragon Pox.”

“Well…” Harry turned towards the twins who were still staring wide-eyed at their stepdaddy. “What do you say, boys? Want to help your father with his potion?”

The two gazed at Severus uncertainly. He didn’t smile; he wasn’t certain he could fake the expression without scaring the two witless. But he managed an innocuous expression—he hoped.

Then James and Albus looked at each other. Clearly they were weighing the disadvantages of working with smelly potions and their strange new daddy with the clear benefits of finally seeing what he did when he was hidden away so mysteriously for most of the day.

They appeared to reach a silent conclusion. “We’ll go!” James cried.

“Can I help stir?” Albus demanded.

“You’re too short to reach the cauldron lip,” Severus drawled. When Albus’s face fell, he added, “But you may help me measure.”

They both grinned. The expression was so much like their father’s; Severus thought it quite…nice.

Harry remained unmoved. He merely nodded his approval and went back to his meal.

Severus had expected more of a response than that. Harry had no idea what Severus meant to do to his children. The man must be more distraught than he realized to be so indifferent to their probable fate at the hand of his awful former Potions master.

All too soon, Harry finished his meal and moved to pick up Lily. Severus would have liked to take her with him, too. But a scampering toddler around his potions and volatile concoctions was a recipe for trouble.

Severus drew away the boys. He was arrested by a whisper so soft, he was certain the twins hadn’t heard it.

“Come on, Lily. Let’s go talk to Mummy.”

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
“Ready, Lily?” Harry whispered. His daughter was a touch sleepy from her meal. That was good. She was less likely to squirm. He didn’t know what would happen if you let go of a baby into a Pensieve. But he was betting it wouldn’t be good. He gently pulled the toy lion from her grip and Banished it to her crib.

He took a deep breath and plunged their heads into the shimmering material in the bowl.

James and Albus couldn’t really do much to help in Severus’s lab. But they were curious about everything they saw and Severus was very busy keeping them occupied.

Finally, he decided they were sufficiently relaxed to let down their guard. Casually, he asked, “I wish your father had been as enthusiastic about potions as you two.”

“Daddy said he couldn’t learn with you. You were always bewhittling him,” Albus said as he eyed a glass jar. The thing inside it wiggled whenever he tapped the glass.

“That’s belittling,” Severus said flatly. “And stop playing with that. You don’t want it to break out of the glass and attack you, do you?” Albus snatched his hand back with a frightened expression.
“What’s that mean?” James asked, looking up from the ladle he was polishing.

“It means to make light of someone’s efforts.” Had he spent the time demeaning Harry, making him feel small? He’d been trying to get the boy to learn, blast it! Still, he had been harsh on Gryffindors. Hermione Granger had done well in his class and he had retaliated by ignoring her abilities.

Here was a chance to amend matters somewhat. “I had been hoping Harry would be as good at potions as his mother,” he murmured, watching them carefully. He didn’t know what Harry told them about Severus’s relationship with Lily Evans, if anything. Here was a chance to find out.

“Was she really good at potions?” Albus asked, his attention finally taken from the wiggler.

“She was. She was a gorgeous red-haired witch, much like your little sister. But tell me, why was your father so upset earlier?”

James dropped the ladle he was holding. Albus looked miserable, the green eyes filling with tears. He began to sob quietly and James grabbed the ladle from the floor and resumed polishing it, furiously, as if ashamed at his inability to comfort his brother.

Severus hovered, at a loss at what to do. He walked over to Albus and patted him awkwardly on the head. “There, there.”

Albus wrapped his arms tight about Severus’s knees. “I-I miss my Mummy,” he whimpered.

“Do you? Why today of all days?” he murmured, trying to make sense of all this.

“It was Mummy’s birthday today,” James mumbled. He sounded muffled as though he were speaking through cotton. He sniffled and wiped his nose on his sleeve before rubbing the polishing cloth hard over the ladle like he wanted to remove the finish.

Merlin. Today was Ginevra Potter’s birthday.

This explained everything: Harry’s despondency, his near-refusal to go out today; his indifference towards the twins and his baffling anger when James had asked about cake.

Why hadn’t Harry said anything to him? He thought back to Harry’s behavior this morning. Damnation. They man had probably wanted to tell him but Severus had ridden roughshod over his protestations because he’d been so fixated on getting his potions.

That nasty emotion, shame, bit at him again. It was doing that quite a lot lately.

Severus considered these things while he alternately patted Albus on the head, rubbed his back and muttered rambling syllables of comfort. Surprisingly, it seemed to work. Albus’s sobs died away to gulps and then to sniffles. He drew back from Severus, wiping his nose on his arm.

“I’m sowwy,” he mumbled, his voice still thick with tears.

“It’s quite all right. Your mother was a good woman. It’s natural to mourn, especially someone that you loved dearly.”

James had stopped fiddling with the ladle. He was staring into his lap.

Severus cast about in his mind for anything that he might do for these little lost boys. He mutely directed Albus over to his workbench and sat down beside him. “James, come here.”

The boy snuck a peek at him from under his bangs. He hesitated and then, still holding the ladle,
shuffled over to where Severus sat with his arm around his younger brother. He perched uncertainly at Severus’s other side and the man embraced them both.

“Let me tell you about your grandmother, Lily Evans.”

“Daddy’s mum?” Albus asked, wide-eyed.

“Yes. You see, I knew her when she was a girl only a few years older than you two.”

James perked up. “Really?”

“Really. I used to see her floating flowers while her sister Petunia would scold her and tell her not to do magic out of doors where anyone could see her.”

“Great-Aunt Tuney?” James asked.

Severus’s eyebrows rose. “She lets you call her that?”

She grinned, his earlier misery forgotten. “No, she hates it.”

She would. “Well, your grandmother was the prettiest girl I had ever seen, with bright-red hair that had gold highlights when the sun would hit it…”

For years, it had been deeply painful even to think about Lily Evans and Severus had refused to talk about her to anyone except Dumbledore. He hadn’t even discussed her with her son. But now, in the stillness of the Black dungeon, he gathered together her two grandsons and told them about their maternal grandmother: her laughter, her warmth, her smile, her sense of mischief and her undeniable courage.

Would he have been happier to have her sorted into Slytherin? Perhaps. But a Slytherin Lily wouldn’t have had the courage to befriend him in public. As a Slytherin, she might have fallen prey to Lucius Malfoy’s advances, although he would never have married her. Malfoys seemed to marry none but other blonds. No matter how undeniably beautiful Lily was, Malfoy would have trifled with her and then left her for Narcissa.

He didn’t talk about that. Severus only spoke of the halcyon days he’d spent with his beloved childhood friend.

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“Look, Lily. There’s Mummy.” Harry pointed at the redheaded teenage girl. With a solemn expression, Lily watched the image of her deceased mother.

Harry held Lily in his arms while he watched his younger self walking around Hogwarts with Ginny Weasley. They held hands, talked about nothing in particular and tried to pretend there wasn’t a Dark Lord out there waiting to destroy their world. Often, the younger Harry blushed whenever Ginny’s hair brushed his cheek.

They didn’t kiss. He had felt much too inexperienced and clumsy to try and Ginny had seemed contented with just conversation and traveling around Hogwarts.

The memories unfurled before him, showing their continuing courtship, the marriage, the happy uneventful days that were nevertheless so filled with joy. Birthdays, anniversaries, parties, ceremonies for the Boy Who Lived—all swept by him and his wide-eyed daughter.
He pulled his head reluctantly out of the memories. Even if he couldn’t communicate with her, it had been wonderful to see these images of Ginny again, both of them vibrant and happy. It was like the Mirror of Erised only better. That showed illusion. This presented the actuality of memory.

He straightened his shoulders, wincing at the ache in them. How long had he been in the Pensieve? It was hard to judge the passage of time; it might have been hours for all he knew. He shifted Lily in his arms and Transfigured her clothes into her favorite sleep gown.

When he walked to the door to put her in her bedroom, he found Severus standing there, his hand held up as if to knock.

“Severus? What is it?” Harry looked behind him. “Where are the boys?”

“They were fatigued. I put them to bed.”

“Oh, you didn’t have to do that.”

“No. But I thought you might appreciate not having to deal with them for once.” Severus spoke lightly but those dark eyes were scanning his face, searching for disapproval.

“Really? Well…thanks. That was nice of you.”

Severus eyed Lily who looked back at him just as curiously. “I actually came to see your daughter. I thought she would like this.” He waved his wand and a vanilla cupcake appeared on a plate.

A whirl of mixed emotions swept through Harry. What was Severus playing at? His daughter suffered no such confusion. At the sight of the little treat, she squealed happily and waved her hands, entranced by the hovering confection.

“Well, she seems to like it. Come in, Severus.” The man waved the confection ahead of him into Harry’s bedroom.

“Look at that, Lily. Look what your Daddy Severus did,” Harry said, kissing his daughter on the top of her head as he settled on his bed. Severus sat beside him, not too close, but near enough to touch the little girl.

“Cack! Cack!” she cried, leaning towards the cupcake.

“Take a bite, honey.” Harry reached for the cupcake—only to watch it wobble on the plate and then lift, amazingly, into the air. It hovered there, one inch above the plate, before dropping to land on its side.

Harry stared at it and then at Severus. “Did you do that?”

The Potions master was equally surprised. “Not I. I thought that you had.”

“Nope.” The two men looked at the little girl lying innocently in Harry’s arms. She was fussing, reaching for the cupcake. Severus waved it within her reach and she dug her fist into it, mashing it and scooping up crumbled vanilla pieces. She crammed her fingers into her mouth and hummed happily as she licked and chewed at the sweet bits.

“Is that normal, Severus? To display magical abilities at such an early age?” Harry whispered, awed by what he’d just seen.

“It is not. However, that was just a small act of magic. As she gets older…”
“Yeah, I get it. Well, she’s got ten years ahead of her before she goes into Hogwarts.”

“Indeed. Perhaps she will take after her maternal grandmother and show aptitude at Potions.”

Harry glanced sharply at him. “Let’s not get ahead of ourselves.”

Severus smirked. Then he ran a finger down Lily’s cheek. She grinned up at him and wrapped a sticky fist around his finger. “Dada Sevvie,” she murmured just before she grabbed for another piece of cupcake.

A ghost of a smile seemed to flash across Severus’s face. Harry could feel one edging on to his own. The ache that had been there all day seemed to ebb a little. It would probably never go away entirely. But, with Severus here, it didn’t seem so bad.

“Harry?”

“Yes, Severus?”

“I was wondering…” The man hesitated, an uncommon look of uncertainty in his dark eyes.

“What?”

“Madam Pomfrey told me you had been quite – startled when you learned that I was pregnant.”

“You bet. I still have a hard time believing it.” Harry shook his head.

“Then why did you have contraceptives?” Severus sounded casual but his face had grown stony. Harry wasn’t sure whether he was hurt or angry. But the man deserved an answer.

“Well…I had thought that you might use a – potion to get me pregnant. And I didn’t want to be,” he mumbled.

“I see. You didn’t trust me,” Severus stated flatly.

Harry felt his face flaming. “No! That is…” He bit his lip. “No, I guess I didn’t. I read about my rights under the marriage contract and I was worried you’d do something sneaky like dose me up with a pregnancy potion. I figured that’s what it would take to get a man pregnant. The last thing I wanted was to bring a child of yours into a hate-filled marriage.”

Severus’s cheeks colored faintly. “I…understand. My behavior towards you in the beginning was less than trustworthy. I hope you will believe me now when I state I would never do anything like that to you in the future.”

“I do. But thanks for saying it.”

Severus nodded but didn’t speak again. Both men watched quietly as Harry’s little daughter devoured the rest of her cake.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
“What’s he doing down there?” Albus whispered.

“How should I know?” James whispered back.

Harry watched his children covertly. He didn’t need his Invisibility Cloak since he’d finally managed to learn Disillusionment Charms. So they didn’t know he was standing a few feet away, discreetly watching them for signs of mischief.

So far, Severus’s plan to have them all dine together hadn’t provoked any major scenes. Lily had shown herself to be surprisingly cheery in Severus’s company. The twins were also coming around, especially since Severus talked to them in a grown-up fashion, without the condescension they got from other adults. He even got them to laugh by telling them about the childhood antics of their father, much to Harry’s embarrassment.

Now they were lurking at the door that led to the dungeon. Harry banished the Charm around himself. “Boys. What are you doing?”

The twins both jumped, looking startled and guilty. “We weren’t doing anything!” James yelped.

“We weren’t! We were just wondering what he was doing!”
“You know how Severus likes to brew, boys. I thought I explained this.”

“Yeah. But he’s been down there all day. Kreacher said he didn’t even come up for lunch.”

“Really?” Was this cause for concern? Harry admitted that he still didn’t know much about his bond mate or his habits. Perhaps an all-day brew was perfectly normal for Severus.

Or maybe something is wrong. He didn’t know either way and James and Al were looking at him as if they wanted confirmation or denial.

“Never mind Severus. He’s fine. I’ve been looking for you two. I want you to clean your room.”


He gave them both a stern look. Severus was right; he was too soft on the boys. He needed to take a firmer hand with them, if only to keep them from plaguing their new daddy. “Don’t argue with me, Albus. Your rooms are starting to smell and that can’t be good. Do as I say, you two, and clean your room.”

“Why can’t Kreacher do it?” James asked. “That’s what he’s for.”

“Don’t let Hermione hear you say that,” Harry responded wryly. “So you boys have a choice: either you clean your room or I’ll do it myself.”

“No!”

“We’ll do it!”

Panic was not a good sign. Whatever they were concealing in their rooms, they definitely didn’t want him to see it. “So you’ll clean your rooms now?” he asked mildly.

The boys nodded and edged around him. Then they pelted for the stairs. “I’ll be checking later so don’t skive off by shoving things under the bed! And don’t bother asking Kreacher for help because I’ll just ask him!” he called after them.

Albus stopped and looked back at him. “You’ll tell us if he’s okay, won’t you?”

Surprised but touched by his concern, Harry said gently, “I will, Albus. But you’ve got to clean your room.” The boy nodded and took off after his brother.

There, that should keep them busy for awhile. Now to deal with his crotchety bond mate.

Concentrating all his strength, he managed to break down the ward. Even if Severus were involved in brewing, that would surely attract his attention. Harry braced himself for the angry roar that was certain to follow.

When nothing came, he advanced down the stairs, his wand out. “Severus?” Harry called out. There was light flickering in the dungeon depths…then he heard what sounded like a moan.

“Severus? I’m coming down!”

Harry bounded down the stairs two at a time. He charged into the lab only to see Severus glaring at him from his workbench. Approaching him cautiously, Harry could see a faint sheen of sweat on his forehead. The exposed skin was so pallid, Severus almost looked like an Inferus.

He knelt beside the taller man, alarmed at his silence. Harry searched the shadowed eyes and winced
at the pain he caught in their black depths. “Severus? Are you all right?”

The man scowled like he wanted to bite off Harry’s head. Then he sighed and sagged against the wall. “I was trying out a milder version of my antivenin potion to help with my spasms. The experiment was not successful.”

Translation: Severus had been down here for who knew how long quivering in agony. Harry rubbed his own forehead. “Severus, why didn’t you send word to the orphanage if you were in trouble? I would have come.”

“Very touching. But I was in no need of assistance you could provide.”

“Then why not call Hermione or Poppy?” Harry demanded, starting to get angry now.

“Mrs. Granger-Weasley is a married woman with a child, another on the way and a bustling legal career, all of which require considerable time, dedication and attention on her part. She does not need to be dragged away from her life every time I have a twinge. Besides, it was one of her suggestions that I was attempting to formulate. There is plenty of time to let her know that it failed,” he finished in a more subdued tone.

“And Pomfrey?”

“That irritating woman cannot keep herself focused. In fact, she drives me to distraction with her prattle about my unborn, what I should do to keep healthy, exercises I can try. She talks about everything conceivable concerning my condition. I’m surprised she hasn’t discussed baby names… What is so blasted funny, Potter?” he snarled.

Harry just barely choked back his laughter. “You. You said conceivable and since you’re the one conceiving…” He started laughing again.

Severus rolled his eyes. “Very droll. I wouldn’t have thought you capable of such sophisticated wit.”

Harry waggled his eyebrows at Severus. “There’s a lot of things you hadn’t thought me capable of, aren’t there?”

The black eyes widened. For a moment, there was dead silence in the basement.

Heat crept up Harry’s neck. Had he just talked about his one-time sexual fling with Severus—as if it were a joke? He hadn’t thought he could do that. At the time, Severus’s manipulation had left him so furious; it had seemed beyond the pale.

And now? He honestly couldn’t say that the memory weighed on his mind much these days, not when poor Severus was the one suffering because of what they’d done together.

Abruptly, Harry realized that kneeling at Severus’s bent knees left him in a very suggestive position and he scrambled to his feet. He resisted the urge to shuffle like an awkward adolescent. He was a father of three children (soon to be four). He couldn’t allow Severus to unnerve him like this.

“Well, anyway, I was worried about you. The twins told me you’d been down here all day. Do you think you can eat anything?” he inquired.

The waxen pallor acquired a greenish tint. “I do not think ingesting food would be prudent at this juncture,” he gritted through clenched teeth.

Harry resisted the urge to laugh again. Only Severus could sound so much like a dictionary while he
was in pain. “Then let me help you up the stairs. I don’t want you collapsing and hurting yourself or
the baby. Please, Severus, it’s the least I can do.”

Severus sniffed but allowed Harry to pull him to his feet. “You’ve done quite enough to me as it is,
Potter.”

This time Harry did break out laughing. “This isn’t my fault, Severus. It’s the woman’s job to see
about protection, innit?” he replied with mocking accusation.

Severus glared and wrapped his arm around Harry’s neck tight enough to strangle. “Potter, so help
me—!”

Harry wriggled loose but caught Severus before he could stagger. “I’m just teasing, Sev.”

“I see you share your baby’s infantile penchant for silly nicknames.”

“It’s better than Sevvie, isn’t it?”

“I object to both names, Potter.”

“And I object to being called ‘Potter’ by the person carrying my child. What happened to the two of
us getting along better?” Harry remonstrated.

“I suppose I can allow you this little indulgence, if you insist.” Harry waited. Severus’s lips thinned
but he ground out, “Harry.”

“See, that wasn’t so hard.” Harry pulled Severus’s left arm over his shoulders and steered him gently
towards the stairs. He noted idly a rich scent of balsam wafting from Severus’s hair. It was quite…
nice, actually. He found himself leaning against the man, sniffing to absorb more of that scent. Then
he jerked away.

“What is it?”

“I just wanted to say, I set the twins to cleaning their room. That ought to give us some privacy for
awhile,” Harry babbled. That wasn’t at all what he was thinking. But there was no way he was
letting Severus know that he’d been sniffing at him like a girl enjoying her boyfriend’s cologne.

Severus lifted an eyebrow. “While I am glad you’re taking a firm hand with them, I wonder at this
change in policy. What happened to their being too young to attend to such a mundane matter?”

“You were right. I’ve been taking it far too easy on them. I just…I think of Ginny, yeah? She asked
me to protect them and I can’t bring myself to get too tough on them. Childhood passes too quickly
and I don’t want them to look back on theirs and think how miserable it was.”

Harry stopped. That was getting too close to home. He didn’t want to discuss his miserable past with
Severus. The Slytherin would sneer at his pain or tell him to buck up and be a man. He couldn’t bear
the ridicule or, worse, the questions. The man would think he was lying or wonder why he hadn’t
just hexed his entire family.

He was aware of those obsidian eyes digging into the side of his face but refused to answer the
unspoken question. If the Slytherin truly wanted to know, he could ask.

But Severus didn’t. Instead, he murmured, “I believe I would like to retire to the library. In spite of
Mrs. Granger-Weasley’s worries about its dubious contents, there is much to be learned about the
various different flora and fauna in the magical world that warrants further study.”
A dark eyebrow lifted. “No? What do you mean, no?”

“You just spent several hours locked in a dark, airless dungeon. What you need now is good food inside you. I know you think you don’t want to eat. But we’ll find something mild for your stomach and then you can read in the library if you want.”

The pale face clenched in a scowl. “You think you can order me about, Harry? I’m no frail woman who needs her husband’s guidance.”

“That’s right, you’re not. You’re my bond mate and I want to take care of you, make this time as comfortable as possible.”

Severus didn’t answer. As they neared the top of the stairs, he thrust back his shoulders and took his arm deliberately from Harry’s shoulders. Clearly he wanted to show his returning strength. His hand shook slightly as he reached for the door handle but he was able to open it.

“Kreacher?” Harry called.

There was a pop. The old house-elf bowed. “What does Master Harry require?”

“We’d like a light supper. A plate of fruit and a light salad for me and a plate of sliced Edam and Swiss cheese, an orange, a peach, some steamed asparagus spears and a bowl of cream of tomato soup for Severus. Oh, and lots of whole wheat crackers.”

“Very good, Master Harry. Might Kreacher add it is almost time for Miss Lily’s feeding?”

“Oh, okay. Bring the food to the dining room along with something for her.” The house-elf nodded and disappeared.

“That’s quite an eclectic menu you’ve selected for me. What is the rationale behind it?”

“Molly and Ginny. They told me the kind of foods a pregnant woman should eat during the nine months. Some of these got to be Ginny’s favorites. If you have any kind of food you’d prefer, just let me know.

“And the fruit and salad? There’s no need for you to starve yourself because of me,” Severus offered.

“I know. But I’m not going to have anything heavy or meaty. The smell alone might make you ill again and I don’t want that.” Once again, he was subjected to that piercing look. “What? What is it?”

“You’re truly serious about taking care of me—and my child?” Severus asked. His tone was almost indifferent but that narrow stare demanded an answer.

Harry gave it. “Of course. I swore I’d love any child of our union. This isn’t the way I would have wanted it to happen. But if you’re going through with it, then so am I.”

Harry wasn’t sure but it looked like Severus was disappointed somehow. What had the man expected to hear?

“Very well. I will join you in the living room,” Severus replied stiffly and wanted away from him, his back ramrod straight.
Lily was getting almost too big to sit comfortably on Harry’s lap. But he so loved her weight and sweet-smelling skin that he didn’t mind. She ate her food mostly without fuss. But once again she was clutching her toy lion and then murmuring unhappily when food got on it. What with balancing her, getting her fed and using wordless charms to clean the soiled fur, Harry had his hands full.

Severus sipped delicately at his bowl of soup. He didn’t speak to Harry; conversation between them had gotten much better since Lily’s birthday. But there were still awkward moments. Harry would have been nervous about it if he hadn’t been so busy feeding his youngest.

“You’re quite proficient at wordless charms,” Severus murmured.

“I guess. It’s amazing how much you’re forced to pick up when you have three active children to look after. It makes me wonder how Molly managed it so well, what with having seven and all.”

“Indeed.” The conversation lapsed. Lily actively began rejecting her food. Harry decided she’d eaten enough, cleaned her face and toy one last time and set her down on the floor.

Severus leaned back; he’d finished his meal. Harry had thought he would leave at once but he seemed inclined to stay. He looked marginally better and not so ashen as he had in the dungeon. If he was in pain still, he didn’t mention it. Harry decided not to bring up the subject again.

Lily crawled across the floor, following the path of her furry toy. Harry cleared his throat. “I wanted to thank you again for Lily’s toy, Severus. She adores it. Practically the only time she’ll let go of it is when she’s bathing.”

“I’m pleased she likes it.” Severus seemed about to say something else but he subsided. Then he started and stared down at his leg.

Lily was pulling herself up, clutching at his trousers. The lively brown eyes were staring into his face and she waved her lion at him. “Dada Sevvie.”

He grimaced but accepted the sticky toy. However, Lily refused to let him go but kept tugging at his trouser leg.

“Young infant is quite tenacious, Harry. What in the world does she want?”

Harry hid his grin. “She wants you to pick her up, Sev.”

“What? I most certainly will—ow! Stop pinching me, you little urchin. Merlin, your fingers are like daggers,” he groused, glaring at her.

“Well, pick her up and she’ll stop nipping at you.”

Severus sighed as if this were a great imposition. But he leaned down and picked up the little girl. “I can’t see why you want to be hauled about like a piece of furniture. Your father was holding you and you couldn’t wait to be rid of him.”

The brown eyes stared at him solemnly. Then, quick as a flash, Lily reached out and gripped Severus’s prominent nose. The man huffed in indignation and twisted his head in an effort to escape. But the toddler had a firm grip on him and refused to let go. She let out childish squeals of amusement as she explored this large protuberance on her new daddy’s face.

“Leddo, you siddy chibe.” He reached up and finally managed to pry away the grasping fingers.

Harry let out a loud laugh. “I think she likes you—Sev.”
The black eyes glared but Harry couldn’t detect any real ire in them. He held out his hands to Lily but she nestled in Severus’s arms. She smacked her lips and then let out a burp. Drool dribbled from her lips down Severus’s shirtfront.

“Oh, for Merlin’s sake!” Immediately, Severus stood up, strode to Harry and dumped the child in his arms...or rather he tried. Lily dug her fingers into his shirt and began to whimper. “Let go! What is wrong with you, miserable girl?”

“I told you. She likes you.”

“Well, I don’t like her. Especially when she drools.” Severus glared at Lily. The expression had no effect at all on her as she merely giggled and grabbed for his nose again.

“You might as well get used to it. Newborns aren’t easier to take care of, Severus. They just cry, eat and wet themselves.”

“What a charming image. It’s so delightful to know what I have to look forward to,” Severus growled. “I expect you to take care of such onerous duties as changing the nappies.”

“Oh no, Severus. That’s not the way it works. I don’t care what sort of family life you had growing up. But, in my household, people pitch in with household tasks and that includes childcare.”

Sharp teeth flashed at Harry. “Does that mean I’ll be allowed to discipline your other offspring?”

“Their names are James and Albus. And, yes, you may…within reason,” Harry added hastily.

“Fine. Oh, Merlin’s pants...” Lily had wound one of her hands in Severus’s hair and Harry laughed again as he watched the man’s vain attempts to free himself from her clutches.

It seemed Severus was a huge softie underneath his bluster. Perhaps this marriage wouldn’t be so bad, after all.

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Then again, perhaps not.

“Potter!” The lean figure surged into the kitchen.

The boys gaped. Harry knew just how they felt. It was all he could do to keep his jaw from hitting the floor.

Severus was standing there, completely naked except for a towel wrapped around his middle. Images of Severus screaming underneath him, supple male physique, that hot, tight arse clamping around his prick and burning black eyes collided in his mind as a new picture was added: one of ivory skin gleaming with water.

Those dark eyes were glaring at him now. “Potter, this is intolerable. Someone has been in my personal bathroom and removed my balsam shampoo!”

“Um, really?” Harry blinked, trying to get his mind under control. His trousers suddenly seemed two sizes too small and he swallowed—hard. No, mustn’t think of hard! Get a grip, Harry!

Severus’s tone dripped with scorn. “Yes, really, Potter. I suspect your house-elf has been up to mischief again.” He glared at the twins. “Or your rebellious sons.”

“It wasn’t us, Daddy, really!” pleaded Albus.
James glared at Severus. "We weren’t in your bathroom!"

"James, Al. Tell me the truth. Did you have anything to do with this?"

"No, Daddy, honest," James cried. He actually looked hurt.

Harry raised his voice. "Kreacher?" When the house-elf appeared, he asked, "Kreacher, Severus claims someone took something from his bathroom. Do you know anything about that?"

The house-elf responded in his usual flat gravelly tones. "Kreacher was cleaning the bathroom and a bottle fell and broke on the tiles. Kreacher removed the mess but did not replace the lost liquid. Kreacher apologizes if any damage was done."

"There, you see, Severus. It was an accident."

"I very much doubt it, Harry. Your house-elf has been decidedly antagonistic towards me since my first day here. It gives me awful food unless you request otherwise, is slow to respond to my requests and shows me nothing but contempt. And I believe he is the reason I received none of your letters from the cottage when your children were ill."

Harry stared in shock at Kreacher. Emotions were hard to read on the alien, wrinkled face but the old defiance shone from the sullen eyes. "Is this true, Kreacher?"

The house-elf looked towards the floor. "It is, Master Harry."

"Why?"

"It was thought, if your bond mate were sufficiently estranged from you, you would not have to suffer his viciousness."

"It was thought…by whom? Was this your idea, Kreacher?"

This time the house-elf did not speak, merely continued staring at the floor.

Harry knew he could force the house-elf to answer him. But he shied away from commanding the decrepit Black servant. As it was, he could see the tremors running over the sagging frame; the house-elf was two seconds away from banging his head on the floor for failing in its duties.

A quick glance at the boys showed them tucking away into their meal, both pair of eyes bent avidly on their plates. Harry sighed. "James, Albus. Look at me."

Hazel and green eyes reluctantly raised to his. "Have you been making Kreacher an accomplice to your tricks?"

"Daddy…” Al whispered.

James burst out, determined to defend himself and his brother. "He hated us, Daddy! We didn’t want him. And he didn’t want us. But we don’t hate him now," he finished plaintively.

"Did you tell Kreacher to harass Severus?"

"Only at the cottage. We didn’t think…” James stopped, flushing.

"You didn’t realize he’d keep up the mischief," Harry finished. "You forgot to tell him to stop so he’s been bothering Severus here as well." This was going to be hard, but it had to be said. "When you finish with dinner, go to your room. You’re not getting any dessert tonight. Don’t argue with
me, boys. You put Kreacher in a terrible spot when you did this and it’s your fault. Be glad this is
your only punishment,” he added, glaring as harshly as he could at the two boys.

If they were going to say anything else, one look at Severus’s glowering expression stopped them.
However, Harry wasn’t finished. “Before you leave, say you’re sorry to Severus.”

Both boys mumbled, “We’re sorry.”

Albus added, “We didn’t know Kreacher was doing this. You were so much nicer to us and we
forgot.”

Severus looked down his nose at Albus. “That is no excuse.”

“Let it go, Severus,” Harry warned. The older man sniffed but subsided.

James and Albus finished their meals quickly and then shuffled away from the table with hurt
expressions. Albus stopped and turned towards Severus. “We’re really sorry.” The Potions master
didn’t deign to answer and the little boy shuffled off with a visibly crestfallen expression.

Harry sighed. “I’m so sorry, Severus. I didn’t realize what they were up to.”

“I did tell you those two trouble makers needed discipline. Frankly, I would have preferred a hex.”

“Trust me, going without their favorite desserts will be far more effective. Kreacher, listen to me.
There are to be no more tricks or pranks; ignore the boys if they ask you to do so. Severus Snape is
my bond mate. You’re to obey his commands with the same attention and care that you do with
mine.” He paused. “Remember, there is going to be another child in this household soon. My bond
mate needs all the fine attention you’ve paid to generations of Blacks. I’m sure you’re capable of
that.”

The large ears twiched. A curious shudder ran over the house-elf’s thin shoulders. Harry wasn’t
certain if it was because of the aborted self-punishment or inner revulsion at carrying out his orders.
Whatever it was, the house-elf bowed towards him and made a spastic twitch towards Severus.

“Perhaps Harry Potter’s bond mate should dry and cover himself before he catches cold,” he grated
before disappearing.

With that, Harry became aware—again—of Severus’s near nudity. Severus appeared to realize it as
well. A faint flush covered his cheeks before he swept out of the room with as much dignity as he
could manage in bare feet and a towel.

Harry shrank into his chair. Getting a stiffy for Severus—what was wrong with him? He had been
married to the most wonderful woman and had three children with her. He wasn’t supposed to be
troubled with inconvenient erections and lust-filled thoughts about another man. He was straight!

The more time he spent around Severus, the more confused he got. As usual, his first impulse was to
run to Hermione. But she couldn’t help him with this. What if Ron found out? What if MOLLY
found out?

He sagged forward until his head hit the table and groaned. Life seemed so much simpler when all he
had to worry about was killing a crazed wizard.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
Better Late Than Never

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Title: Scarred Souls
Author: Misty Moonlight/Co-author: QueenBoadicea
Beta: QueenBoadicea
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Summary: A widowed Harry must bond with Snape in order to save his daughter’s life. Sev gains a family, for better or worse, and the hearts of two scarred souls will be changed forever.
Warnings: Romance, Drama, Angst, Alternate Reality/Universe, Sexual Situations, Hurt/Comfort, M/M, Slash, Anal, Language, Humor, possible MPreg, Bonding, Original Characters, Family, non-canon, OOC, WIP

Chapter 35: Better Late Than Never

“What do you think of Roger?”
Severus peered up from the book he was reading. Harry wasn’t sure what the title of this one was. He only knew it was dusty and had growled at him when he came too close—which explained why Severus was wearing dragonhide gloves while he handled it.

“Who’s Roger and why should I be thinking about him?” the older man asked coolly. While Severus was enjoying Harry’s company, he had to admit the man’s thought processes escaped him. Gryffindors never seemed to learn to think along rational lines, with the possible exception of Mrs. Hermione Granger-Weasley.

“No, I mean the name Roger. You know, for the baby. If it’s a boy.”

Bang! The twins were playing Exploding Snap and Albus crowed as he clapped his hands. “I win!”
James snorted. “Best two out of three.” He looked up at Severus. “I like Roger.”

Another of Seveus’s lip curls curved across his face and Harry ducked his head towards the baby book in his lap. Merlin’s shorts, that was weird. He shouldn’t be getting twinges in his trousers because of a sneer. “So. What about Roger?” he managed, keeping his eyes firmly on the page.
“As a choice, it is less than inspired. Why should I want such a pedestrian forename for my firstborn?” Was he to have children with no better labels than the Weasley clan? Bill, Percy, Fred and George, Charlie, Arthur were such dull names. Severus suppressed a shudder at the thought that the child might be named “Ronald”.

“What’s peddessian?” Albus asked.

“Pedestrian. It means commonplace or ordinary, Albus,” Severus supplied.

“What’s wrong with Roger?” Harry demanded. “Honestly, why do babies have to have weird names just because they’re born into wizarding families? Doesn’t being magical make them special enough?”

“Words have symbolic meaning for wizards, Harry. Your dogfather, Regulus and Draco were all named for the constellations they were born under, far more meaningful choices than a trivial name picked because it sounds pleasant.”

“What’s trivial?” James chimed in.

Severus answered absently, “Trivial. Unimportant.”

“There’s nothing trivial about the name ‘Roger’. It’s a good solid English name,” Harry protested.

Severus sighed in a much put-upon manner. Harry was completely wrong, as usual, and insisting that he was right. “Actually, the name comes from the German. It means ‘famous spear’.”

Harry glanced down at the small print listed under the name. “Oh. Um, how do you know that? Were you looking for names in your spare time?” he asked with a sly smile.

“Of course not!” Severus snapped. “I get enough of that nonsense from Poppy.” He shifted with irritation, the book emitting a warning grumble in his hands. “This is all a moot point anyway. I’m not even certain…” He glanced towards the boys. He clearly didn’t want to talk about his plans for an abortion in front of them.

“What’s a ‘moot’?” James demanded.

