The Courting of Neville Longbottom
by neddiheht

Summary

Viktor Krum is a proud man. The best seeker in the world. So when his ex tells him he needs to stop sulking and date, he is skeptical. But this Neville Longbottom that Lyusha suggests as a date intrigues him. Viktor knows what he has to do. His only route for an honorable mating is to court Neville formally, an action that means coming out to the wizarding world, and risking everything on a chance that he can convince the lonely herbologist and war hero to marry him.

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.
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Oliver Wood lay sprawled in a pool of his own vomit in the alley outside the rather poorly marked and maintained exterior of the gay pub. His trousers and pants were down by his ankles and he stank of alcohol and sex. Viktor Krum stood over him, glaring at the path of the Muggles who had fled in wake of Viktor's formidable presence.

"My old friend," said Viktor softly, "is not being answer." A few whispered words erased all trace of Oliver's sickness from the walls. A few more cleaned up Oliver's body. After a moment's hesitation Viktor added charms to protect Oliver's health and prevent his night's activity from having other unforeseen consequences. Viktor shook his head sadly and lifted the large burly man from the ground, then, with a crack, they were gone.

Oliver awoke to an intense stare beneath dark bushy eyebrows. He shook his head to clear it and immediately regretted it. He knew he should be sick, but even as he felt the nausea erupt within him, he could feel something quelling his stomach, keeping him from emptying its contents.

"Is already expelling the contents of your stomach many times, old friend," said Viktor. "Is making so will be having breakfast. Is being plain, but will not be immediately losing it to battle with night full of too much alcohol."

"Never too much," mumbled Oliver through half-lidded eyes.

"When is vomiting uncontrollably and offering of self to Muggles when too drunk to see who they are being, is having too much," said Viktor sternly. "Now, old friend. Is suggesting you are drinking potion on nightstand, and advising to shower. Cleansing spells is not being same. Hot shower will be helping, yes?"

Oliver pulled himself up in the bed and leaned against the headboard. "Why are you here, Vitya?"

Viktor shook his head. "Must to be having shower first, if is asking questions of Vitya."

Oliver groaned. Viktor was perhaps the most stubborn man he'd ever known, and as a Gryffindor, he'd known his share of stubborn men. Brave, but stubborn. He looked at Viktor and chanced
opening his eyes all the way. The room spun and he regretted it instantly.

Viktor sighed and moved from the chair to the bed, sitting next to him and grabbing the potion from the night stand. Oliver closed his eyes as the liquid poured down his throat. This was a sensation he knew, as though falling from a broom and hitting the ground. BAM! He was suddenly coldly and totally sober.

"FUCK."

"Is being better, my old friend," said Viktor. "Now is taking shower. Then breakfast. And once is doing these things, will be talking with Vitya."

"That's supposed to encourage me?" asked Oliver.

Viktor helped him stand and pushed him towards a room that must be the bathroom. The colors were dark, muted. Deep crimsons, browns, blacks. Rich fabrics. Oliver closed his eyes as he leaned against the door frame for support. Viktor had brought him to his sanctuary. It was an honor Viktor afforded to few, even among his friends. Oliver swallowed softly and showered. The hot water was just shy of scalding, and Oliver stayed under the spray until his body was bright red from the heat of it.

He stumbled out of the shower starkers, the towel thrown over his shoulder. He glared at Viktor, his mind now awake and his memory sadly reawakened. "I preferred being pissed."

"Is not doubting this," said Viktor. "Be getting dressed." He gestured to the bed where someone, probably a house elf, had cleaned and pressed his clothes. "Is hungry and has been waiting for guest to be eating." Viktor stood and walked from the room, stopping only for a moment by the door to add, "Is needing to be discussing of letter. Is sure in my heart that old friend is knowing of what letter Vitya is speaking."

Oliver felt the wrenching pain in his gut at the thought. The horrid tightening in his stomach. The sense of unbearable loss. The shadow of a pain he wished to forget. Of course he knew. Neville. Luke had done it then... Luke had gone to Viktor Krum.

It took Oliver several minutes to regain his composure enough to dress. Longer to force himself through the door and into the manor. And it was a manor, even if it was a small one. Heavy stone walls were draped with heavy carpets, and out the windows were plains of stark white, constant flurries obscuring all sight beyond the windows. Oliver followed the low rumble of Viktor's voice until he found the room where Viktor was giving his house elves instructions. The elves glanced at Oliver and then with a nod to their master and a soft pop they were gone.

"You said we'd talk?"

"Is first to be having breakfast," said Viktor, spreading his arms wide over the table as it became quite suddenly laden with a wide assortment of breakfast dishes. "Be eating. And then will be talking."

They ate quietly while Viktor watched Oliver intently, his dark eyes blazing. Finally they were done, and Oliver could no longer endure the stare.

"He. He came to see you, then. Luciano, I mean."

"Da," said Viktor softly, "Lyuusha was visiting Vitya. Was speaking of old times. But also of friends."
"He said you knew each other at Durmstrang," said Oliver. "But there was more to it, wasn't there?"

"Is being great deal more. Was Lyusha that taught Vitya what it was to love, and what it was meaning to be losing love. For long time has not been whole in heart, since losing Lyusha."

"He left you?"

"Is mistaking Vitya. Was losing Lyusha, but because of own... was not being deserving of such love at time. Was being too concerned with appearances. With fears that... Olya, my old friend, is knowing you have also been sharing in these fears."

"You wouldn't..."

"Da. Was too busy embracing secrets to be honest in love for Lyusha, and was losing him."

Oliver sighed. "You stayed friends?"

"Is being good friends. Close."

"Doesn't that hurt?"

Viktor leaned his head back, his ample adam's apple bobbing as he closed his eyes and stared into lids that gazed at the ceiling. "Is hurting always from this loss. But is good not to be losing of presence in life. Is better to be bearing the hurt than the agony would be feeling to be losing of him completely."

"He told you about Neville?"

"Is thinking Lyusha was trying to spare his old friend much pain. Has spoken of Neville only seldom to Vitya. In passing, as name of cherished love, but never with the details. Viktor sighed. "Was being grateful, but now finding of self at disadvantage."

"He's brilliant," said Oliver softly, his voice choked.

"Lyusha is trusting Vitya with Neville. Is still loving in his core. Is taking and claiming of his new mate, and that is bond forever, but is still loving of Neville in core. Is wanting to see this Neville happy."

"Can't... can't you ask someone else?"

"First must be knowing from you, not from paper with scribbles is not meaning, that is understanding. Is knowing what it means for wolf to be pursuing of mate. Is not losing old friend over man is not even knowing yet," said Viktor softly. "Lyusha is asking for Vitya to try. Has been long since Vitya was opening of heart for anyone. Is knowing, old friend, how hurt Vitya was being over Vanya."

"I remember."

"Was even worse when was losing Lyusha. Is not seeking such pain, nor to be causing such pain in friends, especially old friend like Olya."

"I love him."

"Is knowing this," said Viktor with a quiet certainty.
"How?" asked Oliver softly, his eyes on the table.

"Is remembering well last time was picking Olya up in alley from being buggered by Muggles. Was after Evan. When he was taking wife after learning Olya being wizard. When was realizing that he could have..."

"Just stop," said Oliver, slamming a hand into the table. "Alright. Yes. I love him, okay. Like... like I did Evan."

"Lyusha is hoping Vitya will pursue Neville. Is asking him outright to be doing so."

"Luke is feeling guilty, Vitya," said Oliver. "He left Neville. They'd been together for years but only just admitted to each other that they were in love, that it was more than just sex, even though we could all see it. And then from nowhere Luke was promised, and it was over. Neville... he was hurt horribly. He told me that he... he took his own memories of Luke and destroyed them."

"Obliviated?"

Oliver sighed and nodded sadly. "It took me weeks to draw Neville out. We were finally working. I wanted him so badly, but he... he was holding back."

"Is asking why. Can be telling Vitya, is knowing this."

"He said... he said he loved me. But he wasn't in love with me. And fuck it all, I know what that means. I know. And I hate that he couldn't..."

"But Olya, he was being in love, I think."

"Yeah. I was in love," said Oliver.

"Is not pursuing this Neville. Is not to be causing old friend..."

"No. Please, Vitya. I..."

Viktor peered intently into Oliver's eyes. "Is needing to be knowing, Olya, that is not to be causing friend pain."

Oliver shook his head. "You can't help that, Vitya. I. I want him to be happy."

"Is not even knowing this Neville."

"He's beautiful," said Oliver wistfully.

"Is knowing this. Lyusha was showing to Vitya photo of Neville, digging. Is never seeing such a sight in life. And is Quidditch Champion, is seeing many naked men ready to throw selves at Vitya, even not knowing that Vitya is preferring men."

"The reality... oh fuck. Vitya, he's..."

"Is knowing, old friend, that is to be very difficult. But if is to be trying... is knowing that for pure blood this is..." Viktor struggled to find the words. "Is from old family. Is not to be finding of man for fling. Is to be finding mate to be loved and cherished. If Neville is to be... Vitya must be knowing. Can. Olya, can you be telling Vitya..."

Oliver nodded almost imperceptibly. "I will try."
Chapter 1

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Viktor stood in the quiet stone room before the heavy stone of the carved basin. In the end it had proved too difficult for Oliver to share, his loss was too recent, the pain still tearing him up with every word. It was something, Viktor knew, that would haunt him later, though Oliver was keen on one point.

He wanted Neville happy, and Luciano Grimaldi, the man who knew Neville better than anyone in the world, thought that Viktor was the man who could make that happen. And so Oliver had pulled from his mind the silvery strands of his memory and exacted promises for the memories' return, and then he had left, begging Viktor to let him slake his grief.

Viktor sunk himself into the memories and watched them, each one dozens of times. This was the art of emotion and it was not the same as catching the Golden Snitch, but that was the means he had to approach the memories and that was what he used. He studied Ron's plea to Oliver to go out with Neville, and their first date, and watching Neville at the Quidditch pitch, and several dinners and a brief bit in what Viktor was sure was the greenhouse at Hogwarts. Quiet walks around the lake. Each of these he studied and then another memory, an older memory. Neville at seventeen with ice in his eyes and a heart and mind of cold iron as he shook off *Cruciatus* during a fight against Death Eaters. Carrying the body of a small boy with a camera, a boy Viktor remembered. Neville Longbottom alone resisting Voldemort when everyone else had given up, thinking Harry Potter dead.

Viktor pulled himself from the memories, shaken. This Neville was like two men. Two very separate men. And the one of ice and iron was standing guard over something very different. Someone Viktor suspected that his old friend had only been given to glimpse and never been allowed to see. He swallowed softly. How could Oliver have... Oliver knew. He knew and he'd fallen so hard for Neville and so fast that he had tried anyway.

Viktor stored each memory safely and resolved to watch them again, after time to reflect, before returning them to Oliver. Then he walked to the Floo and cast a handful of powder into the flames before stepping into them and appearing in a flash of green flame at the stone arena that served as the Quidditch pitch at Durmstrang. He walked past the suddenly very quiet students and down into the earth, into the deep corridors beneath the Russian steppe. Professors and students alike stepped from his path. He was easily the most famous student to attend Durmstrang since Grindelwald, and he had been told in no uncertain terms that every visit he might choose to make would be a
The library at Durmstrang was deep, in vaults under the earth. The chambers were small, but they were many, and every inch of every wall was covered in bookcases. The librarian looked almost more like a spider than a man, his limbs long and thin and bony. He looked up at Viktor and smiled. "My old student..."

"Is not here to be renewing of acquaintance," said Viktor.

"I had hoped..."

"Is not fleeting hope, is knowing would be sharing glass of good fire whiskey that is keeping hidden not well enough from students, but is needing assistance."

The man looked piercingly at Viktor. "And what kind of assistance brings Viktor Krum to the Durmstrang Institute?"

"Is nothing like that," said Viktor. "Is not wishing to use libraries where research is being seen. Is watched at all times. Is knowing this."

"Dark magic then?" asked the librarian, bringing himself to his feet. He was a very tall man, and so bony and skinny that Viktor might almost wrap his hands completely around the man's waist.

"Is needing to know everything there is to be knowing about life of hero."

"Viktor... Vitya, my old student, surely if you wish to know about Harry Potter... he was your friend. You could just ask him. You know not to trust the distortions that..."

"Is knowing distortions of others involved is being less."

"Hermione Granger is your friend too. More than that, I thought. Surely she could..."

"Is being deliberately obtuse. Is knowing I was happiest in these halls when was running with Luciano, and letting him taste of the flesh of my body."

"These unnatural passions..." began the old man.

"Is always preferring men," said Viktor with a growl. "Is not something that will be changing."

"Your father..."

"Is not so deluded as old teacher is thinking," said Viktor, his voice clipped. "Though father was also thinking to hope for life of Vitya with Miss Granger."

"A hero then. You knew many at Hogwarts. The classmates and friends of Harry Potter were all given that exalted status. The Order of Merlin."

"Is being concerned with only one. Was not knowing well when was at Hogwarts for Triwizard Tournament. Was very quiet, subdued."

"Not Weasley then," said the old man. "Vitya, are you researching a mate?"

Viktor gulped. "Is needing to be researching well. Is. Is contemplating to be courting."

"Vitya!"
"Is thinking hero is not being good enough?"

"I'm thinking what your father will say. You're contemplating courting a man, is that what I'm hearing?"

"Da."

"And will this man bear for you? You are Viktor Krum. The heir to the Krum family name. You do not have a promise to fall back on. You would have to find a mate, a fertile mate who would..."

"Will be bearing myself if he will not. Will not be leaving father without possibility of heir. Is Krum."

"And will this man... Vitya. Is knowing you were running with Luciano, but Luciano was pack as you are. Will this man. You are wolf, Vitya. He is not of Durmstrang where such... you are taking a great risk."

"Is why it is being necessary to know before is offering of courting gift."

"Have you run his chart?"

"The essential piece. Is compatible, but is not meaning is being right for Vitya."

"Did you want me to..." the old man hesitated. Running of a full chart for the people directly involved. Parents did it for children before a promise, but that was the only time such a thing was ever considered acceptable. In the normal course of things only a minimal chart would ever be run. To show the basics. Would two people be compatible. Two businesses. A partnership. A business endeavor. And then the results were rarely useful, not like a full Arithmancy chart.

"Is not asking this of old friend and mentor. Is asking to be helping with research. Would be knowing everything to be knowing about family of this man.

"Not about him?"

"Is learning lessons well, old teacher. First is needing to be knowing of family, that might be understanding what is learning about him."

The old man nodded. "Very well. I hope..."

"Is not walking in blind," said Viktor. "Is Lyushenka moi who is suggesting match. Lyusha is knowing Vitya better than any other."

"Luciano thinks this... how would he know?"

"He was in love with this man for long time. Is knowing well. Perhaps better even than is knowing Vitya."

"Your father will never forgive me for helping you with this. Even if the man is a hero. Even if he knows of your... alternative path. He will hate me for..."

"Is not planning on father ever knowing that was finding assistance in this. He will be knowing only," said Viktor, "that my Lyusha suggested the man as a potential mate. Out of kindness to an old friend. This is all Vitya is intending on telling him."

"You will ask the proper permission?"
"Is Krum. Will be courting this man properly or not at all. Is knowing even now that he is broken in his heart from loss of a love. Is not knowing even if will be considering suit of Vitya."

"Your courtship offering will have to be..."

"Is not promised. Is the only honorable route to marriage for Vitya. Is knowing this."

"Very well. What little friend of Harry Potter's do you have your eyes set on?" asked the librarian quietly, "The Prophet did profiles on all of them, though if it's a man you might be better served by the Witch Weekly profiles. They were more honest, if less deep, than what Skeeter writes."

"Is thinking Skeeter would be writing truth. Is knowing man had tragic life. Is like Skeeter to be acknowledging this and laughing at it in her black heart."

"Who?"

"Neville Longbottom."

"Viktor... Neville Longbottom has the Order of Merlin, First Class."

"Is knowing," said Viktor. "Is hero, as Vitya was saying."

The librarian sighed. "There will be a lot about him that is..."

"Is knowing old teacher can be helping to find what is truth amid sea of falsehoods."
At his heart, Viktor Krum was a simple man, a romantic who read the heartbreaking accounts of the torture afflicting the Longbottoms with tears in his eyes. He read with interest the concerns of the reporters that the child who had suffered the *Cruciatus* curse along with his parents would share their fate, and never come to true consciousness. He read the accounts of the mediwiches who had the Longbottoms in care. Of their certainty nothing would ever be done, of their resignation to take care of the family anyway, as heroes who had fought against the Dark Lord, for a price.

He read of the fall of a powerful family as the moderately wealthy Longbottoms were taken into care, and the family left nearly destitute from the cost. Suddenly the derisive comments about Neville, about a wand that was not his, about a bumbling figure whose magic did not work properly began making sense. The boy's schooling had been funded by a trust that could not be touched even by the government, but it was modest and insufficient. The reports suggested that Hogwarts' headmaster, Albus Dumbledore, had supplemented it to allow the boy to attend at all.

He read about how the young man had finished Hogwarts, of the surprise that he'd been awarded the Order of Merlin, First Class, the only student other than the infamous Golden Trio to have achieved that honor. He read the young man's statements and his sorrow. Not proud to have accomplished, but torn by what he had not.

He read with fascination of the young man's hopeless pursuit of Harry Potter, and then the suggestions of a romance between Neville and his own Lyusha. Then there were smaller articles, brief but likely accurate, about Neville as a man, about a partnership with Casey Hughes, a former Durmstrang student in Luciano's year, to provide potions ingredients. Their business specialized in the exceedingly rare, with Neville having an apparently well-deserved reputation for excelling at raising and cultivating impossibly rare and difficult to grow plants.

Viktor looked at the picture again. Neville digging. He was beautiful, a young man in the prime of life, smooth and muscular and covered in sweat and earth. But it was the look of total contentment on his face as he was digging that helped to make him beautiful. Viktor sighed. The man had no idea he was beautiful, no ego to speak of. Viktor closed his eyes. If he was to do this he'd have to...
Viktor set down the mass of papers on his desk and looked to the small room off of his study where the pensieve lay waiting. Luciano was right, this man, this Neville, was fascinating. To have so completely captured the heart of two of Viktor's closest friends would have taken a man of complex and wondrous character. He found himself wanting to know this man, to understand him.

Viktor growled and stood. He took a deep breath and summoned his determination. There was a crack, and a lurch, and Viktor was elsewhere.

Half a dozen house elves descended on him at once. They fussed and begged to be of service and scattered at a growl from him as he strode through the opulence of the nobility. He strode past ceilings touched with gold leaf, through rooms paneled in amber. The house elves followed at a distance, hiding behind corners and statues when he turned to give them a look and a glare. He could see the fear in the house elf who guarded the peace and privacy of his father's study. The brave front as the elf tugged upon the tea towel with the wolf crest of the Krum family and puffed out its chest.

"Your father is seeing no one today," said the elf in the haughtiest tone it could manage.

"Be moving aside, Zhensi," said Viktor.

"The young master is not to disturb his father," said Zhensi backing up and throwing his arms wide across the door.

Viktor growled.

"We have been given orders, sir!"

Viktor considered. House elf magic was strong, and it answered families, the head of house over all others. Hermione would have been proud. He hesitated. He knelt quietly before the elf. "Is inside?"

Zhensi nodded.

"Is telling father, then, for Vitya."

The elf gulped. "Yes, Master Vitya."

"Is to be paying court in suit for marriage. If father is to be wishing to speak to Vitya, he should be..."

The door slammed open from inside, flinging Zhensi aside. The house elf apparated just before he hit the wall, to be caught by two of the other house elves down the hall. Viktor allowed himself to smile at the familiar scene. His father had always heard every word of every conversation outside his study. And Zhensi had always been an expert at never actually hitting the wall.

"Vitya, my son," said a tall man, muscular and with a vicious hook of a nose and familiar bushy eyebrows. He spread his arms wide and hugged his son fiercely. "Is finding nice witch? Finally. Was waiting long time. Was worrying after Grimaldi boy. So be telling your father. Was stealing Granger from Weasley? Or finding nice witch with golden fur and eyes shining black like..."

"Was right to be worrying after Lyusha, papa."

Gregori Krum looked into Viktor's eyes. "Is Vitya telling to his father that he is to be embarrassing Krum name? Do not be speaking such foolishness!"

"No, papa. Is telling you my intentions. Is to be courting, if suit is being accepted."
"Nice witch, be telling father that is nice witch that Vitya is to be courting."

"Is not lying to papa. Lyusha, he asked me long ago to be accepting suit, and was always regretting that I refused him. Now is doing right. Is courting beautiful man, if man is to be accepting suit of humble Vitya."

"You would embarrass me? Embarrass all of Krum family! Thousand year history of ancient family!"

"Is not to be embarrassing of family, papa. Is preferring men. Would rather I..." Viktor's eyes fell. "Is having fortune of own. Manor of own. Is not asking anything of family since was finishing at Durmstrang. Has made family proud, best seeker in all of world, papa. Now is wanting only to be happy."

"And will this man, this human wizard, give to you a pup to bear our name?"

"If is not, will bear pup myself," said Viktor. "Is not ending line of Krum. But is not willing to sacrifice so much of self to lie."

"They will be being... there will be being pictures, Vitya. Of you with this man."

"Is being hero, papa. Is good man. Is fighting evil like grandfather did." Viktor stepped away and bowed his head. "Is begging leave of father to be pursuing courtship. Please, papa."

"Be telling your father first. Who?"

Viktor swallowed softly. "Neville Longbottom."

Gregori Krum turned away and covered his face with his hands. "Be telling me why."

"Would rather I continue flings with Muggles?"

The words were a growl this time. "Be telling why!"

"Is a beautiful man, papa," said Viktor softly. "Is not walking into this without thought."

"Vitya, my son, is in love with this man?"

Viktor shook his head. "Is knowing him only as younger student when was being at Hogwarts for Tournament. But is. He is lost soul, like to Vitya. Lost and needing to be found. Is thinking we could be finding of each other."

"Love is fickle thing, Vitya. What if you find is not compatible with this man. Surely there is..."

"Vitya will not be finding a witch," said Viktor. "Papa, do not be hoping for this. Will not be happening, not ever."

"Is still fair question, my son," said Gregori.

"Is purpose of courtship. To be finding if truly compatible. Is having great hope for this man, papa. Is knowing much about him."

"Be telling your father why."

"In school, papa, was in relationship with Luciano Grimaldi. You were knowing, I am thinking. That hurt was greater than simple fighting between close friends. Was great joy, papa, to be sharing
in each other, to be reveling in the heart and heat of being wolf. Was in love, papa. And was losing. Lyusha and Vitya, both of us, we were being so very like. And it caused between us much conflict." Viktor sighed and looked at the floor.

"Is great regret that was turning aside courtship offering of Lyusha," continued Viktor. "Is telling you this. Lyusha was promised, in dark rite, by He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Was promised to son of Death Eater with approval of Grimaldi family."

Gregori growled. "Was never much to be liking Damian Grimaldi."

Viktor grunted in agreement. "Is. Papa, is knowing much of Neville Longbottom, because was being chosen mate of Lyushenka moi. Lyusha, he is thinking that Neville and Vitya, that we could be making each other happy. Lyusha was being lover of both of us. Is knowing Vitya better than even you, papa."

"Is not possible to be claiming mate of another wolf."

Viktor shook his head. "Lyusha is not... was not claiming. And has given his claim to promised. Now is seeing to happiness of Neville, who he loves still. And of Vitya, who still has place in Grimaldi heart if not in his bed."

"He will not be accepting suit of Vitya."

"Then is hurting nothing to be giving permission to son, to be pursuing of desires of his heart."

Gregori looked at Viktor critically. "Is pack to be accepting this Neville?"

"Is not knowing, papa. But is pack leader. And Lyusha is pack defender. Lyusha will stand with Vitya. Is wanting only for Vitya to be finding happiness."

"He is seeking to be using you, my son, to be taking of his scraps."

"No," said Viktor, his voice harsh and raw. "Is having to leave cherished soul, and wanting Vitya to be offering this soul comfort. Is so hard to believe of your son, that Vitya is being willing to try?"

"Comfort is not love."

"But is easy for it to become basis for being more, papa."

"Is needing gift."

Viktor shook his head. "Is giving to him rose."

"Vitya!"

"Is decided already, papa. Will be courting even if you are denying to me place in family."

"That rose is secret of Krum family. Held in trust for the great witch for a thousand years!"

"Is hoping then that the Baba Yaga will be forgiving actions of heart," said Viktor quietly. "Is making suit. Is gift, rare and precious. Is also gesture of trust. Is making gift, papa. Is giving witch rose. Is preferring witch rose of Krum family that blooms in the night of the Siberian winter."

"Is foolish to be giving such a precious gift. Is not even to be recognizing."
Viktor gulped. Neville would recognize the rose. He would. Viktor held himself up straight and squared his shoulders. "Will be accepting suit, then, if Neville is recognizing of rose?"

Gregori's eyes narrowed. "Vitya is trusting too much in young hero if is thinking will be knowing. If was Granger, she would be knowing."

"Neville will be recognizing rose, papa."

"If is recognizing," said Gregori softly, "is learned man. And also hero. If is recognizing, my son, then Krum family will be accepting Vitya's intended."
Chapter 4

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Note that this is a side story based on the events of Promised, a fic written for the Nuke Bigbang 2012 that combined a Nuke and a Drarry fic.

IMPORTANT: This story is a side story and is based on the events of my previous story, Promised. This story begins before the events of The Redemption of Seamus Finnigan and shortly after chapter 90 of Promised.

A/N: I may be posting more frequently for the next few chapters, since while rewritten from a slightly different POV and in some cases expanded quite a bit, after this chapter there is a bit of repeat material from Promised. It's brief, but since it tells how the courtship actually starts, I didn't want to skip it.

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"Thinking about something, love," said Noah Mayer quietly.

Luciano smiled softly and leaned backwards to catch the other man's lips with his in an awkward kiss that somehow reinforced everything about why they worked. It was awkward, but Noah's lips had been there waiting. Just as his hand was there to catch Luciano's and squeeze. Luciano smiled into the awkward kiss and returned the squeeze of Noah's hand. This man was his, owned and claimed. He belonged solely to Luciano, to the very depths of his soul.

"You can go see him," said Noah softly. "I'm not jealous."

"Liar."

Noah chuckled. "Okay, so I'm not perfect. He's your ex."

"I need to. He. This is for Neville. I really... I," Luke's voice got very soft. "They could work."

"Like Oliver did?" asked Noah.

"We both knew that wouldn't last, however much we hoped..."

"I ran the charts."

"Noah!" said Luke, pulling himself up from his chair. "Why would you..."

"Because last time they were both hurt. Oliver and Neville. If you're going to push them together, let us at least know if there's a chance."

"Is there?"

Noah smiled just a bit at the corner of his mouth. "Perhaps. Arithmancy isn't Divination, it doesn't tell the future exactly."

"I asked Viktor to try, Noah. He's. He's been very alone. He barely leaves that manor of his except for Quidditch games and interviews. I don't know if he'll try, Noah."
Noah leaned in and kissed him. "Go. He might need a push, love. It's. Give him that push. Neville... he'll thank you for it eventually."

Luke moved close to Noah and pressed against him, kissing Noah somewhat more seriously and brushing the marks on his neck with his fingers as his hand wrapped around the back of Noah's neck to pull him closer for the kiss. Noah moaned into it as the claiming mark sent waves of pleasure through him. Luke smiled. "Mine."

Noah kissed him again. "I love you."

"I'll be back soon, bubby." Luciano smiled and brushed the marks on Noah's neck one final time, then his hand reached for the pot of floo powder on the mantle, and with a word and a flash of green flame, Luciano was gone.

Viktor's voice was calm when it greeted him. "Has been expecting visit from old friend," he said quietly. "Is wondering what has been taking you so long."

Luciano stepped up to the chair and set a hand on Viktor's shoulder. "Is it so hard, Vityenka moi, to try?"

"Is not knowing this boy. Is. Lyushenka, Vitya is Krum. Only honorable way to be pursuing is..."

"I know. You'd have to court him. I pursued you that way once."

Viktor gulped. "Was being foolish to be refusing of suit from beautiful wolf that shared my bed."


"Is thinking you are very lucky to have man that accepts claim of wolf so openly."

"You think Neville would refuse you because of that? Vitya, you," Luke paused, "you could try. It can be done quietly. You don't have to risk refusal in the open."

"Is thinking you are forgetting what life is like for Vitya outside of walls," said Viktor, standing abruptly from his chair. "Is being followed everywhere is going. Even if others are not seeing, Skeeter, she will be seeing."

"You're going to let a skank from the Daily Prophet keep you from trying to be..."

"Is not saying will not be asking."

Luke grinned. "You..."

"Is studying of this Neville Longbottom. Is seeming honorable man. Complex."

"He is that," said Luciano quietly.

"And if Vitya is wrong for this man. Is hurting. This man, he is recovering still slowly from heart broken by own dear friend. Is it right to be asking of him now? To be asking for..."

Luke strode past the chair and grasped Viktor firmly by each arm. "All you can do, Vityenka, is ask. He... we will struggle and he. He might refuse you. You're right, he's fragile."

"And if refuses? Is hurting then both of this Neville and of Olya, who is dear friend."
"It's your father, isn't it? Does he disapprove?"

"Is knowing well that my father... he is not approving of this," he nodded to Luke, "of Vitya wanting to be with man."

"He has to know. He... he walked in on us that time." Luke blushed. There had been more than one time.

"Da, is knowing, but is not same as accepting. Is long holding hope that Vitya will be finding nice wolf with golden fur, and be giving to papa grandchildren with strength in the blood of wolves."

"Vitya," said Luke, moving his hand from Viktor's shoulder to his chest, "Neville... he's very strong. He's..."

"Is being conundrum, this Neville. Is being hero but hating it, I am thinking," said Viktor, "as much as Harry is hating it."

"Please Vitya. Your father, he loves you. He'll. If you ask him, if you want it, your father will give you..."

"Is being late for that..."

Luke's dimples showed as he beamed at that. "You already..."

"Is having permission is needing," said Viktor. "Does not mean will be asking. Is thinking..."

Luke's hand clutched gently at Viktor's chest. "I want you both to be..."

"Father was accusing me of accepting scraps from you. Of Lyusha using Vitya to be assuaging guilt on own conscience."

"And you?"

"Is thinking father is not completely wrong. Is not courting to be assuaging guilt of old friend, even if friend was lover once."

"He's. I want both of you to be..."

Viktor hung his head. "Is having to risk much for chance of Longbottom being interested."

"Vitya. Vityenka moi," Luke's hand grasped again at Viktor's chest over his heart, "Nev is capable of such... you have to understand, he loves so, so completely. And he's been so alone all his life, he holds onto the fire of passion and he, he doesn't let go."

"Was letting go of you, Lyushenka."

Luke shook his head and looked away. "Only because he had no choice."

"There's... Vitya, there's a game this weekend at Hogwarts. Come with me. Have dinner with us afterward."

"Is knowing this cannot be waiting. Is pure blood from old family. Is having to..."

"At least you'll know," said Luke, "one way or the other. If there's a chance."

"Is wanting Vitya to be charming and dashing. Is intrigued, is knowing this already, by
Longbottom. Is intrigued and terrified also," said Viktor. "Was seeing into eyes of Longbottom in memory shared by Olya. Was seeing him at battle at Hogwarts. This is man able... Lyushenka moi, was studying Dark Arts, same as Vitya. Is knowing that look."

Luke nodded. "That's part of why you are a good... you will understand the things that bring terror to Neville's soul, Vitya. You can..."

"He was finding comfort from you in this?"

"Yes."

"Is not liking to be admitting terror in own soul. To be asking. To be begging for hero to be considering Vitya, not Krum. Is thinking Neville will be knowing difference. Was being surprised that greatest fear is least of issues."

"I know it's difficult, Vitya," said Luciano quietly. "And I know... it's going to require something special to convince..."

Viktor shook his head. "Is already knowing what is offering to Neville."

"So you will ask."

Viktor turned away and closed his eyes. "Da. Is asking. Is taking risk. But is still feeling terror. Is not being good at affairs of heart, my Lyusha."

"Your father?"

"Is accepting of choice so long as Neville is recognizing gift. Was knowing Vitya was serious in request when was telling..."

"What is it?"

Viktor's hand sought his wand and he spoke a word. There in the center of the room, suspended in magic and power, was a rose. A single rose, slowly blooming, its petals strangely transparent, like ice or glass, its thorns wicked and sharp.

Luciano gulped. He'd seen this rose before. Been shown, secretly. "Your father is letting you..."

"Letting is strong term. Not preventing is being better at describing." Viktor looked sadly at the rose. "Papa is to be allowing suit if Longbottom is to be recognizing rose."

"There's no way he's ever seen one. It's a myth, that rose."

"Is not being myth. Is ancient secret of family descended from daughter of the great witch. With Natasha came promise of rose. Is thinking Neville is great lover of rare plants. Is offering to him gift both rare and precious. If is keeping and not selling, will be knowing quality of man. If is even knowing what is flower that Vitya is offering, will be knowing skill of man. If flower... if rose of great Baba Yaga is glowing when Vitya is touching man, is also knowing, for was great test of ancestor, to be showing could be loving daughter of the Witch."

"He'll love it."

"Is counting on this," said Vitya softly. "Is hoping that rose will be opening way through walls of ice beautiful man is raising around him. Is hoping that he will be considering..." Viktor gulped. "Is very frightened old friend. Is risking secret of Krum family."
Luke turned Viktor to face him and tapped him on the chin. "It's a good choice, Vitya. He'll love it. He will."

"But will he be accepting suit of Vitya?"

Luke embraced Viktor and held him. "I hope so. I want both of you to be happy."
Chapter 5

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IMPORTANT: This story is a side story and is based on the events of my previous story, Promised. This story begins before the events of The Redemption of Seamus Finnigan and shortly after chapter 90 of Promised.

A/N: The next three chapters are taken from Promised, though rewrites have been done to shift and take into account Viktor's POV. I'll try to get these chapters out of the way quickly, so that those of you who read Promised are back to new material soon.

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Viktor stood toward the back of the faculty box nervously watching. Neville was clearly cold and miserable, though he was doing his best not to show it. The others in the box were leaning against each other for the shared warmth of warming charms against the cold November air. Neville just stood, watching intently as Hufflepuff scored again.

"Slytherin seeker best be careful," said Neville as he watched the Slytherin seeker desperately seeking the Golden Snitch. "If he catches the snitch now, Hufflepuff will still win."

Harry and Draco looked alarmed at the scoreboard and realized Neville was right. He'd been the only one to notice, but the last score had pushed Hufflepuff into a hefty enough lead to survive Slytherin catching the snitch. And it looked to be a danger too, with the seeker zipping past as if in chase. Noah had a broad grin on his face. The Slytherins hadn't realized it yet, and while Slytherin had a better seeker, the Hufflepuff keeper had only missed blocking the Quaffle twice.

Neville shivered again against the chill. "Wish the seeker would just catch the damned thing," he muttered to himself.

"You are wearing inadequate coat for such weather," said Viktor, pulling off his own heavy fur coat and setting it gently on Neville's shoulders. The chill of the air was invigorating, and Viktor smiled, comfortable in just his plain clothes as he stepped to the edge of the box with Neville. "You are being right, I am thinking. Sloppy, but is easy to miss as seeker. Always paying more attention to finding snitch than to score."

It was not difficult to see the astonished looks in Harry and Draco's eyes as they recognized him. He'd expected it, of course. Viktor Krum was the best seeker in all the wizarding world. And Harry, of course, had been a Triwizard Champion with him. Viktor smiled as Hermione practically glowed with delight. His nose twitched. How was it that his old friend had failed to mention that she was pregnant? Viktor turned his attention back to Neville.

"Ummm... Thanks for the coat?" said Neville weakly.

"Is being my pleasure," said Viktor, scanning the pitch to get a feel for what was going on in the game. "Slytherin seeker is being rather well trained," he commented with a hint of a grin. "I is hearing this is your doing," he glanced in Harry's direction.
Hermione stood carefully came over to hug him. "Viktor! I... what are you doing here?"

"I am being right now very happy to be seeing old friends," he laughed spinning her gently and without squeezing her at all. "And... I was not hearing about your condition," he said, giving her a little frown to show his disappointment. "Why did you not say something in last letter?"

Viktor only half listened as Hermione, Noah, and Luke bantered about Hermione's work stress. Luke and Noah were cloyingly sweet together he noticed. It was welcome, but still painful to watch as Luke nuzzled close against Noah, whose attention was fiercely on the game.

"Still can't see the snitch," groaned Neville, watching the pitch carefully in search of the elusive Golden Snitch.

Viktor smiled as he released Hermione, kissing her on the cheek. He stepped rather deliberately close to Neville. "It is being right there, my young handsome friend," he said pointing with fierce certainty. He'd spotted the snitch first on entering the box. As a seeker he knew it would distract him from the handsome Gryffindor until he'd found it. "And I am thinking the Slytherin seeker is knowing this. Trust me, all he can sense is his own broken nose, and sight of snitch. He will grab it, I am certain, and will lose game for Slytherins."

Harry looked at him suddenly alarmed. He trusted Viktor's instincts about Quidditch implicitly. "What makes you think that?" he asked.

"Is how I lost World Cup for Bulgaria against Ireland. Was injured and could think of nothing but ending game."

Viktor seized Neville's hand, delighting in the tingle that surged through his body as the snitch zoomed past them. Viktor managed to duck with Neville under the path of the Slytherin seeker as he followed, a rush of chill air in his wake. Viktor released the hand reluctantly as they stood back up, clapping Neville on the back in a friendly gesture. "Sorry my handsome friend. I fear my reflexes would have had me grabbing the snitch. Then we would be watching whole game over. I am thinking you are being cold enough already."

Neville swallowed softly, trying not to think about the tingle in his fingers as he replied uncertainly, "It's... happy to help."

Viktor endured the expected questions then. Why was he here? But before anyone could ask him anything of substance, the Slytherin seeker claimed his prize to the groans of his dismayed teammates.

Noah cheered wildly, hugging Luke and kissing him soundly while Draco and Harry slumped against each other in disbelief. "Best go down to keep our seeker from getting hexed into oblivion," said Harry. "Come on, my dragon. Let's go."

Noah kissed Luke again, this time just lightly on the forehead. "I need to congratulate the team! Meet you at Hogsmeade, love?"

Viktor beamed, answering quickly, "Of course. We is having best seats in house at Griffin's Fire. All of us." He carefully made sure to include Neville in his sweeping gesture, even as Neville was backing away.

"I wasn't," began Neville.

"But... I..."

Minerva climbed down the stairs from the post above with the student announcer. "What an upset, Neville!" she said excitedly as she stepped carefully down the sturdy wooden steps. She looked a bit startled at the sight of Viktor standing there with them. "Mister Krum. Hogwarts is thrilled to have you here. What is the occasion?"

"Visiting old friends, headmistress."

She looked at him oddly, seeking in his eyes for something, but finally nodded. "It is good to see you again. The last time was in rather sad circumstances."

"Diggory boy is much missed," said Viktor, his voice suddenly rather sad. "Was worthy adversary."

Neville took the opportunity to seek an escape and quickly, rushing down the stairs with a mumbled apology.

Viktor gave the headmistress a quick nod of respect and followed close behind Neville, seizing Neville's hand just as he sought to turn back to the castle to pull him back towards Hogsmeade. "Is knowing what is like to be lone man in group of mated pairs," said Krum, glorying even in that brief contact, "but is sharing distinction with you. Is thinking you would not abandon me to such fate, yes?" He could see Luke watching them with a quiet smile.

"But... you're Viktor Krum!" said Neville. He tried to ignore the tingle of his fingers as his body responded to the handsome Quidditch star. He wasn't big and burly in the same ways as Oliver, but Viktor was built, and soft, and his hands were...

"And is still lonely when only single man in group of coupled friends," said Viktor plainly, an open, hopeful expression on his face. "Is knowing you are familiar with dilemma. Can tell."

"What if people think..." Neville looked pointedly at their hands. After Oliver, Neville had no illusions about the press. They clearly had gotten the hint that Neville liked men. In the past several weeks there had been at least a half dozen articles linking him to everyone from Seamus Finnigan to Anthony Goldstein.

"Is why studied dark arts in school," said Viktor with a sly grin and an eyebrow waggle. "Is knowing many appropriate hexes. Let us hurry. Is seeming that air is still cold for you, even in coat."

"I..."

"Neville," said Luke, stepping forward finally, "let's go."

"I was just going to..." Neville looked at Luke pleadingly. Surely his old lover wouldn't abandon him to Viktor Krum.

"Is hurting," said Viktor with an air of mockery that was clearly intended as a friendly joke, "that you would abandon me to couples in such sweet states of affection, my handsome friend."

"I wish you'd stop saying that!" shouted Neville.

"Is not knowing," said Viktor, feigning puzzlement, amazed to see the total lack of ego expressed so clearly, and yet turned on by Neville's awkward shyness. "Am I saying something wrong?"
"You keep calling me handsome!"

"You is preferring sexy?" said Viktor with another waggle of his bushy eyebrows. Viktor's eyes raked over Neville. The young man might never admit it, but he was actually both sexy and handsome. "I will be remembering, my most sexy friend. Come, friends are waiting."

Neville's gaze sought out Luke's as Viktor began to lead him away. "Is he flirting with me?" he mouthed at Luke. But the blonde just smiled, falling into place a few steps behind them as they walked to Hogsmeade.

Viktor tried to keep his occasional glances at the young Gryffindor subtle, but the blush on Neville's cheeks suggested he was not wholly successful. Neville did, reluctantly, keep hold of his hand though, and Viktor was fiercely glad that the young man hadn't let go. He kept the long walk from the Quidditch pitch to Hogsmeade as sedate as seemed feasible. Both Luciano and Viktor were used to such chilling temperatures from many winters at Durmstrang, but even with Viktor's coat, Neville was suffering.

By the time they reached Hogsmeade, it was clear word of Viktor's presence had spread. While the quiet town could handle its secretive entertaining of Ronald Weasley and Harry Potter, Viktor Krum was arguably the most famous Quidditch player in the world, and his appearance at Griffin's Fire, Hogsmeade's most exclusive restaurant, provoked not just looks, but screams. Viktor had to actually release Neville to work some quick magic to keep the press of anxious fans at bay.

Once they'd arrived at the restaurant, they were led to a back room where an elegant table had been set for the group. Ron and Hermione had arrived already and were laughing with each other as Luke entered with Viktor and Neville. Viktor chanced a brief smile at Hermione, whose letters and quiet friendship had helped sustain him through the difficult period when he'd just lost Luke. He could see the questions in her eyes as he took Neville's coat and hung it up in the corner and then quietly pulled out a chair for the young herbologist, heedless of the panicked look in Neville's eyes.

Viktor sat across from Neville, while Luke sat next to the shy herbologist who kept glancing furtively at him mouthing "well, is he?" as inconspicuously as he could.

Luciano could barely contain his "yes," focusing instead on continuing to ignore the question. He spotted their regular waitress quickly diverting her gaze from Viktor for just long enough to place a drink order for the group before sending her out again.

Talk at the table quickly turned to current events at their jobs, with Hermione being oddly evasive about her duties at the Ministry, noting only that it had been rather busy since Noah's departure and then there was another brief rush of people as Harry and Draco arrived with Noah. Luke smiled and stood again, kissing Noah and running his fingers lightly over the claim mark through his clothes, prompting a soft groan of pleasure from the handsome potions master's lips.


"Stop it you two," said Harry. "Even Draco and I aren't so cloyingly sweet."

"We could be," whispered Draco, kissing him lightly before pulling out a chair, prompting Hermione to turn her eyes toward Viktor, poignantly reminded of Viktor doing the same for Neville only minutes before.

"So Viktor," said Hermione as the others took their seats, "what really brings you to Hogwarts?"

"Had break in schedule," said Viktor. "Was feeling lonely and thought I would pay visit to old
friends. You, Hermione, and of course Lyusha." He smiled at his former paramour, then picked up
his water glass and drained it in a single long gulp. "Is thinking of you both after seeing pictures in
paper. Is sorry was unable to make it, Harry. You gave rather shorter notice than I was needing."

"I know," laughed Harry. While there had been no issues in getting time off for the Hogwarts staff
for his wedding, everyone else had found his choice of date rather tricky. "I had to ask personal
favors of Ron's team to get him the time off."

"Is understanding need for quiet and secrecy," said Viktor. "I is being followed constantly by
reporters. Is part of reason for being recluse!" He chuckled softly to himself. Humor was the only
way he'd found to deal with the indignities of being followed constantly.

Viktor tried to ignore it when the waitress returned with more drinks and took their order. She had
eyes for no one save Viktor himself, and flirted with him shamelessly despite his best efforts to
signal his disinterest. Viktor shook his head as she left.

"Sorry about that Vitya. You're a bit famous," said Luke apologetically. He'd known this bit would
be difficult for Viktor, who shied away from public appearances excepting his own matches.

"Is used to it," said Viktor with a shrug. "Is thinking though that there are better looking men at
table with whom forward waitress could be flirting."

"Victor!" exclaimed Hermione.

"Is true. Sitting here with gorgeous men. Gorgeous famous men, half of them heroes, and waitress
looks at me." He shook his head. "I is not understanding."

"You're famous, Vitya," said Luciano firmly, as though that should explain everything.

"Is knowing this. But he is Harry Potter. And he Ronald Weasley, and Draco Malfoy," he turned
his eyes on Luke, "and Luciano Grimaldi. Is like reading top ten of society pages for wizarding
world."

"They just want to know what girl you're going to pick next," said Ron honestly. "If you'd just pick
one, they might give you some peace."

"Is nice thought," he glanced across the table at Neville, suddenly nervous again. "But is not sure it
being favor to pick someone."

The waitress returned with food, quickly laying out the dinners for everyone except Viktor. That
one she lingered over placing each dish carefully before him and making sure her arms and hands
touched his as she placed them, then she disappeared again. Viktor pulled his wand out quickly,
sealing the door. "Begging forgiveness of old friends, but need peace for a few moments at least."

Conversation was quiet briefly as everyone began to eat. There were a few sympathetic looks at the
table, especially from Harry, though everyone there had experience with the pressures of an
unforgiving wizarding press.

It was Viktor who finally tried to get the conversation moving again, feeling the tension and
desperately trying to keep himself from succumbing to what he knew was a rather infantile desire
to play footsie with the young Gryffindor across the table. "Lyusha tells me he has new pack
mate?" he ventured. "A child... medvyedchik... I is thinking Teddy is name."

Harry beamed with pride as he met Viktorn's gaze. "Yes, he's been helping a great deal with Teddy.
I... I didn't realize you knew about..."
"Is being a quarter wolf. Not so unusual at Durmstrang. Is not something press needs to know," he said quietly. It was a stirring admission with the shame in wizarding circles over wolf blood, and Viktor kept his eyes on Neville as he made it. "They would be... blowing out of proportion, yes?"

"Teddy is half," said Luke with a smile. "His instincts are very strong."

"Is good then to have protector and pack mate," said Viktor. "Is being good father to allow it, Harry."

"Thank you, Victor," replied Harry. "Luke and Noah have been good friends to us."

Viktor looked across the table at Luciano. "Lyusha. Has been wanting to meet this Noah of yours," he said, elbowing the young man beside him in the ribs. "Is sitting next to him and he says nothing."

"Not sure what to say," said Noah, shrugging.

Victor turned and sniffed the air. "He claimed you last night. Rubbed his scent into you knowing I would come. Scent is very strong. You are his."

"Completely," said Noah, blushing. He'd known, of course, that Viktor would be able to smell him but... his next words were quiet. "I am owned."

Krum's eyes darkened. "I is thinking my Lyusha is lucky man. Was having much worry for him. He," Viktor looked rather pointedly at Neville, "had been very much in love before. And he was not entirely knowing it, I think, until he was losing it."

"Neither of us were good at admitting those feelings until it was too late," said Neville, his voice tinged with bitterness and regret.

Viktor gulped. He hadn't wanted to see Neville react with such... he turned quickly toward the end of the table. "My redhead friend," said Viktor to Ron, "You are being rather quiet. I am hoping I is not making you too uncomfortable."

"Sorry, mate," said Ron, his voice also subdued. "Just still..." he shook his head. "You remind me of a difficult time. Nothing you did."

"Mister Malfoy?" asked Viktor with a quiet sense of desperation.

"Hmm," said Draco, as though only realizing belatedly that Viktor was speaking to him. "Sorry. That year you were at Hogwarts, Krum, it was a difficult one. For both Ronald and myself in particular."

Harry and Noah both reached out to set a comforting hand on Draco's, gazing into pained eyes as Hermione did the same for Ron. The redhead wizard looked away shyly, unable to meet the formidable witch's eyes.

"I see. I is being poor guest dredging up bad memories." Viktor looked down at the food on his plate, herb-laden butter swirling around chicken. "Forgive me. I is not being good at..."

"Don't feel bad," said Neville with a cautious smile, jokingly kicking at his leg gently, "I'm bollocks at the social thing too. That's why I wanted to skive off it."

"Ah, well, perhaps my sexy young friend," Neville's eyes went wide as Viktor spoke, "we can at least share in that."
"Why do you keep. I'm not handsome or sexy," hissed Neville, suddenly very conscious of his best friends surrounding him.

"I is thinking you say that to yourself often enough that you even believe it," said Viktor, looking directly into Neville's deep blue eyes. "Does it bother you that I mean it?"

Neville's face became pale. He'd been looking at Viktor's eyes when he said it and there was an honesty there that stunned him. "You..."

"Oi mate!" said Ronald, shaken from his own embarrassed avoidance of Hermione's gaze. "Stop teasing Neville! We all know you're straight!"

"He's rather fragile," said Hermione with a sad glance at Viktor.

"And we don't want to see him hurt," said Harry quietly. "He..."

"He's stronger than you are thinking. Can smell his power. His strength," said Viktor, his head weaving back and forth as he inhaled the scent of the room. "The earth lives inside him, makes him strong." Viktor shuddered as he breathed in Neville's scent and let it fill him.

"I'm right here," said Neville, slamming a hand into the table. "You could talk to me!"

Viktor looked at him, directly at him as though his eyes might bore into Neville's soul. "If it is bothering you, Neville, I will stop calling you sexy, or handsome. But not saying these words, it does not make them less true, yes?"

"It makes me uncomfortable," said Neville, his cheeks coloring.

"Then forgive me young friend. Nevya, yes? Is not proper to use formality of full name. Is being Vitya, not Viktor. Viktor is famous seeker. Vitya is simple quiet man. Man who was happiest," his voice got very quiet as he looked directly at Luciano, "when he had Lyusha on his arm a long time ago. Is thinking you is knowing that feeling."

Neville lips curled into the barest hint of a smile. He'd been right about Viktor. He gulped. Which meant it probably had been flirting. "I'd... I suspected. He gets all wound up when he sees the pictures of you with a woman on your arm."

"Was making stupid mistakes in youth. Is for best though," Viktor gazed quietly between Noah and Luke, "he is bound, and with mate and pup, by Koschei, a pup. Would have been losing him," said Viktor quietly. "It is loss I know well."

"Blimey, Viktor," said Ronald, his eyes wide, "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Told few," said Viktor plainly. "Perhaps ten people in whole of world."

Ron's mouth opened into an "oh."

"So why did you come to Hogwarts?" asked Draco, his voice coldly pointed. "You don't travel. Not even for old friends. Your reputation for being a recluse rivals this one," he set his hand on Harry's.

"Hmph. You is being most perceptive, Mister Malfoy. Is here to congratulate old flame who is being bound soon. Is here to see him with own eyes, and welcome, if his mate allows, their pup to our pack," Noah's eyes widened as Viktor spoke. "Is for protection, as pup is Grimaldi and will have enemies, and is Mayer and will be reviled for the name. For old lover, I will do this thing, and make the pup safe forever, as Lyusha has done without a word for Harry's medvyedchik." He
looked back at Draco. "Is good enough reason I am thinking?"

Draco nodded silently at him and gulped, his gaze wandering across the table to Luke who regarded him calmly with just a raised eyebrow.

"Didn't know you were binding, mate," said Ron leaning across the table to look past Harry and Draco to Luke and Noah.

"Hadn't told anyone," said Noah, turning inquisitive eyes to Viktor. "You knew?"

"Is knowing Lyusha long time. You made him howl, Noah. Is not knowing how you pulled the full passion from him. Is not knowing, but is still accepting your place in pack. Knowing Lyusha well. He will follow formality in this. His pup will be borne with a proper name, and he will acknowledge the child in your body before the witnesses of his flesh." He looked pointedly at Luke. "I am thinking it will be soon."

Neville trembled and began to shake, then pushed away from the table. "I'm... I'm sorry." He stood, turning from the table, and ran. Luke started to follow and was stilled by a word from Viktor.

"Is taking care of this, Lyushenka moi," said Viktor, standing and following Neville out of the room.
Chapter 6

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IMPORTANT: This story is a side story and is based on the events of my previous story, Promised. This story begins before the events of The Redemption of Seamus Finnigan and shortly after chapter 90 of Promised.

A/N: As before this is chapter repeated and expanded from Promised.

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Neville had maintained enough propriety to walk through the restaurant once he'd left the small private room, but Viktor did not bother as he followed, running quickly to catch up to him. He found Neville, shaking from the cold in the absence of his coat, leaning against a wall a few hundred meters from the restaurant.

"Nevya?" said Viktor softly.

"Neville," said the Gryffindor firmly.

"I is thinking not," said Viktor. He took a quick look at the trembling young herbologist and cast a quick warming charm around them. "Neville is hard. A hard and powerful man. Quiet, so no one is suspecting, but very hard, ruthless even, when necessary. Neville is being very like Noah. Is why was such good match for Lyusha."