“It means subject to debate—talk about—not a serious subject. The two of you would benefit greatly from a dictionary,” Severus sighed. “Perhaps I shall give you one for your birthday.”

Harry waited. “Well, Severus?”

“Well what?”

“How did you know what ‘Roger’ meant?”

Severus’s features tensed. He looked embarrassed and Harry wondered why such a simple question should trouble him.

Then he muttered, “When I was a small boy, my mother held out the hope for other children. We—we went through a book of baby names together. I remember a great many of the names she studied and their meanings and origins.” He greatly hoped Harry wouldn’t make any further inquiries. He wasn’t sure he could keep his composure if the man pushed him too far on this subject.

Harry wanted to ask why she hadn’t done this with her husband. But he guessed the answer and decided not to pursue it. Inwardly he was thrilled. It was one of the rare times Severus divulged a
personal comment about his past. It made him feel a little bit closer to the man. And then he wonder why that caused him to feel so warm inside.

He bent over the book again. Then his face lit up. “We can call the baby ‘Sheridan’. That’s a good name for a boy or a girl. It means…”

“Seeker. Not an entirely imaginative choice, is it?” Severus said dryly.

“Sounds girly, Daddy,” Albus said as he laid down another card.

“It is a tad effeminate,” Severus concurred.

James struggled to follow the conversation. “What’s effemilate?”

“Effeminate. What your brother said, James.”

“I like it. Is it so bad?” Harry murmured, feeling unaccountably small.

Severus frowned at him. “I would want a child of mine to have a name with some special significance to myself.”

“Signifi-what?”

“Importance, Albus.”

Harry cleared his throat. “What about ‘Theora’ for a girl?”

“I like it!” Albus crowed.

“We can call her Theo for short,” his brother responded with a wicked grin.

Despite his annoyance with the business, Severus found himself drawn into the subject. Harry’s green eyes sparkled when he was engrossed in any subject and he was thrilled to see it, hoping that he was in some small way responsible for his bond mate’s joy. “The Greek name for ‘watcher’. Why, may I ask?”

“Because you were watching out for me, even when you didn’t want to,” Harry said quietly. He stared Severus in the eyes, hoping to impress the Slytherin with his sincerity.

The statement appeared to stun his bond mate. Harry could count on the fingers of one hand the number of times he’d caught Severus off guard; this would appear to be one of them. The man nodded slowly. “That…would be acceptable for a girl.” He paused and then murmured, “Thank you.”

Harry hoped he wasn’t blushing, though his neck was rather warmer than the room’s temperature was accountable for. “You’re welcome.”

Lily was playing with her toys again, the cushy rug of the sumptuous living room having more than enough room for two men and three small children. She had dug out her dragon, sadly neglected all these days she’d been playing with her lion. The two animal toys were circling each other and then charging into mock fights, the lion swiping at the dragon with puffy paws while the dragon flapped its wings, reared and tried to tear the lion with its soft talons. Lily crowed and clapped her hands every time they tangled.

Finally, the lion appeared to have had enough. It ran away, ducking underneath Severus’s chair. The man didn’t notice it until it began butting its head against his ankles. Severus wordlessly levitated the
plaything so that it dangled in the air above Lily’s head.

She fussed and whined as she reached for it. Then she pushed herself off the floor—and stood up.

Harry held his breath. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed that Severus had stopped reading, his entire attention focused on the little red-haired girl wobbling unsteadily on her two legs as she waved her hands for the out-of-reach toy.

The breathless hush in the room caught Albus’s attention. He cried out, “Look, James! Lily’s standing!”

Lily did more than stand. She took two shaky steps forwards before the toy dropped into her arms. Then her legs gave way and she collapsed to the rug.

Harry was up and moving to her before she had a chance to cry. He scooped up the little girl and began praising her and rubbing her bum, doing his best to distract her from any pain she might have suffered from her tumble. “Good Lily. You’re such a good girl! Standing and walking all on your own. I wish your mother could have seen that,” he added softly.

Severus stared unseeingly down at his book, hoping Harry didn’t notice his sudden irritation. Was he always to labor in the shadow of that dead woman? Severus had just witnessed the little girl take her first few steps, along with Harry. Yet the man didn’t think of him at all. The first thing that entered the Gryffindor’s mind was that his deceased spouse was no longer with him.

Harry didn’t see the cloud that darkened his bond mate’s face. He jumped when Severus loudly snapped shut the book, causing it to give off a muffled roar.

“Since it is impossible for me to study with such distractions, I believe I’ll retire to my room for the afternoon.” He stood to leave.

Harry didn’t get it. They’d been getting along so well. What had brought on this? He was about to demand an explanation when the floo activated, exposing a plump woman stepping briskly from the flames.

“Grandmum!” the twins cried, abandoning their game to run to Molly Weasley and hug her about the knees.

Lily waved her arms at the stout woman. “Gamma! Gamma!”

“Hello, boys! It’s good to see you all!” Her smiled dimmed slightly when she saw Severus. “Hello to you, too, Snape.”

“Mrs. Weasley,” he intoned.

She switched her attention back to Harry. “I just came by to see how you’ve been doing, Harry. I haven’t heard anything from you in so long. No owls, no floo visits. We are still your family, you know,” she said reprovingly.

“I know, Mum. It’s just that Severus and I have been getting better acquainted. Isn’t that right, Severus?”

“Quite.” Out of the corner of his eye, Severus noticed Harry edging ever so slightly towards the couch, where the incriminating book of baby names lay.

He stepped smoothly in front of Molly Weasley, shielding Harry from her searching gaze. “Mrs.
Weasley, I wasn’t aware that my bond mate was under any obligation to make reports to you. I now have exclusive conjugal rights to him. His first and only duty is to myself.”

The smug tone and proprietary words worked in distracting her. Mrs. Weasley’s face immediately colored in anger. “How dare you? I don’t care if Harry is bonded to you, Severus Snape! You are not the be-all and end-all in his life! He’s a father now with children of his own to take care of and they take a far greater precedence over you. Also, he is still like a son to me and I’ll see him whenever I wish. Do you hear me?!”

Harry had shoved the book surreptitiously behind a pillow. Severus sneered at the irate Weasley woman. “All I see is a woman who’s suffering from empty nest syndrome. Unable to keep smothering—I mean, mothering—your own children, you’ve moved on to Harry’s. Well, he doesn’t need your persistent attentions and I’m glad to do without them.”

Before she could say another word, he swept from the room. Hopefully, Harry would have the sense to follow him before the woman saw anything suspicious.

“James, Al, leave your game behind. Let’s go talk with your Grandmum.”

“But I was winning!” Albus protested.

“You were not! You just got lucky!” James shot back.

“Oi, boys. Don’t fight,” Harry said. “If you want to keep playing, you can. Your Grandmum and I will chat in the kitchen.”

The two boys settled back to their game and Harry breathed a silent sigh of relief. He hadn’t been sure the ploy would work. After all, it was better the boys were kept away from Molly. Who knows what they might blurt out?

Harry handed over Lily as the girl hummed happily, once more gnawing on her lion’s ear. “Ooh, Lily! How big you’ve grown!” Molly cooed. “How has she been, Harry?”

“She took her first step today, Mum,” Harry said proudly, edging her towards the door.

“She did? Oh, how I wish I could have been there to see that?” Molly cried.

“I can make a Pensieve memory of it. You can view that, if you’d like.”

“That would be simply lovely, Harry. I didn’t realize you had a Pensieve. Arthur would like one but they’re so fearfully expensive.” She flushed and busied herself with Lily, refusing to meet Harry’s eyes. Their lack of wealth was still a sore point with the Weasleys, even after all these years. Harry knew enough not to harp on the matter.

“What about Molly?” Albus piped up suddenly.

“Excuse me?” Mrs. Weasley asked, raising her eyebrows in puzzlement.

“For the baby. If it’s a girl,” Al said matter-of-factly, his head still bent towards his game.

To Harry, it was as if the fireplace had blown jets of heat into the room and the floo had immediately sucked it out. Molly turned slowly towards him.

“Baby? What’s this about a baby?”

“We were thinking—I mean, Severus and I—about having another baby.” That was the truth; he still
had no idea if Severus wanted to carry the baby to term. “And we were discussing baby names. Come along, Mum. Let’s leave the boys to their games.”

“No, Snape’s having a baby,” James protested, looking up at his Daddy and Grandmum.

“We don’t know that, James,” Harry muttered.

Albus frowned. Now he was confused. “Then why’s Poppy always here?”

“Poppy? Poppy Pomfrey?” Molly had set her heels against Harry’s grip on her arm, refusing to budge. “Harry, what is going on? Are you and Severus—having a baby?”

Harry shrugged helplessly. He hadn’t discussed revealing Severus’s pregnant status with anyone outside of the twins, Poppy and Hermione. But he knew the man’s deep-seated need for secrecy; he had taken it as a given that the news wasn’t to be given out on a casual basis.

“Indeed. However, I am but seven weeks into my pregnancy.” The low voice caused Molly to swing around in surprise. She managed to keep her hold on Lily, however, as she met Severus’s grave stare.

“You, you’re actually…” she stammered.

He nodded his head.

Now his adopted mother gave Harry a genuinely wounded look. “Harry, why didn’t you tell me?”

He cast Severus a beseeching look. Help me!

“Mrs. Weasley, perhaps we might discuss this further in more private quarters.”

“Can we come?” Now that it was clear they were being excluded, the twins, with the natural perversity of children, wanted to hear what the grownups were saying.

The look Severus gave them could have frozen the Hogwarts lake. “No.”

The man might have become less mean to them over the last few weeks. But that didn’t mean James and Albus had forgotten how scary their stepdaddy could be. They turned back to their game, sneaking nervous looks at him as he left with their father.

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“Just a moment, Harry.” Severus pointed his wand at Harry’s bedroom door. He fired off a rapid succession of spells at the door—some Harry recognized, some he didn’t. He privately made a note of them in case he wanted to use them another time.

Molly shook her head. “Still so paranoid, Severus. The war is long over, you know.”

“True. But Harry’s hellions are more prying than all of the Dark Lord’s Death Eaters put together.”

“You can call him Voldemort, you know, Severus.” Harry rolled his eyes.

Severus winced. “You will pardon me, Harry. Old habits die hard.”

“Obviously.” Harry squinted at the door, now vibrating with such strong wards against eavesdropping and trespass that he could almost see them, wavering lines of color too faint to be identified.
Molly stared at the Pensieve in the corner but evidently decided against looking into it for the moment. She plopped down on the bed, still holding her youngest grandchild, leaving the two men to seat themselves as best they could. “So. You’re really pregnant.”

“I believe I’ve stated the case,” Severus responded dryly.

Harry glared at him. Don’t. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you, Mum.”

“You should be sorry!” Her lips were pinched together, with anger or sorrow; Harry wasn’t sure. “I’m your mother, Harry, or as good as. Don’t you think I, of all people, should have known?”

“Harry’s silence was a concession to my need for secrecy. Someone had leaked our marriage to the Daily Prophet.”

“Not me,” Harry interjected.

“I’m aware of that, Harry. I no longer blame you and I apologize if I accused you unfairly. Because of that article, I was attacked in Diagon Alley a short while ago by some of Harry’s sympathizers who felt that he’d been ill done by in his marriage to me.”

“Goodness! I didn’t know.” She stared at him uncertainly. “I-I hope you weren’t badly hurt, Severus.”

“Your concern is touching,” Severus responded dryly. “I escaped unscathed. But that assault made clear that it is still not safe to show myself in public. Now that I am carrying a child, the need for secrecy is even more vital. I apologize on Harry’s behalf if his silence hurt you, Mrs. Weasley.”

“No need. I understand perfectly, Severus.” The protectiveness in her eyes, so reminiscent of Ron at his most defensive, softened. “I am sorry if I was too harsh a moment ago, Harry. It’s just—this is such a shock.”

Harry managed a small smile, hoping his relief didn’t show too baldly. Truthfully, he had half-feared Molly’s temper and had dreaded telling her. He hadn’t forgotten that she was the one to destroy the mad Bellatrix Lestrange.

Something seemed to occur to the woman and she glanced between the two of them. “Am I to take it then that you two have—worked things out between you?”

Severus spoke, smoothly covering Harry’s confusion. “Not all of our problems have been resolved. Our natures are quite different and that will cause a certain amount of friction at times. But I believe that Harry and I have come to an understanding.”

“Oh.” Evidently this rational explanation didn’t quite satisfy the Weasley matriarch. “How did the two of you—”

“That was a very personal moment. You will excuse us if we don’t go into detail about it.” Severus moved towards Harry and draped his arm around his waist. He hoped his smile into Harry’s face, while not bursting with affection, held enough warmth to satisfy the inquisitive woman.

Molly Weasley, who must have been no stranger to passion given her seven children, flushed right up to her eyebrows. Harry himself looked positively stunned by his actions…or was it something else that was causing that lithe form to tremble in his embrace?

“Oh. Well. That’s—that’s wonderful, it truly is,” Molly babbled. It must have occurred to her all of a sudden that she was perched on Harry’s bed and what had likely occurred there because she jumped
to her feet as if she’d sat on Blast-Ended Skrewt.

“Harry, I’m so glad that you’re all right.” She lit up and smiled hopefully at her self-adopted son. “May I—may I tell Arthur the good news?”

Harry opened his mouth only to be interrupted by Severus. “Actually, I’m not certain that is an acceptable idea, Mrs. Weasley. Your husband is a Ministry official. I don’t want anyone at the Ministry of Magic learning this as yet; they have not always been reliable for their discretion in the past.”

Molly’s eyes narrowed. “Severus Snape, I’ll have you know my husband is as discreet as anyone. He may not be a paranoid Slytherin former Death—”

“I trust Arthur, Mum. If you want to tell him, that’s fine with us. Isn’t that right, Severus?” Harry wound his arm around Severus in turn. But his grip held a warning squeeze and those remarkable eyes flashed at him. Severus found himself momentarily unable to remember what he was going to say.

“Thank you, Harry. Congratulations…and to you, too, Severus.” She handed Lily to Harry and headed towards Harry’s personal floo. She turned back for a moment.

“And I wouldn’t mind ‘Molly’ for a girl’s name.” Her lips curved in self-satisfied smirk before she threw in the glittering powder and vanished in a cloud of smoke.

In the wake of her departure, Severus looked at Harry. “Don’t even think about it.”

However, given Harry’s flickering smile, he very much feared that his future daughter might very well be named after the Gryffindor’s self-proclaimed mother.

Merlin help him.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
Chapter 36: Decision

Severus swallowed the concoction, making a face at its bitter taste. Is this what Lupin had had to endure every time he drank his Wolfsbane potion? He knew a belated sympathy for the man, once an unwilling part of the hated Marauders.

Hermione gazed at him anxiously. “Well? Is that better?”

He blinked repeatedly and looked down at his shaking hands. “The pain has lessened considerably. However, the continuing tremors in my hands are perturbing and I appear to have acquired spots in my vision.”

Hermione slumped. “Oh, I’m sorry, Snape.”

“No, this is a marked improvement on the other potions. We need to work at removing the deleterious effects from the brew, that’s all.” She fidgeted, looking unaccountably guilty. “What is it, Mrs. Granger-Weasley?”

“Well, I had a talk with Poppy.”

This couldn’t be good. He arranged his features to convey a bland disinterest. “And what did our dear, devoted medi-witch have to say?”


Title: Scarred Souls
Author: Misty Moonlight/Co-author: QueenBoadicea
Beta: QueenBoadicea
Pairings: Severus/Harry
Published: 12/10/2008
Summary: A widowed Harry must bond with Snape in order to save his daughter’s life. Sev gains a family, for better or worse, and the hearts of two scarred souls will be changed forever.

Warnings: Romance, Drama, Angst, Alternate Reality/Universe, Sexual Situations, Hurt/Comfort, M/M, Slash, Anal, Language, Humor, possible MPreg, Bonding, Original Characters, Family, non-canon, OOC, WIP

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“She thinks we should stop the experiments with the potions.”

“I’m aware that she has grave doubts about their efficacy…”

“It’s more than that, Snape. She’s disagreed from the beginning about your experimenting with this stuff while you’re carrying a baby. Now she’s putting her foot down. If you don’t desist, she’s going to have you confined to St. Mungo’s.”

Anger flared and his hands shook even more before he clenched them. “How dare she! I refuse to go.”

“She’ll bring your condition to the notice of the Ministry. They can force you, say you’re unfit to make this decision, that you’re…” Her face reddened with shame and she looked at the floor.

“That I’m what? A former Death Eater and therefore unfit to rear a child? A master of the Dark Arts? A limb of Satan? What, pray tell, could their objection be?” he asked, not bothering to hide the sneer.

“That you’re mentally unbalanced,” she finished quietly.

“That’s a ridiculous notion and no one in or out of the Ministry would believe it of me. My mind’s as sharp as it ever was,” he snapped.

“They know that you’re antisocial and don’t care for children.”

“Yet I am a boon to the people of St. Mungo’s by providing health care for those stricken beyond ordinary means to heal, including children. Being misanthropic is not grounds for a sentence of mental incapacity,” he pointed out.

“You hate children but you agree to help them? That doesn’t make sense when you think about it. That could be seen as signs of mental instability.”

“I don’t need to justify myself to anyone, not after what I’ve been through as a servant for the Light. Surely, after all these years, I am allowed some indulgences.”

“It’s because of the fact that you’ve been hiding behind the Ministry’s aegis that they feel they can order you about,” she said, sounding apologetic. “It’s like you’re their—”

“Property,” he finished with a snarl. He sprang to his feet and began to pace angrily over the dungeon floor. “This is intolerable. I’m sure, if their precious Boy Who Lived were in my position, they wouldn’t care if he went flying over the Atlantic upside down on his broom.”

Her brows pinched together. Then she brightened. “I know! If Harry spoke up for you, he could keep those Ministry vultures off your back and you out of St. Mungo’s.”

He waved his hand, dismissing the idea almost at once. “No. This is an issue I must put to rest on my own. I refuse to put myself in Harry’s debt. The brat would love that, I’m sure. He used to whinge on so much about all he did for me when he thought I was dead, as if that makes up for leaving me to die in that filthy shack.”

He was confronted by confusion in the woman’s brown eyes. “Why are you talking like this? I assumed from the way Harry talked about you that you were friends now.”

“Friends? We get along better, it is true. But that is mostly for the sake of peace in the household. We’re hardly bosom chums like the Golden Trio,” he ended, smirking.
“If Harry, Ronald and I were friends, it’s because we worked at it,” the brown-haired woman shot back with asperity. “We had our problems, our ups and downs like anybody else. There were days when we weren’t speaking to each other. But we learned to sort things out. If you tried just the littlest bit, you’d be friends with him, too.”

“And become another one of the Chosen One’s sycophants? No, thank you.” Severus was aware that his behavior was irrational. He and Harry had been getting along better. But this latest failure coupled with Mrs. Granger-Weasley’s indirect threat had unsettled him and, when that happened, he tended to lash out.

The frustration on the woman’s face was clear. Before she could answer, Harry appeared on the stairs and called to them.

“Hermione? Severus? You two about finished down here? I had Kreacher make us up a light lunch. I thought you could use a break.” He noticed the tense silence. “What’s wrong? The latest batch not doing so well?”

“It’s worse than that. Poppy wants to put Snape in St. Mungo’s,” Hermione replied, her eyes not leaving Severus.

Harry frowned and descended to the floor, walking over to them. “What? Why?”

“She’s threatened to have him committed on grounds of insanity if he continues with the potions experiments. She says they’re a threat to the baby’s well-being.”

“Evidently, it’s perfectly all right for me to suffer agonizing tortures and blackouts but the baby’s health must be protected at all costs,” Severus sniffed. “I haven’t even decided whether I’ll keep the wretched thing,” he added coldly.

Harry’s face turned the color of sea foam. “W-what? But I thought…when Molly was here…”

“I told her about the baby’s existence to keep her from being too incensed at your secrecy. At no point did I indicate to her or you that I meant to keep it.”

“What about all that talk about baby names?”

“Instigated by you, Harry. I saw nothing wrong with a harmless indulgence of your whim.”

Harry reached for him. “But Severus—”

Severus swept by him, ignoring the stricken look on his bond mate’s face. “I believe you said a luncheon was prepared?”

Left alone with Hermione, Harry sank down on the nearest workbench. “I thought…I mean, I really thought he wanted this child,” Harry whispered.

Hermione hadn’t seen him look so devastated since Ginny had died. But she thought Harry was ignoring the facts. “Did he ever say so? I know what he said at the time of the bonding. But I figured he just said that to torment you.”

“That’s what I thought too at the time. But lately, he’s been so much…I don’t know. I don’t want to say kinder. This is Severus, after all. But he’s been decent to me and the kids. I even think he changed Lily’s nappies once though I can’t get him to admit it.”

“That doesn’t translate to him wanting another screaming, crying infant on the premises.”
“That sounds like something Severus would say.”

She sat next to him. “Harry, maybe it’s for the best.” Harry glared at her. “You have to face facts. Severus isn’t the nurturing type. If he’s forced to bring a child into this world, one that he’ll resent, the poor thing will be miserable—and so will you.”

Harry buried his face in his hands.

She looked at him uncertainly. “Harry, why do you care so much? You told me the circumstances under which this baby was conceived. I thought you’d be happy if Snape decided he didn’t want it.”

“Happy? All right, yeah, I’ll admit I was right pissed when I realized what he’d done to me. But once I knew about the baby, I got, I don’t know, really excited. I wouldn’t have minded another child. And I figured Severus would learn how happy a baby can make you, how they can bring joy and wonder into your lives. I thought it would be a chance for him to get it right…the way his parents never did with him.”

Hermione sucked in a breath. She’d never realized Harry felt this way. “Did you ever tell him that?”

“No. I thought this was the kind of revelation a person should come to on his own.”

“That’s true. But, ultimately, the decision is his.”

“You’re right.” Harry stood up warily. “We should join him before he starts wondering why we’re taking so long.”

Hermione followed him, thinking furiously. Privately, she thought Severus needed some prodding. And she was just the person to figure out how to do it.

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Those Gryffindor idiots were far too trusting. He walked away from them and they neglected to erect wards behind him? Lurking at the top of the stairs, Severus had been able to hear perfectly everything they said after his supposed exit.

By the time they reached the kitchen, he was seated and tucking into his sandwiches, giving no indication that he’d heard anything amiss. Both Gryffindors seemed equally inclined to silence, for once, leaving him alone with very unwelcome thoughts.

Harry Potter was turning out to be one surprise after another. He wanted this child and apparently desired it for Severus’ sake, not his own. This wasn’t some selfish desire to have Severus suffer or sullen acquiescence to the inevitable, unwanted addition to his already established family. Harry genuinely hoped this baby would make Severus happy.

He watched the other two covertly. Ronald Weasley’s wife was shooting him angry glares in between the sympathetic glances she kept giving Harry. Typical. She would show compassion to Harry. What about him, the man actually carrying a new life inside him? You’d think that a woman over five months gone as she would feel a certain camaraderie.

However, she was the one who’d pointed out to Harry that if he chose to terminate the pregnancy, he was within his rights. That’s exactly how Severus would have put it. But coming from another it sounded terribly…cold blooded.

Was that truly how she saw him? How Harry saw him? From the overheard conversation, he realized his bond mate had told her what had transpired between them the night Harry had brought
Severus to Grimmauld Place from the restaurant.

She must hate Severus for that. However much they had irritated him in Hogwarts, Harry’s two comrades had been true to him and remained so still.

Harry evidently returned the favor. The man sat closer to that woman than he did to his own bond mate. In spite of the past few weeks attempting amicability, Harry was still reluctant to get near him. The Gryffindor only allowed touch when he thought Severus needed help.

Did Harry bother to show such solicitous behavior only because it concerned the unborn fetus? Would he still display such kindness if Severus were no longer pregnant?

The consideration was loathsome, for some reason. Severus didn’t want false concern attached to him simply because he was a breeder. Yet he was reluctant to lose Harry’s affections, no matter how slight the reason behind them.

But that wasn’t a viable alternative either. Keeping the child in the hope of instilling some feeling in the father—hadn’t his own mother tried that? And look how badly she had failed.

Even if he could dissolve the Vow, he had no wish to rear a child on his own. Also, he couldn’t bring a helpless infant into the world, knowing that its parents disliked each other. Hadn’t that been Harry’s exact sentiment the first time Severus had tried to seduce him?

Defeat and its brother misery whispered inside Severus, worse than the heads could have done. He had started this whole marriage to punish Harry. Instead, he was the one who suffered. No matter what tortures Severus tried to inflict, Harry would still have his friends, his children, his extended family, the adoring Wizarding World, ready to comfort and console him. Whom did Severus have except the bond mate he had failed to win for himself?

He was about to speak up, to let Harry know his choice of termination was final, when he heard light footsteps coming down the hall. Lovely. Trust Harry’s other spawn to interrupt when he had an important announcement to make.

“Daddy, Auntie Mione, hi!” Albus called. James ran closely after his brother with Kreacher bringing up the rear, cradling the precious Lily. “Auntie Mione, Lily walked!” Albus crowed. “Kreacher, let Auntie Mione see!”

The house-elf set the girl down on the floor with all the care he might have shown to precious crystal. The child sat on her bum for a moment before pulling herself up with the nearest table leg.

“Oh, that’s just darling, Lily! Come to Auntie Hermione,” the woman cooed.

Lily ignored her. She looked around and, when she saw Severus, she staggered towards him, holding up her arms. “Sevvie! Sevvie!”

At least you like me best. It was an uncharitable thought but Severus wasn’t ashamed of it. He reached down and scooped up the toddler, watching her narrowly as she giggled, flapped her hands and reached for his nose.

“Oh no, you don’t,” he muttered, leaving her on his lap. “I learned my lesson from last time.”

Hermione settled back, appearing not at all put out that her niece preferred her greasy git of a stepdaddy to herself. “She seems really taken with you, Snape.”

“She shows good taste.” When she smiled, he added, “In view of the closeness of our families, I
would not mind if you were to call me Severus.”

The woman looked flabbergasted. Harry gaped like a fish. The bright eyes of the little boys opened wide as they swung their heads between him and Mrs. Granger-Weasley.

Severus didn’t think his request was that noteworthy. Merlin, you would think he’d just asked her to ride bareback and starkers astride a hippogriff.

Finally, she spoke, breaking the uncomfortable silence. “Well, in that case, you may call me Hermione.”

“I would be honored.”

Hermione settled back and dug into her meal again. So far, she had polished off six beef sandwiches, three apricots, a cup of custard and five cups of tea. If she continued like this, she was going to swell up to Molly Weasley’s size.

“Oof. Baby pushed.” She lurched forward suddenly, clutching her stomach.

The twins rushed to her. “Can I feel?” James demanded.

“Mummy used to let us feel when she had Lily in her belly,” Albus added, sounding much too solemn for a six-year-old boy.

“Of course you may.” She shifted away from the table, giving both boys room to lay their heads on either side of her swelling abdomen.

“She kicked!” Albus suddenly squealed.

James scoffed. “Girls don’t kick like that. It’s a boy!”

“Is not!”

“Is too!”

“Is not!”

“Boys, don’t start,” Harry chided. “Your Aunt Hermione wants to keep the baby’s gender a secret until it’s born.”

“What’s gender?”

“It means whether boy or girl, Albus,” Severus replied before Harry could answer.

Albus rested his head against Hermione’s stomach a moment longer. He glanced at Severus. “Will your belly get big like this, Severus?”

Severus glanced at Harry. The Gryffindor’s face had shut down, becoming blank and impenetrable as the stone walls of Hogwarts. Harry evidently didn’t care to lie to his children or stall them on the question. He was trusting—or dreading—that their stepfather would tell them what Severus meant them to hear.

Hermione’s gaze was far less equivocal. The brown eyes begged him to tell the Potter brats that they could expect a new sibling in eight months time. Her hand reached out and clasped Harry’s. By the whiteness of her grip, it must have been painful. But Harry made no sound of protest.
Lily leaned her head against his shoulder, brown eyes resting trustingly on his face. Her eyes were a kind of dark honey tinged with gold, not at all like Hermione’s dark brown orbs. Would his unborn have eyes like this? Would it have Lily’s eyes instead? He wouldn’t mind sleek black hair like his own, of course, not the flyaway mop that Harry sported.

He cleared his throat. “I imagine my belly will swell to a certain degree, though I will try to avoid becoming egregiously overweight. I’ve no wish to look like Hagrid,” he sniffed.

Hermione beamed. Happiness was slower to reach Harry’s eyes and he did not smile. It was as if he didn’t trust the good news—or Severus.

Honestly, the man was impossible to please. Here he was, dandling one of Potter’s brats and stating he’d keep this baby, and the sullen prat couldn’t show the slightest bit of appreciation. Severus wanted to snap at Harry to grow up, to stop acting like life had dealt him an unfair shake.

The change in his mood seemed to be noticed by no one else…except for Lily. The little girl whimpered and began to cry, her voice rising to wails in seconds.

“Oh, for Merlin’s sake!” Severus snapped. He stood and shoved her in Potter’s arms. “Here. Probably wants her nappy changed,” he grumbled as he stalked from the room.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
“He’s getting worse, Ron.”

“Is he, mate? Didn’t think that was possible with Snape.”

Harry nodded moodily over his fire whiskey. It wasn’t as good as what he had at home but he wasn’t looking for quality, not now. This was just a good way to get away from the children and out of the house. It wasn’t always practical for Harry to meet with his mates on a Monday night after work. But Rosmerta’s was dead quiet then and, after a weekend cooped up with an increasingly sour Snape, Harry found himself glad for the relative peace.

“I don’t know if it’s the pregnancy or what. But he’s either hostile or sulking. He doesn’t talk for hours on end except to bark orders. If I try to talk to him, he practically bites my head off.”

“Hermione gets that way sometimes. It’s female hormones or something. Pregnancy makes women grumpy. Guess it does that to blokes, too.”

“It’s not that. Ginny had three kids, yeah? So I know all about temper.”

Ron chuckled. “You don’t have to tell me, Harry. I grew up with her, remember?” He lifted his finger and signaled for another pint.

“I’m telling you, this is different. It’s like the first days we were bonded. Severus is acting as if he hates me again.”
“That’s too bad. But it’s not like it’s anything different from the past, yeah?” The redhead smiled ruefully, his gaze suddenly faraway. “Sometimes I got the feeling Hermione hated me. Before Timothy was born, when her back was aching or she couldn’t sleep at night, she’d grumble and swear she was never letting me touch her again. Used to drive me mental. But here we are, expecting our second child.”

Harry grinned. “Cheers.”

“Likewise.” He clinked his glass with Harry’s, downed his drink in one gulp and licked his lips. “Gotta say, mate, I was fair gobsmacked when Hermione gave me the news about Snape. Imagine: the greasy git pregnant.”

“He’s not so greasy these days, Ron,” Harry pointed out. “Whatever that gunk he used to put in his hair isn’t so much in evidence. Guess he found a way to keep his hair clean—especially now that Kreacher’s not messing with his shampoo.”

Ron sniggered. “Wonder what other jokes he was playing on the man?”

“I asked the twins but they said they didn’t know. They just told Kreacher to ‘mess about’ with him and Kreacher just used his imagination.”

“There’s another shock. Didn’t think that shriveled dwarf had any.”

Harry leaned back with a sigh. “I’d give anything to go back to the cottage. Black’s manor is as gloomy as ever. It hasn’t got ghosts but it feels like it’s haunted. If it weren’t for the kids, I’d have been driven up the walls by now.” Harry brightened. “Speaking of which, did Hermione tell you about Lily walking?”

“She did. She also told me about her walking up to Snape. Now that I would have given Galleons to see.” Ron tapped his wand on the table and cast Tempus. “Oops. I promised to meet Hermione soon. She wants to go scouting for baby things, ‘gender-neutral’ she calls them, whatever that means.”

Harry wanted to cry out to him to stay. It wasn’t that he was afraid of returning to the manor. It just was so depressing these days to have to deal with Severus’s temper, which only seemed to worsen after the ultimatum from Poppy. Harry wasn’t sure but he feared that Severus was secretly experimenting on his own and that accounted for the severity of his mood swings.

He said none of this to Ron. The man couldn’t help and he had his own life and wife to handle. Harry feared he was on his own, unless he was willing to brave his bond mate’s rage and carry out Poppy’s threat.

“Hello. Harry?”

Ron and Harry looked up, both of them furtively reaching their wands. Merlin on a stick, it was Colin Creevey again. He was wearing a sky blue shirt and nondescript tan pants instead of the usual wizarding robes. It looked weird on him, like he was playing a part rather than merely opting for more comfortable clothing.

“Colin, good to see you again,” Harry said cautiously. Ron raised his eyebrows, surprised.

“You too, Harry. Mind if I join you?”

“We were just leaving, actually,” Harry said before Ron could speak.

Colin’s smile faltered a little. But he pushed on. “Oh, in that case, I’ll just leave with you, if you
Ron interjected, “Colin, been awhile. Whacha been up to, mate?” Harry wanted to warn Ron. The former Gryffindor student seemed genial enough and he appeared to have forgotten their previous encounter. But something was off about Colin and it set every nerve in his body prickling.

Colin shrugged. “Nothing much. When I left Hogwarts, I got a job working in the Ministry with my dad. It didn’t quite suit me. So now I’m drifting until I can find something better.”

“Really? My dad and me are in the Ministry. What does your dad do?” Ron probed.

“He’s in the Improper Use of Magic Office. He’s got a whole file filled with photographs about enchanted Muggles. Good stuff but it wasn’t for me.”

Ron nodded politely. Clearly, he was bored with the conversation and so was Harry. Colin trailed after them when they left and they both said goodbye to Ron when he Disapparated.

Colin didn’t seem inclined to leave. He leaned closer to Harry and said, “Sorry about your marriage, Harry.”

Harry shifted back slightly. Colin was wearing some kind of cologne and it was a little overpowering when he was this close. “I’m not,” he replied stiffly. “Severus and I are getting along real well these days.”

Blue-gray eyes narrowed. “Really? I thought otherwise.”

Harry didn’t want to talk about this with Colin. “Well, it was nice chatting with you again, Colin.”

Colin’s hand flew out and grabbed Harry’s arm. “Wait, Harry! I was just thinking—if you weren’t in any particular rush to get home, would you mind grabbing a pint with me? I’ll pay, if you’d like.” He stepped even closer to Harry, his eyelids drooping over the blue irises. “Maybe I can show you what you’re missing at home.”

Harry froze. He didn’t believe it. Was he being—chatted up? By a man who thought his tastes had changed because he was married to Snape?

He hadn’t even known Colin was gay! All those hours and days Colin had spent trailing Harry with his camera came rushing back to him. He had thought it silly hero worship at the time. Had it actually been something else?

His silence must have emboldened Colin. He grabbed Harry and flung his arms around his neck. He kissed him soundly on the lips and it was enough to break Harry out of his shock. He brought a knee up into Colin’s crotch—hard. The man immediately doubled up, gasping for breath, as Harry stumbled back a few yards.

“You stupid shit!” he snarled, pointing his wand at the other man. “You obviously didn’t read that article as carefully as others did, you illiterate. Otherwise you’d know I was tricked into that marriage. Just because I’m with Snape doesn’t mean I’m into shagging blokes!”

Colin managed to gasp, “I know all about that article, Harry. I helped write it.”

“You—what?”

He straightened up although he kept his distance as Harry continued to brandish his wand. “After Hogwarts, I decided to follow my natural bent and started working for the Daily Prophet.”
“That filthy rag? Colin, how could you lend your name to those bastards? They’ve written nothing but crap about me since my fourth year!” Harry spat.

“I told you. My dad works in the Ministry. He overheard that minister complaining about how badly Severus treated him when you two were bonded. He relayed the information to me. So I did a little digging. Did you know that successful Unbreakable Vows become automatically registered at the Ministry?”

He grinned at Harry’s stunned expression. “That’s right. I realized that was the real reason behind your marriage. Deciding that this would be a really great story, I started following you around when you were in public.”

Visibly preening, he continued, “I was listening in Slugs & Jiggers that day you came in to buy potions ingredients. I interviewed people who knew you at Hogwarts. You thought I was just a shutterbug. But I actually find it pretty easy to get people to talk to me. Even Slytherins. Although most of them just liked to take cheap shots at you.” Colin frowned and that ugly look flickered through his eyes again.

“Colin, you berk. Do you have any idea of the trouble you caused? You nearly got Severus killed!” Harry hissed.

Colin shrugged. “And that would be a bad thing why?”

“Evidently, your dad didn’t look into my situation too carefully. If Severus dies by violent means, then I die, too.”

Instead of looking horrified, Colin smirked. “That’s only if you kill him, Harry.”

“What?”

“You say that an awful lot, Harry. You can’t be too bright. Honestly, who told you that? Snape?”

“Hermione. And she was a hell of a lot smarter than you, Colin. Or your dad, I’ll bet.”

“I don’t care what she read, Harry. Magical laws regarding the Unbreakable Vow have been considerably loosened in recent years. If you kill Snape, you’ll die. But not if someone else does.”

The unpleasant smile on Colin’s face stated that he wouldn’t mind being one of those who did Snape an ill turn in an alley someday.

Harry clenched his wand. He had to make this idiot understand. “Colin, listen to me very carefully. I don’t want you or anyone going after Severus. He proved to be a good, brave man during the war. We all owe him our lives. Even you!”

“None of which changes the fact that when he finally came out of hiding, he used an evil trick to get you to marry him! He’s a right arse and he always has been! Where’s his fucking gratitude, Harry? You want to tell me that?”

“Again, that’s none of your business. This is a personal matter between him and me. It doesn’t concern you or the rest of the Wizarding World.”

“Oh, but it does, Harry. When you married Ginny Weasley, I was devastated. But then you had to get shackled to Severus Snape,” he spat. “That was too much. Something had to be done.”

There was a mad light in Colin’s eyes now. This was beyond hero worship, whatever it was. “Colin,
find somebody else to molest. And pick your next target a little more carefully, unless you want to
find yourself on the business end of a nasty hex.” Before the man could speak again, Harry
Disapparated.

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He was so shaken by the encounter, he didn’t notice nor care about the silence in his home. For once
he was in no mood for conversation with his children or Severus. He was just going to take a shower
—a long, hot one—fix himself something to eat and then go to bed.

A loud pounding on his bedroom door made him jump. It must be Severus. No one else banged in
that demanding fashion. He let it go on for a few seconds and then waved his hand, causing the door
to fly open.

Severus did not fall into the room—too bad, that would have been amusing to watch. Instead, he
glared and strode in without so much as an invitation.

“Oh do come right in, Severus. Couldn’t wait to get back in here, could you?” Normally, he didn’t
taunt Severus. But Harry was in a foul mood and had had enough of his bond mate’s high-handed
ways. If Severus wanted a fight, he was about to get one.

The man halted and then flushed, his eyes flicking to and from the bed. Interesting; he looked almost
embarrassed at that reminder. The next instance, his features assumed their typical stony expression.

“Where have you been? You didn’t come home from work.”

“That’s right. Had to get away,” he muttered. “Were the children all right?”

“How should I know? I’m not the caretaker for your brats.”

Brats. Not again. “What do you want? I was just about to take a bath so I’d appreciate a little
privacy.”

“This won’t take long. You should have let me know you would be taking a detour. I could have
asked you to stop on the way home for more potions ingredients.”

“It’s not for you, is it? You’re not supposed to be taking more experimental concoctions! Poppy said
so!” Harry snapped, staring angrily at the dark-eyed man currently smirking at him.

“And how would you know to what uses I might put any herbs or other ingredients? You’re still as
inept at potions as you were when you took my class, aren’t you, Potter?”

Harry didn’t bother to confirm or deny the statement. “If you’ve just come in here to complain about
my being tardy, you can save it. And since you’re not crippled, you can make a glamour or take
Polyjuice and get your own damn ingredients.”

Severus glared and stalked over to him, invading his space. He was about to say something else,
probably a malicious retort, when his face assumed a very odd expression. His nose twitched and he
leaned closer to Harry, his eyes narrowing.

Harry stepped back, unnerved by this performance. “Oi, back off. What do you think you’re doing?”

The Slytherin moved closer, fury blazing in the black eyes. “So this is what you’ve been up to,
Potter,” he snarled. “I might have known.”
“What? What’s gotten into you now?” Harry cried, exasperated by this latest display of hostility.

“Have you forgotten you can give yourself to no one but me? Are you trying to lose your powers? How can you be so selfish, you stupid little sneak?” he hissed.

“What the hell are you banging on about, Snape?” He hoped using the man’s surname might shock him into some sense of civility. Harry had been calling him Severus for weeks now, a courtesy he imagined the man appreciated.

Severus either didn’t notice the formality or was determined not to let it stop his tirade. “You come home late, reeking of another man’s cologne, without a hint of shame or explanation and expect me to accept it calmly?” Severus yelled, his sallow cheeks becoming blotched with rage.

“Another man’s—is that what you think I’ve been doing? Sleeping with somebody else?” It was too much. The tension from the past few weeks, the strain of the current argument, the quivering residual resentment from Colin’s attack caused something to break inside Harry. He leaned forward and spoke as harshly as he could, feeling himself practically shaking with anger.

“Are you insane? You think that, what, one drug-filled romp in the sheets with you and I’m going to throw myself at other men? I couldn’t bring myself to touch you until you fucking drugged me! Did you conveniently forget that?”

Harry’s voice had lowered until he was nearly hissing with fury. He was practically toe to toe with the taller man now but he wasn’t about to back down. He wasn’t in the wrong here and he was getting tired of being treated like he was still a bumbling Hogwarts student.

Abruptly, the anger faded from Severus’s face to be replaced by a crazed expression. Without a word of warning, he grabbed Harry’s head and kissed him.

This kiss was nothing’s like Colin’s. That had been clumsy and sloppy, with the eagerness of a stupid child who’d seized an opportunity but didn’t know what he was doing. This—this was the fiery passion of a man pushed beyond his limits.

Severus clung to him, kissed him like Harry held all the life-giving air in the room, plundered his mouth with tongue as one licking sweets. He groaned, mumbling something incoherent in which Harry could make out only the words “god” “Harry” and “snake”.

In an instant, all his objections to gay sex flew right out the window. Shit, this felt incredible. The firmness of Severus’s wiry form was one long band of heat running the length of Harry’s body. He leaned towards that heat, a plant arching towards the life-giving sun.

Oh, that’s…what’s he doing with his…feels so good. No, wait…no, don’t want to wait. It’s because I haven’t had any in a long… Fuck, who would have thought Severus kissed like this???

His senses reeling, Harry didn’t have enough self-possession to reject his bond mate, to deny the hard thigh rubbing between his legs, the insistent bulge he could feel against his stomach. He gasped and arched when the man’s hand swept under his shirt and grasped a nipple. A whimper burst from him as it was expertly rubbed and tweaked. He was sitting on the edge of the mattress, Severus’s lips running from his mouth to his ear and down his neck, before he realized what was happening.

Over Severus’s head, he could see the picture of his dead wife, staring at him, open mouthed with shock. Oh god.

Harry shoved Severus away. What had Severus been thinking? What had he been thinking?
Severus backed off, looking lost and bewildered. The cheeks were flaming with color and the hot breath of him swept over Harry’s face like a desert wind.

“I’m—I’m sorry, Harry. I don’t know what came over me,” he muttered as he staggered to his feet.

“It’s…” What could he say? That it was okay? That it meant nothing? He knew better and so did Severus. However, Harry instinctively knew that any acknowledgement would make the embarrassment infinitely worse for both of them.

Severus regained his composure faster than Harry did. He smoothed down his hair and swung around. He was through the door, banging it behind him, before Harry could think of a thing to say.

What had just happened? Okay, it hadn’t happened. But it might have. It could have. It could still, if this tingling in his trousers meant anything. What the fuck was wrong with him?

Harry shivered. He glanced at the portrait. “I’m so sorry, Ginny,” he whispered. She said nothing, only stared at him with a tender, sad expression.

Sighing at the latest mess life seemed fit to throw at him, Harry threw off his clothes, left them in a heap on the floor and proceeded naked to his bath. He wasn’t usually so careless but right now he didn’t give a damn. Kreacher would be delighted at cleaning up the extra mess, anyway.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
“Daddy?”

“Um. Yes, Albus?” Harry muttered absently. He was searching for his favorite green shirt. Ginny used to pretend to complain about the Slytherin color. Hermione, however, had told him it brought out his eyes and, the few times he’d worn it with Ginny, she had been properly appreciative.

But now he couldn’t find it. He sighed. Oh wait. He was a wizard, wasn’t he? “Accio Green Shirt!” From underneath his pillow, a flash of green winged through the air. He caught the wrinkled shirt and grimaced. Kreacher must have missed this one when he was doing the laundry.

“Daddy?”

“What?” He hit it with a Scourgify and sniffed again. Passable. The orphans weren’t picky about his appearance but Harry wanted to make a good impression on any potential adoptive parents.

“Are you and Snape fighting again?”

Fighting? That didn’t quite cover what he and Severus had done—almost done. Whenever he thought about it, he could still feel the heat of the man scorching his flesh.

It didn’t make sense. He used to have dreams about Ginny after she died. But they were nothing like the ones he had about Severus. Those got more passionate and erotic with every passing night. Had the man laid a spell on him?
“Daddy! You’re not listening to me!”

“Oh! No, we’re not fighting, Albus.”

“Then why aren’t you talking to each other?”

“Severus is carrying a baby and that makes him a little—tetchy.”

Albus scratched his head. “What’s ‘tetchy’?”


“Mummy wasn’t like that.”

No, she wasn’t. Harry didn’t like lying to his children. But he wasn’t sure how to explain this. “Severus is very different from Mummy. So he’s going to act differently. Understand?”

“Oh.” Albus still didn’t look quite satisfied. “Should we stay away from him?”

“No, no. He’s not angry with you. It’s just… What he’s going through is hard for him.” Harry pulled the shirt over his sleeveless tee.

Albus was still staring at him. It was unnerving the way the boy seemed to pick up on things. James was the clever one, quick to make plans and schemes. But it was Albus who seemed to get to the heart of the matter, understanding people just by observing them. Compared to his older twin, he was eerily knowing at times.

“Well, I’m off, Albus. Hermione is coming here with Timothy to spend a little time with you, James and Lily until I get back home.”

The boy brightened. “Timmy’s coming? Yay!”

Harry ruffled his son’s hair. “You two take care of Lily. If there are any problems…”

“I know. Ask Kreacher to get you.”

“And don’t bother Severus,” Harry added sternly.

“We won’t.” Albus watched his father leave through the floo. If Timmy was coming, they were going to have a great time. But first he wanted to talk to his brother about their new father. Something told Al all was not well and it was up to them to fix it.

He marched down the hall, hoping his brother would come up with a plan.

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Severus settled down in his armchair to read, safely ensconced in his bedroom. His private floo was blocked and the wards surrounding his rooms were of such a strength he doubted even Harry could get through them, at least not without considerable effort.

Not that the man would try. Harry had steadfastly avoided him since that charged scene from four nights ago. They met for the occasional odd meal, during which they kept conversation to a bare minimum and avoided eye contact, but that was it. Sometimes it seemed like the early days of their handfasting, when both men assiduously steered clear of each other.

True, they hadn’t been getting along well lately, what with the unpredictable surges of emotion
caused by his *enceinte* condition. But he hadn’t meant to repel the man completely.

His sanctuary in Black’s manor had become more of a prison. Harry never intruded here. Indeed, no one did, even when Harry’s friends occasionally came to visit. The house itself held no happy memories for Severus save the hours spent in its library but his room remained an ideal location to avoiding—unwelcome company.

Unfortunately, it gave him far too much time and isolation to think about recent events.

Merlin, what had he been *thinking*, kissing Harry like that? Harry had been horrified. That yielding Severus had imagined must have been merely surprise from being caught off guard. He’d shoved Severus off soon enough once he realized what the man was about. The disgust on the man’s face afterwards had been undeniable, probably not just from the kiss but also the rampant erection jabbing Harry in his stomach.

But when Harry had hissed at him—it had been like hearing Parseltongue all over again. He’d lost control of himself completely and attacked the man like a lovesick adolescent. And the reality had been so much better than his erotic fantasies: the feel of Harry’s lips; thepliant, warm body in his arms; the taste of the man’s skin, strong and spicy. Even the last fading traces of that rank cologne hadn’t been enough to stop Severus from touching Harry, from wanting Harry to touch him…

Severus grimaced when he realized he had been staring at the same page of the book on his lap for the last 20 minutes without taking in a single word of it. He slammed it shut and began pacing up and down his tiny living room.

Ever the intellectual, Severus had looked up everything he could lay his hands on in the last few weeks about pregnancy and its effects. Since he had made the decision to keep this baby, intimate knowledge of his condition was absolutely vital. He didn’t want a single thing left to chance. At this point, he would have bet he knew more about the subject than Poppy did. After all, how many Hogwarts students actually carried through pregnancy and childbirth during her tenure?

What had occurred between him and Harry were hormones, that’s all. Pregnant women were subject to it; apparently the phenomenon affected him as well. Just because those delectable lips had hissed at him, the man’s body so close its heat practically scorched him and that face had been tilted up at just the right angle for a kiss, didn’t mean that Severus wanted Harry…again.

But he did want—something. No matter how he tried to deny it, his body heated and his groin stirred like any other red-blooded wizard. He woke up with damp sheets and sticky smalls from maddeningly vague dreams far too often lately. He had needs and desires just as much as the next man. Dammit, why *should* he deny himself?

He narrowed his eyes, considering. Perhaps he could get himself another partner. The Vow made it impossible for Harry to take another mate but there was no such restriction on himself. He could go to the whores of Knockturn Alley, find one with shaggy black hair and green eyes and shag him until he went blind.

There were whores who could manage cheap glamours that made them look like the Boy Who Lived; such imposters were very popular among certain segments of the Wizarding World. He had never stooped to taking one; his pride wouldn’t allow it. But now that he’d had a taste of what the Chosen One could do in bed, the ache in his thighs grew harder to ignore with each passing day.

Yes, he’d find a warm luscious body to sate this thwarted passion—right now.

Buoyed by the resolution as he hadn’t been by the potions book he’d been blindly holding, Severus
decided to get dressed. Briefly, he considered using a glamour to make him look like someone else. But who would see him? Only other denizens and customers of Knockturn who were there for the same purpose as he and what would they see except Severus Snape with Harry Potter, or at least a reasonable facsimile of him? It was unlikely any news would get back to Harry and, if it did, he could point out with malicious satisfaction the exact terms of the Vow.

Let Harry fume. After all, he had rejected his bond mate’s advances. Was it Severus’s fault if he had to get his jollies elsewhere?

Gathering his cloak, he dressed himself and Summoned a purse filled with Galleons and Sickles. He was about to open the door when he heard stealthy footsteps and furtive whispers.

He paused. It couldn’t be Harry; the man had left for work hours before. It couldn’t be the house-elf. It’s small stature meant it moved almost soundlessly; it seemed to know every creaking floorboard in the looming manor and steered clear of each one.

The voices sounded high. The children then—however, he could make out not just two voices but three. Treading lightly, he cast a Disillusionment Charm, opened the door soundlessly and slid down the hall with all the predatory skill that had made him such a superb spy.

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"James, what if we can’t get through your dad’s wards?” Timothy whispered.

“We can ask Kreacher,” the older twin stated with more confidence than authority.

“Can Kreacher get us past Daddy’s wards?” Albus said doubtfully.

“We can always ask him.”

“I don’t know if this is a good idea, James,” Albus murmured.

“Oi, don’t back out now,” James hissed. “We’ll just get Kreacher to help us.”

Realizing they were about to call the house-elf, Severus dropped the charm. “What do you three think you’re doing?”

Timothy jumped, Albus let out a squeak and James went pale. However, the hazel-eyed twin recovered with amazing swiftness. “Nothing.”

“Why do I never believe you when you say that?” A furtive movement on Timothy’s part caught his attention. “What do you have behind your back?”

“It’s—”

“Don’t you dare tell me it’s nothing, little boy, or I’m going to have a little talk with your parents about your sneaking around here,” Severus threatened.

“I wasn’t going to… It belongs to my Dad,” the boy answered, his voice sullen with dislike.

“Then what is it doing here? And what are you doing here?”

The three boys looked guiltily at each other. “It’s…something Daddy took from Harry and I was just bringing it back,” Timothy muttered.

“It’s got nothing to do with you,” Albus added defiantly.
“I’ll be the judge of that. Hand it over.” Timothy reluctantly held forth the object and Severus snatched it from him.

It looked to be nothing more than an ordinary flask. But Severus felt the faint tingle of Transfiguration. When he concentrated, he realized it was indeed Mr. Weasley’s magic, familiar to him from the many hours he had spent watching the teenager duel in Defense Against the Dark Arts classes.

He shook the flask and heard the liquid sloshing around inside it. “What is this? Some potion Harry needs to take?”

“I don’t know. I heard Daddy saying to Mummy it’s got something to do with a Pen-pen-pen…”

“Pensieve,” Severus said absently. So these were Pensieve memories that belonged to Harry. How fascinating. Suddenly the evening was looking to provide a lot more entertainment than a couple of hours spent rolling in soiled sheets with an anonymous hooker.

“The three of you are dismissed.”

“Wait! If I don’t bring that back, Dad’ll know that I took it!” Timothy wailed.

“If Harry learns about his memories being in Mr. Weasley’s possession, I imagine your father will have explaining of his own to do. Now stand aside.” He pointed his wand at Harry’s wards and threw as much of his power against them as he could.

Harry’s power was great; the wards held against his initial attack. But he persevered and they fell before him. Satisfied, he let the door slam shut behind him and erected his own wards against the inquisitive children outside.

Timothy looked at the others. The twins looked back at him. “Thanks for helping, Tim,” James offered.

“Do you think he’ll fall for it?” whispered Albus as they crept away.

“We’ll just have to wait and see,” Timothy whispered back. “Mum said it would work and Dad says she’s the smartest witch he knows.”

Albus hoped so. He also hoped that a smart witch could outwitch his stepdaddy.

********************************************************************

The Pensieve was still where Harry had left it. This was a perfect time to see what little secrets that ginger-haired Weasley had ferreted out from Harry’s brain. He poured the silvery liquid into the bowl and thrust his head into it.

Darkness descended over him.

He looked around quickly, assessing the situation. Where was he? It was bright sunlight but the surroundings were unrecognizable. A row of houses, all looking depressingly the same, were arranged in neat, unvarying rows. He was standing in the garden of someone’s house, the place looking as uninteresting as the rest.

A loud horn blared and he spun around, his years as a spy making him sensitive to every unusual sound. He froze as he recognized a familiar figure.
Crouched in the garden rows was the young Harry Potter. He looked to be about nine years old, though it was hard to tell for certain considering his diminutive size. He was wearing a baggy Muggle shirt with holes in it, clearly three sizes too large for him. His hair was plastered to his forehead with sweat and his hands were covered with dirt. His face also seemed far too thin. The boy had the appearance like a starveling waif not the heroic Boy Who Lived.

“Boy! Aren’t you finished in the garden yet?” The shrill voice came from behind and he turned, seeking its source.

Standing framed in the back door was Petunia Evans. It had been over 20 years since he’d seen her last but he would recognize that pinched horseface anywhere.

Harry got to his feet. It didn’t help; the woman towered over him. “Aunt Petunia? I’m thirsty. Can’t I have a drink of water?”

“Not until you’ve finished in the garden, you lazy little freak. When you’ve done that, you can come in the kitchen and clean the floor,” she snapped, slamming the door.

Harry’s head lowered and his fists clenched. His mouth pinched tight, not with anger, but with resignation. He sighed and turned back to his thankless task.

Harry renewed his attack on the weeds. He lowered his head to sniff at the blossoms but didn’t do so too often, his eye trained towards the back door. Doubtless, Petunia was watching to see that he didn’t skive off.

He finished the job and neatly too—a surprise, given Harry’s general clumsiness in class. But, no, Harry wasn’t awkward in handling plants, Severus grudgingly admitted. He merely had trouble cutting them to size and putting them in their proper order in a cauldron.

When it was all done, the boy stood up once more. He swayed a little on his feet and Severus was disturbed to see him grow pale underneath his sunburned skin. The boy staggered towards the door and barely made it inside before sitting down abruptly on the floor.

Severus stood over him, watching as the boy struggled upright again. Breathing heavily, Harry made it to the kitchen sink and poured himself two glasses of water, both of which he gulped down in swift succession. All the while, he had his eyes on the door, as though afraid that someone would catch him at the business. He acted more like a furtive thief than someone quenching a raging thirst.

The Potions master found himself a helpless spectator as Harry washed the floor, polished the furniture and cooked a large meal for Petunia; her husband, a porker of a blond nearly bulging out of his clothes and a blubbery son who could have passed for his father in miniature. His ungrateful relatives sat down without so much as a thank you and gave Harry a plate of scraps not fit for a dog before telling him to clear off.

Severus followed the boy to a narrow enclosure underneath a staircase. The door opened and Severus ducked his head, nearly treading on Harry’s heels. Severus was annoyed but not surprised to hear the door locked after them.

Inside he saw what looked to be nothing more than a storage cupboard, the kind of cramped space meant to hold folded linen or odd tools. Instead, there was a low bed covered with a tattered sheet, a thin duvet and a battered trunk that he knew all too well. Against the wall was a neat pile of broken toys, objects so pathetic the orphanage would have rejected them.

Harry sat on the bed and mechanically ate his meal, his face expressionless. He gobbled it down with
graceless haste, something Severus could recall him doing at Hogwarts meals at the beginning of first term until he slowed down after two months. Why? Did he think anyone would want to take that offal he was swallowing away from him?

Abruptly there was a rattling at the door. Harry bolted down the last of his repast and placed the plate on top of the trunk. He’d barely sprung to his feet when the door was unlocked and swung open to bang against the wall.

Inside the doorway stood the fat man, Vernon Dursley. “Where did you put it?” he roared.

Harry stood his ground, incredible given the man’s obvious rage. “Where’d I put what?”

“How’s video game, you little freak! He says it’s gone missing. You stole it out of his bedroom, didn’t you?”

“No, I didn’t! You keep me locked up in here. How could I get into Dudley’s bedroom?”

“I don’t know. But it’s gone and you’re the only one who could have taken it.” Vernon surged into the room, his large size made even more terrifying because of the narrow space.

Harry shrank back but he couldn’t escape the man. A meaty fist came flying out and caught Harry on the side of his head before he could duck. The boy’s head swung around and he collapsed to the floor.

For a moment, Severus feared the man would kick him. Instead, he pulled Harry up by his hair and started smacking him around the face. After a few hard whacks, he evidently tired of it and began searching the room.

It didn’t take long; with such a small enclosure how could it? Bruised and bleeding at the corners of his lips, Harry cowered in the corner while the man pulled up the bedding, tossed around the broken toys and flung Harry’s clothes out of the battered trunk, until the room looked like a whirlwind had hit it.

After he was finished, he had found nothing. Harry muttered, “See? I told you I didn’t take it.”

Vernon Dursley turned menacingly to his nephew. “You’ve hidden it somewhere else, haven’t you?” He advanced on Harry, who shrank away even though there was nowhere else to go.

Suddenly the piggy son lumbered to the thin slatted door. “Oi, dad. I found it! It had dropped behind the bed.” The boy sounded unbearably smug. All at once Severus knew the miserable urchin had known where his silly game was all along; he had falsely accused his cousin to get him in trouble. By the miserable expression on Harry’s face, the Boy Who Lived knew it too.

Vernon sniffed, panting and red in the face from his exertions. “Is that so? Well, you really should take better care of your things in future, Dudley. And you,” he bellowed at Harry “clean up this mess!” The two left the room, banging the door shut behind them. Once again, Severus heard the key turn in the lock.

Severus let out a shuddering exhalation, only now realizing that he’d been holding his breath. Harry came slowly to his feet. To the resignation of earlier was added a terrible sadness. He blinked hard, like one forcing back tears. Sighing, he bent and straightened his room.

The memory came to an end. More followed it: scenes of Harry picking food out of the trashbins; Harry spending endless days locked in the cupboard when company came over; blurred images of
Harry running from Dudley and his bullies; Harry peeking through the slats of his cage, listening while his so-called family watched telly together or played games or talked of the days’ events.

There wasn’t a single image of a friend, visitor, gift, meals with the family or even a kind word. The rare peaceful moments Harry spent away from his horrid relatives involved him keeping lengthy hours with a certain Arabella Figg, a dotty cat owner, who bored the poor lad to near tears prattling on about her pets.

Things got little better as Harry grew older. His accommodations improved; the treatment from his relatives did not. They feared his power therefore they hated him. He was forbidden to practice magic spells in the house. The slightest infraction caused missed meals. His trunk was locked up when he came home from school so that he couldn’t study or practice the lessons learned in school. Even his poor owl was locked into her cage, free only to fly about at night just as all “proper owls were supposed to”.

The images spooled to a halt and Severus pulled his head from the formless gray swirl. Despite the fact that he was severely shaken by what he’d seen, he had enough self possession to direct the memories back into the flask and conceal it within his robes.

God, this was appalling. Was this what Harry’s life had been before coming to Hogwarts? Was this what he had to endure all those years? Why had Harry never told him about any of this?

*Likely because you wouldn’t have listened, Snivellus.*

That voice sounded horribly like the second head. Now that he thought about it, certain hints that they’d dropped about Harry’s past became painfully clear.

Had Albus been aware of Harry’s misfortunes at home? The man had seemed to know everything and yet… How could the ancient wizard have been privy to this and left the boy in the clutches of these terrible people?

Why hadn’t *he* known? He was supposed to be a spy, dammit. How could this have been hidden from him all these years?

*Because I never bothered to find out.* Shame, sharper than a serpent’s fangs, bit at him.

Harry had suffered in his youth, much as he had done. Until he came to Hogwarts, he had had no friends to cheer his miserable hours. Ah, but Severus had had a friend, hadn’t he? He had known a beautiful, smart, funny, witty, charming, courageous and sweet red-haired girl who had opened her heart to befriend a lonely, ugly misfit.

He had failed Lily. He had let her die. Then he’d turned his bitter fury on her only surviving child, one who desperately needed kindness, understanding and nurturing after her death.

Severus stared gloomily at the Pensieve, perched with misleading innocence on its pedestal. What to do next? An apology to Harry was out of the question. He had always despised meaningless apologies and wasn’t going to make one now.

But it was not too late. He had bungled things badly with Harry but there was still time to make amends. He had tried bridging the gap between himself and the Gryffindor before now. However, those had been merely attempts to make himself feel better or out of selfish desire. This was going to be different.

Severus felt remarkably light now, energized really, in a way the potion had never left him. Anticipation coursed through him as he considered ways and means for winning over his bond mate.
He strode towards the door only to see it swing open. He froze as he met a cold accusing stare.

“Snape. What the hell are you doing in my bedroom?”

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
Can You Forgive Me?

He had known awkward moments in his past: accosting the young Lily Evans for the first time; the trembling anticipation of introduction to Lord Voldemort and the attendant worry that he might not be chosen to join the elite; confronting his former Headmaster again after learning the true depths of the Dark Lord’s plans; his very first return to the fold of Death Eaters as a double agent. They had all brought emotions of fear, terror, nervousness, even churning nausea. This one could be added to them.

Harry’s face was stern, forbidding in its anger. He stood with his fists clenched as if he dearly wanted to punch Severus in the face again.

Faced with the possibility of violence, Severus smoothed his features and tried for a mild tone.
“Harry…what are you doing back so early?”

“Just in time to catch you planning something nasty, no doubt.” Harry slammed the door. “Were you going to drop a potion in my bed? Smear my sheets with an aphrodisiac?” The green eyes flashed and a wave of magic washed through the spacious chamber. Severus could sense the diagnostic nature of the spells, as Harry sought to detect any foreign magic practiced in his room. It was a most impressive display and Severus was reminded all over again just what a puissant wizard he’d made his mate for life.

“Harry, listen. I’m actually glad to see you.”

“Really? That’s a first. You’ve never been happy to see me in your life,” Harry spat.
“But it’s true. I wanted to show you…”

“Show me what?” Harry leaned against his dresser and folded his arms. He never took his eyes off Severus.

Severus paused. What exactly could he tell Harry? That he wanted to make amends? That he’d seen his awful past and understood? Harry wouldn’t want pity any more than Severus would. “I wanted to show you that we needn’t be enemies. That we could be friends.”

Harry let out a harsh bark. “Oh, god, not this speech again! Wait, how does it go? ‘Harry, let’s be friends.’ ‘Harry, let’s have dinner together, just the two of us.’ ‘Harry, more, oh god, more!’” The laughter this time had a distinct mocking tone and Severus flushed hotly.

The man finally stopped and smirked at him. “Severus, I’m beginning to think there’s more than pregnant hormones going wild here. Nagini’s bite must have driven you absolutely barkers. All this extreme swinging back and forth is just too crazed; Ginny was never like this even when she was nine months gone.”

“Pregnancy affects everyone differently, Harry,” Severus responded, hearing the defensiveness in his voice. “But that’s not what this is about.”

“What is this about then? And you still haven’t told me what you’re doing in my room.”

Severus stepped forward only to see Harry tense and shift backward ever so slightly. “Don’t come near me,” he said quietly. “Just tell me what you want and get out.”

The rejection hurt. Severus struggled not to show it. He couldn’t allow his wounded sensibilities to get in the way. It was Harry’s feelings that were important not his. “I meant what I said. I want to start over. I want to become part of your family.”

“And I should believe you why? Come on, Snape. Your track record with me isn’t exactly stellar, is it? Why should this be any different from the other times?”

Severus stood silent. He honestly didn’t know what he could say to show Harry he was sincere. Harry was right; he had played the role of the penitent too often to be convincing now.

Very well. He had to offer up something to demonstrate his newfound conviction. This could be a grave mistake that he was making. It put a weapon into Harry’s hands but it would prove that he meant what he said.

He had hesitated too long. Harry sighed in impatience and ran his hands through his hair, leaving it even more rumpled than usual.

“Look, Severus. Let’s get a few things straight, shall we? The only reason I don’t ditch you right now and take the children back to the cottage is that it would leave you alone with your predicament. I swore to help you through with this pregnancy and to love the child no matter what. So there’s no way I’m leaving it alone to your tender clutches.”

Harry shifted from the dresser, still keeping Severus in sight. “I’m following the letter of the Vow. But nowhere in it does it state that I have to put up with your shite. It’s not a condition that we have to get along or even like each other. This act of yours is getting old and I can’t be bothered to go along with it any more. From now on, you can keep to your side of the fence and I’ll keep to mine. Everybody will be much happier that way.”

The man meant it. Harry was fully prepared to live the rest of the bonding as a distant stranger.
This wasn’t what Severus wanted. It remained to him to convince Harry of his true feelings. Swallowing his pride, Severus murmured, “I was in your room because I kept thinking about what we did here…after the restaurant dinner and two nights ago.”

A flush turned Harry’s face bright as a sunset. “Don’t remind me. I’m trying to forget it—both times.”

Severus bowed his head. “I understand if that’s how you feel. Both times I overcame your emotions, your body, without any concern to your own desires. It was heinous thing to do and I—apologize.”

Harry stared at him, the emerald eyes flat and cold. “You think that makes up for it?”

“No. But I have a confession to make.”

“You can save it, Snape. I saw your Pensieve memories. Remember?” Harry asked, sounding weary now.

“I find Parseltongue incredibly…arousing.”

The green eyes snapped up to his. “Uh…excuse me? What did you say?”

“When you speak Parseltongue, I am overcome. It happened when we were intimate and two days ago, when you were hissing at me in anger.”

“But I wasn’t speaking Parseltongue then!” Harry protested.

“I know. But the noise was so reminiscent of the first time we were…together that I couldn’t control myself.” Severus could feel his cheeks warming. He was an intensely private man; it was unnerving to bare his soul like this.

“Really? I didn’t know. I’m so sorry,” Harry fretted. “I won’t do it again.”

Was the man going to misunderstand just as Severus was trying to make amends? “That’s not what I wish. I merely wanted to explain the reason for my loss of control. Such pleasure caught me unaware.” He went on, letting his voice get deeper. “It is a sensation I wouldn’t mind experiencing again.”

“Oh. Well.” Harry sat down on a plain wooden chair. Severus finally noticed how Harry eschewed the more elaborate furnishings found in the rest of Black’s manor. Even the original four poster this room undoubtedly had contained had been Transfigured into an ordinary king-size bed. Severus didn’t quite understand that mindset. The boy had grown up with dire poverty. Shouldn’t he want the best that life had to offer?

He certainly hadn’t gotten that by marrying Severus, had he? So far, Severus had given him nothing in this marriage save his evil moods. No wonder Harry was so bitter and untrusting.

His bond mate hadn’t spoken in several moments. His face was so blank; Severus had no idea what he was thinking. “I just thought you should know—for the future.”

Harry nodded but didn’t answer.

He had tried, hadn’t he? Well, no, he hadn’t, not really. Did Severus really think one little confession about his sexual proclivities would win over the stubborn Gryffindor? It was a pathetic attempt, certainly not up to his usual standards of brilliance.
“I know—I know I’m not what you would have chosen in a spouse. You had a wonderful wife, a
lovely home and three beautiful children. I tricked you into accepting me and you did so with
uncommon grace and fortitude. I want acceptance from you, even if you can’t desire me. And if you
can’t bring yourself to forgive me, then…”

Then what? This was it; he was out of options or offers. Severus couldn’t do the noble thing and
remove himself from Harry’s life. He was tired of being alone and didn’t want to rear a child by
himself. That’s what he would have to do if he absented himself from Harry’s world, from the man’s
warmth and solicitude that he displayed so easily to others.