Viktor hesitated, a hand gently plucking strands of hair from Neville's face. "Nevya, I am thinking, is soft and loving. Nevya is appreciating quiet beauty of flower," He pulled a beautiful translucent rose that looked almost made from frosted glass from inside his tunic, the spells of preservation and protection and stasis that had held it safe within his tunic falling from it, causing it to bloom before their eyes. "Nevya, I think is knowing what this flower is."

Neville looked at the flower in shock. It wasn't possible. The... it was a myth.

Viktor stepped closer to Neville and set his hand against Neville's neck, smiling as the flower pulsed suddenly with light. "I is thinking Nevya knows meaning of this too." Viktor gulped as he glanced furtively down before meeting Neville's gaze. "I is coming to Hogwarts for you, Nevya. I is here for Lyusha, my pack mate of course, but is also coming here for you. To be seeing you and offering to you this flower."

"A Night Blooming Siberian Witch Rose?" asked Neville reverently, naming what was perhaps the rarest of all magical plants, his fingers moving to brush the petals tentatively. "Where... how?"

"I is knowing place," said Viktor, his grin wide. He'd explain the whole truth to Neville eventually... if and when. He gulped softly and continued, "They have never been grown in captivity, not with success. You are knowing this, I am certain. Was thinking you might be wishing to try."
"Why?" asked Neville. He found himself unable to look away from the dark intensity of Viktor's eyes.

"Because you are being handsome, and sexy, and beautiful, Nevya. And I is wishing to know the softness of such a man, that he is showing only to those who are knowing him best."

"What about the reporters?" said Neville, taking note of the flash of wizarding cameras around them, though remarkably Krum's earlier wards still kept them physically at bay. How had... someone had fire called the press, clearly.

"Is thinking this will be front page, and I is not being troubled to care," said Viktor leaning in to kiss Neville, his tongue lightly licking against Neville's bottom lip for permission. Neville saw the light of the rose flare as his eyes closed and he abandoned his hesitance, letting himself be lost in Viktor's kiss.

The dark intensity of Viktor's eyes met Neville's blue as they parted, breathless. "Nevya moi, I..." soft petals, icy cold but velvety soft brushed against Neville's cheek as Viktor touched the translucent rose to Neville's cheek and it glowed softly.

Neville trembled, trying desperately to still his body which was reacting with alarming strength to the hard body of the Quidditch player who held him. Dimly he was aware that they'd been snogging like horny teenagers on the street. But this Vitya that was brushing the petals of one of the world's rarest flowers against his cheek was no teenager. Soft, full lips brushed Neville's neck briefly and then Viktor's forehead was pressed against Neville's shoulder as the man took deep slow breaths.

"I is not losing control like to horny teenage boy," said Viktor through clenched teeth. "Not for this. Is being too important. Is wanting very much, Nevya, is wanting to do properly."

"Feels fine to me..." said Neville, letting himself forget for a moment that the body against his was Viktor Krum and instead focusing on the heat and fire that was pressed against him, on the hardness pressed into his waist. It was so comfortable. So...

Viktor chuckled. "Is hormones talking. Is feeling too!" He took a very long deep breath and then another. Then he stood very straight, pressing his right hand over Neville's heart as he gently brushed the rose over Neville's nose and lips causing it to glow softly with an inner light. "Is offering you flower, Nevya. Will you be accepting?"

Years of pure blood training filled Neville's mind as he struggled to put the proper meaning into the gesture. In pure blood society every gift had purpose and meaning. A pure blooded man was offering him a flower. What was... no. Not just a flower. That was too simple. A gift of rare beauty offered with a kiss, and a hand pressed over Neville's heart. Neville shuddered as he made the association, his left hand seizing Viktor's wrist as the man's hand still splayed wide over Neville's heart. "Is it just a flower?"

"Is thinking you is knowing answer," said Viktor, his eyes not leaving Neville's.

"That can only be offered willingly, never taken," said Viktor, his voice rough and breathy, betraying what the thought of claiming Neville did to him, though his posture was still rigid as he looked up into the taller man's blue eyes. "I is offering flower, Nevya moi, a gift both rare and
precious, of beauty that is matching the ice in eyes of blue that I am searching in for answer."

Neville's eyes glanced back towards the restaurant as he thought of Luciano still inside. "I love him."

"Is knowing this," said Viktor. "Is keeping place in heart for him, always. Is not troubled if you also keep place. Is asking only to be honest in feelings for Vitya," the short man looked down at the flower in his hand for a moment and raised his eyes back up. "Is thinking Nevya felt spark when hands touched. Is thinking Nevya knows what is taking for witch rose to glow from touch of two men. Is thinking Nevya is wanting to say yes, and is halted by loss of dearest love that wounds him in heart, here," Viktor's hand over his heart clenched just slightly.

Viktor hesitated for a moment and dropped down onto one knee. "Is confessing that Lyusha offered this gift to Vitya once. Something rare and beautiful. Vitya has been regretting his answer every day since. Nevya moi?" He lifted the flower up to the hook nose for which he was known and inhaled, offering the flower once again. "Is offering for third time on bent knee. Is thinking beautiful soul is lurking behind hard ice in those eyes. Is wanting to know this soul."

"I'm just a school teacher, a gardener," said Neville disparagingly.

"Who recognizes plant most think is myth," said Viktor, quietly happy in the knowledge that Neville's encyclopedic command of rare plants would translate into acceptance of the suit from his father. If Neville would only... Tradition would not allow him to ask again, so he settled for fixing Neville's eyes in his and raising the flower one more time.

Neville trembled, his gaze jumping between the dark intensity of Viktor's eyes that stared at him under those bushy eyebrows and the translucent beauty of a flower that he had thought did not exist. He swallowed. His gran would be furious at him. Accepting a courtship gift? He almost smiled at that thought. He looked back into the dark brooding eyes of the best seeker in the world, into an expression of hope and openness that was breathtaking. Neville couldn't help the tears that ran down his cheek. He reached out his hand and gently lifted the rose from Viktor's fingers. He closed his eyes and inhaled the scent, a cold vanilla-like sweetness more like candy than a flower.

"It is said that the ancient witch of the Russian steppe, the Baba Yaga, created the witch rose, and it is named for her," said Neville quietly. "The rose reveals the truth of the heart's desire," he pricked his finger against a thorn along the stem and the translucent petals burned with a cold flame, petals erupting in reds and yellows and oranges. "So tell me, Vitya, do you burn with fire as my Luciano did?"

Dark eyes regarded Neville, surprised that he knew even that much about the near mythical flower, but he did not speak, could not speak. Tradition required his silence once the offering was taken, until an answer was given. He waited patiently, pleading with the intensity of his gaze.

"Will you show me your fire, Vitya?"

Viktor gave the barest hint of a nod. Even that stretched the allowances of the rite, but he could see Neville was fighting.

Neville ignored the flashing of wizarding photos being taken by the assuredly very frustrated reporters, watching from the distance that Viktor had forced upon them. The petals of the rose faded once again into a translucent icy beauty and Neville held out a hand to the kneeling man, lifting him to his feet with an ease that startled the seeker. He pulled the other man against him.

Neville reached up, gently, tenderly, as he might have done once not that long ago for Oliver or
Luciano, to run a finger down the side of Viktor's face. He fought for his voice. He could feel it, the tingling in his fingers at the touch. The feeling he thought he'd lost. He could still feel ghosting on his neck the feel of Viktor's lips. He could still taste the butter and herbs that had overshadowed the man's natural flavor on his lips. Neville set a hand on Viktor's shoulder and looked into the questioning man's eyes, pleading eyes, still, but the man was silent. He stepped even closer, deep into the personal space of the other man. Viktor's discomfort at such closeness, here, with the lights of the cameras flashing was palpable, but he did not pull away, and his eyes stayed fixed, boring into Neville's soul.

He leaned in close, so close that he could taste butter again just from Viktor's breath. "I give my consent, Vitya. I will accept your suit." His breath kissed against Viktor's lips. "Burn me with your fire... I want to feel it."

Viktor's body trembled against him, a hand pressed against his face and neck, sliding around to entangle in his hair and pull him into the hot breath and warm fire of Viktor's kiss. His lips were hot, tasting more of the herbs than butter and his tongue teased against Neville's as a low gutteral growl sounded deep in his throat. They pulled apart and Neville could see Viktor fighting against his wolf, his eyes glossy black almost to the edges as his whole body shook softly and he pulled himself back into control. He breathed heavily and smiled, a warm smile that Neville was suddenly very certain few people ever got to see.

Viktor pulled himself to his full height and offered his arm. Neville took another leisurely sniff of the rose and joined his arm with Viktor, letting the man lead them back into the restaurant.
Chapter 7

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IMPORTANT: This story is a side story and is based on the events of my previous story, Promised. This story begins before the events of The Redemption of Seamus Finnigan and shortly after chapter 90 of Promised.

A/N: One last chapter of repeated material, again somewhat expanded, from Promised.

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Neville tried to ignore the questioning glances of his friends as he was escorted back into the room, tried to ignore the pointed looks at their joined arms. Once again Viktor pulled out his chair for him, seeing that Neville was seated and comfortable before taking his own seat across the table. Viktor was beaming, clearly happy, and it was an odd look on the normally serious Quidditch player.

After the pudding had been served and eaten, Viktor spoke. "Forgive me old friends," he said, looking at each of them in turn, "but I is having match tomorrow and must be sleeping." He stood and turned to the man next to him. "Noah. You will be accepting protection of pack for pup, yes?"

Noah glance at Luke was hesitant, but he nodded, briefly. "I will."

"Harry, Mister Malfoy. Is pleasant seeing you both," he said, moving past Noah to them and setting a hand on Draco's shoulder as he passed them by. "Is very sorry to have been missing wedding." As he reached Ron he became briefly concerned and covered it as best he could by tousling Ron's hair as he moved past on his way to Hermione. "You have made Hermione happy. Is recommending you be keeping doing this," he said, moving past on his way to Hermione. "I am still regretting..."

Luke hushed him with a finger and a shake of his head. "Nyet, Vityenka moi. I am the lucky one, to have someone so enamored to want my mark on him. It does not do to live in regret. What we had was special. What I had with Neville... that was special too. I'll love you both, always. But what I have with Noah... Vitya, it's forever."
"Is knowing. I is feeling power of mark from here," he said, clapping Luke on the shoulder as he laughed, though his eyes were drawn to Noah's shoulder. Finally he turned to Neville, taking a deep breath and looking seriously into Neville's eyes. "Nevya moi," he said, "is sorry must depart so quickly. Quidditch is harsh taskmistress. Is thinking you is already knowing this, but is still promising to make up to you."

"It's okay, Vik... Vitya," he corrected himself quickly as he noted the pain in Viktor's eyes from the formal address. "Just owl me, okay?"

Viktor smiled and gave a brief nod, then kissed Neville lightly on the top of the head. "Is promise. Be enjoying beauty of flower for both of us."

As Viktor gave a final glance around the room he noted something that chilled and angered him. He schooled his emotions and his reflexes, turning to leave. Quick fingers moved with lightning speed, seizing something in the air between finger and thumb. "And now, Ms. Skeeter," he said coldly, walking toward the door, "we is having quick talk about press respecting privacy of gentle soul Vitya is courting."

"Did he just kidnap Rita Skeeter?" asked Draco, as the door closed.

"I wouldn't worry about Skeeter," said Luke with a soft chuckle. "I have a feeling she's about to be told just what will and will not be allowed. Viktor has had rather better luck than either of you with the press."

"Still lousy, but rather better than mine," acknowledged Harry. Since his marriage to Draco the coverage had only gotten worse, though being at Hogwarts had done a lot to shield him from it. "I still wonder how he did it."

"He started hexing every reporter that broke his rules," said Luke with a grimace on his face. "Nothing illegal, but we study dark arts at Durmstrang, and some of those curses..."

"Like the reporter still looking for his toes, 'Mione!" said Ron. His laugh was hearty but also strangely nervous.

"He shouldn't... it's dangerous to attack the press that way, Ronald," said Hermione, a little chagrined, Ronald's nervousness lost to her in light of her own embarrassment. "I should never have let them get to me."

"They did call you a skank," said Harry. His look made plain that he would have done worse if it had been left to him.

"So," said Ron, his fingers tapping the table in a nervous rhythm. "Viktor's gay?"

"Yes." Luke laughed softly and shook his head, as though Viktor being gay should have been obvious to anyone.

"And you dated him?" Ron asked.

"Oh, yes," said Luke, his voice filled with a hot breathy sound that betrayed a certain amount of continued lust. He looked down at Neville and shook his head, his voice cracking a bit as it returned to normal. "Sorry Neville."

"And you set him up with Neville?" asked Ron incredulously. "I mean. No offense, Neville, but didn't we just go through that with Wood?"
Neville slid back his chair and just stared forlornly at his feet. "I think Viktor likes me, Ron, really likes me," he said. His voice was soft, embarrassed.

"He barely knows you," said Harry, his voice tight and clipped. "I... I hate to say this, but I agree with Ron, I'm not sure this is..."

"Nev," said Luke softly, setting a hand gently on Neville's shoulder as he pulled over his chair and sat down next to the love he'd lost. "I'm thinking Vitya gave you something. Something rare and precious. A courting gift. Didn't he?"

Neville glanced up hesitantly, and nodded, looking at Luke with tears welling into his eyes. "I'm sorry, Luke... I..."

"It's okay," said Luke, a hand moving to stroke Noah's cheek. "Maybe if you show them, they'll... He was serious, Nev. He wouldn't give up his secrecy about himself if he thought it was going to be a fling. He is telling you he wants to..."


"A courting gift?" said Hermione, her head shaking as her voice trembled. "Oh, Neville... you can't, you just can't."

Neville looked at her, frowning. Why couldn't his friends? He set his face and his mouth formed a serious line as he pulled the rose, upon which he'd layered powerful spells of stasis and protection, from his robes. Ron and Harry both looked at it very oddly.

"A glass rose?" asked Harry, his face screwed in something almost approaching disgust. "Hardly all that rare, is it?"

Hermione and Noah couldn't resist a hesitant step forward as they stared at the rose with wonder. But it was Draco that actually moved around the table to Neville, his mind spinning with the impossibility of it. "Is that. A witch rose? I've never seen one quite..."

"Night Blooming Siberian Witch Rose," said Neville swallowing, meeting Draco's eyes.

"Baba Yaga's rose?" said Hermione, floored, unable to keep herself from joining Draco in staring closely at the flower. "He gave you a Baba Yaga's rose!"

"Can't be real," said Noah, his head shaking in disbelief. "Sorry, Neville, but it can't be. Witch roses are rare, but the Baba Yaga's rose... It's a myth."

Neville glared at them, his face suddenly angry. Even his friends wouldn't. He was. Finally in anger he spoke, his voice tight, angry and clipped. "I'm one of the top herbologists in the world. Don't tell me I don't recognize..." he pulled out his wand and loosed the stasis, allowing the rose to bloom again, waves of subtle chill radiating from it as the flower slowly opened. "A gift, both rare and beautiful."

"It's a pretty flower," said Harry, his eyes glazing over a bit as he tried to be interested. Flowers reminded him too much of Petunia, except lilies, and those just made him feel rather sad. "But really, Nev, a flower?"

"Forgive my husband," said Draco as he stared intently at the flower in quiet reverence. "He doesn't know."

"Mione?" asked Ron. It was easier for him. Living with Hermione meant always having to ask for
clarification of things that she felt ought to be self evident.

"The petal of a witch rose is a rare potions ingredient," said Noah, answering in Hermione's stead. "Very rare," his gaze moved to look seriously at both Ron and Harry. "Dried and powdered, a single petal might fetch as much as a hundred galleons." He turned his eyes back to the rose, and studied it intently. "A fresh petal... A fresh petal from an ordinary witch rose would sell for a thousand galleons to a potions master. Maybe more."

"And the Night Blooming Siberian Witch Rose," said Hermione, responding at last, "is... Merlin, Neville, he's given you a fortune." She meant it. It wasn't just petals, the thorns of the rose were also valuable, and the stem, every bit of it worth a fortune, the whole -- priceless.

"I couldn't sell it," said Neville, shaking his head, one finger carefully stroking the soft velvet of the petals. "It's precious."

"Rare and beautiful," said Luciano, nodding as he reached again to tenderly stroke Neville's face. "Just like Neville."

Noah coughed, hesitant. "You're sure it's real?" he asked, his voice serious but soft.

Neville looked up at him and pricked his finger rather deliberately on a thorn, watching them gasp as the translucent petals burned once again with cold fire and the rose petals took on the colors of a roaring fire. Neville looked at Luke, "Does Vitya burn?" he asked.

Luke beamed at him, the dimples making Neville feel like he was going to melt. He missed this closeness with Luke so much. "Like a bonfire," said Luke, stroking hairs away from Neville's forehead.

"I'm still not sure this is a good idea, Neville," said Hermione, still unable to take her eyes from the rose.

"Mione," said Ron firmly, stepping behind her and setting a hand lightly on her back. "Let it go. He's going to try."

"Ronald!"

"Ron's right, Hermione," said Harry, nodding at Neville. "Look at him. He made his decision out on the street when he accepted the rose."

"Can't..." Neville shook his head, looking at the floor. "can't you just be happy for me?"

"We're just nervous because of what happened with Wood," said Harry, in the voice he used to use when trying to reassure his friends just before everything went to hell. "That's all."

"It's rather soon, Neville," said Ron, his hands rubbing nervous circles on Hermione's back. "You have to admit."

"I know," said Neville, nodding briefly as he took his wand out again and began wrapping spells around the rose. "He... he's dashing and sweet and..."

"And he kisses like the world will end tomorrow," supplied Luke, moving quickly over to Noah and pulling the man into his arms for a kiss. "Your kisses are sweeter though, baby."

Neville looked at them longingly, his loss over Luke suddenly very tangible. "Will I have that?" he asked softly, not really intending for anyone to hear.
"No," said Noah, pulling away from Luke for long enough to answer. He looked seriously at Neville for a moment and then continued, "Neville, you'll have something that's uniquely you, that... We want you to be happy, Neville. Both of us."

"And us," said Harry reaching for Draco's hand and squeezing it. "We're not saying don't court, Neville. If he wants to court you... I'm all for that. Just... be careful." He glanced pointedly at Noah's shoulder. They could all sense it, the mark upon him. "I mean, he's a quarter wolf."

Luke shot Harry an annoyed look, but it was Noah who responded, his voice serious and forceful. "Remember the wolf is in him. Cherish it. Dominate it. Submit to it. You have to decide. But never ever forget the wolf is there, or he will claim you without meaning to."


"I... I don't know," said Luke with an honesty that clearly pained him.

"He wouldn't hurt me," said Neville with a confidence he frankly hadn't expected to feel. He tucked the rose safely under his robes. "I know he wouldn't."

"I... I know what it is to love a wolf," said Noah. "Come find me, if you need to talk."

Neville stood and looked at Noah with a nervous expression. "I. I might just do that."
Chapter 8

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IMPORTANT: This story is a side story and is based on the events of my previous story, Promised. This story begins before the events of The Redemption of Seamus Finnigan and shortly after chapter 90 of Promised.

A/N: And back to the new stuff. For the record, this story does actually take the courtship day by day, all the way through the thirty days of gifts. I hope I manage to do this well. Also, now that we're through the repeated stuff, the pace of posting will slow down a little bit.

-----

Neville set the rose hovering over the mantle in his rooms in Gryffindor tower, wrapping it with powerful spells of preservation. It would outlive him, that beautiful impossible rose would live for hundreds of years, blooming each night in perfect translucent beauty. He looked at it still with wonder, touching his lips and wondering that they still tingled from the kiss, that kiss that drowned him in... that kiss that kept going as though the world was at an end.

Courting. Was he insane? His gran would think so, he had no doubt of that. But then she still had hopes of him finding a nice young witch to settle down with. He was a bit more concerned that Harry and Hermione and Ron had all seemed so uniformly against it. They had respected his choice, recognized that he'd made it, that he intended Viktor to court him, but they had not, except for Noah and Luke, believed in it.

The reporters had taken photos. His gran would... she'd know. That he'd... he'd snogged Viktor Krum on the streets of Hogsmeade like a horny teenager. Neville smiled. Maybe that was a good thing for her to see. Of course the Howler that would inevitably follow would probably be rather nasty. He resolved to suffer through it, as it would doubtless be easier than actually trying to talk to his gran. She had rather firm ideas of what he needed in his life. Herbology had never been particularly high on the list, which meant his entire life except for his seventh year at Hogwarts was a bit of a waste as far as she was concerned.

Of course to be seen on the front page of the Prophet snogging a beautiful man, that was not nearly the horror to his gran that this courtship would mean. She'd never approve. A courtship... no one courted anymore. Pure bloods were promised. That was the way of things. Except that he hadn't. And Viktor... a promise would have revealed that he was a wolf, was that why?

Neville sat for a long time, staring at the rose. The impossible flower. He'd always been naturally talented at Herbology. It was his special interest, the one thing that had kept the staff at Hogwarts from giving up on him entirely. He'd been honored by Professor Sprout's faith in him. Faith that told him without question that the rose on his mantle was an impossibility.

He'd seen witch rose petals. He'd even seen a harvested flower once during NEWT level Herbology, a discipline Headmaster Snape had insisted not fall by the wayside. During his seventh year when he'd been beaten and tormented and Ginny and Luna had gone and not returned, when
he stood alone between the students and the Death Eaters, Professor Sprout had told him to remember wonder, and had shown him the rose and told him the story. He'd never thought to see such a rose again.

When Viktor had revealed the rose he'd thought he was mistaken. A tangible aura of cold, translucent petals. That it glowed... it glowed when Viktor... Neville stroked the velvet softness of the petals. A visual representation of his heart's desire... the fiery passion he'd had with Luciano. It was what he wanted. To love someone touched by that passion. To hold them and feel it burn him. He had touched the mythic rose, had watched it reveal his heart. He swallowed softly. It was an offering, rare and precious, and it moved even Neville's fragile heart to risk.

Of course his gran would not appreciate the subtleties of ancient folkloric flowers that weren't meant to exist. To his gran there would be only one reality. He was being courted. The last Longbottom heir accepting the suit of another family. If they pursued the courtship, his family name would cease to exist. He would become...

He took a very long, deep breath. That was far from certain. It was a courtship, not a promise binding. It was the only honorable way for a pure blood from a noble house to marry outside of a promise binding. Unlike a promise there was no elaborate Arithmancy to determine compatibility between two suitors. No aura of magic soothing differences and enhancing the closeness and trust of the promised.

A courtship was simple. An offering so carefully chosen that it could not be easily refused followed by thirty gifts. A declaration of love. A declaration of intent. The offering of a token. It was a path that led by design to a marriage. Each gift would come with a letter, and through the gifts and the letters the suitor was meant to show his affection for the courted. The courted was meant to respond with words of their own, with a fleeting touch and a kiss. To drive the suitor mad with desire such that by the end, when the suitor declared the hoped for truth of love, that with it would come the declaration of intent to marry, and a token, a ring that bound the courted to their house.

Viktor had proved himself handsome and dashing. He'd shown a certain flair with his gift... to give something so truly rare and precious, and not just a thing of monetary value, showed an understanding of... It made Neville nervous. Oliver had been pushed into dating Neville. He'd not regretted it, at least Neville hoped he hadn't, but he'd still been pushed by Ron and by Harry. He didn't need to look very hard to see the fingerprints of his Luciano behind this suit of Viktor's. It was only that the man had pressed to court him that had kept Neville from sending him away. A courtship wasn't a date, it was a commitment in itself.

Neville took one last look at the rose and went to the bedroom, sitting at the small desk there and writing a brief note by candlelight. He swallowed softly, knowing what his gran would think. He shook his head. This was his life, not his gran's, and he... he could still taste the butter and herbs on his lips from Viktor's dinner, from that kiss.

He sighed softly as he wrote the first of the two letters the courtship ritual required of him. First to Viktor's father, affirming his intention to allow the suit. He chuckled as he wrote it. By tradition he was required to acknowledge the gift, that no gift outside the means of the family could be offered without the knowledge of the head of the Krum family.

To Gregori Krum, Boyar

I, Neville Longbottom, of House Longbottom, son of Frank and Alice Longbottom, do hereby affirm my acceptance of the suit of Viktor Krum. His courtship offering, a rose of the Witch Rose family, from the subset known as both the Night Blooming Siberian Witch Rose, or colloquially as
Baba Yaga's rose, is both rare and precious and I am honored to be presented with such beauty. In honor of the honesty of such a gift, I have pricked upon it my finger, revealing the desires of my heart. May that show of truth be reflected in our courtship together.

- Neville Longbottom, Order of Merlin, First Class

He sealed the letter quickly, pulling out the aging Longbottom seal. He had the right to claim the title of Lord, but it hardly seemed right, not to him. Everything of the Longbottom family had been sold to provide for his parents. There wasn't any land associated with the family, not anymore, and since the title was almost certainly bound to the land, he hardly felt right claiming it. In the end, it just felt dishonest. He might hate his Order of Merlin, but he couldn't claim not to have earned it honestly.

He set the first letter aside and wrote the next one, still stilted and formal, though he allowed himself to write it in his natural handwriting, rather than the carefully legible scrawl he'd developed to appease Professor Snape.

To Viktor Gregorivich Krum, First Son of the Boyar

I, Neville Longbottom, of House Longbottom, son of Frank and Alice Longbottom, do hereby affirm my acceptance of your courtship suit. I find your offering both rare and precious, and find you worthy of consideration for a place in my heart and in my affections. In a gesture of trust I have revealed to you the deepest desire within my heart. I can only hope you prove worthy of that trust.

With respect and hope,
Neville Longbottom

He sealed the second letter with some trepidation, pressing into the wax the ancient coat of arms of the Longbottom family, and then summoned a Hogwarts elf to take both letters to the owlery in the West Tower. The words had felt so stilted. Would... would Viktor write him like that? How could they find a love in letters so full of formality?

As Neville settled himself slowly into the massive curtained four poster that told him without question immediately that he was at Hogwarts. For a long time he lay there, his head buried in a pillow staring up at the canopy, the drawn curtains keeping any sense of light from the bed. His fingers strayed to his neck. A part of him that he was sure was just in his head could still feel the soft press of Viktor's lips there. Could still feel it, and yearned for the touch again. It was a long time before sleep came, and when it did, his dreams were troubled.
The tapping at his window had Neville groaning. He grabbed his wand. Fuck. What was an owl doing at his window at two a.m. An owl carrying a red envelope. The Prophet wasn't that fast, the story wouldn't break until the morning. Who was sending him a... Neville took the envelope from the owl. A too familiar owl. Familiar enough that even half asleep he got a treat to its beak before it bit him and it flew off. How had she? Neville closed his eyes. Of course. The letter he wrote to Viktor's father would have been mirrored by one to the head of his own family. His gran, his only living relative. She knew. Fuck. He stared at the familiar writing. He felt the nervousness in his stomach and he walked into the lounge and looked at the mantle as he turned the red envelope over and over again in his hands. She might say no. She... no. This was a courtship. She didn't actually have the authority to say no. This was how wizards wanting to marry for love in pure blood families escaped. They courted, properly. It was required to inform the head of the family, but not to get their consent. Neville took a deep breath. Had Viktor's father approved? Was Viktor looking at a red envelope?

An anger filled Neville then. He'd made a choice. Why wouldn't anyone even let him try? He tore the seal on the envelope and let the wave of heat fill him.

"Neville Longbottom!" her words echoed in the small tower chamber. "How dare you! Accepting a suit from a Krum! Don't let any bit of suave fool you, Neville, they are filthy beasts! Wolves! Oh, I know they don't advertise it, but it's said they regularly breed more wolf into the family line to preserve it! As though it's precious, that filthy tainted blood. How dare you risk it! Letting that taint into your blood. You'd touch a beast? I. I am beside myself with fury! You will cease this nonsense at once, Neville!

"And a man, Neville? What happened to that Luna girl? Surely even her antics are better than the touch of a beast! I cannot accept this Neville. I will not. This is the most irresponsible thing you've ever done. How dare you! It's a disgrace! Your father would be devastated!"

There was a boom then, and another heated burst as the letter burned. Neville's face set and he shook. How dare she! His father... his father would want... Neville returned to his bedroom and pulled out a robe and marched from his room down the stairs. The corridors were blissfully empty and the portraits sleeping, though he did run into Noah Mayer doing rounds. Noah took one look
into Neville's eyes and stepped aside for him.

The air was cold, the coming winter sending a chill through his bones, but he didn't care. Neville strode from the castle to the gates and through the wards and then with a sudden blinding flash of determination there was a pop and he appeared before the door of his gran's house. He didn't pound on the door. He pointed his wand and obliterated it. That much noise would wake even his gran. He quietly wove spells around himself as he waited.

The curses flew quickly when she stepped from the room, her eyes burning. His gran. A part of him was proud. This was his gran. The old witch the aurors couldn't take. The woman who had protected him as a child, even though he'd never been anything but a disappointment to her. A reminder that she'd lost her son. Neville closed his eyes and blocked the curses. He could, of course, have simply endured them... at Hogwarts that year he'd never been permitted the luxury of blocking the curses of the Carrows. After a few moments the curses stopped flying. She peered at him. "Neville?"

Neville still shook with anger. He let the spells around him dissipate and glared in the darkness at the woman who had raised him. Finally, teeth clenched he hissed, "A Howler, Gran?"

"You'll stop this nonsense."

"I will not," said Neville standing tall, his eyes cold ice.

"He's a wolf. Don't let him try to fool..."

Neville shook his head. "I knew. He. He wouldn't have kept that from me. I wouldn't have accepted his suit if he tried!"

"And you'd let..."

"Maybe," said Neville. "I'll give him the chance. That's what a courtship is..."

"You're meant to marry a girl," said his gran harshly.

"You really think that? Still? After I lived with Luciano all that time?" Neville's face was firmly set, his anger flaring, cold blue fire behind the ice in his eyes. "Did you think we held each other in that bed just for warmth? That somehow I wasn't having sex with Luciano?"

She blushed a deep red. "But Luna..."

"Is a friend and nothing more," snapped Neville. "And Gin is with Casey. Luciano and I slept in that bed together, Gran."

"It was... you're telling me that thing with you and Luciano Grimaldi was serious?"

"It was. I had planned. But he was promised, Gran. And I lost him because of that."

"But this is your chance, Neville. To find a nice witch and..."

"No."

"But Neville..."

"No," said Neville again. His voice cold and harsh. He turned and whispered a word, repairing the door and stepped into the center of the room. "I loved Luciano, Gran. I loved him enough to have. I was going to ask him Gran. To share a life with me. To mean it and do it proper. But he... he was
promised. It wasn't his fault. But he has Noah now, and I have to let him go."

"At least he was..."

"A wolf, Gran. Luciano was a wolf. And I shared my bed with him for three years. I don't have a problem with Viktor touching me. I hope he touches me. I hope... I hope that he's just as suave and dashing as he seems. I hope that I get to fall asleep listening to that beautiful accent whispering to me. I have hopes, Gran." Neville paused and caught his breath. "Do you know after losing Luke. After Oliver. After that the idea that I want this. That I'm considering it. That I have any hope at all. It was a gift."

"He gave you a flower, Neville," she said, practically spitting the words. "All you were worth is a flower."

"I'm. Gran, I've worked hard to become an expert on rare plants. A top herbologist. I had options beyond Hogwarts, you know. I went there... I went there because Pomona, she asked me to. And it's hardly." Neville's fury was deep now, this was his passion, the earth's gift, the beauty of flora. "I could sell that rose for more money than the Longbottoms have ever had. It's the rarest and most valuable flower in the world. To him... I was worth." Neville stopped and turned his back on her. "It's not Viktor Krum who was underestimating my worth. There aren't more than a few dozen people in the world who would even recognize that rose, and most would identify it only as a witch rose and not realize it's the one that's not supposed to even exist. The rose of the Witch Queen of the Russian steppe. Baba Yaga's gift to her daughter."

"Stop living in stories, Neville!"

"I'm not. Viktor is real," said Neville, shaking his head sadly, "and so is the rose. I accepted his suit, Gran. I. I don't need your permission."

"You don't even know this man. You... he's a filthy..."

"Don't call him that. I've loved a wolf before. He's not. It's not filthy."

"But if he..."

"It can't be taken."

"And you trust that?"

"I trust Luciano," said Neville, turning back to face her again. "He assures me that it's true."

"And what about your name. The gift of your father who is in a bed in St. Mungo's never dreaming that his son would disgrace..."

"Don't you dare!" thundered Neville. "Never, ever dare! He's my father, he'd want me... he'd want me to be happy."

"And your name?"

"I will yield willingly if it means that I'm loved in return. Or did you not give up your name, Gran?"

She swallowed. "You're. You're the last."

"I'm a hero, Gran. If I'm to be the last, there is no more honorable way to end the line."
"And if he taints you? Your children Neville... they. How can you do this to them?"

"I don't even have children yet!"

His gran stood suddenly tall. "And this is why it's irresponsible, you aren't thinking of the future!"

"We are only courting, Gran."

"Courting is a path to marriage, Neville," she said, stepping close to him. She moved to touch him and realized his anger when he swatted her hands aside. He'd never...

"I was ready, with Luciano," said Neville softly. "Ready to share my life. I was in love and I'm looking for that again. I won't accept anything less. If I. If I meant to settle for being loved, I would still be with Oliver."

"He's a..."

"He's a man, Gran. A beautiful craggly rugged man. He has eyes... oh god, his eyes! They're like. I can't even describe... and he. Gran, I accepted his suit because. Because I want it. I want him to woo me and win me and touch me, yes, to fucking touch me, filthy beast or no. And I want and hope that I keep feeling that way!"

"Don't you use that language with me, young man!"

"I had more respect for you, even then, than you showed for me in that Howler. It's enough, Gran. Accept it. Or I will learn to live with having only friends as a family. Harry's a good teacher." And with a crack, Neville was gone.
Chapter 10

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Neville groaned as the tapping at his window grew worse. It had been past three a.m. when he returned finally to his rooms in the tower, and he'd been looking forward to a lie in.

He groaned again as he opened the window and cursed. He hadn't been fast enough. He stuck his torn fingers in his mouth as his other hand sought and found a treat and tossed it to the owl. A letter and a parcel. The letter was formal and sealed.

He swallowed softly as he tore open the letter. The writing was tight with the bold lines of a man who pressed the quill too hard into the parchment, punctuated by bursts of black where the nib broke.

To his Lordship, the Esteemed Baron Neville Longbottom, Order of Merlin, First Class

Is thinking to have written this many times before now. To have found words to be expressing terror in heart at pain is fearing for future of beloved son. Was hoping to be sparing him this pain. Was hoping this unnatural passion would be passing him by. Is Tri-Wizard Champion, and Quidditch hero, but is still to father a beloved son before all other things. Beloved only son. Be treating heart of my treasure with care, or is to be learning power of Krum.

Now to be saying plainly. Is not to be denying of suit because son is loving of another boy. Is grown man now, and is knowing of own passions. Would not be to deny son the truth of himself. Is to be accepting the courtship of Neville Longbottom and Viktor Gregorivich. Is not petty despot to be denying son happiness because would be preferring witch. Be only to treat him well. Would have son live in life where is being loved. Is being most important thing, that if is not finding, is living life of emptiness. If is finding that love, then Krum will have no quarrel with Longbottom. Be only to be sure of seeking it.

- Gregori Krum, Boyar

Neville trembled a little. There was fear there, but also such love for his son. For Viktor. Disappointment but trust, to know this was what his son wanted and to accept it. Gran hadn't been able to do it, at least not right away, and yet this man, he had. Numbly Neville wondered if his Gran had sent a Howler to Viktor also.
He slowly opened the parcel. After the initial offering a courtship gift could be anything. The parcel itself was small and accompanied by a letter, upon which was noted: "Please to be opening of letter first." The script was similar to his father's, but the lines were finer, the letters smooth, the spots where the quill rested and ink seeped into the parchment fewer, and no sign of the dark blots that marked the breaking of a quill's nib.

My dear Nevya -

Is not to be pretending formality. Is hoping familiarity was finding after Quidditch match is something can be continuing. Is fearing distance to be created with name of fearless guardian of friends is not to be helpful to be finding of Nevya that lurks within, the quiet gentle soul is praying to be finding.

Was wishing to be getting something for Nevyenka that would be representing understanding of history, understanding of place. And was procuring it and then advised against as gift, for Nevya is also being Professor, and cannot be showing the pride of a house in ways I was hoping. So is giving to Nevya personal treasure. Is only tie tack, to be holding of tie against shirt, yes. Not for Gryffindor House, as was intending. So is giving to Nevya tie tack that was gift of father when becoming seeker. Is precious to me as reminder of love that father is having for his son. Of rare pride in accomplishments of humble Vitya.

Is hoping. Wanting to be trusting of Nevya with treasures of past. With understanding of what was to be raised as Krum, to be at Durmstrang. To be understanding what is meaning to be Gryffindor and how is this to be being different than being Hufflepuff. Was attending Hogwarts during Tri-Wizard Tournament, and is yet uncertain how is meaning houses and differences. Was still to be being rather separate from Hogwarts students during tournament, and so was not learning of such things. To be understanding of Nevya, is wanting to learn.

Keep for me treasure of past. Is knowing Nevyenka can be trusted.

With deepest affection,
Vitya

Neville smiled and opened the tiny parcel. A Golden Snitch tie tack, spelled so that the snitch, once the tie tack was attached, would dart across the fabric of the tie. He set the small gift aside, putting the letter safely in a locked drawer. Under normal circumstances he'd probably have a bit of a lie in, but he'd slept rather poorly as it was after his confrontation with his gran.

Instead he found his way to the en-suite and showered, luxuriating briefly in heat and wet as he lathered himself up and washed. He dressed in simple casual clothes and made his way to the library. Pure blood families all kept family records, but the importance of blood status in the wizarding world meant that even a library like Hogwarts would be able to tell him something about the Krum family.

He also, shyly, asked the librarian, Madam Pince, for help finding articles about Viktor Krum. He was rather surprised to note that for staff members, she was rather helpful, and soon he was staring at a pile of articles about the famous seeker.

"If you're looking for real information," she informed him quietly, "I rather regret there will be very little. Like our own Mister Potter, Viktor Krum is too famous. His life is a shell on display, and he guards the reality with even more ferocity than Professor Potter."

Neville nodded numbly and flipped and found a corner of the library to look over the articles. It quickly became clear that the articles, save one or two very old ones from when he was first
recruited for the Bulgarian national team, were filled with such vapid nonsense as to be useless. He did note, however, that in every photo where the seeker wore a tie, and there were a number, that a tiny Golden Snitch could be spotted moving about his tie.

He studied the articles until the early afternoon and then returned the materials to Madam Pince with his thanks and summoned his coat to him before leaving the grounds. The air was no warmer than it had been the previous evening, and Neville pulled his coat tightly against him as he walked the path down to Hogsmeade. He indulged himself in a box of chocolate frogs and had a quiet dinner away from the castle, then procured himself new stationary and ink and some fresh quills and was preparing to walk back to the castle when he noticed the stares. People staring and looking at a paper. He gulped and found a copy of the Daily Prophet, dropping coins into the hands of the wide-eyed cashier and finding a quiet corner.

The story was brief and filled with little about them, but the banner itself said plenty. The headline was "Longbottom Playing the Field?" and accompanying it was a picture of Viktor Krum and Neville Longbottom in a passionate kiss, the petals of a rose touching Neville's neck. Neville took a very deep breath and folded the paper under his arm. He was grateful, as he walked back to the castle, to have missed dinner. By then the students with subscriptions to the Prophet would be gawking. He could only hope that Viktor's discussion with Rita Skeeter would make the story minimal and brief. And indeed, he thought, glancing back at the vapid nothing of the story, perhaps he'd been successful at that.

A thrill went through him then. Viktor Krum had talked to Skeeter. He was a man of enough money and power to have influenced the outcome and yet he had let the Prophet run with a picture of snogging Neville on the front page. To the wizarding public, Viktor Krum being gay was big news, on the order of what had hit when Harry and Draco had announced their promise binding. He smiled at the sight of Viktor's lips against his. It made him smile. Fuck. Oliver! Neville made his way quickly to his rooms, groaning at the small pile of angry red letters that had been left for him. He pushed them aside and quickly penned an apologetic note to Oliver. It wasn't enough, but he knew right now, Oliver did not wish to see him. And after the Prophet article, it would be even harder.

Once he'd finished the letter to Oliver he glanced at the Howlers. Somehow he half expected to find one there from Oliver, but there wasn't. Upon making sure none of the Howlers were from anyone he actually knew, he cast them out the window and incinerated them, one by one, the screaming of their epithets dying in fiery screams as each letter was hexed individually into oblivion. When he'd finished that he calmly opened a chocolate frog, seizing it by a wriggling foot before it could get away and popping it into his mouth, then he laid out his stationary supplies, and began to write in vivid indigo ink on parchment of pale cream.

Vitya-

I confess that these letters are difficult for me. I am not one to speak of my feelings. I've always been withdrawn, and my feelings were. Well, let's just say that my feelings were not considered particularly important in my home. I fear my gran does not think much of our courtship. I hope she did not wake you as she did me with a Howler in the wee hours of the night. Do not fear though. I am my own person, and my gran's disapproval, though disappointing to me, does not influence my own feelings on the matter.

I am struggling to find words to convey how I felt upon receiving your gift. Whoever is advising you is quite correct, it would be improper at the present time for me to show overt favoritism towards any house. It is likely in the future that I shall find placement here as the head of Gryffindor house, and when that happens, then I shall be allowed some measure of freedom in such
matters. Until then, my ever present tie must go without Gryffindor symbolism, which is frankly a shame, as half my ties (at least!) give some homage to my Gryffindor roots.

I dated Luciano for long enough to have a small grounding in Durmstrang, but I confess, his tales of the place always seemed to culminate with him and another boy in some nook or cranny doing rather unspeakable things to one another, and for the sanity of my jealous streak, I tuned much of what he said regarding his old school out. This leaves me with an unfortunate dearth of knowledge of the subject, and I hope you are willing to share with me.

As for Gryffindor, it is my family. Boarding at school for many students is a hardship, to be away from their families. For me there was only my gran, and she was always so displaced from me in age and commonalities, that there was little for us to share together. I fear I have always disappointed her, except at a time in my life of which I am not proud, though it garners me much attention and respect outside the walls of this castle.

Gryffindor is a fierce house, brave and impetuous. In a way, you owe my acceptance of your offering to my Gryffindor side. I am wont to follow my heart in all things, and I confess, the sorting hat did nearly place me into Hufflepuff for those qualities, the fierce loyalty I have for my friends. But I am also brave in my heart even when faced with fearsome odds, and that is indeed a house trait. It leads to many conflicts between us in Gryffindor, I fear, but brave and honest are hardly negative traits.

Hufflepuff, the house of Luciano's promised, Noah, is a house of loyal and fierce friends, who value loyalty and hard work and friendship over all things. I am grateful that Luciano has found a Hufflepuff, as it means I never need fear that Noah would stray or hurt him, he is far too loyal for that.

I've always privately suspected that Hermione, who I know to be among the few true friends you had while at Hogwarts, was almost sorted into Ravenclaw. It is a house of keen minds and intellect, a house that values the facts and knowledge over all else.

Slytherin's reputation precedes it. I need not explain that many of the world's darkest wizards came from this house. It is a house that values leadership, resourcefulness and ambition. I used to think I could never befriend a Slytherin, but I have found more recently that Draco is not nearly so much of a prat now as he was in school.

I know this is little more than I'm sure your own headmaster gave you before you arrived at Hogwarts that terrible year that Harry was thrown into the midst of the Tri-Wizard Tournament. I love Hogwarts. In many ways it is the only place that has ever felt like home.

I am seeing your gift in many pictures of you and do not wish to steal a treasure from you. I am honored and humbled by your trust. I wish that I could see you to give you proper thanks and consideration for everything you make me feel. I look forward to word from you tomorrow.

- Neville

Neville sealed the missive and summoned a house elf once again to take both letters to the owlery. He sighed very deeply as he looked at the photo, touching his lips gently. It would be a week before they were even permitted in the same room under the rules of courtship. And even then... Neville gulped. That it seemed too long a time could only be a good thing. He extinguished his candles with a wave of his wand and pulled on a set of robes. Tonight he had agreed to take Professor Flitwick's patrol of the corridors. He could only hope it proved a distraction.
Chapter 11

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Viktor Krum sat quietly in a room high in the manor that was his sanctuary, scanning the sky. He'd been waiting for a reply all day, and that he had waited anxiously all day frankly scared him more than a little bit.

"You can't do this to yourself, Vitya," said a large burly man, casually lounging in a chair on the side of the room.

"Is content to be waiting," said Viktor. "Is only being glad that Olya is taking well the pictures in the Prophet."

"Well, you should be glad you warned me," said Oliver, trying to hide the crack in his voice.

"Is not needing to be hiding the pain from Vitya. Is knowing that you are feeling it."

"I want him to be happy."

"But will Olya still be feeling this if courtship is to be going well. This is what I am fearing."

Oliver closed his eyes. "I will struggle," he choked the words as much as said them.

"Is glad to hear Olya finally admitting to this," said Viktor quietly, though his eyes never left the sky. The man paused before he continued, his voice quieter. "Is sorry about conjecture of Skeeter."

"You cannot control Rita Skeeter. You forbade her from finding the truth. It shouldn't surprise you then that she chose a convenient lie instead."

"You cannot control Rita Skeeter. You forbade her from finding the truth. It shouldn't surprise you then that she chose a convenient lie instead."

"He is caring for you a great deal, I think."

Oliver sighed. "It was not enough."

"Is knowing you can be staying, if is wishing. There is much room at manor."

Oliver shook his head, heedless of the fact that Viktor couldn't see it. "It wouldn't be right. Not while you're courting him. Besides, I should join my teammates for their party. Puddlemere is
doing well this season."

"Is your doing," said Viktor. "Is watching standings. Ronald, his performance is slipping."

"He's been distracted. I can't really..."

"Is knowing there was being something happening. Is not to be asking. Hermione is already saying that no one can be speaking of it."

"Probably best I don't talk about it anyway. I should go. I'll catch you next week?"

Viktor nodded, though his attention did not waver. "Yes. Is having break from training mid-week, with no game until the week is ending. Would be good to be having dinner at manor. House elves will prepare something suitable if is wishing."

"Is he... is he happy, Vitya?"

Viktor let his attention leave the sky for a moment and turned to look at Oliver. "Is too early to be knowing. Is still only day of first gift, and already is receiving Howlers. First was being in wee hours of morning from grandmother of Nevya. She is feisty for grandmother is thinking. Certainly possessed of healthy lungs for the screaming."

"You're not a witch. No wizard will ever be good enough for her, until she holds a grandchild with the Longbottom name in her arms."

"She worries for name of son?"

Oliver nodded. "That was my impression."

"Hmm. Is useful to be knowing. Is grateful, old friend. Could be making of this much difficulty. Instead is helping Vitya from making missteps."

Oliver wiped the start of a tear away. "I only want him happy. I just wish I could have been..."

Viktor walked over and clapped him on both arms. "Is not to be giving up. Is knowing there is perfect wizard for dear old friend. Is out there right now, just waiting for moment to be finding of Oliver Wood."

"Noah said something rather similar."

"Is smart man, promised of Lyushenka moi. Will be watching for owl of old friend by Tuesday of next week. Is knowing old friend will not put Vitya through finding him in alley this time."

Oliver laughed. "I'll try to keep the tricks in my bed."

"Is better to be seeking of mate, than endless sex is engaging in."

"Right now, I think," said Oliver, "I..."

"Is not judging," said Viktor seriously. "Vitya has also done this in past. After was losing Lyushenka was bedding many of both sexes for hope of losing memory of lost love. Is not healthy for you, old friend, but is asking only that is being careful and casting of charms."

"Yes, mother dear," said Oliver, then his hand dipped into the pot on the mantle and he mumbled something and was gone in a flash of green flame.
It was another hour before the missive arrived. When the owl finally settled on the stone sill, Viktor fed it a treat and then sat, anxiously reading the lines of indigo ink. He read the letter again, and his lips curved into a soft smile. A part of him wished desperately to simply go to Neville and talk to him. He was sure there must be some ancient wisdom that was meant to guide courtship rules, but right now the separation felt painful. Only the evening before he had pressed his lips and his body against Neville and it had been... Viktor shuddered.

He looked again at the words Neville had written, at the carefully schooled scrawl. Ties. He would have to speak to Madam Malkin tomorrow. He grasped the letter in his hand and with a tired wave closed the windows and set the fire to rest for the night. He entered his study and spent the next hour writing and rewriting his own missive to Neville for the next day, sealing it and setting it aside to be sent by owl in the early morning hours of the next day. Then his head was in the Floo speaking to the assistants at Madam Malkins on Diagon Alley, arranging for a discreet visit outside of normal business hours.

Putting together the parcel for the next day was something that took time. Viktor knew what fame was, how overwhelming it could be. He hoped that Neville would take the gift in the spirit he intended it. He shrank frame after frame, loading each into the box until it was full to bursting even with the items carefully packed. Then he carefully framed the original color image from the Daily Prophet - the image of Viktor and Neville kissing - and wrapped it separately.

Viktor had always been grateful for his ability to sleep under stress, and he was certainly grateful for it now. He woke well rested, going to the manor's owlery and sending the day's missive and gift. Then he went via Floo to his appointment.

Madam Malkin met him herself. "I could scarcely believe my assistants," she said, ushering him through the shop, its heavy curtains drawn. "I'm having a light breakfast fetched for us both."

Viktor let the woman fuss. He'd been here for fittings often enough before events to appreciate her need for such social pleasantries, and when she was done he smiled softly at her. "Is needing ties, Madam Malkin."

"Oh, we have a wide..."

"Is not to be for Vitya. Is being gift. Proper silk. Modern patterns," he stood and walked to where she had rows of Hogwarts themed ties. "Is knowing students now are wearing more modern prints. Hogwarts for theme, with smattering only of Quidditch. If is having art prints of Quidditch pitch at Hogwarts with castle in background, yes? Is good, several like that. Yes, is liking this one, also," he fingered one of the ties. "Is clock of Hogwarts tower. And this also," he said, flipping through the premade ties on the racks. "Finding bits of brilliant deep blue in fabrics for ties, for blue eyed beauty."

"Not for you?"

"Nyet, Madam. Is not being for Vitya. Is being courtship gift. Silks only, made with your hands and your wand. You can be trusted to find the right prints based on what is saying?" asked Viktor.

"For the Longbottom boy?"

Viktor nodded. "Nothing Gryffindor, nothing focused solely on single house, is understanding? Is professor now, cannot be playing favorites. Is problem, already he is having many ties for Gryffindor. Now is needing ties to be being professor."

"It will be expensive."
"Is Krum," said Viktor, pulling a handful of gold coins and dropping them on the table. "Is knowing that Madam Malkin is accomplished at making clients look their best. Be doing this for my Nevyenka, and Krum will be grateful."

"You need them tonight, no doubt."

Viktor nodded.

"I will have to close the shop. I'd lose a lot of..."

Viktor dropped more gold coins on the table.

She stared at the small fortune he'd tossed casually upon her sewing table. "Of course, Viktor. You know we love your business. Expect my owl this evening."

Viktor smiled broadly. "Is leaving you to your work. Is knowing to be expecting only the best from most skilled seamstress."

--

Neville was grateful that the tapping came later than it had the previous morning. Of course the owl, who had flown clearly quite a distance carrying a rather significant parcel, was rather vexed, and took it out on Neville by trying to bite the man as he stood in his pants by the window, suffering in the cold air, trying to get the package and letter from the large owl. Finally he got the package free and a treat into the beast's beak before it could try to bite him again and it flew off. He closed the window and set the parcel on his desk.

Classes would keep him from opening it now. He set the letter aside and got ready for his classes, pocketing the letter in his robes once he'd dressed. Hopefully he'd find a break in the day to read it. He looked longingly at the parcel. That too would have to wait, and he wasn't going to lug it around in hopes of opening it at lunch. That would cause far too many questions. He shut his window tight against intrusion, fearing yet another round of Howlers, and then headed quickly down to breakfast.

Neville did his best to ignore the stares during breakfast, eating quickly and then disappearing to the greenhouses. The morning was first years and trying to get a first year to pay attention to Herbology had never been an easy task at Hogwarts. Neville smiled at the memory. It had been one of few disciplines that hadn't required much wand work, and since he'd had to function without a proper wand, using his father's totally unsuitable wand until his sixth year, he'd taken naturally to the only class he actually seemed to be good at. Unfortunately this year none of his students had that issue. They were all, universally, inattentive and dismissive. He grumbled. There was something to be said for the influence of a basilisk in the walls.

By lunch, Neville was in a rotten mood. He'd had a Slytherin and Gryffindor student end up in a bout of fisticuffs in his greenhouse, until they both stumbled through the wards around one of the man-eating flytraps. He'd scared the class half to death by waiting until the class was over to free them. That had earned him a lecture from Madam Pomfrey, even though she freely acknowledged that they suffered no lasting ill effects. In fact she was downright rude until he confessed that they'd also shot a hex into the only just recovered dragon's eye rose plant that Noah needed in good condition in order to supply her with potions. She'd grumbled and then dismissed him, fussing over the two boys.

Lunch brought another round of mail, including several Howlers for Neville, which he calmly incinerated to the stares of the assembled students. It took a fair amount of power to destroy a
Howler without setting it off, as they were meant to be unavoidable, and despite a formidable reputation fostered by students in the sixth and seventh year who remembered Neville as a student, few really considered him to be a wizard of power. Courage and compassion, yes, but power... his power had been in his ability to endure abuse for others.

Once he'd dealt with the day's mail, he pulled the envelope he'd saved from the pocket of his robes and broke the seal, opening it to the fine script of Viktor Krum.

Dearest Nevya -

Is knowing you are to be in classes now. Vitya can only hope is to be finding time in busy day to be reading note of humble seeker. Today for Vitya is day of training, and so is also having not enough time for necessary things. And writing to Nevya, is hoping is understanding, for Vitya is very necessary thing.