Perhaps he should consult Hermione. She knew Harry so well. If anyone would have a clue how to
win his affections—

“Sssshhhhiissssha.”

Severus froze. “Harry?” he whispered.

The man was staring at him intently. “Hssshhharrrssshhaallliiiaaa.”

The blood moved south so quickly Severus was almost light headed. He took a trembling step
towards Harry. The Gryffindor stood up but made no move to approach.

So. He would have to prove himself. Severus crossed the space swiftly, his confidence wavering
with every step.

“Ssshakkkkllllsshshshshs.”

He was reluctant to speak and break the spell hovering in the air. But the harshness of this sibilance
made him pause. “What did that mean, Harry?”

Harry smiled and it was mischievous, innocent and naughty all at once. “It means ‘tall, dark one with
the sinful tongue.’”

“Ah.” Severus told himself that the heat he felt now had nothing to do with mortification. It was
sheer lust, pure and simple. Though why it bloomed in his cheeks instead of his trousers didn’t bear
close examination.

Hissing noises continued to come out of Harry’s mouth until Severus closed the space between them
and kissed him.

He kept the kiss light, tentative. The last thing he wanted to do was force Harry, not now, not after
all the mistakes that had been made. He sensed an equal hesitance in his mate. After all, he was not
the one Harry would choose under normal circumstances.

But when had circumstances ever been normal between them?

Hands inched up to Severus’ shoulders like creeping vines. The shorter man was leaning into him
now; Severus could feel the Gryffindor’s heart pounding against his. Merlin, it throbbed rather fast,
didn’t it? Perhaps it was his own heartbeat he felt. Even more exciting was the answering erection
that was making itself felt.

But he had to be certain. He’d made too many errors as it was. “Harry, is this what you want?”
Severus whispered.

Those emerald eyes turned sharp and the chin lifted. “Sshshiiissshhhhtt!!”
Well, that sounded resolute enough. Severus lapped at Harry’s mouth, bolder now after this show of acceptance. Sinful tongue, eh? He hadn’t shown Harry just what this wicked little bit of muscle could do.

The mouth, with its soft lips, opened beneath his. Harry’s breath smelled of eggs, jam, pumpkin juice—it hadn’t been so long since breakfast, after all. There was a darker undertone to it, flavorsome and indefinable. Whatever it was, it went to Severus’s head like old wine.

The texture of soft velvet welcomed him as their tongues met, explored each other. Harry truly was a superb kisser, a technique that translated well, whether kissing a woman or a man. He hummed, sighed and hissed, the breath puffing into Severus.

Harry’s fists were tugging at his robe. What? Oh, yes. Too much clothing in the way. Severus waved his wand and muttered, “Divestio.”

He had to part from Harry as their clothing flowed from their bodies. It took only a few seconds but it felt entirely too long for Severus’s liking. When they were finally naked, they nearly flew into each other’s arms.

The sensation of skin on skin was bliss. After so many nights of frustration, dreaming this touch, it was here at last and all at once Severus was impatient to taste its pleasure.

So he licked down Harry’s cheek to his ear, suckling it between his lips. The lithe body shook and more hissing buzzed into his own ear. Severus groaned. Spurred by that voice, he lapped and nipped at the golden column of neck. Harry gasped when he felt his teeth but he didn’t back away.

The smaller man was shaking in his arms now. “Knees a little weak?” Severus murmured, smiling against Harry’s lips.

Harry pulled back to glare at him. He let out a stream of Parseltongue, his eyes glowing with challenge.

Severus just barely managed to hold back a groan. He picked up the Gryffindor—really, how convenient to be with a partner so much smaller and lighter than himself—and carried him over to the bed. He wanted to drop the man but the muscular arms locked around his neck and he was forced to lower them both onto the bed, kneeling on the mattress.

It was Harry’s turn to nuzzle Severus’s neck. Severus went cold and jerked away.

Confusion showed in those changeable eyes. “Severus? What is it?”

“Nothing.” His voice sounded tight, even to him.

“Are you sure? Did I—did I do something wrong?”

“No. But my scars—the skin is unpleasantly rough.”

“Oh? I didn’t notice,” Harry murmured. Suiting action to word, he swept his fingertips over the raised flesh. There was more Parseltongue, soft as a seductive whisper. Then Harry was kissing him there, trailing his tongue over the ruined skin, tracing the ridged scars. Where he didn’t lick, he kissed. Where he didn’t kiss, he lipped. When he didn’t lip, he hissed, the skin burning at the brush of air.

“Sshhhahahheehhhshshh.”
“Yesss,” Severus moaned.

He rolled on to his back so Harry straddled him. It would be easier for the man to move and he wanted to prove the strength of his feelings. He wanted to give to Harry not take.

But the way Harry touched him felt like giving, too…

Harry tilted his head and laid his hand on Severus’ stomach. His look was inquiring, a touch worried. “Don’t worry, Harry. You won’t hurt me. Sex is possible all during the first trimester,” Severus purred. Harry flushed and ducked his head. He was embarrassed; how cute.

Emboldened now that he had permission, Harry began rocking back and forth on Severus’s lap. He gazed down at Severus’s cock where it lay on his stomach. “Ssssshhhooooohshshshhlllliiisshh.” The tone sounded admiring. When Harry reached down to wrap his hand around the pulsing length, Severus couldn’t help the gasp that ripped out of him.

Harry leaned back a little and hissed. “Ssshhahee?”

It was like he’d forgotten that he wasn’t speaking English. What was the man saying now? Good? More? Severus hazarded a guess. “More.” Harry smiled, happiness lighting up his features.

Harry reached down and gathered up Severus’s prick and his in one hand. Biting his lip, he began thrusting back and forth, watching with lidded eyes as both heads appeared and disappeared in his fist. Severus panted too, caught by the same erotic spectacle.

Harry’s weight should have been too much, lying across his thighs, but he was a lightweight and the pressure was good in all the right ways. Harry evidently knew it as he squirmed harder while his head went lower, biting and sucking the skin on Severus’ shoulders and chest, even as he released Severus’s cock from its warm, fleshy prison.

Now the tongue was at his nipple, bursts of Parseltongue causing the flesh to flick out at his sensitive nubs again and again. “God, Harry!”

Harry closed his eyes. Again there was that sweep of magic in the air. What was he…?

Severus’s eyes widened and he let out a cry of shock. A tingling sensation enveloped his arse and he bucked his hips, startled at the flood of moisture in his anal passage.

Fuck! Where had Harry learned that? Severus certainly hadn’t taught it to him. He was damned certain his wife hadn’t taught him that, either.

“Sssshhhillllahhhshhaaahaha.” The Gryffindor looked unbearably smug now, delighted at having taken Severus by surprise. Then he lent down and breathed on Severus’s cock. His tongue came out in one swift lick from root to head.

“AHH!” Severus’s fists curled into the sheets as he bucked towards that knowing mouth. He couldn’t believe such an intensity of sensation could come from such a delicate act.

Harry didn’t take him in his mouth. He seemed content to lick at the column only. Evidently, his boldness went only so far, not that Severus cared. He was on the verge of begging Harry to get on with it and forget the preliminaries.

Fortunately, his partner seemed to divine his mood. Harry pushed at his legs until he was bent nearly in two. This time the indecorous position didn’t bother Severus in the slightest. He was prepared to start singing if it would bring the relief he so desperately sought. He didn’t care if his pride was cast
to the winds in the process so long as Harry fucked him RIGHT NOW!!

When the man thrust at last, Severus swiftly brought down his legs, wrapping them firmly around his bond mate’s waist. He never wanted to let Harry go; he wanted this to last forever. It wasn’t possible but here and now he would do everything to make this good for Harry, to make certain the man came back to him again and again.

Severus didn’t know if it was his pregnancy or the endless stream of sibilant sounds spurting from Harry’s tongue. But this felt even more intense than their previous time together.

Severus cried out as Harry slid over his prostate. Those green eyes widened and the slender body shifted over his, trying to find the proper angle.

“Sshhhheeeheeeehhshshsh…” The sound accompanied a cautious push. In spite of Severus’s urgent need, Harry seemed damnably determined to take this slowly. Clucking his teeth in vexation, Severus grabbed Harry and jerked him by the hips so that the man was suddenly bollocks deep inside him.

Harry let out a startled yelp and his eyes bulged. Severus grinned and squeezed his arse. This time the sound from his partner was a garbled hiss and Harry began fucking him properly, lost to the rising tide of sensation gripping them both.

The man let out another hiss and lapped at Severus’s neck, the side where the scars lay. It should have sickened him. The hissing and licking in that spot should have brought horrific memories of that creature’s attack. But when Harry licked him there, fire streaked from his tongue down Severus’s body. He sobbed and clutched Harry tightly enough to make his bones creak.

“More, oh fuck, Harry,” he gasped. “ Wanted this, yes, want more. Please…”

The man was rocking over him, into him, bringing a warmth Severus hadn’t realized he’d needed until now. But it wasn’t just that. Harry was looking at him, meeting his eyes with an unnerving concentration. The hissing was ebbing and peaking with each move and there was that softness in it, the one he’d heard previously.

Severus was caught in a dual dilemma. All of this—the unlooked for tenderness, the heat, the touch, that tongue, that acceptance of his scars, the sizzling snake tongue that managed to crash against his senses again and again—was threatening to sweep him under and he wanted that. He craved that oblivion, that loss of control.

But what did Harry want? He wasn’t under a drug; Severus wasn’t forcing him to do this. He had hissed at Severus, knowing how it stirred his older mate. It was like a woman wearing a subtle perfume or a certain shade that she knew her lover preferred.

Lover.

Oh god, was Harry that? Severus stared into the man’s eyes. He could perform Legilimency and learn what he wanted to know. But somehow…it seemed so wrong and a betrayal of trust, especially now, considering what they were doing. He was on thin ice with Harry as it was and…

A burst of Parseltongue, unbelievably guttural, nothing like Harry’s normal voice, came from the man above him and Severus’s thoughts scattered like startled doxies. From then on, he could do nothing but pant, groan, sweat and scream as Harry plowed him, kissed him and sent that sweet sibilance flying over his skin.

“Harry…god…Harry.” The man was fucking him with abandon and Severus was doing his best to
match his pace. Their hips thrust against each other as their rhythms meshed. Severus’s eyelids fluttered, all the muscles in his body quivering, his toes curling, his legs locking around Harry’s waist.

Those lovely eyes blurred into a dark forest green. Harry hissed and bit Severus in the shoulder, where it joined with his neck. Severus howled and came, spurring on to his stomach. It was like his body seized up in an unending spasm, one that left him coiled around his lover like an unwound spring.

Harry, it seemed, was not finished with him yet, bucking as though riding the crest of Severus’s climax. When he came, Severus swore he could feel the man spurting deep inside him.

Merlin, no wonder the man had got three brats on his wife and another on his bond mate. Harry was disgustingly potent. Molly Weasley had every right to be proud of him; Harry seemed bound and determined to take after her husband, Arthur.

The Gryffindor collapsed, panting hard. Then the firm weight on Severus’s chest pushed off almost at once and both men sighed as Harry slipped out. For several heartbeats of time, there was no sound save the mutter of Cleaning Charms and no movement except the careful repositioning of limbs.

Severus feared this, the moment of separation. Would Harry suffer from remorse or regret? Would he kick Severus out of his bed?

No, the man was peppering his face with slow kisses. Even though Severus was tired, he could still make out sleepy torrents of Parseltongue. “Harry, either shut up or speak English. I’m too fatigued for guessing games,” he muttered.

The eyes unfogged. Harry mumbled, “Ss…I mean, Severus. Did you want to get something to eat later? It’s still early. We can rest a few hours and call on Kreacher to bring us food.”

“That would be fine—later.” He paused, fighting against sleep. “Harry, you still haven’t told me why you were home so early.”

“Hmm? Oh, there was an outbreak of Dragon Pox at the orphanage—it’s really making the rounds this year—and they sent me home.”

“What?!” Severus sat bolt upright in bed, scrambling away from Harry. “You imbecile! And you came home and exposed me to it? How could you be so careless?! Don’t you realize the danger you pose to our unborn child?” he roared.

“Oh, relax, Severus. I never made it inside. There was a note outside the orphanage door warning people away because the outbreak. Remembering what happened with the twins, I came home straight away—which is when I caught you here,” he added meaningfully.

“Ah. That’s good, then.” Severus gradually relaxed on to the bed again.

Harry grinned and nestled his chin on Severus’s shoulder. “You know that’s the first time you called it that?”

“Called what?”

“You’ve always called the baby ‘my unborn’ or ‘my child’. This is the first time you’ve called it ours,” Harry whispered.

“Well, whose else is it?” Severus asked gruffly.
The harsh tone didn’t fool Harry. His answering smile lit up his eyes and he bent down and kissed Severus softly, giving a teasing nibble to his lips. When he laid his hand on Severus’s abdomen, a foolish warmth bloomed under his fingers until it swept over Severus’s entire body.

Severus realized something at last. Such kindness was in Harry’s nature. The man wanted to care for him, not out of duty, but because it was an innate part of whom he was. Severus could have had this all along, if he’d only let go of his hatred.

Vowing not to push away his bond mate again, no matter how difficult things got in the coming months, Severus pulled up the covers over them both. He kissed Harry on his brow and sank into blissful slumber.

TBC

This chapter was written by the talented QueenBoadicea.
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Title: Scarred Souls

Author: Misty Moonlight/Co-author: QueenBoadicea

Pairings: Severus/Harry

Published: 12/10/2008

Summary: A widowed Harry must bond with Snape in order to save his daughter’s life. Harry’s young children scheme to bring their daddy and new father together, and form a new family, while changing the hearts of two scarred souls.

Warnings: Romance, Drama, Angst, Alternate Universe, Sexual Situations, Hurt/Comfort, M/M, Slash, Anal, Language, Humor, possible MPreg, Bonding, Original Characters, Family, WIP

Chapter 40: Paying a Visit

The floo activated and Molly stepped into the living room. She glanced around to satisfy herself that no one was about the place. The space seemed empty but, given the large area, it was best to make certain.

She had never liked Sirius’s home. To be fair to him, Sirius hadn’t appeared to like it either, though he’d never told her why. She swept an eye over the walls, blank spaces showing where portraits of generations of Blacks used to hang. Harry had told her that he’d disliked having the things critiquing him and complaining about a Mudblood Gryffindor soiling their family home. So he’d packed up every last frame and relegated them to the attic. Good riddance.

Even without the portraits, the place was far too gloomy for her liking. Her home at The Burrow might be rather ramshackle but it was filled with joy, happiness and good memories and she wouldn’t have traded it for the finest mansion in the world.

“May I help you, Mrs. Weasley?”

She nearly jumped off her feet. It was only Severus Snape, but, sod it all, couldn’t the man walk like normal people? “Mr. Snape. Hello.”

“Harry isn’t here if you were looking for him. He and all of the children are at the orphanage this morning. They won’t be back for a few hours.” He moved, or rather, glided from his place in the doorway to stand close to her. He didn’t say anything further, just continued to stare at her out of those unblinking eyes.
Insufferable man. She had told the young Harry to respect the man because of his place in the Order. But she had never liked Snape personally and had never regretted striking him when she learned he was forcing Harry into marriage. Molly just wished that she had thought to hex him instead.

“I wasn’t looking for Harry. I wanted to talk to you, actually.” It bothered her to say it but she needed his cooperation if this was to work.

One slim eyebrow rose. He looked amused, annoyed and bored with her all at the same time. She wondered how he managed it.

“I, Mrs. Weasley? I assume this isn’t a personal matter.”

“It is and it isn’t.” She took a deep breath. “Harry’s birthday is in less than a week. I wanted to plan a surprise party for him. However, if I’m to get him to the Burrow, I need your help.”

“The Burrow? Why would you want him to go there? We have plenty of room here for a party. The grand ballroom is large enough to accommodate 250 people.”

She shuddered. “No offense, Snape. But this place is as depressing as a tomb. It’s suitable for a wake, perhaps, but not a party.”

“That’s nonsense, Mrs. Weasley, and you know it. Haven’t you noticed the ducks?” Snape asked.

“Ducks?”

He smirked, grabbed her by the upper arm and gently steered her from the room. “You’ve been coming in and out of here by floo. The last time you were here, you were in rather a hurry. So you haven’t seen the charming décor that house-elf has seen fit to grace our hallway with.” He stopped walking and waved his arm grandly at the colorful wallpaper covering the paneling.

“Wh—oh my goodness. Merlin, is this…Kreacher’s work?” she asked, gaping in shock at the animated flowers tumbling amid the quacking birds.

“Not entirely. He was assisted in his choice by the twins,” Severus drawled.

“Oh. Well, it’s…um…”

“No need to mince words, madam. It’s quite atrocious. Even Harry agrees with me and his tastes aren’t nearly so refined,” he sniffed.

“Oh, it’s not that bad. Merely inappropriate given the rest of the house.” She glanced again at the wallpaper and shook her head bemusedly.

“Try telling that to Harry. In spite of my clear disapproval, he refuses to remove it. He says the house-elf will likely go mad and start battering his head against the floor and furnishings.”

“Then the wallpaper is going to stay. Harry wouldn’t want Kreacher to hurt himself. I’m sorry, Snape, you’re just going to have to deal with it.”

The man grimaced in exaggerated distaste. “That’s easy for you to say, Mrs. Weasley. I’m the one who has to live with it.”

She let out a real laugh this time, beyond surprised that she was actually enjoying Snape’s company. Rallying herself with an effort, she went back to the subject. “I still want Harry’s birthday at The Burrow. We’ve always celebrated it there or at his cottage…”
“Then let it be the cottage.”

“Really? I thought you were set on having it here.”

“Not at all. I merely asked why you didn’t wish to have the festivities at the manor. Now that I’ve reconsidered, I am reluctant to have strangers traipsing about the place. I have made it my home and do not wish to compromise its security.”

“They won’t be strangers, Snape,” she said reprovingly. “This will be Harry’s family.”

“Not the Dursleys, I hope,” he frowned.

She gazed at him steadily. “Surely you know the Dursleys do not have any communication with us. They brought themselves to talk to Ginny—in an extremely limited fashion—and recognize Harry’s children. They did that only because my darling daughter insisted that Harry mend fences with his family. But the rest of us are magical ‘freaks’ and they refuse to get mixed up with us in any significant way. Trust me. They are NOT invited to Harry’s birthdays.”

“I see.” To tell the truth, Severus hadn’t concerned himself overmuch with Harry’s relations, either the Weasleys or the Dursleys. He’d been completely wrapped up in his own brooding and self-pity. It was rather shabby of him and he experienced that shame-bite again.

“If you don’t want to have the party at the Burrow, the cottage will be fine,” Molly conceded. Snape’s face had become a stone mask; she sensed he was undergoing some crisis of emotion but couldn’t figure out what. It was frustrating how impossible it was to read the man.

“You say you wish this to be a surprise for Harry?” he asked.

“Certainly. The cottage is actually a better idea. If you try to get him to the Burrow, he’ll know that we’re planning a party for him. But if you can get him to the cottage on some pretext, I’m certain he’ll be fooled. You haven’t been back there for awhile, have you?” she asked shrewdly.

“No, I haven’t.” At the thought of the cottage, images of the cursed heads flashed through his mind. There was no way he could go back while those—things—were still there.

There was a way to get rid of them, of course. An apology to the Potter twins. The bile surged into his throat just at the thought of it.

So be it. There were limited choices to hosting Harry’s party. He didn’t want it to be at the Burrow; he considered it as “Weasley” territory and he had no intention of being surrounded by all their ginger-haired offspring and on their home ground. Mrs. Weasley was right in her assessment about the Black Manor. The place had all the cheer of a cemetery.

Therefore, it would have to be the cottage. If he wanted to attend, he would have to suffer the heads chattering to him, inaudible and invisible to everyone else—or apologize. He could manage that. Once.

He stood straighter, aware that Mrs. Weasley was looking at him oddly, no doubt waiting for a decision.

“Very well. We will return to the cottage as soon as it is convenient. I can still enter the wards and Harry is used to having me disappear for hours at a time.”

“Even now that you’re pregnant?” she asked, her face aghast with maternal outrage.
“Especially now. My temper is legendary and Harry has been the brunt of it for years. Since my condition is making me even more irascible than usual, my bond mate has learned to let me have as much freedom as is feasible. He finds I am much more amenable if I’m allowed time and space to myself.”

“Hmm.” Molly wasn’t certain what to think about that. She knew about Snape’s temper too. She very much hoped he wasn’t hurting Harry. But a pregnant spouse was no picnic to be around. She well remembered the fits and crochets she had suffered from during each of her pregnancies.

“So if you pick out times that Harry and the children will not be home, we can repair to the cottage and make the necessary arrangements. Fortunately, school is out so we may call on one of the Hogwarts house-elves to assist us, if necessary.”

“Why not Kreacher?”

“He is employed full time here at the Manor. He also helps Harry with little Lily. If he goes absent too often, Harry will suspect.”

“Well, that’s settled then. Let’s go.”

“What? Now?”

“Of course. Harry and the children aren’t here. You seem to be free. We can start with decorations.” She turned and walked back to the dining room where the floo was. She halted when she realized he wasn’t following. “Snape? Are you coming?”

“I just remembered that I left a cauldron simmering in the basement. I must go to decant it before it spoils. It’s a potion I’m creating for a new market,” he lied smoothly.

“Oh? What kind of potion?”

“It’s still in the experimental stage and I don’t want to let anyone know the details until I have perfected it. I’m sure you understand.”

The Slytherin’s tone had become distant. Clearly he refused to talk about it and Molly knew better than to press the matter. “Very well. Later then.”

He nodded his head. She wagged a finger at him. “I mean it, Snape. If I don’t see an owl from you in a few hours arranging a meeting, I will come back here and drag you out by your ears.”

Both of Severus’s eyebrows flew up. He knew he’d betrayed his shock but he couldn’t help it. While the threat was ludicrous, what really made it risible was the smile twitching at the corners of her lips. It seemed that the woman had—warmed to him. The notion caused a weird fluttering in his stomach, no doubt at the sickening sentimentality of it.

Struggling to answer her in kind, he managed, “Heaven forbid. I’m very fond of my ears.”

The woman blinked. Then she let out a bark of laughter. He’d often heard the same sound from her youngest son, Ronald. Good humor seemed to be a familial trait with the Weasleys. Ginevra must have been that same ray of sunshine in her husband’s life. No wonder the man mourned her still.

“Then I’ll see an owl from you later, hm?” She strode to the floo, every inch the queenly matriarch, and flung the glittering powder into the fireplace.
Severus prided himself on keeping a cool demeanor even in the tensest of situations. He had been a spy for the Order for years, following a crazed Dark Lord skilled in Legilimency while carrying out plots concocted by a daffy old wizard with a penchant for sweets and loud colors. He had managed to dance attendance on both lunatics without losing his calm or his sanity.

Both were being sorely tested this evening.

The twins were whispering furiously at each other while Harry watched them and Lily. In between his parental scrutiny, he was sneaking glances at Severus, a suspicious look lurking behind his eyes.

“For Merlin’s sake, I would like to enjoy a dinner in peace. Either stop whispering or just say what is bothering you and get it out of your systems,” Severus snapped.

As if floodgates had been opened, the boys started yelling, their words tumbling over each other.

“Douglas hit Lily!” James yelled.

“He said he didn’t.”

“But he lied! We saw it!”

“So we jumped him.”

“Hit him a good one,” James said with relish.

“Then Mrs. Kinderlieb said we had to go,” Albus said this with a quivering lip.

Severus rested his head between his hands. He hadn’t taken his antivenin potion, courtesy of Poppy’s threat, and he could feel a headache coming on. “One at a time, if you please,” he muttered between his teeth.

“Douglas wanted Lily’s lion. But she wouldn’t let go of it and that’s when he hit her,” Harry said, clarifying the matter.

“I knew that little hellion was trouble,” Severus ground out. “The next time I go to that orphanage I will hex him so that his fingers stick together!”

“Severus, please. It’s no big deal. The boys just have to stay away from the orphanage for a few days. It’s their punishment for misbehaving. We’ll be able to go back on Friday. And I trust you two will behave yourselves?” Harry asked them with a meaningful stare.

“Yes, Daddy,” they chimed with that faux innocence they mimicked so perfectly. Their father may have been fooled but Severus wasn’t.

Harry frowned. “James, Albus, I mean it. You don’t want Corabett to ban you from the orphanage, do you?”

The boys looked upset at that. Perhaps Harry wasn’t so easily fooled after all.

However, Severus privately vowed to teach that little Douglas a lesson. Maybe he could arrange it so that the boy was adopted by Hagrid. The man hadn’t had any children, even after marriage to that Madame Olympe. A lifetime spent in that dingy hut would be enough of a punishment for any spoiled child.

“So how was your day, Severus?” Harry asked. He tried to sound casual but subtlety wasn’t a Gryffindor trait.
“Very well.”

“Did you get a lot of brewing done?”

“Not much.” What was the man on about?

“I guess not if you were interrupted.” Subtlety was being abandoned, it seemed. Harry was staring at him and now the twins were staring as well, watching both their Daddies with worry etched large on their childish features.

“Interrupted?”

“Someone came to see you this morning after I left. Kreacher told me that someone had penetrated the wards.”

Blast, that shouldn’t have happened. Molly had come through the floo not Apparated or entered the front door. How had that lousy house-elf known?

Severus knew his face told Harry nothing; he had practiced impassivity too long. But the green eyes flared. “Aha! I knew it! Someone was here. Who was it?”

“Young house-elf was mistaken, Harry. Why would I hide it if someone came here?”

“I don’t know. But Kreacher isn’t mistaken about this kind of thing. He’s been a house-elf for the Black family manor for hundreds of years. He knows when someone comes into the house.”

“That is ridiculous. What he doubtless felt was an owl delivering my copy of the Prophet.”

“But we already get the Daily Prophet delivered. It comes in the morning,” Harry said with a frown. “Besides, Kreacher has never confused owls with live visitors.”

“I decided I wanted to get my own copy.” Severus made a mental note to start a subscription to the newspaper. It was a bother but he had spent too many years covering his tracks to slip up now. “And I didn’t want to mention this, Harry, but your house-elf is ancient even beyond that of most elves. Poppy herself said that she’d never seen one so old as he. Perhaps he is becoming senile in his old age.”

“What’s ‘senile’?” Albus asked.

“A kind of dementia that attends the elderly. A madness old people sometimes get. It makes them forgetful and prone to strange behavior,” Severus clarified.

“I don’t believe it.” The flat denial caused him to meet Harry’s eyes again. The man was glaring at him. “Kreacher has been cleaning the house, fixing the meals and tending to the children and doing all his chores just as well as he ever has. If anything were wrong with him, it would be showing in his work.”

“Doubtless, he performs his tasks as well as he ever did. That is a house-elf’s function. He could no more neglect his assigned chores than he could learn to fly. But I’m talking about his magical senses, which can fail with age. It happens to wizards; it can certainly happen to house-elves.”

Harry clearly didn’t buy this story but he was wavering. Severus knew that Harry still thought much like a Muggle. Muggles wandered in their wits as they got older; why not house-elves? Merlin knows the Dark Lord had been a few tiers short of a layer cake and the former Headmaster had often seemed to be nothing more than a dotty old geezer. So Harry had no idea whether house-elves
became prey to dementia or not.

Truth be told, Severus wasn’t quite sure of his ground either. But Kreacher was extremely old, the most decrepit house-elf he’d ever known in his entire life as a wizard. Who’s to say that he couldn’t get a little barmy with age?

“Well, I always thought he was a bit daft, what with all that muttering he’d do to himself,” Harry murmured.

“Quite. Now… Lily, I have warned you about that lion,” Severus said sternly. The toy was on the table again and taking swats at the forks that James and Albus were waving above its head.

Lily laughed, ignoring him. Without warning, Severus pulled out his wand and pointed it at the furry toy. A muttered spell and it collapsed on its side, stiff and motionless.

Lily’s mouth pursed up and she began fussing, reaching for the de-Charmed toy. When it failed to return to her, she opened her mouth and let out a wail of childish rage.

“Severus, don’t be mean. Fix Lily’s toy and give it back to her,” Harry chided.

“I certainly will… with a few modifications.” Severus pointed his wand again and mumbled a revised Motion Charm. Then he levitated it over to Lily. It wafted into her outstretched arms and nuzzled her with its mouth.

The wailing ceased at once. Then she dropped the lion back to the table.

It stopped moving.

The girl’s brown eyes crinkled in distress and puzzlement. She picked up the toy and it twisted in her hand, batting at her skin with its paws. When she dropped it once more, it went still. She whimpered and snatched the toy back up, unhappy over its contrary behavior. But she didn’t release it on to the table again.

“What did you—Oh, I get it. You Charmed it not to move if she puts it on the table,” Harry guessed.

“Very astute, Harry. This will teach her not to bring the toy to the table or indeed to any flat surface more than one foot off the ground. That way she will refrain from releasing it while we are dining,” Severus said with satisfaction.

Harry beamed. Severus’s heart fluttered when he saw it. It was silly to get so excited merely from a smile. But images of that smile, that tousled hair, that firm youthful body raised over his own…

Merlin, he was getting an erection and with the children present. While he tried to will it down, Harry said smugly, “See? It’s possible to discipline children without terrorizing them.”

Severus turned to protest only to catch Harry’s kiss on his mouth. The man must have intended to kiss him on the cheek but missed when Severus turned his head.

The kiss deepened and that erection became a raging need that begged for Harry’s hand, mouth or arse. The man had yet to let Severus fuck him and he had to admit he wanted to give topping a try. Harry definitely could use a few pointers and…

His train of thought was broken when something soft collided with his head. He ended the kiss, though not without a delicate nip to Harry’s lower lip, and looked around to see the lion toy lying on the table. Lily was looking at him, the brown eyes sparkling with mischief.
“Dada Sevvie won liba?”

“What?”

“She wants to know if you want her lion,” Albus translated, giggling. His first reaction to Severus’s kiss had been “Yuck!” But his father looked so happy, like he hadn’t been since Mummy died, and he decided maybe kissing wasn’t so bad. At least, not when you were older.

Severus passed the toy back to the little girl and spoke with all the dignity he could manage. “Tell her I already have my own lion.” With that he placed his hand on Harry’s thigh, beneath the table, and squeezed it.

My, that was an interesting shade of red his bond mate was turning. Smirking to himself, Severus resumed eating his meal.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
Severus strode into Harry’s room. The man was seated on his bed, fixing new twigs into his broom. Honestly, he was far too old to be playing that silly game. But he had invited Severus once and he had to admit it was thrilling to see Harry crouched over a broomstick. The man was bloody brilliant in the air and his dazzling moves were breathtaking to watch.

“Harry, I need to go to the cottage,” Severus told his bond mate.

Harry looked up from where he was binding the new twigs to the shaft. “Why?”

Severus pinched his lips into a narrow line, allowing a look of annoyance to cross his face fleetingly. “I—left something behind and wish to retrieve it. I won’t be gone long.” He crossed to the fireplace and stumbled on a nonexistent bump in the rug.

“Are you alright, Severus?”

“I’m fine,” Severus said through his teeth. There, now he sounded as if he were barely holding back a sound of pain. That should elicit the desired reaction.

Sure enough, Harry stood up, his mild curiosity giving way to concern. “Severus, you don’t look so well. What’s wrong?”

His awful looks were courtesy of a mild glamour that he’d learned to cast, one that gave him a sickly pallor. “Stop fussing, Potter!” he snapped. “I’ll be at the cottage and return in a few minutes.” He clamped his mouth shut and sagged against the mantelpiece.
That did it. Harry walked up to him and grabbed him by the arms. “Severus, something is wrong! I don’t think you should be doing any traveling.”

Severus rolled his eyes. “Potter, you have turned into a regular wet nurse. I’m not an invalid. I’m merely pregnant.” He closed his eyes and sucked in a short breath as if hit by a spasm of pain.

“I knew it. You’re sick. You’re not going anywhere until we get Poppy to look at you.”

“Po-Harry, I need to get to the cottage. I’ll be back shortly. Please.”

The begging tone, along with the polite term he never used, were the crowning touches. The emerald eyes narrowed. “Why do you want to go to the cottage? What is it that you’re getting there?”

Severus narrowed his eyes in turn. “Harry, I’m taking a short trip, not traveling across the Soviet Union. Why this interrogation? Don’t you trust me?” He attempted a smile, knowing how badly he did so when he was trying.

“No, I don’t. You’re staying here.”

That wasn’t what he wanted at all. “If you attempt to restrain me, I shall go to the cottage on my own the moment you leave me unattended,” Severus threatened.

Harry fumed. “Fine. Then we’re going together.”

“And leave your children alone? You really are a negligent parent, you know that, Potter?” Severus murmured silkily.

“You’re not going to make me feel guilty about my children, so don’t try that game. James, Albus!” Harry cried, raising his voice.

The boys came running into his room, so quickly Severus mentally rebuked them; they were going to give the game away. However, Harry seemed not so surprised at their alacrity as the fact that they were still dressed from this afternoon. “Why do you still have your day clothes on, you two? I thought you’d be in your pyjamas.”

They looked at each other and shrugged. “We got busy playing Exploding Snap,” James offered.

That excuse appeared to satisfy Harry. Really, the man was far too trusting of his offspring sometimes. “James, Albus, watch Severus. I’m going to get Lily.”

“You’re setting your children to mind me? This is the ultimate indignity,” Severus groused. “You are an idiot if you think I’m going to allow your ineffectual spawn—”

Harry concentrated and Severus’s wand flew into his open palm. Once more Severus was tied with that powerful invisible binding that Harry had used once before. Harry smirked at him and said, “Don’t move a muscle. I’ll be right back.”

At least he had spared Severus the humiliation of having him fall on the floor. Once he was gone, Severus looked at the twins. “Listen to me very carefully, you two. I’m saying this once and once only. I apologize.”


“I have said it.”

This wasn’t satisfactory to Albus. He wanted Severus to apologize and say what for. He had a
child’s need for specifics. “But—”

“You’re not getting anything else out of me. Take your apology and be satisfied.” Albus shut his mouth again, but he looked rather disgruntled. James on the other hand was smugly pleased; doubtless those abominable floating heads had been his idea.

Harry came back into the room carrying Lily. She was awake and dressed in a sweet pink little dress that complemented her reddish hair. “Severus, did you dress Lily this evening?”

“No. Perhaps the house-elf did.”

“Why would he dress Lily in one of her day dresses?”

Severus rolled his eyes. “How should I know? As I’ve stated before, I think that elf of yours is getting senile. Now if you’ll remove this spell—”

“Oh, right.”

Severus felt his bonds loosen and flexed his limbs. Without another word to Harry, he scooped up a handful of floo powder and stepped into the fireplace.

The room was dark but he could sense the presence of other people waiting breathlessly in the dark. He whispered, “Not yet,” hoping that they could hear him. He stepped aside to avoid colliding with Harry and his children and the floo whooshed out seconds later.