Is grateful for explanations of houses. Is knowing must be enduring much frustration. To be needing to wear tie is enough frustration, but then to have shortage because is showing pride in house? In Durmstrang there were being divisions, but was quite different. Perhaps most important division for Vitya was being wolf and not wolf. Pack and not pack. For Vitya, this was being of great significance.

Is understanding frustration of hearing only of interludes with other men from Lyushenka. Is loving him deeply, still in my heart, but must be to confessing that Lyusha was being... is no nice way to be saying. Was having many partners and all at once after Vitya. Was to be making of Vitya very sad, as was still in school and so could not help but be watching. Is being told became worse after was graduating, until Lyusha was finding you, Nevya.

Is knowing that Nevya is often feeling insignificant. Is in part company is keeping. When is friend of Harry Potter, is easy to be forgetting own place as hero. Is hoping reminder in gift is not unwelcome. Is hero, Nevya. Not because of Harry Potter. But because stood in face of all that was evil, and repudiated it, even when there was being no hope at all. Is hero, and is written about in countries is likely never even hearing of. Has found copy of every article. Perhaps is even enough to get respect of gran. But is knowing with celebrity comes also cost. Picture of Neville from articles in paper... is being only shell without substance. Is knowing everything that has been written about Neville Longbottom.

Is problem. For is knowing Neville Longbottom well enough even now, to be seeing lies of Rita Skeeter. To be seeing lies of press and knowing that what is seeing is shell. Is not enough for Vitya to be seeing shell. In with many copies of articles is one wrapped separately. Is picture from paper, but is original photograph, not article. Lips of beautiful Nevya against lips of Vitya. Is not article. In picture is substance. Is hoping Nevya was feeling like to what Vitya felt when was standing with rose against Nevya's throat.

Is start of story, this photograph. Is tale not of Viktor Krum and Neville Longbottom. These is being celebrities, their lives constantly on display. But is story of Nevya and Vitya. Is wanting to know this story. To be hearing of future. Is not looking for newsycle, but for... Is wanting to have something that is lasting. Is trying poorly to be telling Nevya that is wanting to be really knowing of him. That kiss is only foundation. Is wanting to build. Is wanting. Was asking for Vitya to show fire, but is not wanting just to show, but to share.

With deep affection
- Vitya

Neville read the letter twice before folding it again and putting it back in his robes. Every article?
Neville knew of course that there were many, but he'd never really thought about it. About the fact that he was a celebrity. He'd always tried to push that aside. He hadn't been able to find out much of anything about Viktor from the articles he'd read. Maybe Viktor was frustrated by having had the same experience with the articles about Neville?

Neville groaned as a food fight erupted in the hall. Viktor's response would have to wait.
Chapter 12

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After classes were over, Neville remained in the greenhouses. He enjoyed the peace of the greenhouse, but mostly it was because certain students had detention. First years. Best to start them learning to dig early if they were to misbehave in his class.

Neville towered over them, glaring. "You understand why you've received detention?"

They gulped. "Yes, professor," they said in unison.

"So, detention. You will dig. There," Neville pointed, "until I tell you to stop."

"Dig sir?"

"Yes," said Neville. "I have plants in need of planting."

"But digging, sir? It's so..."

"What?"

"It's the work of servants, sir," said the Slytherin boy.

"Really?" asked Neville. "What if I told you that I dig. That I love to dig."

"Then why is it a punishment, sir?" asked the Gryffindor.

"Because I am fully aware that I'm a bit queer. Maybe I'm hoping to discover the next budding herbologist. I've never met a herbologist who didn't find a certain affection for digging. Just be glad that Professor Sprout isn't still here, or you'd have to do it in the company of the Hufflepuffs you so disdain."

"We don't..."

"Don't even try it. And next time you think of Hufflepuffs as being weak, you might remember that Professor Mayer is a Hufflepuff."
"But they're..."

"Scrubbing cauldrons," said Neville. "At least that's what Professor Snape always made us do. Unlike digging, it's a task even potions masters despise. Be happy I am only making you dig. No more talking," Neville pointed again. "Dig."

And they did, for hours, emerging with white shirts caked in dirt and sweat. Neville stared at them. "It's easier on your clothes if you simply strip the shirts off first," he said, "just for future notice, because I sense you have a future in my greenhouse digging. Especially if you keep hexing my plants."

The Gryffindor boy glanced up at him shyly before straightening his shoulders and boldly asking, "Is it true that you kissed Viktor Krum?"

Neville looked at him. "Are you looking for another detention?"

"It was in the paper, sir."

"That the Prophet is full of gossip is not leave for my students to discuss my love life. How would you feel if I were to interview you about the furtive kisses you two had engaged in that led to this stupid bit of violence? A bit young for that sort of thing, aren't you?"

Both boys flushed bright red.

The Slytherin boy said quietly, "I just. I don't want to believe you're the sort of person who would betray Mister Wood that way. I mean, even for someone like Krum."

Neville smiled. "So it's truth that you're looking for?"

The Slytherin boy's eyes became a little crazed as Neville stepped forward, looming over them both. "Umm, sir, I didn't mean any..."

"It's not an appropriate question to be asking a teacher," said Neville, tousling the boy's hair. "Now go hit the showers, both of you."

The boys ran off together and Neville shook his head. The holes they'd dug were pathetic and he'd have to redo them, but they were only first years. First years who were having a row over a kiss. Merlin, didn't kids take the time to be kids anymore?

Neville took the Floo from his office to his rooms and sat quietly at his desk, unpacking and restoring the articles that Viktor had collected. He had never expected... there were so many. Quietly he whispered the summons for a house elf and had them hung in the gallery. He'd been lucky, as a pure blood, Minerva had put him in a suite with a gallery. The picture of the kiss he had the elf hang over his desk in the bedroom.

He sat for a long time at the desk before he finally started writing, staring at the picture on the wall, the endless replay of Viktor's lips on his. Finally he dipped his quill into the deep blue of the ink and pressed it into the paper.

Vitya -

I didn't realize there were so many. I don't know whether to be flattered or horrified by the man those articles speak of. You suggest it's a shell, but I would go further and say that it's a lie.

You were right. I can be hard and ruthless and cold. I am the ice that endures. It should not surprise
you then that I fear the heat of your fire. You want to know me and that means letting you melt through the defenses that kept me alive. That kept my friends alive. It means letting you...

I am not very comfortable revealing myself. I have told you before that my feelings were never considered important in my home. I learned a long time ago to keep them to myself, so revealing anything about myself, especially my feelings, is not an easy task for me.

I want to share your fire. I don't just want to see it. I want to touch it and feel it and let it burn me and fill me. And I know that's a horrible metaphor for a gay man, because being taken burns and being filled burns and so it suggests something very particular and... and maybe that's what I want. And it scares me. Because it's very hard for me to trust enough to do that. And I hardly know you yet and I want more than just lusting after you because you're Viktor Krum, and half the wizarding world lusts after you.

I'm glad I can't see you yet. I'm afraid I'd give you something I'm not ready to give. I hurt Oliver by giving him that before I was ready, before I was sure. I don't want to hurt you that way. I don't want to hurt anyone that way. I rushed into being with Oliver because I was so hurt by what had happened with Luciano. Because I wanted someone to love me and he did.

But I was wrong to want just that and both of us paid a price for our Gryffindor nature, for my impetuosity. I won't let that happen again. I will tell you about myself Vitya. I will let you find the differences between Neville and Nevya. But only if you can show me why you are Vitya and what it means to not be Viktor.

I've never told anyone this, Vitya, not even Luciano. I was with my parents when they suffered *Cruciatus*. I was meant to fall into madness with them. I was tortured by that curse when I was a baby, and I survived. And no one understands why. I think that's why my gran hates me. Because I survived.

- Neville

Neville read the letter several times before sealing it and calling for an elf to go to the owlery with it. He swallowed softly and sat for a long time in bed, rocking himself. He was scared to have Viktor there, he was scared he would give himself away, but he wanted in that moment to be held, and he was poignantly struck by how very alone he was. He looked over to his faithful aging toad Trevor. Not alone. But he still felt it. Trevor couldn't snuggle him, couldn't hold him, couldn't whisper sweet reassurances to him.

--

Viktor slept fitfully. It was a rare experience for him to find his dreams clouded and filled with struggle and the tangle of hot limbs and when he woke up sweaty and cold and covered with... he shuddered and sought for his wand, cleaning himself. He hadn't done that in, well, not since before Luciano. When he was a teen and still had spots. He shook his head. He wanted to hope, desperately. But Neville had not even written him. Was it over already?

Of course the young man he was courting was also a teacher and suffered from the time poverty that went with teaching at a boarding school. He probably had just been busy with patrols and detentions and... Viktor closed his eyes. He'd wanted to believe they were doing well. That Neville would find the time.

Viktor walked to the balcony and threw open the doors, standing at the stone railing in his pants and looking into the night. He'd taken Neville on this balcony in his dreams. Bent him against the rail and. Should he be wanting to do that? Was Neville even interested that way? He wouldn't have
accepted a courtship if he didn't have some interest...

Viktor had been standing at the rail in the cold air for some time when his seeker trained eyes widened. An owl? At this hour? Was Neville's grandmother sending him another Howler? He hoped not. He'd never found the knack for incinerating them. The owl landed and nipped at his hands, which were saved only by his seeker's reflexes. He pulled the note from the owl. Neville must have sent it only just before going to bed himself... and it was flying across time zones to get to him. Viktor took the letter and found a treat for the owl quickly, sending it on its way. Then he sat on his bed and anxiously broke the seal on the letter.

There were tear drops staining the parchment. He noticed that first before reading. Viktor swallowed. He'd wanted honesty of emotion from Neville, clearly he'd... tears. He'd made Neville cry. He read the words soberly, his heart soaring to lofty heights as he read the desires of his heart reflected in the words on the page, but with such fear and hesitance. Oliver had made him question all his emotions and for the best of reasons.

When Viktor read the final paragraph it was all he could do to keep from shaking. He hadn't realized that Neville even knew. He couldn't imagine why anyone would tell a child who had survived such abuses about them... but then, maybe, if his gran really blamed him then she'd hardly keep it a secret.

Viktor's head was spinning and he knew he'd not sleep. He reverently brought the letter to his desk where he locked it with the others and then stripped and showered. He let himself pretend it was Neville's hand that strayed during the shower. He let himself pretend that Neville was the one making him moan. Let himself hope. And when the evidence of his hopes covered him he found himself oddly reluctant to wash it away. He stayed under the steaming water for a long time before returning to his bedroom and dressing quickly. He sat quietly at his desk.

Nevyenka moi -

Is not to be ashamed over thoughts that bring blush to cheeks. Would be less than honest to be claiming that Vitya was not also having such thoughts, dreaming of you with flesh against mine. Is tormenting me nights, the touch of Nevya in my dreams.

Is not saying to be making Nevyenka uncomfortable. Rather is wanting to be honest. Is wanting to know soul of Nevya, heart of Nevya, but also is wanting very much, when both is being ready, to share the joy of bodies together with Nevya.

To be honest, is also telling this. Lyushenka moi, our Luciano, he was pressing of Vitya to be considering Nevya as romantic interest. Is not wanting Nevya to be finding this out later and bearing much anger as result. Is wanting to say now. But also to be saying this. If interest was simply because of Lyusha, would be going on quiet date. Would not be offering to Nevya proper courtship of heart. Wanting to say now, wanting Nevya to be knowing. Is hoping you will not be bearing anger towards Lyusha. Hoping you will be forgiving Vitya for not saying earlier. Is not wanting Nevya to think is pursuing out of pity or favor for old love.

Is hoping Nevya has not incinerated letter for admission. Is suspecting that Nevya was already knowing of meddling of friends. Is hoping can be forgiven. Is finding in Nevya more than ever expected, and it was this and not word of Lyusha that was driving Vitya to be asking for permission to court.

Is protecting of secrets Nevya is sharing. Is trusted, and to be trusted comes with obligation to protect that trust. Is humbled by honesty in letter. Humbled by admission of desires, but also is being stirred and excited. It is this, the Nevya that is hiding behind the ice, the fire of azure flame,
this is soft and gentle soul is wanting to be knowing. And is beginning to see and is hoping that Nevya will be forgiving of Vitya that is excited by such a painful admission, not for pain for which Vitya is not ashamed to admit was weeping over as was reading, but for glimpse. Glimpse of Nevya. Is what was desperately wanting.

Is hard for Vitya. Vitya is always hidden. Is guarding self all of time. People are buying of scraps left at restaurants, because was being on plate of famous seeker. Is making hard to be trusting when napkin is being sold because was held by Viktor Krum. Is such violation for such a thing to be used in this way. And so is never to be speaking of self meaningfully to anyone. Small circle, old friends who is trusting. And pack. Because is pack leader, pack is never to be betraying of Vitya.

Nevya is not being part of circle. But is to be trusting Nevya with more. Is wanting to be trusting Nevya with more. Is confessing that fame and secrecy make Vitya less than adept at relationships. When is desperate and seeking release knowing can never be showing of face or giving name, is difficult to find connection. Is finding relationship only twice before, and love is finding only once. Is difficult to be talking about past love, as is knowing this is recent open wound for Nevya.

Is soon to be out of time for letter, as must be attending to training for game on weekend. For gift, is offering to Nevyenka ties. Was noting frustration in letter, that was having mostly of ties that were Gryffindor and declaring of allegiance of house. Is having ties to be made for Nevya, to be showing of love is seeing in friend for school. And some also of Quidditch, so that can be remembering of Vitya who is thinking often of Nevyenka.

With deepest affection
Vitya
Chapter 13

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Neville knew immediately that this was not the gift to be revealing to everyone. It was such a cliche gift for a man, a tie. And yet these... these ties. He knew the cost of a good tie. Unlike his fellow Gryffindors who fled from proper dress, Neville had always loved dressing up to go out. Wearing a tie. He loved ties. And these... these were handmade silk ties from Madam Malkins. He had two similar Gryffindor themed ties in his wardrobe and he was staggered by what this treasure trove of silk must have cost.

And the letter! Viktor dreamed about him! He was elated and scared to death at the same time. He desperately wished he had time to write back immediately, but with double NEWT Herbology, he knew that wasn't going to happen. It scared him. Would Viktor want him to give this up? And yet Viktor was buying him ties. Ties specifically that he could wear teaching. Expensive, beautiful ties that he could wear teaching. Would he really do that if he expected that this would end with Neville as some glorified live in... Neville gulped. He desperately hoped that wasn't. Fuck.

And so Neville fretted and worried and after his classes he eventually found his way to the divination tower to sit with Luciano as Luke focused intently, speaking the words of his next masterpiece out loud as his quill scribbled the words and the girls outside the door giggled.

Finally, when Luke paused and sat in thought with that expression on his face that Neville knew meant he was stumped as to what to write next and would remain so for at least a little while, Neville turned to the door. "Classes, young ladies," he said firmly, and then shut the door.

"Viktor?" asked Luke quietly.

"Vitya," said Neville. "He. He doesn't like it when I call him Viktor."

Luke smiled at that. "It's a sign of affection, you know. At school first names were only ever used with patronymics. It was awkward. 'Luciano Damienovich' doesn't exactly roll off the tongue." He glanced up at Neville again, "Yes, that means at Durmstrang you would have been 'Neville Frankovich' -- aren't you glad you went to Hogwarts?"

"They used that all the time?"
"The teachers did. In any formal situation. It's not that different than being called 'Mister Longbottom' all the time, is it?"

"That's why he calls you Lyusha."


"And Nevya?"

"Shortening and softening the name. Only friends are normally allowed to use a diminutive name, and for friends it's expected for them to," said Luke, sitting up at his desk.

"It's weird. He keeps going from Nevya to Nevyenka. I. I know he means me but I don't really..."

"Nevyenka is an affectionate form. Only the closest friends or... well, family and lovers mostly, are allowed to use it. He's the only one I ever let call me Lyushenka. It's rather like the endearment when I call Noah baby or bubby," Luke lowered his head, "like I used to do to you. It doesn't bother you, does it? I mean," Luke hesitated, "he'd stop, I think, if it really mattered to you."

"I just want to understand. The 'moi'?"


"He's not claiming..."

"No," said Luke, "no, he's not. It's the nature of a wolf to be possessive. To want to show that. He's trying to be sweet. He's not meaning to. He wouldn't. I think he really..."

"I'm just a teacher, Luciano."

"Maybe, like me, he sees more than that."

Neville looked down and flopped into a chair. "What do I call him?"

"If you want to be possessive?"

Neville nodded. "I. I don't want him to think that he can just take me. I'm not a prize, Luke."


"And 'moi'?" asked Neville.

Luke nodded. "Before or after. It doesn't matter."

"Will he allow that?" asked Neville.

"I should think so."

"Is," Neville looked down at his feet, "is he worth it?"

"Enough that I offered him a courtship gift a long time ago," said Luke softly.

"He said he regretted refusing you."

"I was fourteen. I don't blame him. Neither of us were ready. And... if I'd been with Vitya, I would never have had the time with you. I never would have taken Noah as mine. I..." Luke shook his head. "I am happy, Neville. I want you to be."
"You're not just offering me to him to be taken?"

Luke sighed. "He's a wolf, Neville."

"Is that why... I mean, you never topped. Were you trying to keep from..."

"Claiming can be done from the bottom. I liked, Neville, you were inside me, so beautiful staring down at me. And for us, for you and me, that was good and right and natural. And maybe, in time, I would have talked to you about it. And maybe we would have reached this point, that I've taken with Noah. And maybe I would have submitted myself and asked you to claim me." Luke shook his head. "It's hard to know. We didn't. My parents took you away from me. And I love Noah and he's mine," his voice rumbled as he said it, "but I want you to be happy too."

"He wants to know stuff," said Neville, burying his face in his hands. "Stuff about me. I'm so boring, Luke. I..."

"You're not boring. We were together for three years, and I wasn't bored."

"It was all the sex," said Neville rather firmly, dropping the hands from his face.

"I can assure you, Viktor likes sex."

"I'm not some harem boy!" shouted Neville.

"Is that what you think? That I make Noah my..."

"You spook the house elves with the noise you make," said Neville.

"Well, yes. Minerva actually spoke to Noah about that. You should have seen his face after."

"Is it true?" Neville asked quietly. "About the..."

"A daughter."

"He's bearing for you?"


Neville resumed covering his face with both hands.


"It's only been three days," mumbled Neville through his hands.

"Twenty seven more to go. You'll finish Christmas eve."

"I'm actually being courted. Doesn't he understand what that means?" asked Neville.

"He's nearing thirty, Neville. All he's ever wanted, over Quidditch and everything else is to find someone to love." Luke hesitated. This was really for Viktor to tell. "The last time he had that he was sixteen."

"With you."


Neville let one hand drop, his right running backwards through his hair. "He gave me ties today."
"I bet they're spectacular," said Luciano, grinning broadly.

Neville nodded.

"You like him, don't you?"

"Yeah, I really do," said Neville. "He's. He's dashing and it scares me."

"That's really him, you know. He really is gallant and loving like that, a sweet romantic man."

"I still don't know anything about him," said Neville. "It scares me to be feeling what I'm feeling. I'm scared I'm going to jump in and ruin everything and something will happen like happened with Oliver."

"Then maybe it's good you're courting. You have a few weeks to..."

"With letters?"

Luke looked at him seriously. "You mean to tell me his letters haven't had an impact on you?"

Neville sighed and blushed a little. "Yeah. But we can't. I mean... I want to..."

"You want to touch him."

"Yeah," said Neville, "I do."

"Then tell him that."

"I. I sorta did," said Neville. "But he wants. He says that there's Neville and Nevya and he wants to know Nevya. But, Luke, Nevya and Neville. They're. I mean. I told him I'd try. But I... I don't see them as two different people. The wall I put up that he talks about like it's someone else, like it's part of the lie the press tells about me... it's a part of me too."

"Then tell him that. Maybe his insight on why he feels they're separate will help you understand him. Culturally, I mean, I'm a count, technically, but I wasn't raised that way. He was. First and only son of the Boyar."

"Just what is a boyar, anyway?"

"It's like a count or an earl," said Luke. "My point is that he had a very different upbringing, with very different expectations. There's a reason he's the best seeker in the world and it isn't simply talent, Neville."

"But I don't know what to say."

"Then tell him about your day. His time at Hogwarts, watched all the time, as a Champion expected to prepare for NEWT level equivalents while facing deadly challenges. It wasn't a normal time for him, especially with the attention of the press, having just played in the Quidditch World Cup and competing in the Tri-Wizard Tournament."

"What did he study?"

"You should ask him, Nev," said Luke. "He wants to know you, but you can't find out about him just from me. You should ask him."

"In a letter?"
"Yes."

"But he... I feel like I'm flirting and I don't know how to do that in a letter."

"Figure it out, Nev."

"I was asking you to..."

"I know," said Luke, "but I can't really interfere. I have too much stake on both sides. I love both of you, Neville."

"Did he ever tell you why... when he..."

Luke shook his head. "He gave me a reason, but I don't think it was the real one. You shouldn't be afraid to ask him, Neville. About me. About why we didn't work. It's relevant to you. To you making it work with him. I don't mind."

"I really like him," said Neville.

"Then stop talking to me and go and tell him that."

"I'm not ready."

"It's okay to tell him that too," said Luciano. "He's not expecting a declaration of love after three days. Courtship gives him thirty!"

"Do you think he will?" asked Neville.

"I'm not exactly unbiased. I loved you from the moment I saw you on the dance floor."

Neville grunted. It still hurt whenever Luke acknowledged that he still felt... THAT. "I guess I should go. I might want to..."

"My door is always open, Neville. Anything."

"Sure, but you can't interfere."

"I can still offer encouragement, Nev. He likes you, a lot. I think you know that."

Neville nodded, but didn't say anything further as he took the Floo back to his own quarters.

What he found there took his mind quickly away from everything else. His Trevor was... peeling? He'd had Trevor a long time and that was just... He scooped his oldest friend into his arms as gently as he could and rushed through the Floo to Diagon Alley.

By the time Neville returned to the castle it was late and he was feeling defeated. Trevor needed a skin cream that was horrendously expensive, and though he didn't need it to live, his skin condition would progress and make his quality of life rather sad otherwise. Neville sat, numbly, in his chair, stroking Trevor's head between the eyes.

He'd had so much he'd wanted to say to Viktor, but right now all he could think of was Trevor. His poor old friend.
Chapter 14

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------

The Floo at Grimmauld Place flared.

"'ermione!" came a shout.

Hermione Granger awkwardly made her way down the creaking stairs and past the cursing of Walburga Black. "Viktor?"

"Is needing to be let through, 'ermione!"

Hermione shook her head, grateful her training as an Unspeakable had covered adjusting the wards of other wizards. She waved her wand and released the wards on the Floo allowing Viktor to step through into the lounge.

Viktor grunted and dusted the soot off his clothes, his face a mask of rage and touched, Hermione noted, with tears. Once he'd been sufficiently dusted of soot, he stepped forward, embracing Hermione gently and kissing her lightly on each cheek. "Is sorry to be disturbing, 'ermione."

She let herself fall into the small smile she wasn't feeling. "It's fine, Viktor."

"And everything is being well with baby, yes?"

"The baby is fine Viktor."

Viktor grunted. "And where is being Ronald?"

"He. He's probably out at training. He's been a little disappointed in..."

"Is not to be lying to Viktor, Hermione. Is not being good at it."

She looked away and Viktor was surprised to see her wipe away the start of a tear. "I really."

"Is cheating on you?"

She looked at him strangely.
"Is smelling strongly of someone else. Was noticing at dinner."

Hermione looked away. "No. He's not cheating, Viktor. He's just confused."

"If Hermione, she is being sure," said Viktor, clearly rather skeptical.

"Let it go Viktor," said Hermione. "I. I know what's going on."

Viktor shook his head. "Would be helping if..."

Hermione shook her head. "You don't normally visit, Viktor, what..." she looked at the letter crumpled in his hands, "just what has you so upset?"

"Was thinking was going well. And was receiving this in early hours. Not itself being strange, owl is flying against changes of time, yes, and so if sending just before bed, is reaching to Vitya in the night." Viktor took a breath, holding back a sob. "Was thinking going well. Looking at this," he shook the letter in a tightly clutched hand. "Now is not being certain."

"You're crying, Viktor."

"Of course is crying! Is losing him. Is feeling Nevya as is slipping away!"

Hermione looked at him oddly. "It's only been three days..."

"Be looking at this!" he said, two quick, unsteady steps bringing him back next to her. "Look!"

She took the crumpled pages and read them quickly. "Viktor, I... what am I supposed to be..."

"Look!" Viktor's tight control had his voice in a strangled shriek. "Is calling Viktor!"

"That is..."

"Nevya was calling of me by Vitya, only days ago."

"I. I call you Viktor," said Hermione quietly.

"Is not understanding of Vitya. Look! Look at letter. Is not only of name that is creating now distance, but of... he is finding this Trevor! Who is being Trevor! Why is being so important? Vitya is never hearing of this," he shook and covered his eyes, "Never hearing of this Zebor's Sloughing Sickness. Is dating older man? Was thinking... why was not friends of Vitya telling him there was being other suitor for..."

Hermione shook her head. "Viktor... you're losing the plot."

"But 'ermione!"

"Trevor is a toad, Viktor."

"Toad?"

"Yes. Hop hop. Warts. Toad."

"Nevya is calling of me Viktor because of toad?" asked Viktor, staring at her with wide furious eyes.

She led Viktor into the kitchen and pulled tea cups out of creaking cupboard doors as her wand was busy floating the kettle to the faucet and then setting the kettle over the heat. Shortly the tea was steeping in the cups, sending the pleasant aroma of the leaves through the kitchen. Viktor was still trembling.

"Is not to be understanding. Days is having, Hermione. Days of long letters. Days where Nevya is slowly opening gates of soul to Vitya. Was telling..."

"Oh, Viktor," laughed Hermione. "You have got it bad for him already, don't you."

"What is meaning to be 'having it bad'?

"I guess I'm thrilled, really," said Hermione. "I mean, especially after what happened with Oliver. I was so worried."

"Is not explaining. Be speaking to point, please."

"You like him."

Viktor looked away. "Is thinking like is not being strong enough word."

"Exactly," said Hermione. She sighed deeply for moment and took a sip of her tea. "He's just preoccupied. It's not. He's not trying to. That he wrote you at all is a miracle."

"Is not understanding," said Viktor, adding sugar to his tea and stirring, then taking a brief experimental sip. He smiled with delight, it was the strong tea he was used to from home. He should have trusted Hermione to remember.

"Trevor is his toad."

"Is pet? Like to familiar? As owl?"

Hermione nodded.

"Why is making so..." Viktor shook his head, "was only just receiving lengthy letter with deep confessions of truth of Nevya, and now is getting this feeble attempt at letter. And the sudden changes with name that is now so formal. What happened?"

"Trevor... it's his oldest friend, Viktor."

"How long is having toad?"

"Since he first came to Hogwarts."

"Was not affording owl?"

Hermione sighed. "It's difficult to be sure, but given that he also did not have a wand of his own... Viktor, that toad, I'm not joking, it's his oldest friend."

"And is Zebor's Sloughing Sickness?"

"It's a malady that sometimes affects toads exposed to large amounts of magic. It's degenerative. It can be delayed and treated, but the gels and creams. They're horrifically expensive."

Viktor shook his head and wiped tears from his eyes. "Can be telling Vitya what is needing to treat?"
"Viktor..."

"Just be telling. Nevya is only needing to be asking of Vitya and would have gotten for him. Is he not knowing this?"

Hermione shook her head. "He would never have thought to ask, Viktor. It's just not done."

"Is not understanding," said Viktor. "Is friend. Even if was not courting, would not be allowing friend of Nevya to..."

Hermione fished out a pen and some paper and scribbled something on it. "It's really expensive Viktor. Are you sure?"

"Is not worrying for cost. Is worrying for sudden distance. Is sure being concern over Trevor is being cause?"

"He still wrote to you, Viktor."

Viktor nodded. "Is good then." He finished his tea and hesitated a moment before speaking again. "You are certain you are not wishing to be talking about..."

Hermione looked away. "You think he is, then? Cheating?"

"Is not being certain. If was certain would have been confronting for sake of dear friend."

"You said he was smelling of..."

Viktor nodded.

"Of sex?"

"Is difficult to be knowing. He was not smelling as though bred by wolf for pups. But still was smelling of man. Of sweat and touch like to have bathed in body of this man. Is not a scent is expecting from Ronald."

Hermione set her face and tried to school her expression away from the hurt.

"Is Ronald to be questioning of himself that way?" asked Viktor. "Hermione, is here. Is wanting Vitya to be speaking to him?"

She shook her head. "He. He needs to figure it out."

"Is being certain?"

"It's not... it's not like I didn't know. I mean, he's not coming home nights."

"But is thinking he is not to be cheating?"

"Not yet," said Hermione, her words aching with a pain and an anger held only just in check.

"Is thinking that he will?" asked Viktor incredulously.

"I never had him," said Hermione softly. "I thought... I thought I did. But he..."

"Hermione!" Viktor was across the table and holding her gently in moments. "Is nothing Vitya can be doing?"
"Please. Viktor... tell me you didn't run a full chart. For you and Neville. Please?"

"Why would be doing? Is never to be good idea unless is planning for promise of pup."

She buried her head in his shoulder. "Good."

Viktor scrambled away suddenly. "This is why Hermione is saying 'yet' -- is running of chart. For Hermione and Ronald."

She nodded. It was terribly taboo, forbidden as much by superstition as anything else.

"Is to be leaving you?"

"It's hard to be sure, even with a full chart."

"Oh, Hermione... is being very sorry," said Viktor, hugging her gently. "Is sure you is not wishing for Vitya to be speaking to Ronald?"

She shook her head. "It's. It's only a matter of time, I think. I keep trying but. I only wanted to make him jealous and instead he... he never really came back."

"Would be lying if Vitya was claiming to be understanding of that," said Viktor softly, gently rocking her.

She let him hold her for a few minutes and then pushed away. "Go. Save your courtship with Neville."

"Is nothing Vitya can be doing to be helping?"

"You can't do anything to help the problems between Ron and I. But you can help Trevor. Don't let this," she indicated herself, "distract you from that," she pointed to where he'd slipped Neville's letter into a pocket.

"Is only wanting to..."

"Focus on Neville, Viktor. I mean it."

Viktor nodded and then ran to the Floo.

--

Neville was delicately setting a carefully washed toad back on his warming rock and strengthening the warming spell there when the knocking came on his window. He stroked lightly the space between Trevor's eyes and went to the window. After his rather perfunctory note last night he was almost surprised to see the owl with its carefully wrapped parcel. His heart skipped. He'd thought. There hadn't been an owl this morning. It was past dinner and he'd gone all day without word.

He'd thought Viktor had... he'd called him Viktor in the letter. He'd realized it after sending it off. All those ideas of actually talking to him. Of sharing what he wanted, what he was feeling. Of taking an upper hand with the endearments. Of... of flirting with him in the letters. That had all disappeared in his dismay over Trevor's condition. And he'd called him Viktor. He'd known immediately that Viktor would be upset, but he hadn't thought until the owl didn't show this morning that he might have actually hurt Viktor.

He sat on the bed with the letter. He should really apologize... he'd had so many things to say and had ended up writing two lines about how Trevor needed him. Of course it hadn't helped that he'd
been crying for several hours prior. He broke the seal and opened the letter to the sight of Viktor's now rather familiar handwriting.

Dearest Nevya --

Is torn from distance of letter. Is being two lines to be dismissing Vitya when Nevyenka is hurting and Vitya is not knowing or understanding of reasons. Please. Is wanting to be sharing burdens of life with Nevya. Is not wanting to be shut out when there is difficulty in life, but to be held even yet closer. Is wishing so much to be there, to be able to hold Nevya and be reassuring of Nevya that is understanding.

Is researching this illness of longtime friend. Is finding hope, yes? There is being creams and gels that will be helping of Trevor, that he remains in good health for still many years. Is knowing you are having much love for companion of childhood. Is not wanting Nevya to be worrying for Trevor. Was intending different gift for today, but is sending instead gel for skin of Trevor to stop progress of this Zebor's Sloughing Sickness. Is knowing mind of beautiful Nevya is now on friend and not courtship, and is respecting of that. Is suspecting Nevya was being concerned at cost of this treatment, but is not to be worrying. New supply is waiting every month for as long as is needing. Is not to be expecting of letter tonight, is wanting mind of Nevya to focus on making well his friend. Tomorrow will start again at bridging this distance.

With deep affection,
Vitya

Neville was shaking as he opened the parcel. He felt the tears coming to his eyes as he slid off the bed and over to Trevor. He carefully spread the gel over Trevor's now quite patchy skin and was startled as his skin returned to its usual slick texture beneath his fingers. His breath caught as he lifted the toad and held him close, listening to the soft croaking of the contented creature. He gently stroked Trevor between the eyes, amazed at the transformation being wrought on the toad's skin. He set Trevor gently back on the warming rock, put a longer lasting warming charm on it and changed the water for his bathing pool.

"You're going to be alright, Trev," he said softly as he stroked the toad's skin. "My friend Vitya, he got that cream for you... the one I told you about. You're," his voice choked. "You're going to be okay. The Carrows couldn't get you and neither can this disease."

Trevor made a sudden loud croak.

"Yeah. I. I wasn't. I should apologize to him, I think."

Trevor croaked loudly again and set a foot on Neville's hand.

"Right. You'll need the gel again tonight. I'll take care of it, okay."

Trevor shook his thick head and croaked again.

"You think I should do it now?"

Trevor made several clicks and croaked again.

"Right you are then." Neville tapped Trevor once again on the top of his head and slipped quickly into the en-suite, washing his hands thoroughly of the gel. Then he went to the lounge and took the Floo to his office. The greenhouse was quiet at night, but in the dark, lit only by the stars, there were still sights of beauty to be found there. He smiled as the flowers opened, almost in welcome. This was his greenhouse and the plants all knew it. Sure he knew the magic required, but it was his
relationship with the plants that let him free people at whim from the man-eating flytrap. It was his relationship with his garden that made the winter rose open, the edges sparkling with golden light.

He whispered to the roses soothingly as he trimmed four flowers carefully from the plant and stroked the petals of the others gently. With a wave of his wand he set the greenhouse alive with the sounds of a symphony and whispered promises to the flowers to return soon, and then he was gone, back to his office and through the Floo.

He sat at his desk and wrapped the roses carefully, putting preservation spells on them, spells that would cause them to open again as the package was opened, to make them bloom for his Vitya. He pulled his stationary out and dipped his pen in the indigo ink.

Vitya --

I am so sorry! Last night when I returned from Diagon Alley I was just so exhausted and worn out and devastated by the news about poor Trevor that I lost myself a little bit. It was all I could do to write you and I realized right after that I'd... I'd called you Viktor. I'm not trying to create distance between us, anything but. I'd come to my rooms yesterday envisioning writing you a proper letter that told you what I was feeling and when I saw Trevor's skin sloughing off of him I just completely lost my head.

I was afraid when I didn't receive a letter this morning that you were angry at me or sick of me. And you were being sweet and gallant and making sure my Trevor was well. I know you said not to worry about writing you tonight, but I felt like I needed to apologize. I wanted you to know that I value every letter you send me. I... it excites me to know they're coming. To know that you dream about me. I... I want you to know I dream of you too. It's hard, you know, because I've only seen you in your formals and school clothes, but I still like to imagine. Maybe even hope.

I was always taught that a proper apology involves roses. So here they are. Four perfect winter roses. One for each day of our courtship. I'm so sorry, Vityenka moi. I didn't mean to hurt you.

- Neville

With a whispered word Neville summoned a house elf and gave orders for it to deliver the package and the roses personally. He sighed and pushed away from his desk, lifting Trevor off of his rock and sitting with him on the bed with the lights out for a long time, listening to the quiet croak in the darkness.
Chapter 15

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------

Viktor awoke to the hoot of an owl sitting on the balcony. He quietly untied the letter and parcel and read the letter, a smile slowly coming to his lips as he read. Then he gently unwrapped the parcel and watched the spectacular beauty of the winter roses blooming, the moon making the edges of their petals shimmer golden in the light. It was a beauty, he knew, that Neville had intended only for him. He sniffed softly at the petals as he dragged them gently against his skin. His Nevya apologized. Vityenka moi. Not Viktor. He was Vityenka moi. Neville wasn't fleeing from him.

Viktor stroked the feathers of the owl and tossed it a quick treat before casting charms on the roses to ensure that he would be watching them bloom every night for the remainder of the courtship. He sat, clad in just his pants on the edge of the chair by his desk. The elation he'd felt at the letter... Hermione was right. He definitely 'had it bad' for Neville.

He closed his eyes. With training and his apprenticeship he'd have little time tomorrow. He slid into his chair and began to write in careful script.

--

Neville woke early and applied the gel to Trevor's skin, smiling as the last of the peeling skin was wiped away, leaving only smooth shiny skin behind. He gave Trevor a quick pat on the head and then washed the gel from his hands and headed into the shower. He closed his eyes as the hot water flowed over his body, letting the heat drain the stress of the past day from his body.

Neville returned to the room to the familiar sight of an owl carrying a parcel, and he silently cursed his morning schedule. With Gryffindor and Slytherin fifth years, there was no way he could risk the time to read it. He separated the letter from the parcel, fed a quick treat to the owl, and dressed quickly, tying one of the beautiful ties that Viktor had given him around his neck and fastening the tie tack so that it looked as though the golden snitch was darting around the Quidditch pitch pictured on it. He left his brown teaching robes open so he could look down at the tie throughout the day and think of Viktor, and then grabbed the letter and put it in the pocket.

The fifth years from both houses were miserable to him throughout the class. He wasn't surprised.
Fourth and fifth year students were often stubborn about his classes. They didn't understand, couldn't see the value in studying plants. It frustrated him that the Slytherins, long a house dedicated to the study of potions, could not even be troubled to pay attention. By the end of the class he'd lost his patience.

"Mister Krantz. You're not paying attention."

"Of course I am, Professor."

Neville looked at him sternly. "You don't appreciate this, do you?"

"It's not like I'm going to be here next year," the Gryffindor said brazenly.

"You still need your OWLs, Mister Krantz."

"Like I could fail those," said Krantz. "This is just a joke class."

"I see. Is that what you all think?" asked Neville softly, but his voice carried through the greenhouse.

He looked around the room at the eyes that failed to meet his. "You think it's not important?" he asked as the students still tried to avert their gaze.

"It's... I mean," began one of the Slytherin students. "Nothing against you, Professor, but really, what use..."

"Have you ever seen someone petrified?" asked Neville.

"Why?"

"Because if you had," said Neville, his voice cold, "you'd understand one of the million reasons this class is important."

"But if we had to... I mean. Seriously, like it would help against a dark wizard."

"Fought many have you?" asked Neville, reaching into a pot nearby and pulling out a handful of tiny dust-like seeds.

"No. But if I did I wouldn't use..."

"Why not?"

"Because it'd be stupid. I mean, I'd use curses and hexes and..."

"Curses can be blocked, Mister Krantz," said Neville quietly.

"Your point," said the Gryffindor boy, puffing up his chest.

Neville looked at them all. "You all think that? My class is a joke to you?"

"It's not disrespect," said a Gryffindor softly. "It's just... I mean, Harry didn't..."

"Professor Potter trusted me to know the plants, and when he needed them, I found them for him. But if I'd had it at the Department of Mysteries, I'd have used this," said Neville, tossing the seeds into the air and twirling his wand with a word.
Counter-curses were spoken throughout the room to no avail as the seeds grew into grasping vines, twining around them, squeezing, choking.

"Is it a joke now?" asked Neville softly.

Krantz looked at him bug-eyed as the vines tightened around his throat.

"And for you," he said, looking at one of the dubious Slytherins who was now on his knees choking. "Is it a joke to you? Is it useless to you?"

The boy clutched at his throat as one of the girls tried desperately to reach her wand. He glared at all of them and his wand twirled once again as he spoke a few words and the vines dried and crumbled. "You have two choices. Figure out what I did, or write three feet on defending against herbology used as a weapon. Now get out of my greenhouse. All of you."

"Professor..."

"Out!" said Neville, pointing to the door.

The students scurried with a lone girl, one of the Slytherins, remaining.

"I said all of you," said Neville.

"Professor Longbottom, why did you..."

"I said out!"

She looked at him, turning to go. Just before she reached the door she spoke quietly. "I'd never thought to use Ezerine vine seeds that way, sir."

Neville looked at her and smiled. "No. I didn't either. Took panic seeing someone hurt to make me think of using them. And the punishment I suffered was rather..."

"Why don't you teach it then?" asked the young woman. "I mean, as a weapon? It's clearly... I mean, you know how."

"I fought in a war, Miss Appleton. Of course I know how. Herbology isn't meant to be a weapon."

"But... I mean, isn't it good. I mean, that's why we still have Herbology at Hogwarts, isn't it? That Headmaster Snape felt..."

Neville shook his head. "No. That was an excuse. Professor Snape was a potions master, he valued Herbology more than he ever let on."

"But they're valuable because..."

"The most valuable and rarest plant in the world is a rose, Miss Appleton. A rose that reveals the truth of the heart. Not a weapon but a thing of beauty."

"A witch rose?"

"The Night Blooming Siberian Witch Rose."

"That's a myth, sir."

Neville smiled. "No. No it's not. Maybe if you make it to NEWT level classes, I'll let you see a
witch rose. Maybe, if you make it to NEWT level, I'll let you see that rose."

Her eyes widened. "It's a myth, sir."

"It's really not."

Her eyes widened. "The picture, the one from the Prophet. It was. It was real? He gave you one. That's what it was, the rose in the photo," said Miss Appleton, her eyes suddenly very bright. "Viktor Krum gave you a..."

Neville inclined his head, just slightly.

"But that would... you could retire...

"I teach you about plants, Miss Appleton, because I love them," said Neville. "I realize they aren't exciting to most of the class. I realize that it's not casting a Patronus. That it's not riding a hippogriff. That I can't teach you to brew a love potion or transfigure a bench into a bed. Herbology isn't a magic of the moment, but one of time and preparation, and only a few things, like those seeds, are useful in a fight. But the right plants give rise to the right potions. Create defenses. Foster beauty and tranquility. A sense of peace and right and order."

"But you don't teach us that," said Miss Appleton.

"I do in NEWT levels, Miss Appleton. But until then... for the most part you aren't ready to learn the material safely. You have to study and learn the foundation so that I can teach you the good stuff," said Neville. He peered at her intently and she shrank back. "Most of them will not make it. They'll give up because to get a reward in Herbology you have to be patient. Are you patient?"

"I'm a Slytherin," she said as if that explained everything.

"So were they, half of them. And they had absolutely no idea what I did. Most of them still won't know. They'll be desperate to think of it so they can avoid the essay."

"I won't tell them."

Neville chuckled. "You will. Some of them. Because you're a good Slytherin, because you know which ones need to be allies."

She turned away shyly. "I should go."

"Miss Appleton," said Neville, waiting for her to turn and look at him. "You have an aptitude for Herbology. It's a worthy specialty. Don't let other people's prejudice keep you from it."

She gulped and nodded and then ran from the room.

Neville was pruning his winter roses when Minerva found him.

"Dismissing a class early, Neville?"

He grunted.

"Filch was beside himself. Running about screaming about students in the corridors."

"Isn't he always?"

"He's not usually right."
Neville smiled. "I felt they needed time for reflection."

"Ezerine vines? What if..."

"Minerva," said Neville, standing tall and setting his clippers aside, "I do know what I'm doing. They were disparaging Herbology as a whole. There are three students with some real aptitude for Herbology in that class, I'd hate to see them skip Herbology after their OWLs because others convinced them it was boring and unworthy."

"Only three?"

"I'd hoped my... I'd hoped there'd be at least one Gryffindor."

"You know Gryffindors they..."

"It's still. They all want to be Aurors. Harry's influence."

"You're a hero too, Neville," said Minerva. "I count on you to remind them of it."

"I just did. And I'm being..."

Minerva shook her head. "I'll not interfere in your teaching, Neville. It was a good reminder for them, especially if they want to be Aurors. Actually I was here wondering what lit a fire under you. Poppy tells me you actually let two first year students stew in the digestive juices of the man-eating flytrap for most of a class."

"Herbology is dangerous, Minerva. Especially the first years, they need to know it. They need to come into this class knowing and understanding that this isn't a botanical garden, it's filled with magical plants... the kind that can kill them and eat them and strangle them as much as those that can coax flesh from stone."

"That doesn't tell me..." She narrowed her eyes. "You've been receiving a lot of owls."

"I don't need a lecture about that. I'm corresponding with someone. Someone special."

"Viktor Krum."

He smiled and nodded.

"Is he serious?" asked Minerva quietly.

"Came out of the closet to date me, didn't he?"

"So you think he is."

Neville looked at her and smiled.

"I see," said Minerva, her lips in a tight line. "He's a wo..."

"He's told me."

"And you're okay..."

Neville turned away from her. "I would have married Luciano, you know. If he'd not been promised."
Minerva sighed. "You're doing a good job, Neville. Just don't kill any of the students, alright?"

"Got complaints about the vines?" asked Neville. He shouldn't have been surprised that some students ran straight to the headmistress.

"A few. Some of those students have powerful parents, you know."

"Sometimes practical displays have risks," said Neville. "If the parents complain too loudly, tell them I'm happy to speak to them personally."

"I'll deal with the parents, Neville. Just try to give me some advance warning when you're going to shock one of your classes."

Neville grinned. "Hard to know when they're going to push me enough that it's necessary."

"Just be careful with them," said Minerva. "They're in our charge, we have a responsibility..."

"I know. I should get ready for my next class, if that's alright."

"I'm here to talk to," said Minerva, "if you need an ear, Mister Longbottom."

Neville didn't say anything, he just nodded and watched Minerva walk away. Once she was gone he finished pruning the winter roses and set aside his clippers once more, stepping into his office. He checked the time and then sat in his chair and pulled the letter from his pocket.

Dearest Nevya --

Is asking first after Trevor. Is doing better, I am hoping? Please to be telling Vitya. Was not knowing about friend until was asking Hermione about Trevor. Is finding out you were having Trevor even from the start of time at Hogwarts! Is glad Vitya can be helping with health of old friend.

Is having busy week. In East European league, next match for team is against Romanian team. Not being well funded team, but is having fierce keeper like to friends Olya and Ron. Is being concerned, as own team is having reserve keeper, which is meaning always danger of embarrassing accident of World Championship where Vitya was catching of snitch when is not to be causing to win game. Please not to be telling anyone else this was accident. Vitya was being very embarrassed and using broken nose as excuse.

Is training hard and with apprenticeship is leaving little time. But is always finding time for Nevyenka moi. Always. Is giving for gift, proper watch of wizard. Is suspecting that, because this is custom of father to son, is having no one to be giving of watch. But is not to be worried even if is not, as Nevya is liking of proper dress, I think, so having second watch is not to be bad thing even then. Is wolf guarding rose. Is beautiful, Nevyenka, like to rose, gorgeous beauty with thorns that is showing silent strength and power. And Vitya is being for you always present, always ready, to be guarding and protecting and... to be close to Nevyenka.

Is treasuring every moment is spending thinking of Nevya. Is giving gift of watch, but also of time of Vitya. Be wishing of Vitya much luck that may be doing well in game.

With deepest affection
Vitya

A watch. A proper pocket watch. Wizarding watches were expensive, gifts handed father to son. His father's... it had been sold to help with. Fuck. Did his parents even appreciate the twenty years
of barely subdued pain they'd suffered through? The lingering of *Cruciatus* so powerful that even twenty years of care could not purge it from their system. He bet the watch was beautiful. He slid the letter quietly into his pocket and pulled out a piece of paper. He didn't really need to prepare for the second years. They had en masse rebelled last session, so today they were learning to dig. He smiled as he dipped his quill into the pot of ink and began to write.
Chapter 16

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Note that this is a side story based on the events of Promised, a fic written for the Nuke Bigbang 2012 that combined a Nuke and a Drarry fic.

IMPORTANT: This story is a side story and is based on the events of my previous story, Promised. This story begins before the events of The Redemption of Seamus Finnigan and shortly after chapter 90 of Promised.

A/N: Starting the next installment of my ATWT/Drarry crossover. I promised Neville a happy ending, and in Promised I gave it to him. But those characters: Viktor, Neville, together, and their courtship demanded an attention I could not give them in a fic based around Luke/Noah and Harry/Draco. So here it is. The whole story of Viktor and Noah's courtship. I hope you enjoy it.

-----

Vitya moi -

Trevor is doing so much better. I... you would not have believed it of me, I think, but I haven't been so scared for Trevor since the Carrows decided that they would try taking him from me as a punishment. It was bad enough to turn *Crucio* upon the first year students, for them I could... I placed myself in the path. But they stole him and attacked him as revenge for my stubborn resistance against them. I am afraid this attack of Zebor's is in part my doing, for not surrendering to their terrorism.

I rescued him and set him loose within the greenhouse where they feared to go, but it was a harrowing time, especially once they took Luna and the Weasleys for the best of reasons kept Ginny from returning.

I too am struggling to find time to write, and I hope you'll forgive me if I am brief, at times. I had today the fifth years of my own house and of Slytherin, and they were rebelling, not seeing the value of Herbology. It's difficult when the world sees little value in your work. I wish I could see you. I know we're not permitted to visit each other for several days yet, but I could do with a glimpse of your face.

- Neville

Viktor smiled as he wrapped the gift for day six, a lengthy treatise on the construction of brooms from an herbologist's perspective, studying the plants used and how the art could be used to enhance the use of a broom. A review copy, sent to him for comment and signed by the author who was a fan (and doubtless wished to have his comments to enhance sales).

Dearest Nevya -

Forgive own brevity, today is meeting with master, and also to be preparing for game tomorrow. As is already saying, particularly difficult with reserve keeper.

Is wanting to be finding of common interests. Is hoping you will be finding this book as interesting as I. But Vitya is confessing, is not understanding of many of the author's points. Perhaps Nevya
could be sharing thoughts?

Be forgiving me! Is having so little time. Is thinking should have been writing instead of thinking while sniffing beautiful winter roses. Is keeping them safe to be having something to make Vitya think of Nevyenka.

With deepest affection,
Vitya

He sent the owl with apologies and an extra treat, for the book was rather heavy, and then studied the paperwork Rita had procured for him from St. Mungo's. He wanted... with his feelings already strong, he knew he needed to be ready. He only had thirty days to soften the heart of Neville Longbottom, and he... he might actually be succeeding. The thought thrilled him. He looked at the rather thick pile of papers. This was going to take time.

--

"Harry!" called Neville, catching Harry in the hallways. "Can I. I need to ask a favor."

Harry smiled at him, "Sure Nev, what can I..."

"I need tickets. Viktor is playing tomorrow and I. I want to be there."

"You can't be alone with him, you know that..."

"I'll be in a crowd. He'll probably never even see me."

"I don't know..."

"It's allowed," said Draco, stepping a hand around Harry's waist.

"Even if it is," said Harry, "I don't know if I can. You know I don't like to bank on..."

"This is for the Vultures game against the Romanians?" asked Draco.

Neville nodded.

"I have box seats, and clearly am not leaving Harry. Take them."

"You have box seats for..."

"Well, the Malfoy family does," said Draco. He looked at Neville, "Try not to antagonize my father if he shows. He won't, but if he does..."

"You're sure, Draco?"

Malfoy smiled. "It was a beautiful rose."

"I know!"

"You like him, don't you?" asked Harry.

Neville grinned.

"I'll owl the Vratsa pitch to let them know you'll be using the box. The box elf's name is Nibsy," said Draco with a casual air as he leaned in to kiss Harry's neck and rub his rather large stomach.
"Get off!" said Harry, swatting his hand away, though his eyes were fluttering as Draco pressed his lips against Harry's neck.

Neville clapped Draco on the shoulder. "Thanks, mate."

Neville had carried today's gift with him as he wandered the halls, knowing the title would, perhaps, make his students think. If Herbology meant that Quidditch was improved, maybe then it was not such a useless subject.

By evening he'd actually had several Gryffindors approach him with apologies and beseeching requests to shorten the essay he'd assigned. He accepted their apologies gratefully, smiled at them. He asked them what he had used against them, and then quietly assured them when it was clear they had no idea that three feet was simply not too much. Then he'd pointedly returned to his book.

That night Neville wrote a very brief note to Viktor.

Dear Vitya -

It's been a crazy day, and I've missed you. I'm reading the book and it's fascinating. Perhaps in the future we can build you a broom? I'd like that. Doing something together that interests both of us.

I'm sorry to be so brief. My Vityenka, win for me tomorrow. I share with you my favor, wear it and know that I support you.

- Neville

--

Viktor arrived at the Quidditch pitch both thrilled and disappointed. He was happy to see Neville thinking of the future. Building a broomstick together... it could be fun, and he'd get to show off skills Neville didn't even know he had. But the note had been brief, so very brief.

Viktor set his face into the stern mask that was all he permitted the public and strode through the gates, ignoring the frantic photos and the bursting of bulbs and flashes of light. He pushed past them with his teammates and into the locker room. He shucked his clothes casually and opened his locker. He turned away and began to tremble. A blooming winter rose was tucked between the folds of his Quidditch robes.

"Nevya?" he whispered softly. The other players looked at him strangely as he wiped a tear from his eye.

"Alright, Vitya?" asked Burkov, the reserve keeper for whom Viktor had spent all the extra time training.

"Is looking in locker for Vitya," he said quietly, "And be telling me if is seeing winter rose. Is being white rose, like to snow, the petals' edges glimmering in gold."

"Oooh, Vitya," said the keeper, slapping one of Viktor's bare buttocks playfully. "Do you have a secret admirer?"

"Just be telling Vitya."