Harry paused. “Severus, are you there? Why’s it so dark in here?”

“SURPRISE!!!”

Suddenly all the house lights came up, revealing a room filled with people. They were wearing party hats and fairies flitted through the space carrying streamers and throwing confetti.

Harry fell back against the mantelpiece, the green eyes almost comically wide. Lily and the twins handled it far better than he, the boys laughing their heads off at their Daddy’s shock, the little girl squealing in delight. She wriggled until Harry put her down and a few people cooed like pigeons when she took staggering steps after her older brothers.

Harry whispered to Severus, “W-what is all this?”

“I would have thought it was obvious. It’s a surprise party, Harry, in honor of your birthday,” Severus intoned.

Harry stared at him. “You knew about this?”

“He did.” Molly came bustling up to them, clad in a shimmering dress of maroon. “I got together with him and he got me into the cottage so I could set up the decorations, the food, the presents…”


“Oh, Severus,” and Harry’s eyes widened to hear his adoptive mum call his bond mate by his first name, “it won’t kill you to mingle and be sociable for once.”

“It might kill them,” Severus muttered but so softly Harry knew she hadn’t heard. She spun off in another corner to run after the twins, scolding them for reaching for the cake.

“So this is why you were acting so weird? I thought—” Harry stopped, looking ashamed.
“I know what you thought. It was my intention to make you suspicious so you would accompany me. But you were far more perspicacious than you realize. Molly was the mysterious visitor who came to the manor that evening Kreacher detected an unknown guest.”

“Ha! I knew it!” Harry flung his arms around Severus’s waist and smiled up into his face. “Thank you, Severus. This was wonderful.” He stood on his toes and kissed Severus on his cheek, ignoring the watching crowd.

Severus said gruffly, “It was Mrs. Weasley’s idea. Thank her, if you must.” Really, all these people made this room much too warm. His cheeks were burning.

“Oi, Harry, old sod. Good to see you. ‘Bout time the missus let you out of the house,” George said, bounding up to Harry with a noisemaker in one hand and a drink in the other.

“Watch whom you’re calling ‘missus’, Mr. Weasley,” Severus warned.

The one-eared Weasley just grinned at him. “Why, look at you, Severus. Marriage has been good to you. You’re positively…glowing,” George said innocently, batting his eyes at him.

Severus felt the blood drain from his face. He knew he couldn’t be showing; he was only two months gone! Had that blasted woman told…? He could see from the way George eyed his belly that she had. Furious at this betrayal, he pushed through the crowd to find Molly Weasley.

Harry was right behind him. “Severus, don’t.”

“Don’t tell me what to do, Harry. We demanded that woman keep this a secret and she went and told that chatterbox son of hers!” he hissed in a low voice.

Harry grabbed Severus by the arm and pulled him up the short flight of stairs, away from the partygoers. Severus had warded the upper flight so that no one could reach it except Harry and himself. The bedrooms were safe from interlopers and spies.

Once they found Harry’s bedroom, Harry shut the door and warded it. “Listen, Severus. We can trust George.”

“Can we?” Severus fumed.

“Yes, we can,” Harry stated firmly.

“Oh, don’t tell me. These are your family and none of them would ever do a thing to hurt you. Is that it?”

“That’s right.”

“They might wish to hurt me, Harry,” Severus snapped.

“Severus, don’t you get it. They’re not just my family now. They’re yours. I told you that right at the beginning. Remember?”

Was that true? Severus kept interactions with the Weasleys at a minimum. During the last frenetic week of secret preparations with Molly, he’d gotten close to the Weasley matriarch, true. But that didn’t mean he was accepted by the others…did it?

Harry placed both hands on his bond mate’s face, staring him intently in the eyes. “Severus, they know that you’re important to me and that your baby is important to me, too. These are the people I
trust the most in the world to protect me and my family. And that includes you now. You’ll just have
to believe me on that,” he finished. His tone was firm and brooked no argument.

Severus sighed. “How you can still be so trusting about people after everything you’ve suffered at
the hands of the Dursleys is beyond me.”

Harry stiffened and pulled away from him. “What do you mean, what I’ve suffered? What do you
know about my time with the Dursleys?”

Severus thought back swiftly. Shit. Harry had never discussed with him the torment his relatives had
inflicted. “I saw your mind during our Legilimency lessons, remember?”

“That’s why you kept accusing me of being a spoiled, arrogant brat. That’s why you tore into me the
first time you saw me after I thought you’d been dead for years.” Those green eyes were flashing
again, baffled anger shooting from them.

“While I was conspiring with Molly, we discussed something of your relationship with the Dursleys.
They considered you to be a freak because of your magic, didn’t they?” That was close enough to
the truth without being an actual lie.

“That doesn’t mean I was tormented by them. You sounded like you’re talking about something
specific.” When he tried to answer, Harry held up his hand. “Severus, you’re really good at
deceiving people. Merlin knows you managed to trick Voldemort for years. But I knew you had
someone in the manor. You tried to pretend that you didn’t and blamed Kreacher for being senile.
But I knew.” Harry’s face went stiff. “And I know you’re lying to me now.”

“Harry, I’m not lying to you. Besides, is this the time for pointless accusations? You have a roomful
of people downstairs that are waiting for you to celebrate your birthday.” Severus stepped to the door
and waited for Harry to undo the wards. Lately, he’d found that Harry’s wards were so powerful he
had a great deal of difficulty getting through them. Another topic for discussion, no doubt.

The dropping of the wards caused a burst of noise, song and laughter to surge up the stairs. Harry
marched past him, visibly fuming. But by the time he reached the stairs, he had managed a pleasant
expression for his waiting fans and family.

The scene was chaotic, with various children running around chasing each other or stopping to stare
wide eyed at him. Why? He knew his glamour was in place. What in the world was so fascinating
about his appearance?

Hermione hugged Harry, turning to keep her stomach out of the way. She was six months pregnant
and showing it. “Harry! I’m so glad you could make it. Thanks for luring him out here, Severus.”

“It wasn’t hard, Hermione. You know how gullible Harry can be.”

“Oi! That’s hardly fair,” Harry protested. “I nearly kept you trapped at the manor, you know.”

Fleur Weasley came up to Severus with a tray of champagne held in one dainty hand. “‘Ello, ‘Arry!
‘Ello, Severus! ‘Ave something to drink. This is some of the finest French champagne. None of that
silly English wine that tries to pass for it.”

Severus looked longingly at the champagne. With his condition, he couldn’t indulge nor give a
plausible reason why he wasn’t drinking.

Harry solved the problem by neatly sagged two flutes. “I’ll just hold yours, Sev. Thanks, Fleur!”
Ron came up to Harry and they went off, Ron ribbing about Harry’s creeping years and how it
wouldn’t be too much longer before he had to give up Quidditch.

Severus bowed his head. “Mrs. Weasley.”

The blond Frenchwoman gave a tinkling laugh that caused the heads of several males in her vicinity to swivel in her direction. Identical delirious smiles creased their faces as they unconsciously drifted towards her. “Oh, not Mrs. Weasley! Please call me Fleur.”

“Very well...Fleur.” Idly, Severus considered how many women of his acquaintance were named after plants—Poppy, Lily, Petunia, Pansy, Lavender, Pomona and now this French woman with enough veela in her ancestry to cause nearly every man around her to become drooling idiots. He wondered if such names were part of the European or wizarding custom.

“I must say I was veery surprise to hear you were alive. I was certen as anyone you were as dead as that Dumbledore.”

Gracious, this woman had all the tact of Hagrid when he was roaring drunk. “The news of my death has been greatly exaggerated,” he gritted.

She peered at him, oblivious to his discomfort. “Where are the scars Molly mentioned? You can show them to us. They can’t make you look any worse.”

“I have no wish to frighten the children, not even you.” Before she could process the insult, he pushed past her, searching for Harry. There wasn’t enough veela in this woman to make him tolerate her for a single instant—not without several stiff drinks in him.

He found Harry in a corner chatting with a tall youth he vaguely recognized. The man had sleek red hair and a muscular build akin to that Viktor Krum. He was wearing tight Muggle trousers, jeans like those that Harry favored. Over a cotton tee-shirt he sported a loose jacket in bright green.

The man seemed very interested in his bond mate, bending closer to catch something Harry said, flashing an easy smile at some murmured comment. Severus didn’t care for the way he was standing next to Harry and decided to find out who this stranger was.

The man looked up as Severus approached. “Snape! Cripes! So it is true!” he said with astonishment.

“And who might you be?” Severus snapped.

“I’m a member of the family. Obviously. Who else could I be with hair like this?” he said with a lopsided grin.

“Severus, this is Charlie Weasley. You remember him, right?” Harry asked.

Charles Weasley? It had been years since he’d seen this youth but his face came back along with his name. This close, he could see the man was undeniably attractive. His fine-boned face was graced by eyes the dark blue of a late summer sky. The nose was delicate without being effeminate. Standing next to Harry, they presented quite the handsome couple. It made Severus’ stomach churn to see them together.

The man looked at Severus coolly without the slightest hint of apprehension. “Well, I have to say this is a shock. There were stories that you were alive but I wasn’t sure what to believe. So, Harry, it’s true the two of you are married?” he asked, turning back to Harry.

Harry shrugged. He wound his arm around Severus’s waist. “It’s true, Charlie. It’s been four months now.”
“I’ll be damned. Never thought I’d see the day this would happen.”

“Why do you seem so astonished? Surely you’ve had time to get used to the news,” Severus probed.

“Things can get pretty hairy when you’re working with dragons. Sometimes there were months at a time that I didn’t see a newspaper or get an owl. And when the news finally came from George, well, frankly, I thought he was just having a go at me. You know the way George is,” Charlie said with a shrug. He took a deep pull from his beer for emphasis. “Who’d have thought it, eh? Severus Snape getting married to Harry Potter!”

Severus peered at the bottle. Had they ordered in bottled brew for the festivities? He had left much of that to Molly Weasley, stipulating only that Harry’s favorite desserts and food be on hand. Of course, being as this was a social event, there would have been many comestibles provided to suit the various tastes.

“Life has a way of throwing funny surprises, Charlie,” Harry said quietly. Severus couldn’t tell what he was thinking. But he felt that Harry was bothered by the conversation and wanted it over.

The man laughed, showing off very white and even teeth. That annoyed Severus even more. Until very recently, he had never bothered to do anything about the yellow tinge to his dentures; he had dismissed such fripperies as silly vanity. Only when he’d made efforts to seduce Harry had he bothered. That was when he discovered that no amount of spellwork could erase years of dental neglect. Even now, his teeth still had a faint lemony cast to them.

“Oi, Charlie! You enjoying the party?” There was George again. He slung an arm around his brother. This close, Severus could indeed see the resemblance between him and the one-eared Weasley.

Before he could question George about his brother’s presence, the older Weasley had gone off with George, talking avidly about some of the man’s newest joke creations. Severus wanted to follow but Harry tapped him on the shoulder.

“What was that all about?” he asked softly.

“What was what about?”

“Don’t play dumb. You were pissed at Charlie. Why?”

“I just thought his shock at our marriage was grossly exaggerated and in poor taste.”

Harry tilted his head. “You could be right,” he said slowly.

“What?” He was often right. It was rare to have Harry admit to it, though.

“I don’t know what it is. But I got the feeling—that he was interested in something more than conversation.” Harry flushed and took a pull from his champagne.

“And that bothers you? I would have thought you’d be flattered by having another suitor wash up on your doorstep.”

That type of comment would have set Harry off a few months ago. Now he just gazed at Severus coolly. “I just wondered why he would hit on me when there are so many other good-looking blokes in the crowd.”

“So many…whom do you mean?”
“Well, there’s Kingsley Shacklebolt. He’s got that muscular, mysterious, sultry thing going for him and that booming voice like liquid smoke and some people find bald men sexy beasts. And Icarus Diggle isn’t so bad. He’s a hell of a lot more rugged than his dad and that tenor voice he’s got definitely could send tingles down a man’s spine.”

Severus’s brows drew together. He knew he was frowning forbiddingly. But he couldn’t seem to help it. He hadn’t wanted people from the Ministry at this party. But Arthur had insisted these were men that he found reliable, ones who had been substantial players in the last war against Voldemort. If they couldn’t be trusted, then who could? “Icarus Diggle is married.”

“So am I and that didn’t stop Charlie, did it?” Harry grinned at him and took a swig of his drink.

Severus wondered why Harry hadn’t put himself among the listing of attractive men—or Severus. Perhaps he didn’t see Severus as being handsome. Then again, there was no reason why he should. Old, ugly and greasy—that was Severus Snape and when he stood next to handsome men like Charlie, he knew it acutely.

All at once, he felt an unaccountable weariness. His feet swelled up easily if he stayed too long on them and he was feeling the pinch now. He wanted to slip away quietly but Harry wouldn’t want to leave now. Perhaps he could suggest it in half an hour…

“Harry, you lump! Come over here and blow out your candles!” George cried.

Harry was jostled and grabbed by his friends and family and shoved over to his cake. Severus thought he was going to be ignored, which suited him just fine. But he felt his hands being clasped and looked down to see the twins staring up at him.

“C’mon, Severus! They’re cutting the cake!”

“You should see it! It’s got three steps…” James babbled, tugging him towards the confection.

“That’s tiers, James,” Severus corrected moodily.

“Make a wish, Harry!” “Make a wish!” Cries came from all sides and Harry bent down towards his cake. He appeared to think for a moment and then puffed out his cheeks and blew. The candles went out in a whoosh and cheers went up.

It seemed a great deal of fuss to be made over such a simple act. But when Severus saw the radiance of Harry’s joy, that seemed to encompass everyone in the room, he couldn’t begrudge it. Goodness knows, Harry’s early life had been completely bereft of such things as cakes, parties or presents. It wasn’t too much to grant him this and Severus was suddenly proud of the hand he’d had in bringing such happiness to his bond mate.

Presents were unwrapped with eager abandon. Among other things, there were mittens and woolen pants from Molly (“For winter, dear”), a pound of treacle tart from Ron, a bunch of dubious wrinkly balls from George (“Put ‘em to good use, mate”) and a book of *Hogwarts: A History – New and Updated Edition* from Hermione (“It’s never too early to get the children reading about it, Harry. Maybe this time you could actually read it, too.”).

Charlie shuffled his feet. “Sorry, Harry. This was all a bit last-minute, yeah? I didn’t have time to get you a gift.”

“That’s all right, Charlie. I’m just glad you’re here.” The older man beamed, ridiculously happy for someone who’d been so thoughtless. Severus still didn’t want him around Harry.
The party was in full swing with liquor flowing (and a watchful eye kept on the children). Lily got smeared with cake and fussed over by almost everyone; Timothy and the twins took a little bit of almost everything on the table.

During a quiet moment in the corner, Charlie said to Harry, “Oi, Harry. Where’s the kitchen? Been searching for it and can’t find it. Then again, I may be a bit sloshed.” He wagged his nearly empty beer bottle.

“I’ll show you.” Harry took Charlie to the kitchen. He swung around almost at once. “Charlie, why’d you ward the door?”

“I just wanted to give you this and didn’t want Snape giving me a hard time. He seems just as nasty as when we were in Hogwarts.” He pulled out a plain wooden box and handed it to Harry.

“What? I thought you didn’t get me a present.”

“Well, not for today, exactly. See, I’ve had this a long while. But it never seemed the right time to give it to you. Then you got married to Ginny and now Snape…” He shook his head, bemused. “Guess the timing was always off. So you might as well have it now.”

Harry hefted the box. Whatever was inside, it felt rather heavy. He opened it and his mouth fell open. Lying nestled in a bed of black velvet was a bracelet of shiny platinum, wound around with dragons in gleaming red. They had tiny green stones for eyes and he could tell just from looking at it that it must be quality work.

He looked up to see Charlie eyeing him. “Charlie, this is really… This must have cost a mint!”

The man shrugged. “Dragon keeping really pays, Harry. You should look into it.”

“Are you kidding? I’ve got enough to do keeping the children in line.”

Charlie frowned a little. “Well? Aren’t you going to put it on?”

“Oh, yeah. Of course.” Harry lifted it out. Just as he clasped it on his wrist, Charlie’s hand shot out and grabbed his. A wide grin, maniacal and triumphant, creased his face just as the world whirled around them both.

Harry’s final thought as the Portkey swept them away was Oh shit. Severus is going to be pissed.

TBC

This chapter was written again by the talented QueenBoadicea.
Chapter 42: Photographic Memory

“Harry?” Severus swung open the kitchen door and frowned. He was certain Harry had gone this way. He’d seen him taking that pushy dragon-chasing Weasley away but the two of them hadn’t returned in over five minutes. Feeling a distinct unease, Severus had gone in search of his wandering husband.

Nothing. But the cottage wasn’t that big and they couldn’t have gone to the upper floors. He whipped out his wand and began casting diagnostic spells. Other than a warding that had been recently laid on the door, he couldn’t detect any other magic spells that might have been cast recently.

The kitchen door opened again and he found himself face to face with Ronald Weasley. “Oi, Severus. Where’s Harry? Lily was fussing, says she wants her Daddy.”

“Harry’s gone and so is your brother, it appears.” He beckoned Ron over to him. “Did your brother seem strange to you, Ronald?”

The red-haired man’s face creased a little. “Just a bit. But then Charlie’s away from the family so much and he gets into weird company. The last time we saw him—”

“When was that?” Severus snapped, not willing to be drawn into a rambling reminiscence.

“About six months ago, before you and Harry got bonded.” A hint of anger sparked in the blue eyes
before fading. He clearly still harbored some resentment over the way the bonding had occurred. But
Severus had more pressing issues.

“How did Charles seem to you six months ago?”

“A bit distracted. A new brood of eggs was due to hatch.”

“Anything else?” Severus pressed.

“No, that’s it. What’s with the questions? And where’s Harry?”

“He’s not here. And your ‘brother’ appears gone, too. I don’t think that’s a coincidence or a happy
circumstance.”

The blue eyes narrowed, searching his face. “Something’s wrong, isn’t it? Fuck.” Ron spun around,
preparing to lunge out the door.

Severus grabbed him by the arm. “Where are you going?” he demanded.

“I’m going to tell Hermione to take care of the kids. Then I’m coming with you to search for Harry.”

“No, you will only alarm her and likely she will insist on joining you. You will waste precious time
convincing her she is in no condition for Gryffindor heroics.”

The redhead fumed but allowed himself to be dragged back into the kitchen. “So what do you
suggest we do, Snape?”

Severus threw up Locking and Silencing Charms, just as a matter of habit. They helped to steady his
nerves. “Who could have wanted to kidnap Harry?” At Ron’s incredulous expression, he amended
the question. “All right. Who could have wanted to kidnap Harry who would know about his
birthday party, impersonate your brother well enough to fool his family and be attracted to him?”

“Interested?” Ron yelped.

“Whoever was pretending to be your brother was conversing with Harry in a very intimate fashion
earlier. I don’t believe a mere kidnapper would bother with such a ruse. This man seemed genuinely
engrossed with him.”

Ron appeared to think the matter over. “I think…Colin Creevey,” he said slowly.

“Who?” Even as he asked, Severus turned over the name in his mind, rapidly flipping through his
mental files of names and faces. His memory was prodigious; in all his years of teaching and
studying, he never forgot the name or face of a student. “Colin Creevey, that annoying little toady
who was always following Harry around with a camera during second year?” he asked tightly.

“That’s the one. He came up to us in Rosmerta’s a few weeks back. He acted—queer, like he had
been lying in wait for us.”

“What did he say?”

The man’s brows furrowed as he tried to remember. “Not much. Talked about how he’d been with
his dad in the Ministry but got bored with it and quit. He also mentioned seeing Harry again, which I
thought strange ‘cause it sounded like he was talking about a recent meeting and Harry hadn’t told
me anything about it.”

This was it, then. This was the connection. Creevey’s father worked in the Ministry. How hard
would it have been for this Colin to obtain information about the Weasley family, procure some of
Charlie’s hairs even, if the older Weasley had visited his father now and again—perhaps as recently
as six months ago?

“He’s got Harry.” Both men spoke it at once, Ron with horror, Severus with grim anger. He could
feel his magic sparking in the air, the glasses in the kitchen shivering on the verge of explosion, and
forcibly reined it in. It wouldn’t do to let anyone else in the house know something was wrong.

He barked at Ron, “Where do you think he might have taken him?”

Now Ron looked lost. “No clue. We didn’t exactly keep in touch with Colin after graduation.”

“Then the first thing we do is find his father at the Ministry. Doubtless he will have knowledge about
his son’s whereabouts.”

“Right then. Hang tight, Severus.”

Ron grabbed Severus’s upper arm. The Slytherin felt the familiar jerk of Apparition and barely
managed to keep to his feet before he found himself outside the Ministry.

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The usual preliminaries had to be gotten through and Severus fumed while they were given their
passes (“Rescue Mission” indeed!), took the elevator and searched through the various department
rooms for a certain Berthold Creevey.

While they ran through the Ministry, Ron stopped to alert some of the Aurors. The Weasley man
filled them in on the probable situation, as they knew it. They wanted to know what Severus was
doing there; he certainly wasn’t a Ministry official. But Ron dismissed their questions with an
authoritative air that Severus grudgingly admired.

Some of the Aurors were immediately dispatched to Colin’s house. However, Severus was certain he
wouldn’t be hiding Harry there; that would be the first place anyone would look. Searching didn’t
turn up any other address for him. Severus let them search; he had his own plan.

He and Ron found Berthold Creevey in his office, arguing with another man, a small figure in a
chartreuse coat and scarlet derby. Berthold himself was a man with a broad chest, barrel-like legs and
a windy way of speaking.

“Now see here, Merkus! You can’t use that on Muggles! It’s dangerously close to an Unforgivable!”

“But it isn’t an Unforgivable, innit? Don’t be so fucking soft, Berthold!” Merkus said with a
mutinous sneer.

“Mr. Creevey, a word,” Ron said grimly.

“Ronald? That you? Where’s your dad?”

“He’s not here.”

“Busy celebrating Harry’s birthday, is he?” Berthold chuckled.

Ron ignored the question. “Mr. Creevey, we need to talk.”

“Not now, Ronald.” Berthold flapped a hand impatiently at them.
“Yes. NOW.”

The steely tone caught Berthold’s attention. He snapped his head up and seemed to notice, for the first time, the glowing figure with Ronald Weasley, one who practically radiated menace. “Um, Merkus, old chap. Give us a mo, will you?”

Merkus flicked his eyes between Berthold and Ron. He licked his lips and grinned at the idea of seeing his superior in trouble. “Why? You and me haven’t quite settled our business, have we?”

“Where’s Colin, Mr. Creevey?” Ron snapped, paying no attention to Merkus.

“Colin? That boy? Haven’t seen him in months, not since he started skiving off and finally quit.” He gave a bright smile but his eyes shifted ever so slightly.

“You are lying,” Severus said in a deadly tone that made Ron’s hair stand on end. Merkus suddenly recognized Severus Snape and went a trifle green. He decided he had urgent business elsewhere and used the distraction to sidle through the door and scurry away down the corridor.

Berthold blustered. “What? Now see here—”

Severus stepped into the room, the door slamming shut behind them. Ron winced as powerful, wordless magic surged out, warding the doors against entry and sound.

Berthold turned red in the face. “What is the meaning of this? How dare you just throw around magic in my office, you miserable piece of Death Eater trash! Get out of my office now, before I call the Aurors!”

Severus leaned on Berthold’s desk. “I have reason to believe your son recently infiltrated a private party thrown for my husband.” It was the first time he’d ever said the word aloud without sneering. He only hoped that Harry would be alive to hear it and know how Severus’s feelings had altered.

“Husband—you mean, Harry?”

Severus smiled. The expression caused the other man to shrink back in his chair. “Ah, you’re cognizant with the newspaper printings. Good, that makes this easier. Your son was enthralled with Harry Potter during their school years. He was working for you and through your auspice obtained personal information about my husband.”

“N-no, he didn’t. My son long got over his adoration of Harry Potter,” Berthold protested. Now even Ron was convinced of the man’s guilt as the stench of fear seemed to fill the room.

“Perhaps he told you what his ultimate purpose was, perhaps not. The fact is, he has impersonated Charlie Weasley and kidnapped Harry.” This was no longer a theory to Severus. The moment fear had sparked in the man’s eyes, he knew. He was happily prepared to cast an Unforgivable if it forced Colin’s wretched accomplice to cooperate.

Ron spoke sternly, trying to get the other man to realize just what a mess he was in. “Mr. Creevey, listen to us. This is Harry Potter we’re talking about. If word gets out about what your son did and that you helped him, your name is dirt here at the Ministry. The public will be hounding for your blood.”

“That is, if I don’t finish you off first,” Severus growled softly.

Berthold winced at the name, as most everybody did. Then he pressed his face into his hands. “It seemed just harmless curiosity. I didn’t know he’d go this far,” he mumbled.

“But you knew he was obsessed with my husband,” Severus said, his voice eerily flat.

“No more than everybody else is!” Berthold spluttered in protest, raising his head.

“I’m well aware of the public’s infatuation with Harry Potter. What I don’t understand is how you of all people failed to realize how dangerous your son’s interest in him had become. You are a Ministry official. Don’t they train you to recognize when curiosity grows into obsession?”

“Surely that’s the job of the Aurors, isn’t it?” Berthold flung at Ron.

“I spend more of time out of the office than in it, Mr. Creevey. I certainly didn’t stumble across your son—not as much as you must have done.”

“Enough of this.” Somehow Severus’s wand was in his hand. Berthold stiffened as a very powerful Binding Hex tied him to the chair. “Where has your son taken Harry Potter?”

“I-I don’t know.”

“I’m giving you until three.”

Berthold struggled in his invisible bonds but was unable to break them. “Ronald! Don’t let him do this! Stop him!”

Ron said, “Severus, maybe we should get the Aurors in here.”

“I thought you were an Auror.”

“Ah. Right. Well, that’s covered then,” Ron said in a placid tone, clasping his hands behind his back.

“Three.”

“Wha—wait! You were supposed to count!”

“Too late, Bertie,” Ron said nonchalantly.

“Legilimens.” Berthold stiffened and sweat broke out on his face as Severus dug into his mind.

Severus straightened. “I know where they are.”

Harry awoke slowly. The room swam sickeningly when he opened his eyes and he quickly shut them again. But the brief glimpse he’d had told him something was wrong so he squinted, allowing sight to filter in little by little.

Above him was a wooden ceiling, high with crossbeams meeting in an X. There was a weird chemical smell in the air, akin to potions but much harsher, that made him wrinkle his nose. The windows were high but barred and shuttered against the light.

He was lying in a broad bed with crisp linen sheets covering him from his chin to his feet. The chamber was very spacious but it wasn’t the cottage or Grimmauld Place. Where was he? And more importantly, how the hell had he gotten here?
Harry took a deep breath and tried shuffling through his memories. But they were curiously missing. He’d been at the party…and then here. The party. Here. Additional effort produced a total blank. Shit, had he been hit with a Memory Charm?

He scanned his surroundings, hoping to get a clue as to where he was. Harry was puzzled and then shocked to see pictures covering the walls, pictures of…himself?!

The photos were everywhere; there wasn’t a single clear space that didn’t have an image of himself on it. Pictures of him at the Gryffindor table in Hogwarts. Pictures of Quidditch games. Pictures of him with the children. Official photos of him in fancy dress at Ministry parties. Scads of pictures with him, Ron and Hermione. Pictures of him with Ginny—only Ginny’s face was removed, viciously scratched in some photos, slashed to ribbons in others.

“Harry, you’re awake.” The deep voice came from his right. Harry swung his head around carefully and smiled in relief to see the face of his bond mate.

“Severus? Wh-what happened? How did I get here?”

“You were kidnapped by Colin Creevey. I managed to rescue you.” The man laid his hand on his forehead. “How do you feel?”

Harry tried to sit up but failed when the room lurched around him again. “Queasy.”

“Here. Drink this.” Severus bent forward, his hair falling over his face. He brought up a vial of a colorless liquid to Harry’s lips and Harry gratefully swallowed it. His head felt better but now there was a queer lethargy in his limbs. As Harry tried to move, he realized he was unable to.

“Severus—I-I can’t move my arms,” Harry fretted.

“Really?” Severus sounded oddly unconcerned.

Harry looked sharply at his husband. Something had been nigglng at his mind and suddenly he knew what it was. “Severus…where are your scars?”

Puzzlement flickered through the black eyes. “Scars?”

“Yes. The ones on your face. Why can’t I see them?”

“I cast a glamour over them. I didn’t want to alarm you when you first woke up.”

“But I’ve been seeing your scars for weeks now.”

Severus shrugged as if he didn’t think it was important. But the gesture was off and the truth hit Harry, leaving him even sicker. “You’re not Severus.”

“Harry, just relax. I’m not going to hurt you.” He swept off the linen duvet. To his horror, Harry realized that he was naked underneath the sheet.

A horrible suspicion arose. “It’s you, isn’t it, Colin? It was you at the party, too, pretending to be Charlie.”

Those dark eyes gazed at him fixedly as the man pulled up his robe and dropped it on the floor. Harry’s flesh crawled as nude flesh was revealed, the cock jutting rigidly, already shiny and leaving a sticky trail on the lean stomach.

“Colin, I know it’s you. Severus doesn’t go skyclad under his clothes. Just stop this and I’ll see to it
that the Ministry doesn’t punish you too badly.”

The other man didn’t answer. That crazed light was in his eyes again and he positioned himself over Harry’s body.

“No!” Now Harry knew what the other Gryffindor wanted, what he’d intended all along. He strained to escape but his limbs refused to obey. Concentrating all his power, he aimed his magic at Colin, hoping to send the man flying into the nearest wall. If possible, he wanted to send him through the damn wall.

But his magic didn’t come. Instead, a fiery pain lanced up his right arm so that he screamed in pain. When he regained his breath, he gasped, “Wh-what did you do to me?”

The other man’s face twisted in an ugly smirk. Even that looked wrong, nothing like Severus’s familiar sneers. “You’re supposed to be the greatest wizard of the age, Harry. I know how powerful you are. Did you think I wouldn’t take precautions?” He reached down and lifted Harry’s limp arm, showing the dragon bracelet on it.

“I had this made a few months ago, at considerable expense, I’ll have you know. It’s not just a Portkey. It effectively binds the magic of any wizard who’s wearing it and only the giver—that’s me—can remove it. Too clever by half, eh? Not bad for a Gryffindor.” He chuckled and the obscene, high-pitched sound curdled Harry’s stomach.

“No one knows where we are except my father. Even if he tells, the wards won’t let anyone else except teachers and registered students.”

“Colin, don’t do this. You’re going to be in enough trouble as it is. When Severus finds you…”

“Teachers and students?”

“Yeah. I don’t just run occasional columns in the Prophet. That’s freelance work, not really enough to pay the bills. So I opened up a photography studio. I teach photography to wizards and witches. I even learned about Muggle techniques for those who are interested. It all pays surprisingly well. This,” he waved his hands at the walls, “is my private room.”

“But how did I get in here? I’m not a teacher or a student,” Harry demanded. Keep him talking. Keep him talking until Severus gets here. Harry had no doubt Severus would be the one to come for him. He just had to play for time.

Colin sat back on his haunches. He appeared unconcerned about his nudity as if he had all the time in the world to carry out his scheme. “I was carrying you. The wards will let anyone else in as long as they’re brought in by a willing member of the staff or a student.”

He ran a hand down Harry’s chest. “Now relax, Harry. I’ll make this good for you, I promise.”

Harry couldn’t move but he shuddered with an increasing sense of panic. “You can’t! Colin, don’t you remember the terms of the Vow? I can’t give myself to anyone willingly besides Severus! If I do, I’ll die!”

“I am Severus, Harry. At least for the time being.”

“How did you manage that, anyway? And how come you don’t have Severus’s scars? Polyjuice makes a person look exactly as he is. You look the way Severus did before he was bitten.” Harry knew he was just rambling now. He didn’t really care how Colin had managed to get strands of his husband’s hair. But he’d seize on anything to keep Colin talking.
“He was always picking on Gryffindors in school. I thought imitating him might be a chance to cause trouble for him. So I managed to get strands of his hair by using a Summoning Charm back in fourth year. I just never really had a reason to use them before now.”

Harry shook his head. Really, it was frightening the way the rest of his body didn’t respond. “Colin, I know it’s you. You can’t fool magic like that. Why are you even doing this? What the hell do you hope to gain by it?” he pleaded.

For the first time, rage flared in the false black eyes. “I want to show you what you could have had, Harry Potter! I was faithful to you in Hogwarts! I was more loyal than a Hufflepuff, just as brave as any other Gryffindor, sneaky as a Slytherin and I think all this proves that I’m as smart as any Ravenclaw! Hell, I even joined Dumbledore’s Army for you! But first you turned to a redheaded girl like your mother, which I thought was truly bent. Then you get shackled up with Severus Snape!”

“And you know I couldn’t help that, Colin.”

“I know the story; Snape tricked you. But you could have said no. You could have refused to go through with the bonding. And there was no reason for you to marry him afterwards!”

His face crumbled. “Why did you do it, Harry?” he whined. “Did you actually want that greasy bastard?”

Harry inhaled and exhaled slowly. He had to remain calm, no matter what. It was clear Colin’s sanity was teetering on a cliff and he couldn’t risk sending him over the edge.

“Colin, what does it matter now? The bonding is done, the Vow is permanent and unbreakable. And it’s been years since we were in Hogwarts and I haven’t seen hide or hair of you until this year. Why all this and why now?”

“Severus’s” face contorted and went red with rage. Spittle flew out and flecked Harry’s face and glasses. “Because I wanted to make myself someone you could admire, Harry, someone you could see as an equal. In school, I was just this stupid little kid who trailed after you with a camera. I was a joke. Oh, yes, I was! Don’t even try to deny it!” he yelled when Harry opened his mouth.

“But afterwards, I was ignored, shunted to the side. Hardly anybody would talk to me. I meant nothing to them—especially you!”

“I bounced around from one job to another and all anybody had to say to me was ‘What was the great Harry Potter like?’” he said in a fawning shrill voice, as if mimicking a love-struck fan.

“Finally, I found I could make a living at something I was good at… and I was very good at it. You have no idea how many pictures I took of you and your little friends. The ones in this room are nothing compared to what I’ve got in storage.” He gave another high-pitched asinine giggle.

Harry spoke softly, looking into the other man’s eyes. “Colin, I didn’t realize you cared for me so much. I thought it was just hero worship. I used to get that all the time from practically everybody in school except Slytherins. How was I to know you wanted me that way when you never said anything?”

“For fuck’s sake, Harry, I followed you around like that ugly mutt followed Hagrid! What did I have to do, paint it out on the sky for you?!’’ Colin snarled.

“I’m sorry that I didn’t know, Colin. But this isn’t the way to handle things. What happened to us going out for drinks?” Harry asked with a smile, hoping to placate him.
“I tried that. You weren’t interested. Too busy mourning your dead wife and cozying up to Snape. Well, all that’s done with—”

Colin stopped short and his eyes narrowed in concentration. “Fuck,” he snarled.

Hope flared. Harry tried to keep Colin from seeing it. “What is it? What’s happening?”

“Someone’s battering at the wards. Too bad. I wanted to take my time. Guess that’s no longer an option. Oh well.” He spread Harry’s legs.

Harry wanted to scream but he wouldn’t give this little prat the satisfaction. He only hoped that Severus kicked his narrow arse and that he got to see it.

A surge of magic, powerful and deadly, filled the air. The walls of the room rippled and the photos blasted from them in a hail of paper. Colin yelped as the pictures turned into sharp-edged arrows and tore bloody paper cuts over his exposed skin. He fell off the bed just as the door blew off its hinges.

For a split second, real and fake Snapes confronted each other and each man froze at the sight of his doppelgänger. The true Severus was the first to recover.

Colin Summoned his wand but he was no match for the wizard who had triumphed in dozens of duels and survived Voldemort’s two wars. A jet of blue light flew from Severus’s wand and Colin was unconscious before he hit the floor.

Ignoring his prone body, Severus came running over to Harry. “Harry, Harry, my love, are you all right?” He stroked Harry’s hair, raking his exposed body with his eyes.

“Severus. I…he gave me something.” Hang on. Did Severus just call me love?

“What?” The ebony eyes, so blessedly familiar, acquired a terrified expression. Severus began frantically searching in his robes. “I have a bezoar stone—”

“Not a poison. It just immobilized me. I can’t move from the neck down.”

“The stone will neutralize any such drug. Open your mouth.” When Harry obeyed, he placed the black stone between his lips.

Harry swallowed, grimacing at the feel of the pebble being squeezed down his throat. However, his immobility immediately left him. He sat up in bed and was swept into his husband’s embrace.

Harry gasped for air as the wiry arms seemed to crush him. Then Severus was kissing him fiercely and Harry wound his arms around the lean back, caught in the tide of emotion he could sense coming from his husband, his own mind whirling in shock.

_He loves me. Merlin, I don’t believe it. What should I say? Do I love him?_

He wanted to talk about this with Severus. But he became aware of other voices in the room and he opened his eyes to see Ron and several other people he recognized from the Ministry. Becoming self-conscious of his nakedness, he whispered to Severus, “I hope you brought an extra kit.”

The man pulled back to glare at him. “I was more engaged in coming to your rescue, you silly brat.” The old nickname made Harry grin. Seeing it, Severus snapped, “Get your wand and Summon your clothes, idiot.”

Harry tugged at the bracelet on his arm. Sure enough, it wouldn’t come off. “Mm, I can’t. This
bracelet inhibits my magic. He bought it especially and he’s the only one who can remove it.” Severus didn’t need to know that he’d put it on himself. The man would tear into him for his trusting stupidity and Harry didn’t want that now.

Severus narrowed his eyes at the ornate bracelet. He had the sense not to touch it or attempt any kind of magic on it. Merlin knew what spells were laid on it to prevent removal by another party. “Very well. I suppose we need to wake up this little shit and get him to remove this.”

Harry’s clothes were Summoned and Severus stood in front of him, holding up the sheet to hide him from view of the others. Harry dressed quickly, acutely aware of that dark-eyed gaze on his skin the whole while.

Colin was awoken in due order. By this time, the Polyjuice had worn off and he was revealed in his true, shrunken form. He immediately began ranting and raving, alternately reaching out for Harry and cursing Severus for doing this to him. The Aurors held him back, gripping him tightly so he couldn’t Disapparate.

“Enough,” Severus said in a subterranean growl. “You have kidnapped my husband and will stand trial for your crimes. But first, I want you to remove this monstrosity on his wrist.”

“And if I don’t?” Colin muttered, surly as a first year.

Yellow teeth were bared. “I know curses that make the Cruciatius feel like a feather tickle. I will happily tell them to the Aurors and let them work you over.”

Colin yelled, “They won’t! It’s illegal! My dad won’t stand for this!”

“It’s your father who gave you up, you felonious little flobberworm!” Severus snapped. “He’s in as much trouble as you so don’t expect any help from that quarter. It’s only by cooperating with the authorities that he can hope to keep out of Azkaban. I suggest you follow his example.”

At these words, Colin seemed to crumble up like a wadded piece of parchment. He began crying, in great gulping sobs, and the embarrassment of seeing his emotional collapse made Harry cringe.

Severus thrust his wand under his chin, sharply enough to bring Colin’s crying to an abrupt stop. He bored into Colin with eyes cold and hard as iron. “You may indulge in hysterics another time. Remove this infernal piece of jewelry at once.”

Colin seemed hypnotized by that stare. Slowly he reached out and pulled at the circlet around Harry’s outstretched wrist. Immediately the bracelet slid off as if it had been greased with butter. Severus levitated it over to the custody of the Aurors. “Careful how you touch that,” he murmured and Ron quickly Transfigured a napkin into a small bag. The bracelet dropped into it.

After that, Ron and Arthur agreed to take care of all the preliminaries in processing the prisoner. Harry could come to the Ministry tomorrow to give his statement against Colin. Right now, Harry wanted nothing more than to go home and the Aurors indulged him. In any case, they were too busy gathering up all the incriminating photos from the floor and walls.

Severus knew this wasn’t normal procedure. But for once he had no complaints about the Chosen One receiving preferential treatment. He pulled Harry close against his side and they left the Ministry officials to their business.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
The kidnapping made all the papers. Given that Harry was right at the center of the action, it was impossible to sweep something this big under the rug.

“POTTER POUNCED ON BY PREVIOUS PROTECTOR!”

“OBSESSED CHILDHOOD FAN TURNS EVIL STALKER!”

“CHOSEN ONE CHOSEN AND BETRAYED BY TRUSTED GRYFFINDOR CLASSMATE!!”

The first one, riddled with alliterations designed to draw the public eye, was courtesy of The Quibbler. Witches’ Weekly was responsible for the next title page, complete with the requisite fawning over and ghastly concern for the Golden Boy of the Wizarding World. The last rag, with all those superfluous exclamation points, came from the Daily Prophet. Throughout the article, the fact of Colin Creevey’s house was mentioned several times, as if to point out how treacherous Gryffindors could be.

Severus thought he detected a special malice in it. The pestiferous Rita Skeeter strikes again. The article went on to detail the shock from Colin Creevey’s former classmates and the disgruntled students of his photography class; many of them were asking for their money back and demanding the Ministry make reparations.

Far from what Harry expected, Severus didn’t want the debacle kept quiet. No, he was actually
gleeful about the whole business. Let the entire Wizarding world see that Gryffindors could be as criminally minded as Slytherins and that one of them had tried to hurt their Golden Boy. He also hoped the exposure would teach Harry a lesson.

“Why the devil didn’t you tell me about Colin Creevey?” he stormed.

“I wanted to tell you. But then you flew off the handle—typical of you, I might add—accused me of sleeping around and we got into a row, didn’t we? After that, we stopped listening to each other—as usual. Then you got all flustered because of your Parseltongue kink and attacked me,” Harry pointed out with more than a hint of smugness.

“I do not get flustered,” Severus huffed. He would be the first one to admit he had a temper. That didn’t mean he lost control like a five year old.

“No. You get overcome,” Harry put his hand to his forehead and pretended to swoon.

Severus stalked off, fuming, listening to Harry laugh behind him. His ruffled pride was only slightly appeased by hearing that Colin had received a modified sentence—he was to go to St. Mungo’s for treatment of mental illness. If Severus had had his way, the miserable creature would have gotten life in Azkaban with no chance of parole.

Still, he’d been glad to return to Grimmauld Place after that terrible scene he’d stumbled on. Harry had been rather less so. The birthday in his cottage had reminded the Gryffindor of its hominess and congeniality. Taking the time with Molly Weasley to make the preparations had brought Severus in touch with its domestic attractions, as well. He hadn’t been able to spend much time there before, thanks to those animated heads.

But they were gone now and no longer a concern. Severus didn’t need to stay in Grimmauld Place. He’d only wanted it because he wanted its library. But now that he had access, he could go there whenever he wanted if he ever required a peek at the dusty tomes. He had to admit that the library hadn’t held the charm that he had hoped it might.

Harry missed his home, surrounded by other former Hogwarts students in their down-to-earth little domiciles. Didn’t he deserve its simplicity, its peace and quiet after his horrendous ordeal?

So, with almost no discussion, the Potter family packed its bags once again and returned to their quaint cottage. Seeing the joy on Harry’s face upon their return gave Severus a strange jolt in his chest. He would do anything to keep that expression there from now on.

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It was hard to hold on to that resolution when he was throwing up for the seventh time in three days. The only thing that made this bearable was the anti-nausea potion he took. Poppy allowed it—up to a point—but she had sternly forbidden him from taking it every hour on the hour. “Nausea is perfectly normal at this stage in pregnancy. If you want to alleviate the symptoms, eat crackers. Stop taking potions every time you feel out of sorts, Severus!” she had snapped on one of her intolerable visits.

Harry stroked down his back and held his hair out of the way, while bathing his forehead with a warm wet cloth. “Better?”

“No, I am not better, Harry!” he snarled. It would have been more impressive if he didn’t have his head down the lavatory basin when he said it.

His bond mate had the nerve to chuckle. “This reminds me of Ginny. She used to be running to the bathroom every morning, afternoon and night when she was up the spout.”
Severus lifted his head and took several deep breaths before answering. “Potter,” he gritted through clenched teeth, “you are NOT helping.”

“Sorry, Severus.” The Gryffindor then surprised him by kissing him on his temple and carefully raised Severus from the floor. “Open your mouth.”

“Why?” Severus asked suspiciously.

“So I can use the Mouth Cleaning Charm.” Severus was surprised by this consideration but conveniently opened his mouth. The Charm was refreshing and he licked his lips appreciatively.

In spite of Harry’s arm firmly around his waist, Severus staggered as he regained his feet. With his new weight gain, his usual grace was lost. Some days Severus feared he would never get his svelte figure back, even after this parasite was taken from him.

“I swear, Potter, after this child is born, you are never touching me again.” Harry muttered something indistinct. “What was that?”

“You keep saying that. But somehow we can’t keep our hands off each other. Did you want to give it a go now?” He leered at Severus.

“I’m not exactly in the mood, what with this recent re-acquaintance with last night’s dinner,” Severus grumbled. “Besides, I don’t see why you should be so eager. I can’t be too attractive.”

“I told you I don’t care about your scars—”

“I am referring to this protuberance that precedes me by 15 minutes everywhere I go!” Harry squinted. “Your nose? Okay, it’s rather big. But you know what they say about men with big—”

Severus roared, “POTTER! I am not in the mood for levity!”

“Oh, you mean this?” Harry rubbed his hand over Severus’s bulging stomach. “It’s not that big. Besides, I rather like it,” he said shyly.

“You like that I’m nearly three stones overweight?!” Severus asked in disbelief.

“I like everything about you,” Harry said quietly, even as the Gryffindor flushed in embarrassment. It was endearing, though Severus would never say so. At times Harry seemed impossibly young, even after having three children.

As if trying to hide his sudden chagrin, Harry buried his nose in Severus’s hair, sniffing deeply. His breath caused a tingle to run over Severus’ skin. “I like the way your hair smells after you’ve washed it.” He nuzzled the older man’s neck. “I like the feel of your skin, your hands, your legs—so firm, strong and yet yielding to the touch. I like the way you said you loved me,” he murmured, pulling back to smile at Severus.

“No need to belabor the point. I believe you,” Severus muttered. He could feel his cock stirring. Really, these unpredictable surges of arousal were most inconvenient. He told himself he was hungry not randy. But he allowed himself to lean more heavily against his bond mate.

Breakfast was a noisy affair. The twins and Lily chattered like parrots at each other almost constantly. The girl spoke quite a few words now. But she frequently descended into an idiot babble that only her brothers seemed to understand.
The lion no longer scampered on the table. But Lily had developed her new trick of throwing it at Severus. If the thing landed in his lap, it wriggled around in a way that was truly disturbing before Harry would levitate it back into his daughter’s arms. Moments later, it was flying through the air again, landing on Severus’s head, winding itself in his hair and making the boys laugh like Peeves after playing a particularly buffoonish trick.

“Stop that, you pestiferous child. I gave you that toy to hold on to, not to muck about with. Keep that up and I will remove the Motion Charm from it entirely,” Severus threatened.

“Sev, it’s no good talking to her like that. She’s just over a year old. She doesn’t understand.”

“It’s never too early to instill discipline, husband.” The twins giggled at his endearment and Harry blushed again. Really, it was too wonderful getting that reaction from him. Severus tried to do it as often as he could—just to tease him, mind.

In spite of his earlier nausea, Severus found that he was ravenous. He polished off his eggs, a rasher of bacon, several kippers and a stack of lightly toasted wheat bread liberally smeared with lemon curd. No one else in the house fancied the curd, but Severus had developed quite a passion for it. The lemony taste was also reminiscent of a certain long-departed Headmaster…not that he would ever tell that to anybody. Severus wasn’t foolishly sentimental, like some.

He was sipping his second cup of tea when Harry pushed himself from the table. “Well, I’m off. Take care of yourself, Severus,” he murmured as he leaned down to kiss his husband’s brow. “Call me if you feel the least bit off.”

Severus rolled his eyes. “Yes, mother.”

“I mean it, Severus,” Harry said sternly.

“Yes, I heard you. Stop fussing! You’re going to be late,” Severus snapped.

Harry merely smiled and ran his hand over Severus’s hair. Thinking of what Harry had said about his hair flooded him with a wave of warmth. The grins on James and Albus’s faces showed that they had caught his reaction. Severus swatted away Harry’s hand and scowled.

It seemed his scowls had lost their ability to terrify. Harry merely kissed him again, this time on the lips. Just before he pulled away, Severus grabbed him by the hand.

“You be careful, too, Harry Potter.”

Harry looked surprised, then touched and he leaned his forehead against Severus’s. “Yes, mother.” He grinned and ran off towards the floo. Severus could have sworn the man was skipping.

He polished off the last of his breakfast and heaved himself to his feet. “Kreacher!”

The house-elf appeared, that gold locket banging against its narrow chest. “Yes, Master Snape?”

“Wash and dry the dishes and clean up the kitchen.”

“Very good, Master Snape. Where will you be?”

Severus lifted his eyebrows. The house-elf had never inquired after his whereabouts before now. His demeanor had acquired a grudging respect since Harry’s demands that Severus be treated with better care. But Kreacher hadn’t displayed any particular concern about his well being.
“I’m going to be in the basement. I have several orders on backlog that I need to fill.”

The house-elf shook his head. “You must not be in the basement longer than two hours a day, Master Snape.”

“Oh, mustn’t I?” Severus he crossed his arms as he leaned over the house-elf. He’d never managed to intimidate the decrepit servitor but that didn’t stop him from trying.

Sure enough, Kreacher was unmoved by his scare tactics. “Master Harry said it is bad for you to be cooped up for too long, given your condition. If you try to linger, Kreacher has been given orders to summon Madam Pomfrey.” The house-elf gave Severus one of its toothless grins. The Potions master had no doubt he would do it, if provoked.

Severus clenched his fists. He would have dearly loved to floo after Harry and shake him by the throat, demanding to know where the fuck he got off, siccing his new servant on him like a vicious dog. But that would waste valuable time, time that Severus couldn’t afford.

He released a long breath through his nose. “Very well, Kreacher. After you’ve finished with the breakfast things, take Lily up to her room.”

Lily may not have understood much of adult speech. But she knew enough to feel her abandonment. She started mewling. “No! Dada Sevvie! Dada Sevvie!” Severus ignored her. But when he tried to leave, her cries turned to abject wails.

Severus grimaced. “Will you stop crying, you wretched girl! Goodness, you’d think I was leaving for the Antipodes, the way you’re behaving.” When she didn’t cease, he lifted her out of her high chair. Thinking quickly, he Summoned a towel, draped it over his shoulder and patted her back until she burped and spat up a thin stream on to the cloth.

Immediately, her cries died down to hiccupping sobs and even those ceased as he carried her towards the basement. He was at the basement door when he realized the twins had followed them. “What do you two want?”

They shifted their feet, exchanging glances. “Well, we were thinking…we could help,” Albus blurted.

Goodness, another surprise. That made two and the day had barely begun. “Help me with what?”

“We could take care of Lily while you make your stuff,” James offered.

He knew the twins held a fierce loyalty towards their sister. But this level of devotion seemed suspicious. His eyes narrowed. “This wouldn’t be a dodge to muck about with my potions, would it?”

Albus looked abashed but James looked at him hopefully. “Can we help? Pleeeeesse? We won’t get in the way!”

“We’ll hold Lily!”

“We’ll keep her quiet!”

“We won’t drop anything!”

“We’ll be real careful!”
“Promise!” they both cried.

Severus rolled his eyes. “All right! All right! Anything to stop the two of you from whinging on about it. Kreacher, I’m taking Lily with me. Proceed with the rest of your chores.”

“Yes, Master Snape.”

Severus pretended to be annoyed with the twins but he was secretly pleased. The boys were taking quite an interest in potions, something their father had never done. Albus, in fact, was proving to be quite a dab hand. Neither of them could pronounce the more difficult-sounding ingredients but Albus could remember their colors and shapes faster than his brother, although it was James who more easily remembered what uses they could be put to when they were combined.

Working with quiet efficiency, he Transfigured a worn bench into a rocking cradle for Lily. Then Severus quickly set the twins to work in the far corner beside her. It kept them out of reach of any splashing from the cauldron and they couldn’t reach the higher shelves where the more dangerous ingredients were shelved. Once they were set to the task on lining up tools for him to use, they became obedient and quiet. Just the way he liked children.

The time sped by quite companionably. Every now and then he looked up to see a pair of bright green or hazel eyes staring at him over the lip of the cauldron. They asked him questions in their high, happy chattering voices and appeared to think over their answers. They might make a fine pair of brewers someday.

More of the Dragon Pox vaccine was needed and he worked diligently, unmindful of the passing time. Fortunately, for this particular potion, no lengthy brewing and cooling time was required. The cauldron contents cooled quickly and he began ladling them into their various flasks. Once filled, the flasks were placed into cotton-lined crates, ready for delivery to Hogwarts, St. Mungo’s and the various apothecary shops.

He glanced at the boys murmuring to each other. Their sister had long fallen asleep, content and sated from her meal and the quietude of the ample space.

It struck him just how much things had changed for him. When was the last time he’d had any children keep him company in dungeons who weren’t subject to detention? When was the last time a child had begged to stay in his presence?

His work as a Potions master did net him a tidy little income and his next payment was due today. On the spur of the moment, he decided that a special treat was in order. He cleared his throat and waited until the boys looked at him.

“I have to deliver some of these to certain shops in Diagon Alley. Would you care to accompany me?”

It was like he’d suggested taking them to a Guy Fawkes celebration. Their eyes lit up and they crowed, “Really?” “Can we?”

He shushed them in reproof. “Quiet. Remember, Lily is sleeping.”

They lowered their voices but began hopping on their feet in excitement. “Can we go to Fortescues?” Albus begged. “I want some chocolate custard.”

“I want to see Uncle George!” James demanded.

“We will take care of my errands first and then visit certain purveyances to make purchases if time
permits. We should, however, be home before your father comes back from the orphanage.”

“What about Lily?” Albus said, glancing at his sister, obliviously dozing in her bed.

“We can leave her with Kreacher. He can tend to her just as he’s done in the past.”

Albus ran his hand through his hair. He looked remarkably like his father when he did that; it was almost like having Harry in miniature. “I don’t know. Lily’s sad when you or Daddy isn’t here.”

“She’ll be fine, Al. We can’t take her with us if she’s sleeping.” James was practically dancing with eagerness. He knew that if they didn’t take advantage of this offer, it might not be repeated.

Severus considered the problem. Unlike Harry, he wasn’t completely trusting in the abilities of an old house-elf to take care of a small child, especially one as active as Lily had become. Now that she knew how to stand and walk, she did so constantly, so that either he, Harry or her brothers had to go chasing after her. Kreacher was capable but even he found his hands full.

“We will take your sister with us. I will Transfigure a baby carriage. I will also use a glamour on all of us so no one recognizes us.”

“All of us? Can I look like a redhead like Lily?” James asked, eager at the thought of a disguise.

“Why?” Albus demanded.

He looked down at the green eyes staring up at him. “Why what?”

“Why do you have to ‘guise us’?”

“Disguise. I am still…wanted by certain members of the Wizarding community. It would not do to let them know that Severus Snape is walking around with Harry Potter’s children.”

“Why? No one hurts us,” Albus pointed out.

His brother nodded in agreement. “Yeah. Everybody likes us.”

Because you’re Harry Potter’s children, that’s why. He didn’t bother to explain that. He merely said, “I’m not as popular as your father. So let’s get on with it before I change my mind.”

“Why don’t you just pretend to be Daddy?” James asked. Ever the practical one, this twin.

Severus smirked. “I doubt I could imitate your father well enough to fool anyone.”

The boys stood still while he made glamours for them. Now they looked like portly little urchins with indiscriminate mousy blond hair. Their little sister was given a slightly darker shade of red hair, closer to brown.

James and Albus laughed and teased each other over their new forms until Severus stopped them. “Now, I don’t want you two to talk much or call each other by your names. As I stated, I don’t want people to know who you are. If they do, they might easily guess who I am.”

Then Severus created a glamour for himself, one that put on a few extra pounds, enough so that he resembled the boys and girl. As an additional precaution, he cast a Notice-Me-Not Charm on all of them. Anyone trying to look at them would find himself interested in something else without realizing that his attention was being diverted.

Once satisfied with his preparations, he shrunk the waiting packages to fit into his pockets, picked up
the makeshift carriage holding sleeping child and gestured to the boys.

Wandering the aisles at Slugs & Jiggers always soothed Severus’s feelings enormously. The sight and smells of the various ingredients, rare and common, nestled securely in their jugs, flasks and glasses were a delight to his senses. He treasured this the way others would a visit to a sweet shop or a trip to the florists.

His transactions had proceeded far more cheerfully than in the past. Perhaps the presence of Harry’s children had to do with it. They raced around the store, looking at all the bottles, flasks and boxes filled with mysterious ingredients. Severus had heard Albus murmuring under his breath, trying to spell out the names he saw everywhere.

With his ample stipend from St. Mungo’s, they were able to take a side trip to Fortescues. Even though James had begged to be taken to Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes, Severus had put his foot down. Just because he was getting on better with Harry’s adoptive family didn’t mean he wanted to make a habit of visiting them.

Fortescues was bustling. August brought hot days as well as parents and children taking a break from shopping for school. There were lots of older children chattering excitedly about their upcoming first year at Hogwarts and speculating on what houses they would be in.

Although Severus was uneasy in crowds, this excitement was actually better suited to his anonymity. The parents were tired from shopping and the children too caught up in each other and their plans to bother a trio of anonymous brats.

The boys ate their ice cream but looked longingly at the other children. Like most wizarding tots, they were actually eager for school, wondering what it was like, desperate to get wands and come into their powers. They wanted to learn magic even if their minds weren’t quite up to the task of first year lessons.

Well, who was to say that children as young as they couldn’t be taught? Severus decided he would grant the boys a special favor when they got back home.

The cottage was very quiet when they returned, which was just how Severus liked it. “Children, would you like to learn wandwork?” he asked.

The twins flew into paroxysms of excitement, effectively rousing their little sister. She woke and began fussing. Severus patted her bottom and then wrinkled his nose at the smell wafting from it.

“First things first. Your sister needs to be tended to. Harry! Are you home?”

No answer. Well, perhaps it was too early. But Severus wasn’t going to deal with this if he didn’t have to. “Kreacher! Kreacher!”

There was no answering pop from the house-elf. “Blast,” he muttered. The boys were far too young to deal with this. It looked like he was going to have to handle it himself—again. Well, was he or wasn’t he a Potions master?

So the boys were forced to wait while Severus tended to their stinky baby sister. Severus gingerly removed the nappy. The mess wasn’t as bad as he feared and he swiftly Banished it. Knowing that baby skin was far more sensitive, he proceeded to clean it more thoroughly with a warm cloth. Lily
cooed and waved her arms, smiling up into his face.

“Yes, very easy for you to be cheerful. You’re not the one handling this muck,” Severus muttered. Lily laughed and grabbed for his fingers while he arranged the nappy around her groin area. When he was done, he held her up to his shoulder and sniffed appreciatively.

Freshly powdered and cleaned, she smelled quite nice. She was over a year old, no longer a baby but a growing toddler. Still, she exuded the fresh scent of innocence and baby flesh. It was heavenly really.

When he caught himself sniffing Lily’s hair, Severus jerked back. But it was not quick enough to keep her from winding a chubby fist in his hair. “Dada Sevvie. Nice,” she whispered, batting her lashes at him.

“That’s enough out of you, missy.” When the boys giggled, he glared at them. “Get to my room, you two.”

“Your room?” Albus was wide eyed at the prospect of seeing his stepdaddy’s forbidden chambers.

“You will take very good care while you are in my room. If you disturb or destroy anything with your antics…”

“We won’t!” James cried.

“And don’t interrupt me while I’m speaking!” The brats subsided but he didn’t trick himself into thinking that he’d cowed them.

He wondered if having a child of his own would be like this. It was a heady thought, one that beat back his memories of miserable hours spent regurgitating his food. No wonder Molly Weasley had had seven children if the experience of parenthood proved to be so rewarding.

Smiling to himself, he followed the running twins at a more sedate pace, cuddling their sister close to his chest.

TBC

This chapter was written by the ever talented QueenBoadicea.
Harry came home from the orphanage happy as a hippogriff in mating season. Since his kidnapping, the parents had been flocking to the orphanage.

Normally quite a few people popped in at the orphanage, ostensibly to look over the choices of children. But he didn’t fool himself. A lot of people came to see the famous Harry Potter. He had firmly secluded himself, telling Corabett that he didn’t have time to pander to nosy fans. They either adopted a child or they could sod off.

But this last month had seen an upsurge in parents wishing to have children for themselves. Perhaps knowing that their Chosen One had been in danger had given them a new appreciation for life…or perhaps they finally understood the reasons behind their champion’s efforts to secure happy lives for others. He didn’t know nor care. The children were going off to good homes and that’s all that mattered.


No answer. That was strange. The boys usually either came down at once or scrambled to cover up whatever new mischief they were working on. But this time it was eerily quiet.

“No? He pulled out his wand. His recent abduction had made him jumpy. Not so much for his own sake—he refused to blight his life with constant paranoia; there was no way he was winding up like Mad-Eye Moody. But the terror that a maniac might target his children was never far from him these days.

Harry proceeded up the stairs, listening intently with every stride. Once he reached the second floor,
he cast the Revealing Charm. Nothing showed but he could feel the tug of Severus’s magic coming from his room. Normally, Harry never disturbed him there; Severus was still quite private about his personal space. But the Slytherin might be able to tell him about his children.

He opened the door and was met by such a queer sight, he stood stock still in sheer surprise. Albus was waving a wand and pillows were dancing in the air. James was chasing around a pair of his own shoes, animated so that they danced and ran like live feet were in them. Lily was laughing her head off, entranced by the colored butterflies hovering just above her head.

For several moments, none of the occupants in the room noticed him. Then Severus looked up, feeling himself under scrutiny, and the butterflies disappeared. “Albus, give the countercharm now.”

Albus concentrated and muttered the countercharm. It took him four tries but the pillows finally dropped to the floor. James tried getting his shoes to stop dancing but it took Severus’s intervention for the footwear to lie still.

“Daddy, did you see? Did you see what I did?” Albus cried.

James added, “Me too. I made those shoes dance!”

“I saw. That was wonderful.” Harry crossed to his husband and kissed him on the cheek. “Hello, Sev. What’s going on? Is that your wand Albus is using?”

“I thought it time to teach your children spellwork, Harry.”

“Really? But they’re so young. They won’t go to Hogwarts for another four years yet.”

“I was managing spells when I was half their age. It doesn’t hurt to ground your children in the basics of magic. Think how far ahead of the other children they’ll be.”

Harry let a slow smile cross his face. “Yeah. Can’t hurt to be ahead of the other Slytherins.”

Severus scowled. “They might very well wind up in Slytherin, Harry.”

Harry thought back to his first year and the choice he’d made. “Then they definitely could use the boost. Thanks, Severus.”

The black eyes regarded him in astonishment. “You wouldn’t mind if they were placed in the House of the Snake?”

Harry shook his head and ran his hands through the twins’ messy hair. “They’re my children and I’ll love them no matter what. I’m not making my affections conditional on what house they’re in.” He stared at Severus, willing the man to understand what he was saying.

Sharp eyes dug into his with such intensity; Harry wondered if he was using Legilimency. He drew up the picture of their last lovemaking, Severus poised above him to keep the weight off his belly. The man had been so hot, his head thrown back, his black hair clinging to his sweaty brows, spilling over his shoulders and back.

A brilliant flush blazed across the sallow cheeks and Severus was the first to look away. Smirking at his husband’s discomfort, Harry called to the twins. “So, boys, what do you want for dinner tonight?”

“Meatloaf!”
“Tuna!”

“What about both?” he asked.

“Harry, you spoil these children too much,” Severus chided. “Just pick one menu and stick with it.”

“Why? They have preferences. What’s wrong with indulging them? I remember what it was like to go without. I want them to have what they want. It’s not like I overfeed them—I don’t want them winding up like Dudley did.” Harry scrunched up his nose in disgust.

Severus appeared about to argue. Then a thoughtful expression crossed his face. “Very well.”

Harry knew better than to question his good luck. It was rare he won an argument with Severus. “If we’re having different meals, it’ll take too much time and effort to fix it ourselves. Kreacher! Kreacher!”

The moments passed and the house-elf didn’t show. Severus said, “I was unable to summon him earlier, Harry. Is this normal?”

“Not since I told him to stop tormenting you.” Harry glanced at the twins.

James shook his head. “It wasn’t us, Daddy.”

“We didn’t tell Kreacher to do anything,” Albus added.

“Well, I’ll go to the manor and see where he is. Hold dinner until I get back, yeah?”

Severus gave him a wave as Harry left the room.

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Traveling by floo is a right mess, isn’t it? Muggle travel is cleaner than this, Harry groused as he brushed the soot off his pants. “Kreacher? Kreacher?”

There was no appearance by the house-elf and Harry began to be a bit worried. The wrinkled Black servitor used to be absent at times during fifth year but that was mainly because of his kowtowing to that wretched portrait.

“Kreacher?” Where could he be? Then Harry remembered the little cupboard the house-elf favored. Harry had offered to let Kreacher have one of the Black rooms. There were so many; it would have been no trouble at all to let the ancient servant have one. He had even said he would re-size the furniture for Kreacher’s needs.

The house-elf had refused, saying that such furnishings were not for him. He would no more dream of using one of his former masters’ rooms than he would becoming Headmaster of Hogwarts.

Kreacher had allowed Harry to pad his little cupboard with soft cloth wallpaper and given him a velvet pillow to lie on. More than that, he had categorically rejected.

Harry opened the cupboard. A terrible smell wafted from the opened space and he drew back, coughing at the stench. He knew that rotten-fruit smell, both achingly sweet and gagging sour, all too familiar from Bathilda Bagshot’s home after the old woman had been dead for weeks.

The house-elf was coiled like a little lapdog, the gold locket twined about his neck. He neither moved nor spoke.

“Kreacher?” Harry could barely bring himself to do so but he reached out and touched the little
The body was cool, the flesh dry and crackly to the touch. The eyes were closed and the expression oddly peaceful, more so than at any time during the house-elf’s life.

He wanted to bury the elf quietly. But that had not been what Kreacher wanted. Even when Harry had related how he had buried Dobby, the former house-elf of the Malfoys, Kreacher had stubbornly repeated his request:

“Kreacher’s head must be shorn off and nailed to the wall beside the others. Kreacher wants no other memento of his death.”

“What about your body, Kreacher?”

The house-elf had shrugged as if that were of no importance. “Burn or bury. It matters not. The best part of Kreacher will remain for all time, a shining light to other house-elves.

Shining light indeed. Well, this had to be done and quickly, too, before the flies gathered.

Magic was good for many things, including decapitation, but that didn’t make the task any easier. Harry barely held back the urge to vomit as he created a plaque, complete with Kreacher’s name, and fastened the house-elf’s severed head to it, alongside the other totems. The Slytherin locket was hung about his neck with a Fixing Charm so that it could never be removed.

He wanted to bury the body in the garden back home; there was none at the Black Manor. But it would be too weird to have the house-elf’s head in one place and the body at another. So Harry incinerated it in the fireplace.

There remained one final task and this would be the hardest of all.

“Harry, what is it?” Severus was alarmed. His husband seemed so grim, silent and white faced. His clothes stank, too, with an odor that hadn’t been on them when he left.

“Have you all eaten yet?” Harry asked, not seeming to hear Severus’s question.

“I wanted to wait for you. But the boys and Lily were hungry and once they started, I found myself terribly famished as well. I couldn’t restrain myself.”

“Oh. That’s good.” Harry paused and appeared to brace himself. “Severus, kids…I have something to tell you about Kreacher.”

There is a particular note the human voice gets when it talks about death. Severus had heard it too often to mistake it now. The twins weren’t as familiar with it, but they shrank closer to Severus’s knees.

“I’m afraid…Kreacher is dead. I’m sorry, boys.”

“Dead?” James whispered.

Albus’s bottom lip turned down and began to tremble. “Like Mummy?”

“It was very quick. I don’t think he suffered.”

They stared at him. Harry didn’t think that they had been very close to Kreacher. Given how
reclusive the house-elf had been, they couldn’t have interacted with him much outside of his duties. But there was no knowing just how hard they would take this news.

Then James and Albus ran up to him and wrapped their arms around his legs. “Daddy, are you all right?” Albus asked.

His children would never stop surprising him. They’d just had terrible news and they were worried about his feelings. “I’m fine, Al. Are you two okay?”

They looked at each other. “Did you nail his head to the wall?” James asked.

Harry grimaced. “Yes.”

“When can we go see?” he demanded.

“Merlin, what a bloodthirsty little rapscallion you are,” Severus said dryly.

James squinted at Severus, uncertain if he was being insulted or not. “What’s rapskal?”

“Rapscallion. It refers to an unruly, mischievous child, usually a boy.”

“Oh. That’s a bad thing?” James asked in a small voice.

“He’s just teasing you, James,” Harry answered.

James perked up. “So when can we see it?”

Harry rolled his eyes at James’s persistence. “Maybe another night. I need a bath.” A long one.

Severus murmured, “Mind if I join you?”

“Oh, I don’t need…” Harry saw the gleam in his husband’s eyes. “Okay. I wouldn’t mind a little company,” he said, grinning. “Kids, if you behave yourselves tonight, I will take you to see Kreacher’s head tomorrow.”