"Hmm. Be leaving Vitya in peace then. Is needing to be changing."
"Come on, Vitya, tell us about this secret admirer..."

"Is loving roses," said Viktor. "There, is telling. Now to be leaving Vitya to change."

Burkov shrugged and walked off as Viktor slowly plucked the rose from his robes and sniffed lightly at the scent. He wrapped it in spells to protect it and gently set it aside as he dressed. Once he was completely dressed, his robes and heavy leathers tied to his body, he slid the rose against his sleeve at the upper part of his left arm, where he could just turn his head and shrug a shoulder to sniff at it, and tied it there with the handkerchief Neville had given his as a mark of his favor. The brilliant gold and crimson contrasted against the maroon and black of his robes.

The media would have a field day. No one had believed, except perhaps Skeeter, that the kiss between him and Neville had been real. He'd been bombarded since with questions about his next romantic conquest. He smiled. Today he would dance in the air with his Nevya against his shoulder. The Romanians would not have a chance.

Viktor smiled as he lined up with his teammates to fly onto the pitch. He'd seen his teammates glances. Looking but not looking at the rose against his shoulder with grins on their faces. He glared at them intently and mounted his broom. As seeker he'd take to the pitch last. He watched each of them kick off, flying each with a burst of speed onto the pitch and then the screaming roar of "KRUM" that meant the spectators wanted him. He tucked himself tightly to his Firebolt and launched from the home team entrance into the pitch, letting himself spin to increase the initial burst of speed as he sailed upwards, high over the pitch and then shot straight down, to end hovering just to one side of the official.

The official looked quickly at both teams and the game began. Vitya sped upwards, giving himself a clear view of the pitch. His eyes sought the snitch with their usual fervor while his mind tried to figure out what manner of magic had snuck a perfectly preserved and magicked winter rose into his locker. He zipped quickly toward a momentary glint, thinking it might be the snitch, but found to his frustration that he had spotted only the glare off of someone's glasses. He growled in frustration as he scanned the pitch and then suddenly, he clutched at his broom.

There was a man in maroon and black face paint in one of the VIP boxes. The Malfoy box. A man with blue eyes, staring at him. Blue eyes touched with cold and ice. Blue eyes that had haunted his dreams.

Viktor spiraled down slowly, scanning for the snitch. He had to be wrong. He ducked a bludger casually, ignoring the fact that the beaters had taken notice. The Romanian seeker was ghosting him, which could hardly be a surprise. Another bludger, this one aimed at the Romanian, sailed past. At least his team's beaters were doing their job. Viktor descended slowly, gracefully, until he floated eye to eye with the man in the box. His Nevyanja.

Neville smiled at him and mouthed the words. "Win for me," at him. Viktor trembled and shot upwards into the air, the Romanian seeker trying feebly to follow as Viktor began circling with pitch with incredible speed, the force of his wake knocking down spectators. Neville remained standing, his hands clasped tight against the railing. Then Viktor's flight suddenly went from calculated to seemingly random and Neville smiled. He tapped his wand against his throat and prompted the crowd. "KRUM!"

Viktor could feel the rumbling of the pitch as the crowd screamed his name. But the first voice, that had been his Nevya. Here, supporting him. Viktor rolled out of the way of an incoming bludger, speeding after the snitch. The Romanian was hopelessly following, as though trying to predict the movements of the snitch, Viktor's leather clad hands reached out.
"In an amazing display of speed and prowess, Viktor Krum has caught the snitch!" shouted the announcer.

Viktor smiled and flew to the official who recorded the catch of the snitch and nodded to him. Then he flew upwards and leapt onto his feet, balanced on the broom. It floated close, so close to the stands and he stood across the railing from Neville. Neville smiled at him and raised a hand to stroke Viktor's face gently. Viktor closed his eyes for a moment at the touch and then lifted his hand to gently place the snitch into Neville's hand.

"Is winning snitch for my Nevyenka," he said softly, his voice catching.

"You could have saved it for a gift," said Neville, acutely aware of the eyes on him.

Viktor shook his head. "Is meaning great deal to Vitya, that you are being here to be witnessing of game."

Neville caught Viktor's hand and kissed his finger's lightly. "You know I can't stay."

"Is knowing. Already we are straining rules of courtship."

"I'll be waiting for your letter," said Neville softly, then he stepped back and clutched the snitch tight to his chest and a deep crack rocked the Quidditch pitch.
Chapter 17

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IMPORTANT: This story is a side story and is based on the events of my previous story, Promised. This story begins before the events of The Redemption of Seamus Finnigan and shortly after chapter 90 of Promised.

A/N: Had a brutal week at work, so I may not update much this week.

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Even after years of removing the red and gold face paint he'd worn during Gryffindor's Quidditch matches, Neville still struggled to get all the maroon and black face paint off. Most of it would come out just fine, but it took a maddening array of creams, cleansers, and spells to get the little bits that seeped into the creases at the corners of his eyes, and clung desperately to the base of the hairs on his head.

Finally he got the last of it out and showered briefly. It was still early in the afternoon when he stepped out of the shower and dressed. Having weekends free of Hogwarts responsibilities had sounded like a tremendous thing to bargain for, and yet having the weekends free and being unable to spend them with Viktor was actually quite wearing.

He couldn't turn to his friends, as they were largely occupied. Harry was pregnant, and increasingly very noticeably so. He got tired and grumpy randomly. And on top of that, both Harry and Draco had their arms full dealing with Slytherins. Having watched the Slytherin students this year, Neville was forced to admit that the unusual practice of giving them two heads of house had been not only prudent, but necessary.

Noah was also preoccupied. He seemed to be constantly in the lab brewing potions. He'd never thought about it, but Severus Snape had been the same way. Now he understood. The potions master was responsible for keeping the infirmary stocked with the necessary potions, and wizarding youth at the school were always draining that supply. In addition he was now brewing potions for himself and Harry to balance their magical energies against the babies they were both carrying, as well as carefully brewing reserve batches, to ensure that the near deadly loss that had almost killed Harry and decimated the house points of Gryffindor couldn't happen again.

Luke spent most of his free time either helping Harry with his godson, Teddy, or with Noah in his lab. They were newly promised and Merlin, it hurt, but he could scarcely blame them for it. Hermione was in London and not traveling much, dealing with her own pregnancy. Hers did not have the same challenges as the wizards, but she was also severely limiting her travel to protect the child inside her.

It hadn't seemed so lonely when he'd had Oliver. Oliver who would come and spend the weekend in Hogsmeade, taking him to games and dinner. Oliver who loved him. Neville shook his head sadly. He'd done the right thing, but he knew Oliver still hurt too much for them to make a serious go at friendship. And as much as he hoped that might change eventually, for now... he was alone.
Viktor's letter this morning had been brief. A plea to accept his apologies but that he had to focus on the game on game day. A promise to win the game for his Nevya. A statement wishing Neville could be there to receive the snitch. Neville smiled. He'd been able to make that happen for Viktor. He wished he could have stayed. If it'd only been one day later, they could have held each other's hands, gone publicly to a restaurant. Enjoyed a chaste kiss.

Neville shook his head. He still remembered the taste and feel of Viktor's lips. He wasn't at all confident in his ability to keep a kiss chaste. He'd want to touch, to feel, to kiss and taste deeply of Viktor. Merlin... he was being courted by Viktor Krum. Viktor Krum who had sent him passes for a box seat for all of Puddlemere United's matches for the next year with a note acknowledging that he knew Oliver and Neville were close, and that he hoped they could share the box to cheer their mutual friend.

Neville smiled and sat down at his desk.

Dear Vityenka,

I hope you liked my surprise. I saw that you wore both the favor and the rose. Rita Skeeter must be having a stroke, as I see that she reports nothing. I assume you have some arrangement with her? I'm curious, as it is not in her nature to be kind about such things. Especially when she is, of all the reporters, the most likely to have recognized that I was the one to whom you gave the snitch.

I wish the game had been tomorrow. I would have struggled to give you only a chaste kiss, but I. I miss your lips on mine. And I would have enjoyed having a dinner with you, being able to touch you more than briefly.

I find myself rather lonely. Harry and Draco, they're both so busy between Teddy and managing Harry's health with the pregnancy and dealing with the drama of their house. I know it's silly, but I just don't have much in common with most of the professors, and Luke is still, mostly, trying to give me some distance. It's still very hard for me to see him, you know, even after Oliver.

And Oliver, understandably, doesn't want to see me right now. I feel like I've abandoned him, or perhaps, even worse, led him on. I didn't intend to, but hearing him... I mean, I couldn't let him continue, in love with me, knowing I didn't feel the same way. So that leaves me on a Saturday night alone.

I enjoyed the game. I'm looking forward to sitting with you and watching Oliver play, when he gets to the point that he can be comfortable around me. Looking at how long it is taking with Luke and I... I just hope he finds someone. Oliver deserves someone to be with him the way he needs. I want to share interests, and I hope you know that even though I don't play, that I do enjoy watching my friends play Quidditch.

You are rather striking in those robes, you know. All billowing behind you in flight. Sexy.

- Neville

He summoned an elf and sent it to the owlrey before grabbing the book Viktor had sent him and sitting on the bed to read.

--

Viktor let the freezing water pour over him, trying to erase the feel of Neville's hand against his before walking out to confront an adoring public and an unforgiving press. Unfortunately it wasn't helping. His Nevya, so beautiful. Of course, that line of thought was not helping his problem at all.
Finally he emerged from the showers and dressed. He exited the pitch carrying his broom and sniffing a winter rose. Questions were shouted at him, but Viktor did not look up or answer, just walked, trusting the press to know better than to stand in his way. And they did, always stepping back at the last moment. They'd learned better than to try to press against him. At least one of the reporters was still looking for his foot.

Viktor strode purposefully through the crowd, letting them melt before him. Rita looked at him severely as he approached.

"Is the rose from someone special?" she asked.

"Is being lovely rose, is it not?" replied Viktor.

"But is it from an admirer?"

"Yes."

"And what can you tell me about this admirer?"

Viktor looked at her intently. "Is loving roses."

"You gave a rose recently to..."

"Is wishing still for me to be answering of questions?" asked Viktor, "Because if you wish for still to be answering, is best to be steering clear of this question."

"Why?"

"Is protecting of privacy until admirer is being ready."

"I will hold you to your promise, Viktor. Three answers."

"Is already striking this bargain with Rita. Why is giving trouble now?"

"I just want my answers."

Viktor smiled. "Is still answering of questions, Miss Skeeter, but not to be answering tonight. Is endangering chance of happiness. Is thinking you are smarter than this, to be risking Vitya being unhappy." There was a threat in his words and Rita was quite clearly understanding that threat.

"Is this secrecy worth it, Viktor?"

"Is off record?"

She sneered, but nodded.

"Yes, is being worth it. But he is wanting to be open, and we will be open. Is giving you your answers then. Would be preferring to get them now, when would be forced to be misleading with answers?"

"So you'll be telling me the truth when you decide to talk. You know I don't believe you."

"Is knowing this. Is hoping you will realize truth when is seeing it."

"I think I was seeing it," she said, whispering as silence surrounded them. "Don't think after all those Quidditch matches of Potter's that I don't recognize Neville Longbottom in face paint. Who
else do I know that's going to have access to the Malfoy box. Neville is one of Harry's closest friends, and Harry is married to Draco Malfoy. Access to the box, Viktor. I could run with this. I should."

"Is doing favor for Krum and waiting."

"Why?"

"Is not seeing what is rose? Is wanting romance. Not to be surrounded by cameras, but to be falling in love in proper way. Is giving as gift to man is loving. And will be answering of questions only when is ready. Is promising Rita to be answering three questions. Is three more than has ever been answering for any other paper."

Rita looked at him. "You realize I'm having to guard your privacy from the other papers too."

"Is knowing this."

"What are you doing, Viktor. This is not like you. Even for you, this is an extreme attempt at preserving privacy. Everyone saw. You standing on your broom, handing the snitch to a man in maroon paint. They will be guessing who it is," said Rita. "Some of them will guess right."

"Is being seen tonight with woman who is wearing kerchief of gold and crimson. Press is believing what is easy to believe."

"And what will Neville think of that?"

"I will pass snitch off as gentleman's bet. Press will be believing of that, I think."

"Why?"

"Because is already loving him, and is not to be taking of risks to destroy that."

Rita's eyes grew at that. "And does Longbottom know that yet?"

"Is not being certain. Is thinking it likely he is suspecting strong feelings."

"If you want this kept secret, Viktor, you have to do a better job than you are," said Rita.

"Be keeping of secrets, Rita, and is having good story at end."

She grumbled and dismissed the privacy wards, leaving the other reporters glaring. Viktor strode past then, and apparated, leaving behind only black mist.

From his study, Viktor sat and wrote calmly.

My dearest Nevyenka,

Is writing briefly to be sure is receiving before is seeing of paper. Is still trying to keep quiet courtship. Not being because is ashamed, or nervous, but because is wanting to be having best chance possible with Nevya. Is attending celebration tonight with date as is expected. Is hoping Nevya will not be angry with Vitya. Is not having romantic interest in girl, who is sister of teammate and going only as friend. She is going with Vitya to be getting into party, and is knowing Vitya is having no interest in anything beyond this.

Please to be forgiving of Vitya for this deception for press. Is not wishing to be risking of romance with Nevya. Is wishing could be taking Nevya. Is promising will be taking to function once is
being allowed to be taking... but courtship is still preventing this, yes? Would be simply staying home if this also would not be causing outcry of press.

Tonight will be thinking of Nevya and wishing to be spending of time writing letters of feelings to beautiful man who surprised Vitya instead of going to party. Be knowing you are in my thoughts and in my heart.

- Vitya
Chapter 18

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IMPORTANT: This story is a side story and is based on the events of my previous story, Promised. This story begins before the events of The Redemption of Seamus Finnigan and shortly after chapter 90 of Promised.

A/N: I may be a bit sporadic posting for the next week or two. It's been a couple of really hard weeks for me.

------

Professor Longbottom was in a mood. The students knew to avoid him when he was this way. The younger students tended not to consider it a big deal, but would often find themselves pulled quickly away by sixth and seventh years, by the students who remembered Neville Longbottom screaming under *Cruciatus* meant for them.

Neville tried to ignore the articles and the pictures. Nothing of Viktor standing on his broom or handing the snitch to Neville, just pictures of a party and beautiful raven-haired beauty on his arm. Neville cursed. Didn't he know? Didn't Viktor realize? He wanted to be on that arm, holding Viktor, dancing. He wanted Viktor to... He didn't want to hide. He didn't need to hide.

He'd been in such a good mood when he sent off the letter to Viktor last night. Now he just felt drained. There had been no owl since Viktor's unwelcome missive the previous night. Why was Viktor projecting a need for privacy? He didn't care. He'd been a hero. He'd never hidden like Harry did. He'd never boasted like Seamus. He'd just lived. Which is what he wanted... to live. And he'd thought, maybe, with Viktor.

On a Sunday avoiding the students was easy, especially with so many of them actively avoiding him. And so he took his list, his careful list of which woods he needed for a broom, and he began to search the depths of the Forbidden Forest.

The centaur herd gave him wide berth, watching carefully as he pruned the smaller pieces carefully from branches, and then gently, so carefully, persuaded the great trees in the center of the forest to yield from their core solid lengths of ancient wood. He strode from the forest carrying the lengths, cradling them as the precious trove that they were, wood not cut but yielded freely by the trees themselves.

It was dusk by the time he walked out of the forest. Hagrid gave him a look and a nod, as few even among the professors would normally venture into the forest. Neville returned the look, and the nod, venturing to levitate his collected materials once he was out of the forest and comfortable with occupying his wand with the task.

Once in the castle the students made an even greater effort to avoid Neville. They could see what he himself had failed to notice. His distraction had failed to keep the tears away.
Neville left the materials in a trunk in his office and took the Floo to his quarters. Viktor's owl was on the sill waiting. Neville stared at it in frustration. Viktor had spent the evening dancing with some pretty girl while he'd been dreaming, hoping for...

He sat on the sill and stroked the owl's head. Some day he should really learn the name of Viktor's owl. He took the parcel and the letter and fed a treat to the owl before sending it off. He sat quietly for a long time looking at the letter. Yesterday he'd been full of excitement, now he just felt. He knew Viktor hadn't... he hadn't intended to hurt Neville. But he had. Neville took a deep breath. If they were going to do this, they'd have to find ways to work through differences.

He opened the letter slowly.

Dearest Nevya -

Vitya can only be imagining the anger of Nevyenka. To be going to party with girl on arm when Nevya is home at Hogwarts and feeling as though alone. And even with letter of Vitya to be waking to news in paper, which is deliberately being made to look as though girl on arm is romantic interest who was giving favor to Vitya. Woke this morning being ready to be sending of gift and now is to be fearing of rejection of suit.

Is hoping Nevya will do humble Vitya courtesy of reading letter before is making decision. Is imagining of Nevya all angry with eyes burning behind walls of ice. Is not wanting courtship to be ending, not in this way. Please to be listening to words of Vitya.

Is asking me about Rita Skeeter in letter. Is being true, is arrangement with Skeeter. Is knowing already that most of public and press is not believing that Vitya is to be courting beautiful Nevya. Was to be arranging with Skeeter of obfuscation to preserve privacy of both Nevya and Vitya. Is realizing now this is not to be helping. Is suffering since was young this madness of newspapers and press and never to be being left alone. Is threat of press leaking relationship that was making Vitya coward with Lyusha. Was threat that was destroying of happiness of Vitya, and helping him to be making of decision that has always regretted.

Was making of arrangement for privacy of both, but was neglecting to be discussing properly with Nevva. Is knowing that eventually is wanting to be public about relationship with Vitya, that Nevva is not wishing to hide relationship. But at same time is knowing that press has been invading of privacy in ways that... knowing that press was taking pictures of Nevva with Oliver, knowing that this was to be making of both very angry. And if it was being known that Nevva was with Vitya is being so much worse. Is stepping into light of press willingly for first time in many years outside of life as Quidditch player, but was hoping not to have complications of press to be interfering with courtship. Was not wanting one more thing to be making Nevva to be wanting to refuse suit.

Now is fearing that Vitya sheltering Nevva from the press is making disaster. Now is fearing that obfuscation of personal life that is second nature to Vitya is something that Nevva is rejecting. Please to be listening to Vitya. Is not ready for ending of courtship. Is to be owning up to making of mistake. Is not too proud to plead for forgiveness. Please, Nevvenka moi. Is wanting still to be dancing with Nevva on arm. Is wanting still to be making broom with Nevvenka. Is wanting to be sharing.

To be surrounded by life of party and yet to be alone, this is life of Viktor Krum. Was to be hoping for something better for Vitya. Was hoping to be sharing of all things with beautiful man. Was hoping that Nevva would be this man. Please, Nevva, do not be letting mistake of flawed, humble Vitya be destroying of our chances.
Is to be enclosing of gift. Dancing shoes for Nevyenka, that is to be spelling themselves to match for any outfit is wearing. Is to be promising now, is next time to be going out, is doing so publicly, if this is wish of Nevya. Is not ashamed. Is caring very much for Nevya and does not wish to see him hurting.

- Vitya

Neville sighed. Could he just let this go? His own handkerchief in the hand of a pretty girl pretending to be Viktor's date. That Viktor had just done it and not... not even asked him?

It did not surprise Neville to find that the dancing shoes had been handmade, and to his exact specifications. They fit perfectly.

Neville pulled out a sheet of beautiful cream parchment and began to write.

Viktor -

You have worried about creating distance between us, and now it is you creating that distance through the very route that you were worried about from me - a failure to communicate. You would have had to arrange your attendance at this party days ago. Days you could have used to speak to me, to talk to me, to explain to me why it matters if the press knows. I'm no stranger to the press. I'm a hero. The press has a more than passing interest in my affairs, if for no other reason than that I am a route to one of their most reclusive targets.

While the press is often seen to say that the prompting of Harry's reemergence into the spotlight was the work of his promise to Draco, that is simply not the case. Harry emerged from Grimmauld Place for me. First to try to help Luke escape his promise, and later to tend to a friend when I had used *Obliviate* on my memories of Luciano. I do not particularly care for the onslaught of the press, but I have found that the best defense is to simply keep living, to set the press aside and keep going. Never to seek it or to shy away from it.

You hurt me, Viktor. I feel as though the many pictures taken of us, of me kissing your fingers after you handed me the snitch, that these are an embarrassment to you. I hope you understand, I can't be with someone who sees me as an embarrassment.

When you first gave me that rose. When you first kissed me, the press was there. They were taking pictures. One of those pictures hangs over my desk, and I am in awe that you were able to rein in the attention of the press that they never once contacted me or asked me about you kissing me. It was front page news and then it was gone. But that you were kissing me, that you were declaring that on the front page... that meant something to me. And that you'd hide me going to that game. That means something to me too. It means a place that felt warm and comfortable is now cold and unwelcoming. It means that you disrespected me. It means that you don't really understand me at all.

I am struggling. I was beginning to see sweetness and thoughtfulness. I was beginning to feel something. And now my feelings are confused and hurt.

How could you? How could you do that to me? How could you just decide that it was better for me for you to be seen at a party with a woman holding my favor, my gift to you. How can you think I would want that? What I wanted was for you to know that I support you. That I care about you. That I was there, believing in you.

Now I just don't know what to believe.
- Neville
Chapter 19

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Viktor read the words in Neville's letter soberly. He had meant to be respecting their privacy, he hadn't dreamed that it would, that it could, hurt Neville so very deeply. He swallowed softly.

"My Nevwenka. Believe that I love you, please," he whispered, stroking the paper as though somehow beyond hope he could bring Neville to believe it through the paper itself. He studied the letter very carefully. It had arrived very late. Late enough that he could guess that Neville had stayed up late writing it, sending the owl into the night and across time zones.

He wanted to confess his feelings. To let Neville know how completely he'd fallen for him. But that could just serve to drive Neville, now deliberately distant, further away. And declaring his own feelings so reactively. He wanted Neville to know, but not like that.

Viktor could almost hear Neville saying the words of the letter as he read, but that just made it worse, because with the imagined voice came the pain, the cracks in his voice that meant that Neville was hurting and that Viktor was, himself, the source of that pain. He read the letter again. There was no acceptance or rejection of the gift. No explicit rejection of the suit.

He had several gifts half finished that would speak to the feelings of his heart, but they were not ready. And like a declaration of his feelings, Viktor felt uneasy about revealing them in these circumstances. What he'd meant to be a display of genuine love and affection would become a plea for forgiveness. That wasn't what Viktor wanted.

Viktor looked at the picture he'd procured from Rita. Him, standing balanced on his broomstick, a rose tied to his arm. Neville was stroking his face. The photographer had gotten a very clear shot of the painted face, of Neville's expression. Viktor closed his eyes. It was a look that conveyed well enough feelings neither of them would admit to each other. It was a look he wanted to see every day of his life, and he might very well have lost it.

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Neville woke to the unmistakable tapping of a beak on the window. He stumbled out of bed and unfastened it, rubbing his eyes. With Viktor courting him he'd grown used to being roused early,
but this was still very much the middle of the night. He carefully detached the letter and tossed it on the desk. There was no parcel. A part of Neville cracked at that. Viktor was giving up on him.

He groaned and practically shoved a treat into the beak of Viktor's owl before rather forcefully closing the window. He returned to his bed and drew the curtains.


Fuck, it was spelled not to be ignored. Neville sat up. He glared at the desk and the letter. *Accio* he whispered, his hand on his wand. The letter flew into his hand.

There was the barest hint of a "Thank you" on the air and the letter unfolded itself as though it were a Howler, and spoke in broken strained words.

Dearest Nevyenka -

Is to be accepting that Vitya has greatly disappointed you. Would be saying that is to be being sorry to ends of time, but would not to be making better. Is fucking up. Is thing that father is teaching Vitya when very little, to be honest of mistakes. Better to be asking of forgiveness, than to be letting resentments be festering.

Would be filling room with roses, for like Nevyenka, Vitya was taught apologies were to be given with roses, but is fearing that herbologist friend who so carefully prunes winter roses from bush would be feeling for bushes so devastated. Is only that is holding of rose that was gift of Nevyenka that is giving Vitya strength to write. Is holding great fear in heart that is being rejected. Is caring too much for Nevya to be accepting that.

Is hoping you are believing words spoken at game. About how much is meaning to Vitya to have you there. Was not meaning to demean or lessen great gift of Nevya, that is being there to support Vitya.

Two days ago Nevya was writing that was thinking Vitya is sexy in Quidditch gear with robes trailing. Is wanting to be getting back to that. Is knowing that it is within heart of Nevya to forgive Vitya. Is seeing into soul behind walls of ice. Is knowing that Nevya can be hard and unforgiving. But is also knowing that behind the ice is gentle soul. Soul that Nevya was letting Vitya glimpse.

As much as is wishing not to be sticking of foot into mouth, is also glad is making mistakes. Not because Vitya is liking mistakes. But is wanting to be having honest relationship with Nevya, not shell that is Viktor. And if is honest, is acknowledging mistakes and working together to be getting past them. What is needing of Vitya? Is knowing that Nevya cannot be expecting of perfection in relationship. Nevya was too long in relationship with Lyusha to be believing of this.

Is not able to be describing pain of hearing that is hurting Nevyenka. Is breaking of heart to be hearing such honesty. To be knowing that this pain is being fault of Vitya. But this pain is also being hope of Vitya, because is knowing that pain comes of feeling for Vitya. And is strength of feeling that is causing such great hurt.

Is now to lay before Nevya hopes. For in heart, Vitya still has hope. Hope to be building with Nevya new broom based on theories from book. Hope to be together, watching Olya as is flying before hoops of Quidditch pitch. Hopes to be walking in moonlight in greenhouse with feet bare and feeling of earth, looking at blooming of winter rose. Hopes to be accepted by Nevya for person is being, and not for perfection is trying to show to father. To friend, to courted, to lover and partner, is needing to show more. And is hoping that Nevya is to be being these things.
Please, Nevvenka moi. Is knowing is feeling lost. Is hearing you when is saying that is not knowing what to believe. Is asking and pleading. Believe in Vitya.

- Vitya

Neville looked at the letter. Now that the spell was complete, he could see that the letters... it was Viktor's handwriting, but the lines of the script were shaky, as if his hands had been trembling. And in several spots only the recitation allowed Neville to know for sure what had been said, for Viktor's tears had blotted the text almost to the point of illegibility.

Neville stumbled out of bed and sat at his desk. His poor third year students were going to get a rude awakening when they arrived to the greenhouse in the morning. But he would do this now.

My Vitya -

I am not immune to pleas and apologies. But you will have to make me believe. Awaiting your owl.

Also, you're still very sexy in those Quidditch leathers.

- Neville

It turned out to be quite an argument to get the house elf to take an letter to the owlery in the middle of the night, though of course the elf couldn't have been happy to be awakened then either, despite Neville's profuse apologies to it and open gratitude. Finally, the elf convinced, Neville slipped back into bed, drawing the curtains and pulling covers around his shoulders.