That won instant cheers from the twins and they made no fuss about going to bed early. In all likelihood, they would stay up for quite a while yet, talking excitedly about seeing the remains of the house-elf in all his gruesome glory.

For now, he and Severus would have a little alone time to themselves.

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He sudsed Severus’s back, luxuriating in the smooth skin. The cottage bathroom wasn’t as big as the one in Grimmauld Place. But its snugness meant that Harry had to sit very close to Severus. He found he rather liked that. “How have you been today, Severus?”

“Tolerably well. I find the nausea is much abated if I keep active.”

Harry nodded although Severus couldn’t see it. “Poppy said it was a good idea for you to keep busy for the next few months. Have you had any seizures?”

Severus stilled and Harry sensed that the question surprised him. “No,” the man answered slowly. “I have not suffered them for weeks, not since…” His voice trailed away.

“Since…?” Harry prodded.
“Since the night you and I had sex that second time.”

“Oh.” Severus seemed a trifle tense. Why, Harry wasn’t sure.

“Harry, are you all right?”

Harry heard the tender note in Severus’s voice and marveled. Just a few short months ago, Severus wouldn’t have cared about his feelings.

“I wasn’t really close to Kreacher. He wasn’t a friend like Dobby was and…Kreacher was very old. I suppose it was simply his time. I found him curled up in his little cupboard; he must have died in his sleep. In spite of what Hermione says, an old house-elf like Kreacher was fulfilled in doing his duty and I think…he died happy knowing that he’d served us to the best of his abilities.”

This wasn’t a subject Harry wanted to dwell on. “So what did you do today besides teaching the kids spells?”

“We took a little outing to Diagon Alley.”

“Did you? Any problems?” Harry carded his fingers through Severus’s hair, combing out any tangles he found.

“Not a one. I was able to use glamours that effectively hid our appearances. Your children were remarkably well behaved.”

“You mean our children, don’t you?” Harry murmured.

Severus twisted around in the bathtub to look at him. “Our children?”

“Of course.” Harry sighed in exasperation. “I told you, Severus. My family is going to become yours.”

“Does that mean that Ronald Weasley is my brother?”

Harry thought about that. “Well, maybe I wouldn’t go that far.”

“Thank Merlin.” Severus gave an exaggerated shudder of relief.

“Git.”

“Watch your tongue, Harry,” Severus sniffed.

Harry’s face creased in a wicked smile. “Sssshhhhehhhhhasssssa.”

A shiver ran over the fair skin. “Harry, please. Not now.”

He slid a tongue up Severus’s back, feeling his husband shiver in reaction. “Sssshhhhhlllllalaahhhiiiiisssshhhh.”

“Do you honestly propose to have sex here—in a tub?”

Harry slid his hand down his husband’s front and wrapped it around something slick, hard and firm that wasn’t a bar of soap. “Ssoooosshhhhh ittssssiiillll…”

“Harry, I refuse…oh…wait…that’s…this is so…ummmm…yes…oh yes…right there.”
They made quite a mess of the floor—inconvenient, with no house-elf to clean it up. But Harry had learned more than his share of household charms, what with three children to rear. And Severus was quite willing to let Harry have his own special brand of medicine should the Gryffindor come down with a cold.

All in all, a most happy end to a sad evening.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
Double Happiness

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Title: Scarred Souls
Author: Misty Moonlight/Co-author: QueenBoadicea
Pairings: Severus/Harry
Published: 12/10/2008
Summary: A widowed Harry must bond with Snape in order to save his daughter’s life. Harry’s young children scheme to bring their daddy and new father together, and form a new family, while changing the hearts of two scarred souls.
Warnings: Romance, Drama, Angst, Alternate Universe, Sexual Situations, Hurt/Comfort, M/M, Slash, Anal, Language, Humor, possible Mpreg, Bonding, Original Characters, Family, WIP

Chapter 45: Double Happiness

Arthur and Molly hurried up to Harry, George and Ron as they sat in the St. Mungo’s waiting room. “We came as soon as we heard,” Arthur panted.

“Well? What’s happened? Any news yet?” Molly asked, her eyes darting towards the silent door of the birthing room.

They all shook their heads. Ron looked frazzled, Harry rather grim, George like he was about to pass out. “We don’t know,” Harry murmured. “We haven’t been here that long.”

“Dunno. Feels like ages to me,” Ron muttered.

Arthur patted his boy on the shoulder. “You’ve been through this before. Waiting’s the hardest part. But it usually turns out well.”

Both Weasley sons and Harry exchanged anxious looks. Nobody wanted to remember what had happened the last time there’d been a birth among them.

Harry sat hunched over, his hands clenched between his knees. His thoughts were careening all over the place like a poorly made broomstick. How he wished he was with Severus right now, holding his hands, hearing his voice comment sarcastically on what was happening.

Only Severus wasn’t so sarcastic these days. He’d never lose that acerbic bite of his but he didn’t turn it on Harry and his family so much.
And now there was about to be another addition to the extended family. Harry wanted to smile but his stomach was flopping about with anxiety. Too much more of this and he was going to vomit or start screaming.

Why were they being made to sit out here? In the Muggle world, Hermione told him that fathers were allowed to be with their wives when they were giving birth. The Wizarding realm definitely had some catching up to do.

The door swung open and they all turned towards it as one, like hunter dogs scenting the prey. “Well?” Molly cried. No one else seemed to have the strength or courage to speak.

The medi-witch beamed, an oasis of calm in the midst of all their tension. “Where’s the father?”

“Here!”

She smiled at the man rushing up to her. “Congratulations, sir. You have twins—a boy and a girl. Would you like to come and see them now? The rest of you may come as well. But you must be out of the room in 15 minutes. They all need their rest.”

The new father nodded, too excited to say anything, and they all trailed into the quiet room. Singing flowers on the bedside, balloons with animated messages bobbing in the corner and bundles of fruit enlivened the room. But no one really noticed. They only had eyes for the exhausted figure lying in the small bed.

Alicia Spinnet-Weasley sat upright against the large pillows, proudly cradling her newborns. The babies looked incredibly tiny in her arms, both sporting bright flaming hair and identical sleepy expressions, making it impossible to tell which was the boy or the girl.

George sat down on the bedside and kissed his wife on her forehead. “How are you feeling, pet?”

“Like I just pushed two great big hairy Beaters through a wedding ring, that’s what,” she snapped, although she smiled as she said it.

Arthur gestured at the wrapped bundles, proudly noting the trademark red hair. “Look at them, Molly. Another set of redheaded twins.”

Alicia rolled her eyes. “I know. If they’re anything like George and Fred used to be, we’re going to have our hands full.”

Molly rushed to the other side of her daughter-in-law to get a closer look at her new grandchildren. “Oh, Alicia, they’re beautiful,” she sighed. “Absolutely perfect.”

“They should be. They’ve been baking long enough.” Everyone in the room laughed, breaking the tension. It was very clear why George had married this girl. Her sense of humor was a match for his own. With her, George need never mourn his lost twin brother.

They all talked, about what Harry was never quite sure afterwards. He couldn’t take his eyes off the babies. He knew their hair color would likely change, darkening to the true Weasley red, as they got older. But to witness them as they were now, with hair like fire, was truly wonderful. He only wished Severus was here to see them.

As if on cue, the door swung open and the tall, darkly clad man paused in the doorway. Everyone turned to look at the figure of the Potions master.

Harry smiled at seeing his husband. “Severus? I tried to reach you. But your note said you were in
Diagon Alley.”

“I was; there were purchases I needed to make. Then, by chance, I walked by the joke shop and found it had been closed for business. There were people lingering in the street and I overheard one of them mention that George had shouted something about his wife going into labor, demanded everyone leave the premises and had closed the shop. After that, I came here as quickly as I could.”

He strode stiffly to the bed, self conscious as always of his increased weight hidden under his robes, and stared at the new mother and her children, his expression unreadable. Alicia glanced up at him uncertainly. Even after all these months, her relationship with her former Potions professor remained tentative, at best.

George broke the strained silence. “Would you like to hold ‘em, Severus? If that’s all right with you, love,” he added.

She swallowed before nodding slowly. “Sure. I’ve been carrying them for almost nine months. Let someone else get the chance.”

“Oh no, I couldn’t—” But before Severus knew it, he was holding an armful of newborn babies.

He stood stiffly, practically petrified, a wrinkly infant in the crook of both arms. The Slytherin looked mortally afraid of dropping them and Harry had to choke back his laughter at his husband’s obvious discomfort.

Severus swallowed and stared down at the crumpled, flushed faces. “I see the Weasley red color is running true to form,” he ventured.

“Are you talking about their hair or their faces? You don’t have to lie. I know they look like wrinkled plums,” George said matter of factly. Alicia punched him on the arm. “Ow! Blimey, woman, that hurt!” he yelped.

Alicia glared at him. “Serves you right, George Thomas Weasley! Those are your children you’re talking about and I’ve just spent the last three hours bringing them into the world. So you show some respect!”

“What’re you gonna call them, Alicia?” Ron asked.

Harry realized that question had been on his mind too as he turned towards the woman in the bed. “The boy’s going to be Fred Arthur Weasley.” Arthur smiled foolishly while Molly sniffled. “The girl’s going to be Harriet Molly Weasley.”

Harriet? When all eyes turned to him, Harry flushed. This was something he hadn’t expected. He could tell that Severus was surprised, too, though his face remained immobile and he said nothing.


“It was my grandmother’s name,” she replied.

“Oh.”

George let out a guffaw at Harry’s disappointment. Alicia smacked him again. “Merlin, Alicia! Save your strength. You just came out of labor, you know!” he groused, rubbing his arm.

The medi-witch came back in. “That’s it, people. The 15 minutes are up.” Her glance took in Harry and she blushed a little. “It’s good seeing you again, Mr. Potter.”
“Um, thanks. Let’s go, Severus.” Severus handed the babies to the medi-witch who then deposited them in their cradle. No one missed the expression of profound relief that swept over his face as he rid himself of his burdens.

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After they came home, Severus was unusually silent. He was never what anyone would call chatty, even at the best of times. But now his mind was obviously elsewhere. When he was asked a question, he responded absentmindedly or not at all, needing the question to be repeated a few times before he heard.

James and Albus had lots of questions to ask about the new babies, including when they could go see them. Severus remained mute on the subject; it was like the birth had brought home to him exactly what he’d be undergoing in about half a year’s time.

After dinner, the twins played a game of Exploding Snap, keeping a careful eye on their curious sister, who giggled and laughed every time a card exploded. Harry pulled Severus across the room. “Severus?” he whispered in a low voice. “What’s wrong? You’ve been so quiet.”

“I’m usually quiet, Harry. You just have a hard time noticing, giving the noisiness of your offspring.”

“This is a different kind of quiet, Severus.” Without words, Harry cast Muffliato. He sensed it would be best to keep this conversation private. He nestled closer to where Severus sat on the couch. “You’ve been distant ever since we came back from St. Mungo’s. What’s on your mind?”

The pallid face shut down. Harry felt he understood Severus better by now. His bond mate wasn’t repressing emotion so much as trying to come to grips with it. Something was bothering Severus, something so profound he wasn’t quite sure how to put it into words.

Harry rubbed the Slytherin’s stomach. He couldn’t seem to stop doing it and he knew Severus loved the attention, no matter how much he tried to deny it. His bond mate didn’t acknowledge the gesture, only wrapped one long arm around Harry’s shoulders.

When Severus finally spoke, Harry was unsurprised by the topic. “Was the delivery…long?”

“You heard Alicia. About three hours.” He ran his hands in slow circles over Severus’s bump. “It’s different for everyone, Severus. There’s no predicting how long it will take with—anybody.”

“There are potions that can help speed childbirth with no harm to mother or fetus.” When Harry looked at him inquiringly, Severus admitted, “I have been reading up on the matter.”

Harry gave him a long stare. “Only reading?”

Severus sighed. “Very well. I admit I’ve also been working on modifying such potions to be used on wizards.”

“Aren’t there any already in use?” Harry asked. He had wanted to discuss the details of pregnancy with Severus before now. But the man had steadfastly refused to go over the subject with Harry in the past. It was like the whole business would be easier for him to deal with if they didn’t dwell on it.

“No. The phenomenon of wizards giving birth is so low that no one ever bothered to create one in the past.”

“Then…this potion you’re working on is experimental, isn’t it?” Harry said slowly.
“Rest assured, Harry. By the time I am ready for my ‘big day’, all the variables will have been accounted for and the potion will be safe for use.”

Harry raised his head to peer into Severus’s eyes. He had to remain calm so this didn’t degenerate into a shouting match that would send his husband away in a cold fury. “Severus, you’ve been dosing yourself for years with those anti-seizure and pain-killing potions.”

“I am no longer on them. I have not been taking them for some weeks now.”

“I know. But there’s no telling what kind of long-term damage they did to your body. I don’t want you risking your health by taking another potion just when you’re giving birth. Who knows what it will do to you?”

Grim finality and a spark of tension flared in the dark eyes. “Harry, in the end, it is my body. Surely the choice must be mine to make.”

Harry swallowed and tucked his head into his husband’s neck. “I just—I don’t want to risk losing another spouse in childbirth, all right?” he whispered fiercely. To his horror, a burning sensation crept behind his eyes and he squeezed them shut. He wasn’t going to cry. That would be too humiliating and Severus was right. This was, ultimately, his burden to bear and Harry had no right to get weepy about it.

The lean body stirred against his; he thought he felt the brief sensation of lips across his hair. “Harry, I’m not going to die. Don’t be so maudlin.”

The carping tone, so familiar, banished his misery. Harry blinked and surreptitiously rubbed at his eyes. Suddenly, Severus stiffened and sucked in a sharp breath between his teeth.

“Severus? What is it?” Harry glanced quickly to the children. Had Severus caught them watching? No, they were still engrossed in their game. So what—?

Severus clasped his hand and brought it back down to his belly. “Feel.”

Harry’s eyes widened. “Ooh. It’s kicking,” he whispered.

Severus’s expression was a combination of shock and awe. “It most certainly is. Oof! Merlin, is that normal?” he asked tightly.

“Yes. No. I mean, it’s different…”

“For every person. Yes, I’m beginning to see that,” Severus said. There was the thin edge of a sneer but it was wholly drowned out by the wonder that was changing his features with every new movement from their unborn child. It was like Severus was losing years, the young man he’d once been pushing himself forward. In spite of his scars, Severus looked radiant. Dare Harry say…happy?

Harry snuggled under his arm again, keeping his hand firmly on the swollen abdomen. “So we settled on Sheridan or Theora, didn’t we?”

“Yes, we did. What should we pick for middle names?”

“Got any family names you want to pick?”

Severus’s face went still again. “Not especially. My family wasn’t the nurturing type.”

“Oh. Well, I’m all out of names on my side.”
“Hmm. How about Leontyne for a girl and Barris for a boy?”

“Leontyne meaning ‘lionlike’, right?”

Severus smiled. “Very astute.”

“I like it.” Harry waited but Severus didn’t continue. “And Barris? I don’t know that one.”

“It means ‘son of Harry.’”

Harry swallowed. He didn’t know what to say. Somehow “thank you” seemed very inadequate. Fortunately, Severus didn’t seem to require an answer.

“Finite Incantatem,” Harry muttered.

Severus peered at him, obviously wondering what he intended. “Harry?”

He called to the playing twins. “Albus, James. Come and feel your papa’s belly.”

The boys looked up. Then they scrambled to their feet and rushed to Severus like he was holding candy.

“Is the baby kicking?” James demanded as he laid his hand on Severus’ stomach.

“It is! I can feel it!” Albus squealed.

Miffed at being ignored, Lily got to her feet and toddled over to them. “Jum, Alp! Cad gab! Pay cad gab!” she said with pouting determination.

“Come, Lily, feel this!” Al cried.

James scoffed. “Don’t be silly, Al. She won’t know what this is. She’s too little.”

But, whatever game her older brothers were playing, Lily wanted to be part of it. She tugged at Harry’s trousers until he picked her up. Then six small hands were placed on Severus’s belly as each tried to feel the baby kick. Lily laughed and cried unintelligible words every time she felt her unborn sibling stirring under her tiny hands. The boys were no less ecstatic.

Whatever the next few months brought, Harry hoped that Severus saw he would not be alone. He had the entire Potter family behind him. Harry would keep his last promise to Ginny and make sure he protected his family, including the child yet unborn. He would keep his Vow to Severus and love this child—and its “mother”—no matter what.

Nestling against Severus again, he kissed him lightly on the cheek as their children crowded close, filling the air with their happy, silly babble.

TBC

This chapter was written by QueenBoadicea.
Changes

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Title: Scarred Souls

Author: Misty Moonlight/Co-author: QueenBoadicea

Pairings: Severus/Harry

Published: 12/10/2008

Summary: A widowed Harry must bond with Snape in order to save his daughter’s life. Harry’s young children scheme to bring their daddy and new father together, and form a new family, while changing the hearts of two scarred souls.

Warnings: Romance, Drama, Angst, Alternate Universe, Sexual Situations, Hurt/Comfort, M/M, Slash, Anal, Language, Humor, possible MPreg, Bonding, Original Characters, Family, WIP

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Chapter 46: Changes

Harry knocked at the door. “Severus?”

No answer.

“Severus, please. Let me in.”

Still no answer. But Harry thought he could feel the man glaring at him through the door.

“Severus, don’t hide. I told you I don’t care. Besides, Madam Pomfrey told us it would be temporary, remember?”

When he was still met by stony silence, Harry’s patience evaporated. “Severus Tobias Snape, if you don’t open this door right now, I’m going to break down the wards and come in after you!”

That got a reaction. The door flew open and the scowling face of Severus Snape met him. “Harry, if you don’t get away from my door—”

“I know, I know. You’re going to hex me. Save it for the children. I’m not impressed.” He pushed his way past Severus and sat on one of the fancy chairs. He raised his eyebrows and waited for his husband to leave the door and join him.

Severus visibly fumed for a moment before slamming the door. “Am I to have no privacy in my own room?” he growled.
“Nope. Not when you’re seven and a half months gone,” Harry said cheerfully. When Severus crossed his arms and stared down his nose at him, Harry sighed. He stood up and crossed to his husband, grasping his shoulders.

“Severus, you’re pregnant now. Miraculous things are happening to your body. This isn’t something you should be ashamed of. You should embrace it.”

“EMBRACE IT⁉️” The man’s voice rose, outrage causing his eyes to bulge. “Potter, you sound like that dithering idiot, Sybill Trelawney. Next you’ll be telling me to open my inner eye and accept my internal femininity.” His voice wobbled alarmingly and he broke out of Harry’s arms and raced to the balcony window.

Severus leaned his palms and forehead against the unyielding panes. He looked like he wanted to escape into the snow-covered garden that lay beneath the balcony, but the cold prohibited him from opening the doors. Harry thought he heard a stifled sob but he wasn’t sure.

Harry hesitated. Everything about Severus’s posture screamed a desire for distance. But Severus had been hiding away in his room for three days now and Harry figured it was time to put a stop to this nonsense before he got any worse.

He edged closer to the man and wrapped his arms around his body. Severus stiffened but didn’t push him away. That was a good sign. It seemed only a short time ago that Severus had rejected physical contact, declaring that Harry was never to touch him without his permission.

“Severus, I don’t care that you’ve got a vagina. And no one else knows about it, not even the children. So what’s got you so upset?”

For several minutes, Severus didn’t answer. This position was awkward for Harry, half bent over as he was, and his back soon started to ache. But he was prepared to stay there forever until his husband voiced what had him so miserable.

“I can’t stand this, Harry.” The voice was so low that he had to strain to hear it.

“Can’t stand what?” Harry reached down and stroked the protruding belly in steady, soothing circles. “My body, my moods…everything is lurching out of control. Yesterday, when I patented my Hair Restorer Salve—”

“Yes?” Harry encouraged.

“I started thinking how I would have loved my mother to have seen this. How proud she would have been to know that her son contributed something useful to society! Then, when I realized that she never would, I started…weeping like a homesick first year!” Severus’s hands balled up like he wanted to punch his fists through the glass.

Harry said nothing for a long while. Severus knew these were female hormones at work. They had gone over this and one of the things that annoyed the Slytherin no end was repeating conversations when matters were already settled. Whatever he said next, he couldn’t go over old ground.

“I’m sorry you felt that way. I wish you had come to talk to me.”

“What good would that have done?” Severus snarled and he whirled around in Harry’s grip. The startled Harry suddenly found himself face to face with his furious husband, a suspicious wetness gleaming in the older man’s eyes.
“Because I know what it’s like to wish someone I loved could see all the happy moments in my life,” Harry said quietly. He forced himself not to shy away from the probing black gaze. What he had to say next would be really difficult; he had told this to no one, not even Ron or Hermione.

“Can we sit down, Severus?” he asked. “There’s something I want to tell you.”

Something like fear seemed to leap into the obsidian eyes. Then Severus’s face went blank again. Harry wondered what was bothering him but knew Severus wouldn’t speak about it now.

They sat together on the bed. The furniture in Severus’s room was comfortable enough. But every chair in it was built for one; it was like the man subconsciously discouraged anyone from getting too close to him.

Harry leaned his head against Severus’ shoulder. “When Ginny was…after she had given birth to Lily, she told me to take care of our children and to seek out love with another person. I promised her I’d take care of James, Albus and Lily and keep anything bad from happening to them. I couldn’t promise her…the other thing. I thought she’d be the only one I’d ever love that way, that no one could replace her.”

Severus had gotten stiffer with each word. He was so still now, he might have been made of granite.

“She said she’d be watching over me and the children. There were times when I felt such despair; I couldn’t believe that it was true. I felt that my precious Ginny was gone from me forever. So often I felt like crying—and I didn’t have pregnancy as an excuse,” he finished with a feeble attempt at a joke.

“What has all this got to do with my out-of-control emotions?” Severus asked, his voice flat.

“I think—no, I know that when I look at my children, something of Ginny survives in them. As time goes by, I feel that she is watching over me, looking at me and the children and you, and seeing my sorrows, my joys. If your mother cared about you, the way Ginny cared about me, then she’s proud of you, Severus Snape.”

“Thank you. That is so comforting,” he snapped back.

Harry grinned, perversely glad now that the man was his usual waspish self. “I’m proud of you, too.”

The slim eyebrows lifted. “You are?”

“You may think that I treated you badly by leaving you in the Shrieking Shack and maybe I did. But look at all you’ve accomplished on your own! You got better, set up a life and reputation for yourself making potions and medicines for St. Mungo’s. And I know that hair restorer you invented is going to make you pots of money.”

He placed a hand on the scarred cheek. “After I thought you were dead, I said this to the reporters and the Ministry and everyone who would listen: You’re one of the bravest men I’ve ever known. No one could have done what you did for the Order of the Phoenix if you weren’t.”

Severus didn’t speak but the tension in his shoulders relaxed a little.

Too much more of this and it was going to get embarrassing. Harry gave his husband’s hand a squeeze and stood up. “Can you come down now for some lunch? The children are afraid that we’re fighting again. Seeing you will cheer them up.”

“I doubt if seeing me has ever cheered up anyone, Harry,” Severus said dryly.
“Don’t say that to Lily,” Harry teased. “She adores you.”

Severus sniffed but Harry could tell he was pleased. He wound his arm around Severus, helping the man stand up. Now, more than seven months pregnant, he had trouble getting to his feet on his own.

Stroking his hand over the rounded belly, Harry thought of the growing child inside, the miraculous life that would make its appearance in two short months. The thought, as usual, made him almost giddy and at the same time deathly afraid.

Poppy had said there was a reason wizards gave birth so seldom in the Wizarding world. Magic could do only so much and the births rarely made it past the first trimester. They caused complications for both carrier and child. Many fetuses were spontaneously aborted. Other pregnancies put too much stress on the wizard, causing the deaths of both parent and child.

He’d meant what he said in August. He couldn’t bear to lose two people this way. There was something horrible about that, the way there hadn’t been about deaths during the war. Those had been tragedies. But in war you expected casualties. Childbirth should be a joyous occasion, not one that held danger with both lives hanging in the balance.

Harry said nothing of this to Severus. He’d just coaxed the man out of his bad mood and his room. He wasn’t risking sending Severus back into the dumps again.

Severus paused when he saw the twins and Lily waiting at the bottom of the stairs. All three of them were looking up at their fathers with nearly identical expressions of worry.

“Dada?” Lily mumbled, her tiny fist jammed into her mouth. She had a tendency to do that when she was nervous, Harry had realized.

Severus straightened and managed to make it to the bottom of the staircase unaided, Harry trailing behind him. He leaned down to pat Lily on the head. With the unborn baby placing so much weight on his back, he could no longer pick up the youngest Potter without severe strain.

“I’m all right, children. Your father just worries needlessly. He’s like a fussy old woman sometimes.”

“Oi! You were the one hiding—”

Severus rolled his eyes. “Fuss, fuss, fuss. You’re turning into Molly Weasley, you know that?”

The twins giggled. “That’s what we always say, Daddy Sevvie.”

Harry couldn’t let this slide. “Glad to see you’re recovering, Mother.” He laughed and threw up a Shield as Severus let fly with a hex.

********************************************************************

In the following days, Severus felt more like his old self. However, he found it increasingly more difficult to keep from unleashing his temper as the days progressed. Being cooped up at the cottage was making him stir-crazy.

Harry feared to have him lumbering about in public, lest he be taken unaware by an enemy or disgruntled Potter fan. Harry was leery about him taking Polyjuice in his condition and a glamour wouldn’t change the fact that he was four stones overweight. Due to his large size, Severus couldn’t negotiate the streets as easily as he once did; he’d be a sitting duck if it came to a wandfight.

But Harry did his best to make it up to him. Now that Severus’s room was no longer off limits, they
made love there, if not as often as they had in earlier months. Severus was more and more reluctant to engage in touching when his clothes were off. Today would be the first time they’d touched in days, since before his latest…change.

He stripped and practically flew under the duvet, pulling it up to his chin. “Nox,” he growled. The room was swept instantly with darkness.

“Lumos. Look, Severus, I want to see you.” Harry crouched on the bed, naked as the day he was born. Severus admired that trim form even as he envied its fitness.

“I don’t want you to see me,” Severus hissed savagely. “Nox.”

“Lumos.” Harry sighed with frustration. “Severus, I told you. I like the way you look.”

Severus whipped down the cover so his huge belly was exposed. “You like this? Potter, I look like a beached whale!”

“You’re beautiful.” When Severus scoffed in disbelief, Harry rested his hand on the distended belly. “Every part of you is beautiful to me.” He grinned. “Especially your new parts.”

Severus closed his eyes, hoping Harry couldn’t see the worry that suddenly stabbed him. Upon seeing his new vaginal opening three days previous, he had been so shocked that he had fainted. It was one thing for Poppy to warn him of the event. It was another to find a new opening on his body that hadn’t been there the previous night.

Harry had been terrified at finding him unconscious in the bathtub. Upon recovery, Severus had flown into hysterics, as bad as any woman. It had taken almost 15 minutes for him to calm down enough to tell Harry what had ailed him.

To his credit, Harry hadn’t laughed. He’d been worried, surprised—and then undeniably curious. He had demanded to see the new space between Severus’s legs. That’s when Severus had thrown him off and vanished into the sanctuary of his room.

Now Harry was saying that he liked his recent bodily alterations. Did his husband like the fact that Severus had acquired a female part because he cared about Severus as a whole—or because it made Severus more like a woman?

“Severus?” There was a warm hand running over his face and neck. Harry had no trouble touching his scars. Indeed, he never shied away from them now. When he didn’t open his eyes, soft lips began kissing him all over his face.

“Mmm, my husband is so dear to me.” The hand was easing down his neck, rubbing his shoulders and easing down his chest.

“Harry, I’m not sure…”

“Shhehheettteeeaaaaallll.”

Oh god. In spite of being over seven months up the spout, Severus suddenly found his body quivering with arousal. He opened his eyes and tried to glare. “Harry, you’re not being fair.”

Green eyes sparkled mischievously. “Hhsssshhhlliiiiillll?”

“Speak English and stop this at….oh.”
Harry’s tongue was flickering over his body, trailing down over his throat and chest. Parseltongue was spitting from him as he hovered over Severus. That tongue seemed determined to miss no part of him as it swirled over his shoulder, down his arm and over to his nipples.

Harry didn’t spend too much time lingering over his nubs. Severus was too sensitive there these days, claiming the slightest breeze made his nipples ache. He squirmed away from that tongue—and then squirmed back, eager to feel that wicked licking. His nubs were flicked until they were throbbing points of need.

“SSSSshhhhhsssiiiiimumuuuuussssshhh.”

Now Harry was rubbing his cheeks and mouth over Severus’ swollen bump. There was no pausing at all as Harry eased down the hill bulging in Severus’s middle and made his way past the limp cock.

In spite of the fact that Severus could feel arousal, it didn’t translate to erections any more. Yet he shivered as Harry pressed his thumbs on either side of the wet labia that lay between his penis and anus.

“Harrrryyyyy…”

A wet firmness swept around the folds and Severus moaned, clutching the bed sheets. When the tongue tickled his new-made clitoris, he let out a yell that must have rattled Harry’s tonsils.

“Ssshhhhhh.” Was Harry telling him to shush? Severus didn’t think so. Then again, thinking was hard to do when Harry was putting his tongue to such good use.

Well, this was one benefit of being with a man who’d been with a woman. While Harry had learned the fine art of fellatio from his husband, this knowledge was something he could only have gained at the hands of his departed wife. Severus offered up a silent thanks to the woman’s memory, even as his whole body shook from Harry’s attentions.

This was wholly different from anything he’d ever experienced in his life. The sensations centered in one part of his body but radiated until it was like he could feel Harry’s tongue everywhere.

Severus squeezed his eyes shut as the tongue plunged deeper. His hips were thrusting without conscious thought, striving to bring himself closer to Harry’s talented mouth.

Dimly he was aware that wild, whispering pleas were coming from him. But the loss of dignity didn’t matter. Once more he was a willing captive to the magic that was Harry Potter.

When the orgasm came, it took him completely by surprise. It was more of a gradually building wave than the seismic disturbance he was used to in the past. But the force of it was powerful and he found himself shrieking as it lashed through his body.

Harry lifted his head. Severus blinked at the sight of him, rising from behind his stomach like the moon. His face was shiny and something fluttered in Severus when he saw Harry licking at the juice covering his lips.

He was even more astonished when Harry shuffled close to him. The hard length was probing at his outer lips before he understood what was happening. “Harry?”

There was that Cheshire cat grin. “More great things about girly parts…natural lubrication.” He slid into him and Severus’s eyelids fluttered. “And multiple orgasms.”

Multiple WHAT?!!
Harry began to rock against him and, in the next hour, proceeded to show Severus exactly what he meant.

There was a warm weight under his arm, next to his heart. That was his first sensation. The second was a feeling of utter contentment, something he couldn’t recall experiencing for months, possibly years.

As Severus opened his eyes, the room swam back into view. Had he slept or merely dozed? Late afternoon winter sunshine drifted wanly through the drawn curtains. It couldn’t have been too much later than when they had come to his bed.

Harry had worn him out but this lassitude went beyond physical satiation. There was a lightness that hadn’t been there before, an easing of the fear that had plagued him for the last three days.

The emotion rippling through his body was so foreign Severus had a hard time understanding what it was. With his usual analytical attention to detail, he tried to process it and formulate a logical conclusion.

Happiness.

That’s what it was and the very thought caused a slow stretching of his lips. Soon there was undoubtedly a sappy grin on his face, one that he allowed only because he was sure no one could see it, not even his husband.

Severus turned his head to look at the scruffy black hair tucked under his arm. Harry breathed with barely audible snores, interrupted by soft snuffles and smackings of his lips. A hint of a smile curved his mouth, filling Severus with the almost irresistible urge to kiss him.

He ran his fingertips through the tuft of rumpled hair on top. Harry stirred a little but didn’t awake.

Oh sod it. Severus shifted carefully downwards and kissed Harry softly on his lips. Daringly, he let his tongue come out and lap at the closed mouth like a cat lapping cream. The lips parted sweetly under his but remained slack.

“Umm, that feels nice, Severus,” Harry slurred, opening those startlingly green eyes of his.

Severus jerked back. “You’re awake,” he muttered.

“Don’t stop because of that.” Harry wound his arms around Severus and beamed at him. The expression made him seem no older than the little boy he’d once been. But Severus couldn’t recall ever seeing the young Harry smile like this.

That smile, that radiance he had seen given to so many others, was at last his. His eyes began to burn and before he could stop himself Severus found himself crying.

Harry’s smile instantly disappeared. “Severus? What is it? What’s wrong? I didn’t hurt you, did it?” He drew up alongside his husband, peering into his face with touching concern.

“No, you didn’t hurt me. I-It’s nothing,” Severus gritted, grinding his palms into his eyes, determined to scrub out the tears.

Smaller hands grasped his. “It’s okay. I understand. I’m happy, too.”
When he could trust himself again, Severus pulled his hands away and stared into that searching grass-green gaze. “You are?”

“Yeah.” Harry tilted his head. “Isn’t that strange?”

“Very. But stranger things have happened.”

“You coming back from the dead, for instance.” It was said lightly, but Harry searched his eyes, clearly worried that he might have stepped over the line.

The thought of his near-death experience might have once roused Severus to anger. No longer, and he marveled at how much had changed in less than a year.

“I’d gladly suffer Nagini’s bite again if it brought me such happiness as this,” he murmured quietly.

At that, Harry kissed him, a swift peck on the lips. “And on that note, I’d better get up and get supper ready.” He jumped to his feet and quickly dressed while Severus ogled the lean legs and plump buttocks.

Harry turned back towards him. “Do you want to come down to the table or should I bring supper up to you?”

Severus stretched out in the bed, feeling quite decadent. “I’d prefer it if you brought my meal here. Supper in bed sounds quite…delicious.”

Understanding sparked in the emerald eyes. “I’ll try to hurry then.

In spite of that, he didn’t leave without a few quick and not-so-quick kisses. Severus lay back on the pillows, already anticipating his husband’s return with sustenance in hand.

TBC

This chapter was written by the ever talented QueenBoadicea.
**Blessed Be**

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Chapter 47: Blessed Be

“Daddy! Daddy! Wake up!” The words were accompanied by a loud pounding on the door.

Harry opened his eyes at once. Even years after the war, the habit of waking up at the first sign of trouble never quite left him.

“Daddy! Are you in there?”

“Don’t be stupid. Of course he’s in there, Al.”

The children were banging on his door. Why?

Oh right. It was Christmas. That meant it was a senselessly early hour of the day, no doubt. Squinting at the dial, he saw that it read barely 6 o’clock. He’d better get up before the noise woke his husband. Since he had been four months pregnant, Severus liked to sleep in.

He turned and looked at the pillow next to his. No Severus. “Severus?”

The man himself came out of the toilet, an odd look on his face. “Harry…”

Harry lethargy vanished and he sat up. “What is it, Severus?”

“I’m… My water just broke.” Severus seemed almost eerily calm. But Harry could see the hint of panic in the dark eyes.
For a terrible second, Harry’s mind went completely blank. Shit, this couldn’t be happening, not yet, not today, of all days!

He scrambled out of bed. Now was not the time to get hysterical. He took a deep breath to steady himself. “All right. We’ve prepared for this. Any contractions?”

“A few. Nothing very strong. There’s back pain but mild for the moment.” Severus stared longingly at the rumpled sheets.

“Fine. Try to rest. I’ll hold off the kids, tell them you’re really knackered.”

Severus didn’t answer. He only nodded and Harry lowered him carefully to the bed.

The battering on his door resumed. “DADDY! WAKE UP!”

“I’m up, James! Hold your horses; I’m getting dressed.”

There were faint whisperings behind the door. Harry cast Sonorus so he could hear them.

“Do we have to get dressed?” Albus whispered.

“No and don’t ask. We’ll be stuck.”

Harry raised his voice. “I want you two in your day clothes. No running around in your pyjamas. We’re going to be visiting the Weasleys later.”

“Is Mione going to be there?” Albus cried.

“Yep. She’s bringing Rose Weasley, too. So you boys be on your best behavior.”

The boys scampered off, talking excitedly about the day and the prospect of seeing their baby cousin. Harry sighed and turned back to Severus. The man lay on the bed, staring up at the ceiling. He might have been alone in the room for all the attention he showed Harry.

Harry sat gingerly beside him and laid his hand on one of Severus’s. The flesh was icily cold but he wasn’t sure if that was abnormal or mere nerves. “I’ll be back as soon as possible.” He had a flash of inspiration. “I’ll call Mum. She’ll get here and take the children back to the Burrow with her.”

“Harry.”

“Yes?” Harry squeezed Severus’s hand.

His husband closed his eyes briefly. “Nothing. Call Mrs. Weasley.”

“Actually, I’ve just got a better idea.” Harry Summoned quill and parchment and wrote a short note. He cleared his throat and cried, “Winky! Winky!”

A little house-elf with enormous brown eyes popped into view. “Harry Potter is calling Winky? Oh, it is good to see Harry Potter again! Winky has not seen him in ages!”

“Another devoted fan of yours, Harry?” Severus asked dryly.

“Something like that.” He smiled at the happy house-elf. “Hello, Winky. Look, I need you to do me a favor.”

Winky straightened to her full height. It wasn’t very impressive since, like most house-elves, she only
was about three feet tall. “Winky is happy to do anything for Harry Potter. Any house-elf would gladly die in Harry Potter’s service!”

Harry stared, taken aback by her passionate declaration. He had been acquainted with Winky briefly but hadn’t had much contact with her since his time in Hogwarts. He knew her even less than he’d known Kreacher. Where did this fanatical devotion come from? “Um, that won’t be necessary, Winky. What I want is really simple.”

He held out the piece of parchment, folded over and sealed. “Take this to Molly Weasley in the Burrow at St. Ottery Catchpole. Let her read it and, if she has any message for me, bring it back.”

“Right away, Harry Potter, sir!” She bowed low and popped out.

“That was quite a display,” Severus drawled. Harry looked over to see him staring at the spot where Winky had stood, a familiar smirk on his lips. “What is the cause of such insane loyalty?”

Harry shrugged. “No clue.”

They were interrupted by Winky’s reappearance. “Well?” Harry asked.

Winky bowed again. “Molly Weasley says that she understands and she’ll be appearing here in about an hour.”

“Good.” Harry hoped he had calculated properly. He didn’t like to leave Severus alone for that long. But Poppy had been firm in stating that, once Severus’s waters broke, nothing much would happen for quite a while. There was no need to panic and call out the troops at the first sign of contractions.

“Is there anything else Winky can do?” The little house-elf hopped from one foot to the other. Then she grabbed Harry’s hand and kissed it passionately.

“Whoa!” Harry snatched his hand back. “There’s no need for that, Winky!”

Her long ears drooped. “Has Winky offended? Bad Winky! Bad Winky!” She grabbed her head and began bashing it on the floor.

“No! Stop!” Harry grabbed her head. “Winky, I don’t understand. Why are you acting like this?”

She staggered and rubbed the knot rapidly swelling on her head. “Winky and other house-elves is very grateful to Harry Potter. Winky is just showing her appreciation.”

“Grateful? For what?”

“Why, for burying Dobby and giving him a proper gravestone with his name on it! No wizard has ever done such a thing for a house-elf. We is all so very touched by Master Harry’s noble gesture.”

She pulled up a corner of her toga, which looked like an oversized cloth napkin, and blew her nose noisily on it. “What Winky wouldn’t give to live in such a household with such a generous, kind master—who might bury her properly when her time comes.” She peeked at him above the corner of her toga and then wiped her eyes again, overcome with emotion.

Merlin’s beard. This was the last thing he wanted to think about now. But it seemed he would have to have a talk with Minerva about freeing one of the school’s house-elves for his own personal employ.

“Thank you, Winky. You’ve been very helpful. I won’t forget this,” he promised.
She blinked watery brown eyes and smiled at him. “You won’t? Oh, that is so wonderful! Harry Potter is a good master, yes he is!”

It took Harry a few minutes to get rid of her and he heaved a sigh of relief when she was finally gone.

“Another precious follower of the Boy Who Lived.” Severus shook his head. “Harry, you have the oddest friends.”

“No more than Dumbledore did. Just following in his footsteps, I suppose.”

“If you get the crazy idea of hiring werewolves to help around the cottage, I will leave this house.”

Harry laughed at the dry statement, glad that Severus was able to make jokes at a time like this. It helped brightened his mood.

He gave his husband a quick peck on the lips and promised to be back soon.

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Harry and the children ate a quick breakfast. The twins were almost too excited to eat and Harry didn’t have the heart to prolong the suspense too much. Besides, the sooner he got them out of the cottage, the better. His earlier happy mood was fast disappearing. He was terrified of being away from Severus. Who knew what might happen in his absence?

“Where’s Papa?” Albus asked. It had been decided that it was too confusing for both Harry and Severus to be called “Daddy”. So they had settled on “Papa” for Severus. He hadn’t accepted the name but he hadn’t rejected it either. It was the closest he came to thanks.

“Papa’s very tired this morning. He’s sleeping.” Harry didn’t like lying to the boys. But there was nothing they could do to help and telling the truth would only worry them.

“But he won’t get our presents!” James protested.

“Yes, he will. He’ll be just as happy to get them later. In the meantime, let’s go unwrap our gifts, okay?”

They needed no further encouragement. The boys ran off pell-mell while Harry brought up the rear more slowly, holding Lily.

The living room held one of the loveliest trees Harry had ever seen. An ten-foot-high blue spruce stood in the corner, twinkling with enchanted lights, strings of Bertie Bott’s Many Flavor Beans floating around it, fairies dancing and darting between the branches and a star gleaming with wizard magic on top. The last thing Harry had wanted was a gnome tied to the upper peak; it would only scare the children.

The boys had no appreciation for the tree’s beauties. They dove under it, dragging out their presents. “There’s one for me…from Papa,” Albus said, the awe plain in his voice.

“Me too,” James added, already tearing into the black wrapper. Severus hadn’t been able to bring himself to enter completely into the holiday spirit; his gifts bore nothing other than black unadorned wrapping paper and name tags.

The tissues were ripped away, revealing a book of plants in bright colors with their names underneath for Albus and a book of animals and their various uses in potions for James. Frankly,
Harry thought the books a little advanced for children. But his sons appeared very pleased, flipping open the covers and leaning over the pictures, calling out the names they read to each other. The hours they spent with Severus over his potions must be doing them some good.

But it was their gifts from Harry that had them yelling and cheering. “Look, James! I got a broom!” Albus cried.

“She too!” They were small brooms, not capable of lifting them more than a few feet off the ground. But that didn’t matter to the twins. Both boys straddled their broomsticks and immediately began zipping along the room, barely avoiding their father and little sister.

Lily began to whine at seeing her brothers moving out of reach. Harry quickly distracted her with Severus’s present to her: a set of building blocks that magically made new words every ten seconds. Lily wasn’t old enough to read but the changing patterns and colors soon turned her attention from her brothers’ wild antics.

Harry had given her a stuffed phoenix, the red-and-gold colors shimmering as it hovered above her head. The moment he had seen it for sale, he’d known that’s what he wanted for her. As soon as she was old enough to understand, he’d tell her about the tall, bearded, weird old man who had shaped his past and his future and the special bird that had been the Headmaster’s familiar.

Suddenly the floo erupted and Molly appeared. She brushed the soot from her clothes, swept Harry with a swift, searching look and gave the children a warm smile.

Albus swooped on his broom. “Look, Grandmum! Look what Daddy gave us!”

“Oh my! Don’t you two look the picture! Well, are you ready to go? You’ll have to leave the brooms behind, I’m afraid. You can’t carry them with you through the floo.”

The twins protested. But, in the end, their eagerness to enjoy Molly’s homemade puddings, cakes and pies outweighed any desire to fly. Molly picked up Lily. She didn’t make a fuss about it and neither did Lily. But Albus noticed.

“Aren’t you coming, Daddy?” Albus asked, his green eyes wide.

“I’ll catch up with you in a little while.”

Albus frowned. “Are you and Papa coming?”

“Like I said, in a little bit. Molly probably has some of her special Christmas cake waiting. If you go in first, you get first slices.”

That definitely got their attention. “Yay! First slices!”

Molly smiled at them before flicking another glance at Harry’s. “Harry, do you need…” she murmured.

“I need you to keep the children happy and busy. We’ll be fine here.” He patted Lily on the head. Molly hesitated. “I’ll take care of them, Harry,” she offered, her voice soft so the twins wouldn’t hear. “You may count on me. Let me know—”

“I will.” He waved and watched them disappear in flashes of green fire.

Harry practically flew up the stairs. His husband lay exactly where he’d left him, flat on the pillows.
But now his breathing was very deep as it hadn’t been an hour ago.

He had to hand it to Severus; the man was almost completely silent. But Harry could see the perspiration on his forehead, the worrisome paleness of his skin. “Severus, why didn’t you call or say something?”

“And spoil this lovely day?” Severus groaned and his head fell back on the pillows. He let out great shuddering breaths. “Harrrrry…”

“It’s okay, Severus. I’m getting Poppy.” Harry pulled out the Galleon from his pocket and squeezed it.

Severus stared at the gold coin in his hand. “Harry, am I…having…hallucinations already? What on earth…oh fuck,” he hissed, his body tensing.

“This is one of the fake Galleons that Hermione created in fifth year to gather together members of Dumbledore’s Army. I asked that one be given to Poppy for this very emergency.”

“I…always…thought…that girl was…wasted in…Gryffindor.” Severus let out another groan. Harry sat next to him and wrapped his arm around the man’s shoulders. His husband reached out and grabbed his hand in a punishing grip.

“Where…the hell is that blasted…woman?” Severus gritted.

“I don’t understand it. She should have come right away. It’s the Christmas holidays. There shouldn’t be anyone at school,” Harry fretted.

The floo whooshed open and Harry jumped up in relief, still holding Severus’s hand. “Poppy! Thank good—”

Hermione stepped out from the floo, neatly Banishing the soot from her clothes. “Harry, I came as soon as I could.”

“Hermione? What are you doing here? We’re waiting for Poppy.”

“She’s not coming. There’s been an emergency with one of her family members.”

Family? He hadn’t even known that Poppy had family. The things you learned about people… Harry asked, “What happened?”

“Her older brother fell while negotiating an icy sidewalk and broke his leg. Poppy isn’t taking care of him but she rushed to the hospital to see him. He’s old and they think there might be complications.”

Severus hissed through his teeth. “So…what are you…doing here?”

She held up a fake Galleon. “When this kept going off, I realized something was wrong. So I came as quickly as I could.”

“And?” Severus looked like he was on the verge of exploding.

She tilted her head and walked closer to the man panting on the bed. “I’m going to help, that’s what.”

“I’m…in the hands…of two…Gryffindors. Merlin…save me,” he panted.

Hermione lifted her chin. “I’ve been studying this with Poppy. I know I can help. First things first.
Harry, get clean towels.”

If Harry had thought that Severus would bear childbirth with a stiff upper lip, he’d been totally wrong. The man sweated, groaned, cried and yelled just like any woman would have done during this trial. Harry’s hand had nearly been crushed several times as his husband struggled throughout his ordeal.

The next 13 hours were among the most agonizing of Harry’s life. It had been horrible with Ginny. But he hadn’t been responsible for her; her fate had been in the hands of the good people of St. Mungo’s. Over this lay the unspoken terror that if something went wrong, it would be his fault.

Images of his wife, Dumbledore, Remus, Sirius, Cedric and other people he’d been helpless to save flashed through his mind. Would he never be free from the anxiety of losing loved ones? He blinked when he realized he was putting Snape in that category and wondered when that had happened.

He didn’t know. He only knew that he couldn’t lose him now, not after everything they both had endured. Harry concentrated, reached out with all he had and…

Hermione started and then stared at him. “Harry, what are you doing?”

“What?”

“Your magic…I can feel it.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, whatever you’re doing…” She stopped talking and looked down at Severus. The man stared up at Harry, a pleading look in his eyes. Then his eyelids fluttered shut and he went still.

“NOOO!” Harry wailed. He clutched Severus’s hands and poured all his feeling and magic into his husband.

The man’s body gave a massive shudder and the bottomless eyes snapped open again. Hermione looked between his legs. “Harry, the baby’s crowning!”

Harry couldn’t speak. All his will was focused on the man lying under his hands.

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“Severus, look at her. She’s beautiful.” Harry cradled the wrapped pink bundle in his arms and held her up to his husband’s face.

“She is, isn’t she? I was expecting a prune,” Severus murmured. He didn’t smile but there was wonder and pride in the weary black gaze.

“She really is quite lovely,” Hermione added.

Curly, short black hair lay tightly pressed against Theora Leontyne Potter’s head. It was too soon to tell if she would take after Harry’s bedraggled hair or Severus’ sleek locks. But the green-eyed gaze was undeniably that of her father. She yawned, curled tiny fists into her cheeks and closed her eyes.

“Now, Severus, don’t worry if your nipples are a little sensitive at first. They’ll toughen up as you continue to breastfeed,” Hermione stated with confidence, albeit hiding a grin.

Severus shuddered and turned a little gray. Doubtless, he wasn’t looking forward to that aspect of motherhood. But Hermione was secretly certain he would adore it the moment he held his newborn
daughter up to nurse.

However, there was a mystery here and Hermione had never left a mystery unchallenged. “Harry, what happened to your magic?”

He glanced up from his sleeping daughter. “What do you mean?”

“I felt it while Severus was giving birth. It’s different—more powerful.” Her eyes widened. “Did you have sex with Severus during one of the solstices?”

Harry flushed. Their first time together had been May 2nd. He was unlikely to forget that.

“We did. It was shortly after Beltane,” Severus said solemnly. “I had been noting the increase in my magic as well. I believe this is why my seizures gradually ceased. The combination of our magic caused the final toxins to be purged from my system.”

“You’ve noticed I was getting stronger and you didn’t say anything?” Harry asked, hurt and accusation in his voice.

Severus rolled his eyes. “Harry, every proper wizard learns to monitor his own magic, much like an athlete monitors his body. This was something you should have picked up on your own, without my pointing it out to you,” he said waspishly.

“That and the fact that you probably didn’t want to let me know I was the stronger wizard,” Harry said, staring at his husband.

The Potions master didn’t answer. But Hermione sensed an explosion coming. She didn’t think they’d do each other too much damage—after all, Severus was drained from his pregnancy and Harry wouldn’t want to hurt the new mother. Still, it was best that they be left alone to sort out matters.

“Well, I’m off. Take care of her, you two.” On impulse, she kissed Severus on the temple. “Rest up, Severus.” She pointed a finger at Harry. “Don’t be too hard on him, Harry.”

He sighed. “Fine. I won’t. And Hermione?”

“Yes?”

“Thanks for everything. And Merry Christmas.”

She grinned. “You’re welcome, Harry. Merry Christmas to you both.”

The room was very quiet after she left. Neither man spoke for a long time.

Harry lowered Theora carefully into her crib and stared down at the sleeping infant. “I wonder if this would have worked when I was still a student,” he murmured.

“If what would have worked?” Severus asked cautiously.

“Bonding with you. Increasing my powers. If I’d been stronger back then, maybe I wouldn’t have lost so many people.”

“Harry, you were underage. No Ministry official would have condoned a bonding between you and anyone else, especially to a man almost twice your age.”

“But what about when I was 17? I’m pretty sure I was of age then.”
Severus gave him an incredulous look. “Are you mad? Do you remember the circumstances of your 17th year?”

“I do. And I’m just thinking that it didn’t have to be so terrible if we could have been together then,” Harry muttered.

“Neither of us was in a position to consider something so outlandish,” Severus began.

“Because we hated each other? Newsflash, Severus, we hated each other when you insisted I bond with you eight months ago. That didn’t stop you, did it?”

Severus didn’t answer; he merely closed his eyes.

Harry sighed and ran his hands through his hair. “You know what? It doesn’t matter. What’s done is done. I guess there’s no point in going over the past. And you need your rest.”

Harry leaned over his new daughter, kissing her lightly on the head. She really was adorable. No matter how awful his marriage had been at the start, he couldn’t regret it now that something so miraculous had come of it.

A glance at the bed showed that Severus still hadn’t opened his eyes, but Harry didn’t fool himself into thinking the man was asleep. Yet his husband’s stillness gave him time to reflect on all that had passed between them.

The older wizard’s features were worn with the strain of delivery. Severus had gone through an immense struggle to bring Theora into this world, more harrowing than anything Harry had ever seen. He soberly considered everything they had endured to bring them to this moment. He thought of his feelings when he’d feared Severus wouldn’t make it.

He was taking a risk here. But was he a Gryffindor or not?

He stepped softly to the bed, mindful of the sleeping infant. Harry leaned down and pressed a kiss on Severus’s forehead. “I love you, Severus,” he whispered.

He drew back, unsurprised to see that the eyes were open. He was rarely certain of Severus’s feelings but it wasn’t hard to read the doubt, fear and hope that swirled in those shadowy depths.

Severus swallowed. “Harry…”

“Why don’t you rest? If you want to talk later…” Harry hesitated, not certain what he was asking for. In the end, he knew Severus would talk if and when he chose. “Good night, Severus.”

Before he could pull away, Severus reached out and grabbed his hand. His grip was amazingly strong for someone who had just gone through 13 hours of strenuous childbirth.

“Harry, I want you to know. As much as I know how, I do…reciprocate your feelings.”

Inwardly, Harry rolled his eyes at the convoluted phrase. But all he said was, “I know.”

Before Severus could reply, he was at the door. “I’ll send a message to Molly to bring over the children. We can introduce them to their little sister later. See you in a few.”

He closed the door, smiling to himself at Severus’s thoughtful expression.

TBC
This chapter was written by Queen Boadicea.
First Day Epilogue

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Title: Scarred Souls

Author: Misty Moonlight/Co-author: QueenBoadicea

Pairings: Severus/Harry

Published: 12/10/2008

Summary: A widowed Harry must bond with Snape in order to save his daughter’s life. Sev gains a family, for better or worse, and the hearts of two scarred souls will be changed forever.

Warnings: Romance, Drama, Angst, Alternate Universe, Sexual Situations, Hurt/Comfort, M/M, Slash, Anal, Language, Humor, possible MPreg, Bonding, Original Characters, Family, WIP

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06/07/2010

Authors' Final Note: "Thank you" to everyone who has read and reviewed our story. We really appreciate all the support you have given us on this joint effort and are happy you enjoyed it.

Misty Moonlight and QueenBoadicea

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Chapter 48: First Day

‘Epilogue’

Five Years Later

“Brian, be sure to keep your Remembrall safe!”

“Take care of that pet crow of yours, Violet! Don’t let the kneazles eat him!”

“Come here, young lady! Five minutes out of my sight and your face is as dirty as a gnome’s. How did you get it so filthy?”

The platform holding the children for the Hogwarts Express was teeming with anxious parents and
excited children. Many of the boys and girls were running back and forth, saying goodbye to their families and hello to new children they hadn’t seen before today.

Severus watched with amusement as several people nearby turned, whispered and pointed at Harry Potter. Even at 41 years of age, he was still recognizable as the Boy Who Lived and everyone looked at him like he was a god.

Not that Harry noticed. He was too busy getting James and Albus ready and trying to keep them from getting their new clothes messy.

“Now, remember, boys, be on your very best behavior.”

“We know, Dad. Stop fussing, willya?” James asked, exasperated, pulling at the collar of his new shirt.

Albus stared wide eyed at the train. “It’s enormous,” he said, awestruck. “Where will we sit?”

“Anywhere you like,” Harry said, smiling.

Lily had been chattering with Rose. Realizing her brothers were about to leave, she came running back to her family. “When can I go, Daddy?” she demanded.

“I told you this before, Lily. Not until you’re 11.”

She pouted. “’s not fair.”

“Sevvie can teach you wandwork. When you go, you’ll be as smart as James and Albus,” Harry promised.

She beamed and reached up to grab Severus’s free hand. “C’mon, Dada Sevvie! Say g’bye to Tim and Teddy!”

Severus grimaced. “If I must.”

Lily just laughed and tugged Severus away. He went, bearing the look of a martyr, but didn’t resist Lily’s grasp too much.

Theora was clinging to Harry’s hand, watching the crowd and the enormous train that stood waiting for its passengers. Just like her name, she wasn’t much given to talking. She only looked and observed with green eyes that rarely missed anything.

Ron marched up to Harry, clapping him on the back. “Merlin, Harry. Did you ever think you’d see the day when we’d be sending our kids off to Hogwarts?”

Harry grinned at him. “Ron, this is a dream I’ve had since my first year. The only surprise is the way some things turned out.”

His best mate nodded and looked at little Theora, who stared back at him with unswerving attention. “I know what you mean. Oi, Timothy! Where are you off to? The train’s over there!”

“I lost Jasper, Dad!” the boy wailed. His chameleon familiar was indeed nowhere to be seen. Then again, it could be riding on the boy’s shoulder and none of them would be the wiser until they felt it crawling up their trousers.

“Oh, for—not again,” Ron sighed. “Ta, Harry. I’ll see you later. I’ll be glad to get out of this mess, I tell ya.”
Severus stood before Draco, conversing with him on insignificant topics. They had grown close during the last year of Hogwarts, when he’d sought to protect the young Malfoy from his father’s mistakes and the Dark Lord’s machinations.

However, there were still some things Severus would never tell Draco, just as there were matters Draco refused to discuss with Severus. That was to be expected. They were Slytherins, after all.

“I think Scorpius will do well in Potions. Unless, of course, the man who replaced you is a complete idiot. In that case, I’ll probably have to hire a tutor for him.” Draco didn’t ask but his silver eyes flicked briefly at Severus.

“That’s an excellent notion, Draco,” Severus responded, without answering the unspoken inquiry. “Your hair seems…thicker than when I saw it last,” he added in an insinuating tone.

Draco smiled coolly, unfappable as always. “Does it? I hadn’t noticed.”

Severus knew his hair restorer salve was an excellent product. Many wizards—and some witches—bought it. He kept his hand in the business end of it and knew that caseloads of it went to the Malfoy Manor, carefully diverted through other channels so no one knew that that Draco ordered them. Severus was also aware that thinning hair and baldness were hereditary. He very much expected to have Scorpius, Percy Weasley and his children buying from him someday.

Draco looked Severus up and down. “Your salve must be working well on you. Your hair is almost as long as my dad’s used to be.”

Severus smirked. “Actually, I’ve never needed it.” Harry liked the lengthiness of his hair; Severus could tell from the way his husband continually ran his hands through it. So he’d simply let it grow—no hair salve needed.

Slightly apart from his father, Scorpius Malfoy stood on the platform, a shiny new trunk beside him. He bore the trademark fair looks of the Malfoys, though his eyes were a nondescript hazel rather than silver. His lips pursed and his face was a little haughty as he scanned the crowd. However, Severus detected distinct signs of nervousness in the nervously shuffling feet.

Suddenly, Albus ran up to him. “Hey, Scorpius!”

Scorpius nodded cautiously. “Hello, Albus.”

Albus peered at the brand new chest. “What’s in the trunk?”

“Oh, just a few things.”

“Toys?”

Scorpius scowled, like he was about to snap at Albus. Then he shrugged and mumbled, “Some. Most are books and other objects Father thought would be useful.”

Harry, Ron and Hermione watched this scene with varying degrees of amusement and surprise. “Hmm. I didn’t know that Al knew Scorpius, Harry,” Hermione said.

“Neither did I. They look all right, though, yeah?”

“Blimey. Never thought I’d see the day when a Malfoy wasn’t taking potshots at a Potter,” Ron said.

“Let’s just hope Scorpius is less of a prat than his dad was,” Harry added.
Finally, the children were boarding the train. The parents watched, some in tears, as their little ones leaned out the windows and waved. Last-minute instructions, advice and warnings were yelled from the adults as the train began to pull out of the station.

Harry found Severus—easy, given his height, even in this crowd—and wound his arm around him. “Shall we go home now, husband?” he murmured.

“Gladly. I need the peace and quiet to soothe my nerves. Hearing all these shrieking children was rather traumatic. It was like being in Hogwarts all over again.” Severus shuddered.

“Poor baby.” Harry grinned when Severus glared at him. “Let’s get going. Winky says she’s got a new recipe she wishes to try.”

“Actually, I thought I’d make a few stops in Diagon Alley first,” Severus murmured.

“Oh? I thought we could go home and celebrate.” Harry gave Severus a slow smile and waggled his eyebrows suggestively.

“Celebrate what?”

“Successfully getting the twins here.”

Severus raised an eyebrow. “Ah, so you’re glad to be rid of them too?”

“That’s not what I meant and you know it,” Harry retorted.

“I have difficulty following your attempts at conversation at the best of times, Harry,” Severus smirked. “So what did you mean?”

“I meant how far you and I have come, that you can be with my children and me as a member of the family.” When Severus stared at him, Harry shrugged in frustration. “That’s the best I can say it.”

“I understand. There were times when I thought I would cheerfully strangle your firstborn before they reached their 10th year.” Severus said this with a smile, hoping that would take the sting out of it.

Harry peered sideways at him. “Keep up that kind of talk and you’re sleeping alone tonight.”

“Do you think that I’m so desperate for your touch, Potter?” he asked haughtily, looking down his nose at his husband.

Harry flashed one of his bright smiles. “Yes.” He stretched up on his toes and kissed Severus on the lips. Severus returned his embrace and then kissed the scar barely peeking out of the bangs.

Severus decided he could dispense with the trip to Slugs & Jiggers for now. Today was a day for celebration, after all.

In spite of his teasing, he understood Harry’s sentiment. He still found it hard to believe that he was here with Harry Potter, now watching their children going off to Hogwarts as Severus himself had done half a century ago. In spite of a meddling Headmaster and a pernicious Dark Lord, Severus Snape had achieved happiness at long last.

He hugged Harry to his side and walked from the platform, Harry holding Theora, Severus Lily, their two little girls walking beside them.
Severus slowly removed his robe while watching Harry shuffle off his clothes. Even after all these years, observing his husband in this simple act never palled.

Quidditch continued to hold its fascination for Harry, so much that he played it even in his 41st year. Secretly, Severus had to admit that he liked watching his husband soar aloft on a broom. It left the Gryffindor amazingly fit and that in itself was reason enough to allow his husband to pursue this childish pastime.

Harry twisted as he dropped his robes over a nearby chair. In spite of Severus’s constant chiding, the man was as messy as a first year. You would think that years of being with him would have taught Harry something of tidiness.

First, the stomach was revealed as the hem of the shirt was lifted. Ridged and sporting the dark hair crawling down to the waistband, Severus imagined his tongue trailing over it to the nipples. Those were the next to be shown, still challengingly flat. He licked his lips, in his mind seeing them start up into tight little peaks, begging to be sucked and nipped.

Harry half-turned as his shirt followed his robes. The human back held no charms for most people—but Severus had never thought of himself as most people. Harry’s back possessed a youthful innocence, perhaps the only part of him that still did, except for his eyes.

Those emerald eyes were turned towards him now, quizzical and yearning at once. “Severus? Aren’t you getting undressed?”

“Of course.”

This was a joy as well, having Harry watch him, and it filled Severus with wonder and confusion every time. He’d been awkward as a youth, ugly as a man and truly repulsive after his scars had appeared. But Harry’s eyes never flinched from caressing him all over.

Severus gathered him close and lowered them both to the bed. At 61 years, he was hardly an old man by wizarding standards. But heaving Harry into his arms and carrying him was no longer an option. Once Harry, in a spirit of playfulness, had picked him up. Severus had yelled and rebuked him soundly. But secretly he’d rather liked being cradled in such a manner.

Harry wriggled his bum on the bed and leaned up to steal a swift kiss. “Severus, why do you always insist on having sex in your room? I thought you liked your privacy too much.”

“I do like my privacy. I simply find my room more comfortable.”

Harry ran his fingers across the sheets. “You just like feeling silk against your arse.”

Severus sniffed. “That has nothing to do with it.”


Severus felt himself flushing faintly. Harry had never forgotten those boxers he’d worn the first time they slept together and had even made a present of six pairs to Severus on his birthday once. Severus recalled being highly discomfited. But he hadn’t been able to deny how great they felt—or Harry’s appreciation when he’d worn a pair to bed later.

He had enough of this line of conversation and decided shutting up his husband was in order. The lips parted under his, with a texture much more pleasing than any silk sheets. Severus lipped all along the chin and down his throat. When he dragged his tongue along the bobbing Adam’s apple, Harry gasped and writhed in the sheets.
“Umm, Severus…” Intense green peeked at him from beneath feathered eyelids. Harry reached up and splayed his fingers across Severus’s chest. The Gryffindor proceeded to caress his body with complete absorption. By now, he knew every intimate part of Severus but at times the younger wizard stroked his skin as if learning him all over again. It was endearing and almost disgustingly sweet.

Even though he was a-quiver to get on with things, Severus took care to prepare Harry. It wasn’t because gentle lovemaking was his preference. He didn’t mind giving or getting it hard and fast sometimes. But, at his age, erections took longer to rise, so to speak, and his recovery periods were longer. Slow lovemaking meant he got all the time he needed to prepare.

So Severus tasted Harry’s ribs, breathed and nuzzled at his armpits, licked him in the narrow canal that ran down his ribs to his navel. Harry’s cock throbbed steadily and Severus couldn’t resist licking at it. When his husband moaned, he took it into his mouth. This act always pleased Severus because he knew he could drive Harry out of his mind with his skillful touches. When he licked at the heavy balls, he smiled to hear his husband shout.

Summoning his favorite lubricant, Severus dipped his fingers in it. Sunk deeply into Harry, he wriggled and stroked, watching as the flush mounted to his lover’s head. Harry drew his legs up, panting, and humped his arse into Severus’s hand. When the Slytherin kneaded and cupped his balls, Harry began crying out, his breath catching at every other word. “Oh…fuck, yes, yes…just a little…oooh.”

He wasn’t speaking Parseltongue yet and Severus wanted to hear it. He couldn’t bring himself to ask for it; he wanted Harry to say it on his own, without prompting. But occasionally Harry withheld the sibilance, knowing how it would drive Severus mad. The man could be an unbearable tease that way.

“Mmm, more. I love…that.”

Then Severus could wait no longer. He shifted over Harry’s body. “Look at me, Harry.”

The eldritch eyes lifted to his. No matter what other changes life made to Harry, Severus was sure those green eyes would remain unaltered, and he would love them all the same. It would not be for the remembrance of his lost childhood friend but for Harry’s sake alone that he would love the sight of those sparkling orbs.

Still holding that bright, beautiful stare, Severus pushed carefully into his husband. “Oh, Merlin. How can you be so tight still?” he whispered hoarsely.

Harry gave him an impish grin, one that soon slid into shock as Severus nudged against his prostate. That, too, never seemed to change and Severus hoped he would see it always when they were just like this.

Soon, they were rocking together and it was getting more and more difficult for Severus to keep to his deliberate pace. “Harry…Good God. More, love,” he gasped and then bit his lip as Harry clenched all around him.

“Severus…Sev…” Harry eyes squeezed shut as he flung back his head.

“Fuck, Harry, my love…more, I need…let me hear it,” Severus ground out.

“Sssshhhllllllisshhh.” There it was at last, that singular language that Harry used only in the bedroom, for him alone. It served to engorge Severus to the point where he thought he’d burst if he didn’t
“Yes!” Severus gasped, his back bowing as he thrust harder.

“Ssshhakkkklllissshhiilllltttttssshssshshshs.”

Usually, Severus could never identify whatever Harry said in the snake language; the patterns of Parselmouth were too complex for him to decipher. But he knew this particular sequence.

Sinful tongue. Severus smiled and whispered, “Harry, you look so wanton like this. You’re all spread out, taking my cock like an eager little slut. You want me here, deep inside you, fucking you until you can’t walk or see straight.” He reached down and began stroking his husband’s cock, gradually increasing his manual strokes until Harry was gasping for air.

“Shhlllltttt!”

“Yes, it’s good, isn’t it?” Severus purred. “You want me to split you open. You like being nailed to the mattress like this, with my prick up your sweet little arse. You’re nothing but a naughty little bottom, Harry, and this is what you should have got from the beginning.”

Lithe arms and legs wound around Severus, melding him to the tense body trapped beneath his. The spurts of Parseltongue were spitting out at him, the tongue lapping at his neck, his chin, at his mouth until the lips parted and he was sucking the air from his Gryffindor lover in tiny ferocious sips.

“To have you here, in my bed, milking my prick…Sheer. Fucking. Bliss,” Severus panted. “Mine, Harry, mine. As long as I live!”

The green eyes opened wide and Harry let out a shriek as he came, clenching on Severus like he never wanted to let him go. That vise took Severus so much by surprise that his orgasm raced to meld with Harry’s, both of them crying into each other’s mouths.

When it was over and Severus lay looking smugly at the ceiling, Harry whispered, “Hssshssarrrahhha.”

“English, Harry, English. How many times do I have to tell you?” Severus muttered.

The other man ignored him. Instead he began licking down Severus’s body, removing every trace of semen until Severus was purring with happiness. When his head lifted up, their lips met in a torrid kiss as Severus fed off the taste of his own seed from his husband’s mouth.

Harry pulled back to look him in the face properly. “Severus?”

“Mmmm?”

“I, um, I went to see Poppy the other day.”

Severus’s eyes narrowed to see his husband looking dizzy, happy, smug and nervous all at once. “You went to see Pomfrey? Why?”

“Oh, good news. I think.” He grabbed Severus’s hand and moved it over his abdomen. “What do you think of Claresta Fay for a girl or Bran Hugh for a boy?”

“WHAT?!”

Harry James Potter had managed to surprise him again.
The End

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