--

Viktor scanned the letter. Terse lines, but they offered a chance. And the last bit suggested Neville was still interested. Viktor clutched the brief letter to his chest. To Viktor it was a triumph. The greeting was to 'My Vitya' -- the distance was not gone, but it meant at least that Neville wasn't going to emphasize it.

He stood up and went to the balcony. The chill December air bit against his skin, but he stood and watched as the sun rose over the horizon, filling the sky with the brilliant beauty that Viktor so loved. It was his daily ritual, to rise before dawn and watch the sunrise before his training. To be humbled by the magic of nature and the earth. He let the rays of the oncoming dawn kiss against his skin for a few moments, and then he changed into his workout gear and ran several dozen times around the Quidditch pitch to help him clear his head and focus.

Shortly, freshly showered and clean, Vitya sat in his chair half-dressed, staring at the paper. Slowly, deliberately, he began to write.

Dearest Nevya -

Is not to be having of magic word to be restoring of belief. It must be coming from within, and so Vitya must be making of foundation that will have Nevya knowing in heart that Vitya can be trusted. Is hoping letter is saying that will be allowing Vitya to show Nevya this. Is hoping letter is saying also that Nevya is wanting of Vitya to be showing.

Is to be waking each day before dawn. Is ritual of Vitya since was boy. To be standing in only skin and pants at balcony and watching as sun is peeking over horizon, at brilliance of color and light. Sunsets is being beautiful, yes, but to be seeing the dawn, the rising of the sun to be taking of all evils of night and be offering of renewal -- is such beauty that Vitya is taken short of breath to even
consider it.

And yet this beauty is pale in comparison to Nevyenka. To the azure fire of soul that is glimpsing. Is truly a beautiful man, Nevya moi. And when I think of you in tears from actions of Vitya, is knowing that you are more beautiful. Because is being man capable of great feeling, capable of great love. And to even consider that Vitya might some day be the object of such purity and strength of feeling is to be making of Vitya to feel like to what is feeling on Quidditch pitch chasing after snitch. Is to be making of heart the racing and the pitter-patter and the mouth dry and aching to be touching of Nevya.

Is not able to be promising not to be making of mistakes. Vitya is man of passions who is acting on feelings not always to be considering problem before is acting. In acting with such decisiveness has hurt Nevya, and yet, because Nevya is sharing with Vitya, is knowing this is trait of much familiarity, because is Gryffindor, and is saying already that this is trait of house. Is also trait of Vitya.

You were saying this is trait that leads to many conflicts in house, but is grateful for this, because is meaning that Nevya can see Vitya is coming honestly to passions of heart, to rash action, to impetuousness. But is making of Vitya fires of passion... was wishing to see fire of Vitya, and is fearing to have shown worst part of fire first.

Was thinking to do something risque, but now is fearing for that. Is reining in impetuousness for Nevya, and instead offering something of beauty. In manor that is sanctuary for Vitya, is tapestry, the Dawn over Durmstrang -- to be reminding Vitya of many dawns when was boy and happy in school. Artist was to be also creating tapestry of dawn at other schools, and was procuring for Nevya the Dawn over Hogwarts. On days when sky is filled with clouds, is looking instead at tapestry and remembering beauty. Is hoping this can be dawn of understanding in relationship between Vitya and Nevya. Chance for renewal, and building of something beautiful.

Is so sorry to have been hurting Nevyenka moi. Is more precious to me than is knowing. Forgive Vitya.

- Vitya
Chapter 20

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Neville sat quietly at the morning meal. He surveyed the Gryffindors quietly as was his habit. It was a subdued group, especially since the actions of their most popular sixth years had squashed all chance at winning the house cup. Blevins, the Gryffindor seeker until the incident, looked particularly dejected. Even his cohorts had shied away from him, as though trusting him had somehow tainted them and they were determined to make up for it.

Neville glanced at the Gryffindor head of house, her attention barely on the students at the table and grumbled. He'd known that she hadn't wanted the additional responsibility of the house, but if this was how she ran it, they'd be better off with him. Maybe that was the plan. To give Minerva an excuse to shift the responsibility from the older senior witch to Neville. The headmistress had made no secret that her intention was for him to become the head of house for Gryffindor.

He glanced at the other houses - Slytherin surprisingly animated under the guidance of Draco and Harry, Hufflepuff excitedly talking Quidditch, Ravenclaw still buried in their books as they ate. The students were happy. There was no great fear to cast a pall upon the students. Numbly Neville was forced to acknowledge that the fear that they'd lived under had done damage to him. He was always waiting for things to go all pear shaped, because he had an utter and complete faith that things could not be going well. Perhaps that was even why he'd been so hard on Viktor. He'd made a mistake. He'd tried to apologize and Neville had responded by hurting him in turn.

The screech of an owl alerted him to the mail as owls descended on the great hall delivering their packages. Viktor's owl landed neatly before Neville as four owls, each of them grasping a line, flew in with a large wrapped cylinder taller than Hagrid, and launched it before Neville. It floated gently to the ground. Neville's eyes widened in surprise and he quickly opened and scanned the letter.

All eyes in the hall turned to Neville. He stood and walked around to the front of the table. Neville pulled out his wand and levitated the package, moving quickly to the door. He noted that he was quickly followed by several others. He stood in the corridor taking deep breaths. He'd told Viktor he was okay with being public, that it was what he wanted, and yet he couldn't help but note Minerva standing a few feet behind him, and Luke, and Draco.
"Is everything alright, Professor Longbottom?" asked Minerva.

"I just, I would have preferred it come to my quarters," said Neville, "though actually it's probably better it didn't. It would likely have fallen out the window before I could get it through."

"I'm sure Vitya intended it to be public, Neville," said Luke.

"Why?" whispered Neville.

"He's very aware that he hurt you."

"You've spoken..."

"I've spent many hours talking to Vitya over the past two days. He's devastated that he hurt you Nev," said Luke. "If public is what you wanted, I'd say you have it. He's not hiding anymore. But if that is what I think it is, he's also not pulling punches."

"What do you mean?"

"It looks like a tapestry," said Minerva softly. "May I?"

Neville nodded.

Minerva waved her wand and the packaging keeping the tapestry safe fell away. The tapestry unrolled and the hall was suddenly flooded with light as the sun peeked out and the sunrise over the Hogwarts castle was repeated, beautifully, completely, flawlessly in the hallway. Minerva gasped, her hand going to her chest and Draco whistled.

Luke stepped up to him and whispered, "You cannot refuse it, Nev. It's an apology and a courting gift. You'd be rejecting him totally."

"Why would I refuse it," breathed Neville, "it's brilliant."

Luke shook his head. "I... it was meant to come at the end, I think. To show you that he meant it. Nev, he's giving you the sunrise, the thing he finds most beautiful in the world."

Minerva was still shaking. "Professor Longbottom. What are you not telling me about your relationship with Viktor Krum?"

"What... did I do something?"

Draco shook his head. "It's *the Dawn over Hogwarts*, Neville..."

"... one of three tapestries commissioned in 1622 by the headmasters of each school," said Minerva, her hand still over her chest. "It's an Eclesius Longbottom tapestry. It's..."

Neville looked at her stunned, he knew enough of his family history to know that particular ancestor was a renowned artist, his work valuable.

"They were all privately held," said Draco a strange look on his face. "Father has a small Eclesius Longbottom in his gallery at the manor... one of the less known and less valuable. Neville, that one is worth in the hundreds of thousands of galleons. And you're looking at one of his most famous works."

Neville shook. "You're saying..."
"He's saying... You didn't tell me you and Viktor were serious, Neville."

"It's... I think it's rather serious, Minerva," said Neville walking up to the tapestry and touching it lovingly. He glanced at Luciano, "Can you help me hang it?"

"Surely the house elves can help you hang it in a sitting room," suggested Minerva.

"Perhaps eventually. But for now it was meant to make me think of Vitya on a rainy morning, and it belongs in my bedroom." He didn't need to look to see Minerva's scowl. "I'm not being selfish, headmistress. Vitya spent a fortune with a purpose in mind. He wanted me to wake and have the sunrise, even when it was raining or overcast. He spent a fortune to give that to me. I'm not taking that away from him."

Minerva grumbled but waved her hand dismissively. Neville waved his wand, rolling the tapestry back up and then levitated it and floated it in front of him as he walked up the staircases to his quarters. Luke followed shortly, after letting Noah know where he was headed. Once in Neville's quarters, Luke followed him to the bedroom and helped him hang the tapestry opposite the balcony.

"He really is very sorry, Neville," said Luke quietly when they were done.

"Why did he do this?" asked Neville, nodding at the tapestry. "If it's so..."

"Traditionally gifts at the end of a courtship are extravagant. I suspect he'd intended this as a gift at the close... as an indicator that he wants a dawn, a beginning of a new life," said Luke. "He is terrified, Neville, that you'll reject him for something that he thought... he was trying to protect you."

"But he didn't share that decision with me. He decided for both of us and never discussed it."

"He realizes now that he made a mistake, Nev. Are you going to keep punishing him for it?"

Neville shook his head. "Is he. Is he a good man, Luciano?"

"He's a wolf, Nev, not just a man. And that makes it hard. Because wolves are creatures of passion and instinct." Luke stroked Neville's hair, pushing a loose lock back behind his ear. "You liked that, when it was me."

"It's. It's stronger somehow. He said he was a quarter?"

"His grandfather refused to rally the werewolves for Grindelwald."

"I'm afraid, Luke."

"Why?" asked Luciano.

"I like him. Merlin, until this weekend everything was so sweet and romantic. From helping with Trevor to trying to find... I. I like him."

Luciano sat on the bed. "Like Oliver?" he asked.

Neville shook his head. "It's different. He's. It really fucking hurt, Luke, when he..."

"Shh, baby. He cares a lot about you. And I know all of his gifts were probably expensive somehow, but even a Krum doesn't throw around money like that," he pointed to the tapestry. "It was meant at the end to show you he was serious in his suit."
"So what does it mean now?" asked Neville, looking at the tapestry.

Luciano stood up and stood behind him. "I think it means that he's as serious now as he thought he'd be at the end. Most... most would have given up the suit over a row like that. Considered it a sign you were unsuitable."

"But what if it means we are unsuitable, Luke?" Neville turned to look at his former lover. "I'm in over my head. I'm not ready for this."

"I think you are. He's not asking you to marry him, Nev."

"Not yet."

"It's a courtship, Nev," said Luke. "It's the only honorable way for him to pass on his name. And he chose you."

"Only after you pointed him at me."

"He seems very happy to have been pointed at you to me," said Luke, running his hands down Neville's arms. "Nev, give him a chance. I think he really cares about you."

"You can tell that from this," said Neville, gesturing to the tapestry behind him. Luke shook his head. "Do you know when the last time I saw Vitya really smile was? He smiles at you. You know the one. You've seen it. Do you have any idea how rare... Nev, you have to know that he's serious about this."

"I'm just a school teacher, Luke."

"And that's enough. Don't let displays like this..." Luke paused. "It might... I mean, Vitya doesn't worry about money, I'm sure you've figured that out."

"I hadn't guessed," said Neville with a sigh. "How am I supposed to... I mean, I can't return a gesture like this."

"He doesn't expect you to. Be you. Let him see who that is."

"Yeah right, he won't. I don't know anything about him except that he likes me and plays Quidditch."

"I think you know more about him than that," said Luke. "But if you want to know more, demand to know." Luke smiled and tugged on Neville's robes to drape them properly. "I don't think he'll deny you."

"I have to... I need to get to my classes."

"Nev. He's nervous right now. Write him soon, okay?"

Neville nodded and took the Floo from the lounge down to his office. He strode into the greenhouses ignoring the onslaught of questions and began. "So, Mandrake root. I'm assuming someone," he leveled a glare at the entire class, "can tell me why this particular plant is so important?"
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Hours passed before Neville was able to slip away from the bustle of school and into his office to set his quill to parchment, scribbling in his distinctive indigo on the perfect cream pages.

My Vitya -

You've given me the sunrise as a gift and I am humbled. That you would, that you could ever suggest that I am as beautiful... I think you must see something very different than what I see in the mirror.

I want us to communicate, okay? I know what that tapestry is, and I have a very general idea of how much it cost. It scares me, because I'm a school teacher. You are wealthy beyond any imaginings I might have and I can't compete against that. How am I ever supposed to... I know you weren't intending it, and I'm not angry, I'm astounded and bewildered and stunned, it's just, it's so beautiful. But I also feel inadequate and I want to talk about that with you, with Vityenka moi, because I don't want to end up where we were.

I don't want you to be scared by that. About me wanting to talk about it. I know it's probably not a talk that you've had, but I have. I just want to come to an understanding about it so that we can set it aside and live and not have to worry about insecurities on my part tearing us apart when we least expect it.

You've pushed for me to share what's inside, the pieces I hide behind my wall of ice. First off, I've been meaning to say, and I want to be clear. That ice, that wall. It's me too. I can't just pretend that it's not. The place that I go to be capable of... I don't want anyone else to know, but if you mean to be intimate with me, and I think... I hope you do, you should know. That's me too. It's a part of me as much as the 'azure fire' you talk about.

I'm sorry I was so angry. I thought we were understanding each other and seeing those pictures of you with that girl. I was jealous, Vitya. I wanted to be on your arm.

I have to return to classes. I don't want you to worry, Vitya. This is okay. We're okay.

- Neville
Neville looked at his watch. He had just enough time to take it to the owlery himself. He smiled. The walk would do him good. He made his way to the owlery and attached the letter, sending it off to Viktor, and then back to the Great Hall for lunch. He sat next to Hagrid and chatted with him briefly about how the thestrals were doing and which Gryffindors were showing promise, his eyes darting every now and then to the students at the tables. There was Blevins again. Outcast. He remembered how much Harry had hated being ostracized like that, so many times for things. Blevins had messed up, badly, sure, but he'd done it because all of them had failed to communicate their trust in Noah.

Neville shook his head and began to eat. It was going to be a long week.

--

Viktor shook slightly as he read the words. He closed his eyes and kissed the parchment gently. He was forgiven. He was...

"Concentrate, son," came the wizened old voice of his master. "I understand you're courting, and I will..."

"Is being sorry, master. Is only reading of note."

"Yes, but you're supposed to be polishing those wands."

"Is finished with this before was reading," said Viktor. "Is wondering why is never using..."

"I know about your project, Mister Krum. I am rather intrigued. Plant matter for the core. It's not been..."

"Is thinking could be strong, very strong."

"Flesh is fragile in ways plants are not, but we use the best of magical creatures. Unicorn hair, dragon heartstring, the tail feathers of a phoenix."

"Is thinking this is way wands are being made for generations. Is learning this. Is good, already at making this. Is wanting to know about thestral hair, or even Rusalka."

"And yet you are not trying with these things, Mister Krum," said the old man, glancing at the work desk across the room where a polished length of Karelian birch sat in a potion bath.

"That Vitya is making as gift."

"You are turning wand theory on its end," the old man said, his wrinkled hand resting on Viktor's shoulder. "You know the wand chooses the wizard."

"But wand is having mind also of maker," insisted Viktor. "Is to be making with love. Is to be consulting with expert on magic steeped in love. Is saying is possible."

"Perhaps. If you are taking your time making it. If you use the right materials that match the soul and personality of the wizard. If no flesh ever touches the wand. It's not impossible, just improbable."

"Is having still almost three weeks. Is to be being enough?"

"It's for your courted? A gift for the end?"

"Is being penultimate gift."
"Not the final?" asked the master, one eyebrow arching upward.

"Nyet. Is having one gift is being more precious even than wand made of own hands."

His master sat across from him. "You've tested this idea? Plant cores?"

"Was making fascinating wand from filaments of devil's snare."

"Only one test?"

"Is also using leaves. But is finding petals of flowers is to be working best."

"Flowers?" asked the master. "I suppose it might make a fanciful wand for light charms work."

Viktor shook his head. "Is using witch rose petals."

The master stared at him. "You'd try to contain the power of the Witch?"

Viktor smiled and nodded. "Not for just any wizard. But for wizard with strength in nature and earth, is thinking could be good match."

"He's an herbologist then, your courted, or a potions master?" The master stood. "Show me these wands. This is inventive, this thought. But for the wand to choose him. The petals would have to be filled with love, Viktor Gregorivich. I don't know how you might achieve that."

"Ah, but my master, Vitya is knowing."

--

Neville looked grumpily out the balcony at the darkness. The sound of the pouring rain pounded against the castle. Behind him, the sun began to dawn upon his wall, but the lightening of the sky was barely reflected in the sky outside. So this was why he had a tapestry then. For these days. Neville sat up and piled his pillows so he could be comfortable and watched as the sun dawned, filling the room with beauty and light and making Neville's heart soar. Everyday, he'd know Viktor felt... felt something. Neville gulped. How had Viktor gotten there so fast when his own feelings were so confused?

But then Viktor hadn't had an Oliver or a Luciano to recover from, had he? At least not recently. Well, unless he was keeping it out of the press. Soberly Neville realized that wasn't nearly so out of the question as he'd once thought. Viktor could very well be recovering from a love affair. Neville could just be a rebound. False strength of feeling from need to be loved and touch and... Fuck.

Once the sun had risen in his rooms and flooded them with light, Neville stepped out of bed and took his shower. Probably Viktor's owl wouldn't reach him until meal time, not with this weather. Despite the rather alarming thoughts of the morning, he let his thoughts stray to Viktor as his hands roamed, soaping himself. Viktor staring intently at him. The look on Viktor's face as he handed him the snitch. Viktor flying in Quidditch leathers, his robes billowing around him. Fuck he was so... Neville's body shuddered and his hands moved to steady himself against the wall of the shower.

He'd been intending something risque. Viktor had said so in the last letter. That he was sending something else, because he didn't trust risque right now. But fuck, Neville wanted risque. He wanted... things he was rather certain he shouldn't.

Neville dressed quickly, dressing in his teaching robes and putting on a modern Hogwarts tie that
Viktor had given him that was hip enough for even the most fashion conscious of his students to approve. He slipped his watch into the pocket of his waistcoat and headed for breakfast. He made sure to catch Blevins before the disgraced Gryffindor went into the Great Hall.

"Mister Blevins," said Neville firmly, "a moment."

The Gryffindor put Neville much in mind of Harry, in his manner and magnetism and ability to get his entire house angry with him. He was beyond impetuous, even more so than Harry had been. He looked sullenly at Neville and stepped over to him. "Yes, Professor?"

Neville cast a subtle silencing charm and looked sternly at the boy. "What's going on?"

"You know, sir. Almost killed Professor Potter."

"Everyone is still shunning you."

"My punishment, isn't it?"

Neville shook his head. "No. You had detention and expulsion from the Quidditch team and being kicked out of Defense Against the Dark Arts. Those were your punishments. This is something else."

"Lost my nerve, didn't I," said Blevins. "I... I'll never be able to make it up to the guys. I lost the team the Quidditch match, and the House Cup. Harry is actually helping Slytherin win, and I... I just wanted him to notice me looking out for him."

"You could have done that by bringing your concerns to him. To me. To the headmistress."

"Yeah," said Blevins, "I know. I fucked up..."

"Language, Mister Blevins."

"Sorry," said Blevins. "I just can't believe. I destroyed my life. Wanted to be an Auror. It'll never happen now, for any of us. Not without Defense."

"And what if you were to have some possibility. Professor Mayer has allowed you into his classes."

"Yeah, but Professor Malfoy, he doesn't. I can't blame him," said Blevins, "I nearly killed his kids. I'd hate me too."

"Did you consider that as Gryffindor's themselves, that both the headmistress and Harry may have been prone to harsh punishments in anger? Have you actually asked them to reconsider?" asked Neville.

"They wouldn't listen."

"Your friends are Gryffindor," said Neville. "They need to see you try and not just accept that you've destroyed the house. They need to see you redeem yourself."

"They'll never..."

"I assure you, Harry did his share of impetuous things. Harry... he was kicked off the Quidditch team twice," said Neville, setting a hand gently on the boy's shoulder. "Hurt him horribly to see the team fail because of him. At least... you could try. He might reconsider that. And your friends would see you trying, being a Gryffindor."

"I can't face him."

"That's what bravery is about, Mister Blevins. If you didn't have it in you, the sorting hat would never have put you into the house."

Neville watched as the boy walked off. The boy didn't have his usual confident swagger, but he held his head up for the first time in weeks. Neville sighed. The boy had done something with potentially deadly consequences and his punishment had been drastic. Deservedly drastic, but the boy had meekly accepted it once he understood the depths of his error. Meekly. That was the problem. He was Gryffindor. Meek wasn't really in the vocabulary.

Neville strode into the Great Hall a few moments after and walked confidently to the staff table, taking his seat. He was not surprised to see the furtive glances Blevins made at Harry, and at him. He smiled slightly at the boy, but could do little else as the mail began to arrive. Owls swooped low over the tables, dropping their parcels, and, as expected, Viktor's owl, a snowy owl that reminded Neville rather a lot of Hedwig, dropped both a parcel and a letter in front of Neville and then flew off.

Neville could feel the eyes of students on him. They were still wondering, he knew, why McGonagall had been so taken with the contents of Viktor's parcel yesterday. He let a smile touch his lips as he opened the missive.

My Nevya -

Is so much more beautiful than the sunrise, is wishing you were seeing as Vitya sees. But is happy to be hearing that the sunrise is pleasing you. Is always wish of Vitya to be pleasing of Nevyenka. Is so happy to be sharing beauty with you.

Is knowing that is not to be worrying about money, but if is wishing to be discussing, Vitya is not unwilling. Vitya is understanding that money can be causing of many difficulties in relationship, and is relationship is wanting. So to be discussing. Is promising. But please, to be holding off on this for some time. Is knowing is probably being taken by value of tapestry. Is apologizing for this. Was to be giving near end of courtship, but... not wanting to create further distance. Let us to be repairing of what is having before venturing into dangerous ground of finance, yes?

Is asking first after Trevor. In anger at Vitya, is not hearing if condition of Trevor is improving, and is knowing this is still on mind of Nevyenka. If is needing anything for care of Trevor, please to be telling Vitya.

Is giving to you already dancing shoes. Was also to be giving this. Is proper dress robes. Is knowing Nevyenka has outgrown set was wearing to Yule ball. Is remembering because Nevya was one of few to be dancing during ball, even to very end. Vitya is not to be liking walking on ground, is feeling always unsteady, unbalanced. But when is to dance, this is not being problem. Is hoping shoes and robes together... is to be taking of Nevyenka dancing. Is promising to you. Is thinking Nevya will look dashing in robes, and is making waistcoat to be touched with gold and crimson of house.

Vitya is wanting to be doing this together, to be dancing with hand on waist, spinning together over floor. Is wanting for this very much. Is... is hoping you will to be wearing entire outfit for dance.

- Vitya

Entire outfit? Neville opened the package. The robes were stunning pieces of Madam Malkin's work, something he'd be proud to wear. Neville blushed and swallowed softly. Stunning, right
down to the fine cotton of the undershirt and the smooth red silk of the rather skimpy pants. Viktor wanted to be thinking of him in those. Neville shuddered as he set the package aside and tried desperately to quell the red from his cheeks.
Chapter 22

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Dear Vitya -

Trevor is doing much better. I'm sure he appreciates your asking.

The robes are beautiful, and the gold and crimson subtle enough that I could wear them even for official functions here at Hogwarts. With Luciano soon to be in a ceremony here at the castle, I'll have an occasion to wear them soon. Though I suspect from your letter that you're hoping for me to wear them sooner.

There used to be a formal party every year before the holidays when Professor Slughorn was here, but I fear Noah has little interest in continuing the practice. With the final ceremonies of his promise approaching, I can't say I blame him. Too many had ill feelings for those gatherings as it is, with Professor Slughorn choosing favorites as he did. I attended the parties as a servant, if you can believe.

I don't know when we'll have a proper chance for dancing, but you're right, of course. I do love to dance. The music and the feel of someone pressed close and the circling about the floor. It brings me a sense of peace I don't really often feel. I wish I could be dancing with you now. If only to feel your hand on my waist. When you held me giving me the courtship gift my attention was so focused on the rose, on your kiss, that I struggle to remember your hands on my skin. I want to remember that, your hand, gripping against my waist.

I'm sure you've figured out that I love to dress up, so I hope you have in mind something fun. I want it to be public, our dancing. I know it's silly, but I was jealous of you and that girl. It didn't matter that she was a girl, it was that. Well, it was that she was on your arm. That if we're doing this, that's my place to be. No one else belongs there, at your... I. I should cross that out. I should spell it away. But we promised to be honest to each other, and it's only fair for you to know that I'm a jealous, possessive man. If it were not for the promise binding, Noah Mayer would have something to fear from me.

I suppose I should admit that as well. I'm jealous of Noah. That he has Luciano. I know what it means to have Luke. For him to be close. I feel like I can say that, because I know that you had that
too, once. It's funny, because Luke was always the jealous one. He always held on to me like he couldn't bear to let go. As much as I used to chide him for that, I miss it. There's a part of me, an irrational part, that wishes he'd held on tighter. That somehow holding on could have kept us together.

I hope... I'm not trying to hurt you saying these things. For me the loss of Luciano is still very fresh. I'm not trying to chase you away saying it. I hate that my relationship with Oliver fell apart, but it left me. I'm ready, is what I'm trying to say. And I hope. I have hopes, Vitya. For us.

I hope that the scandalous parts of your gift are an indication that you're thinking of me, or that you want to be. I'm glad. Because otherwise it would be embarrassing, I think, for me to admit that I spent a rather long time in the shower this morning, thinking about you in Quidditch leathers. I should be crossing that out too. But I won't. I want you to know.

- Neville

Viktor smiled broadly at the note. Like so many of Neville's notes, it had woken him in the early morning hours, the owl flying late night in Scotland and across great distance and several time zones to his sanctuary in Eastern Europe. Lately Viktor had been allowing himself to simply rise early and read Neville's note even as he prepared the gift for the next day.

Today the smile on his face was warm and his face flushed. He'd known it was a risk, to be sending something so private as undergarments. And he knew, if they managed to dance still during the courtship, that he'd not get to see Neville in them. But just knowing that under all that perfect tailoring Neville was wearing silk against his privates, silk that had been gifted to him by Viktor. That he'd wear something sexy for Viktor just so that Viktor would know.

And the admission about jealousy! To have Neville jealous... it spoke of a depth of feeling that made Viktor crazy. How he was going to survive another eighteen days, with thoughts of Neville, of him wrapped in that sumptuous red silk. It was bad enough when the only picture in his head had been the picture of Neville digging. Now he had also the picture of Neville touching his face... that expression that told him so much of what the herbologist was feeling. And just the idea of Neville... Fuck, he needed a cold shower now.

Almost an hour later he emerged from the heat of the shower, where instead of cold he'd opted for hot, pouring hot water inflaming the skin. His hands had wandered at that thought, of Neville in silk, and he'd climaxed with such a scream that house elves had appeared in the shower with him to check on him. He'd had to have a stern talk afterwards with the house elves. All of them.

He was still trembling a bit from the force of the imaginings he'd allowed himself in his morning shower when he heard the shout of his father. He cursed silently. His father was not one to invade his privacy. He'd been granted the sanctuary for exactly that, and even his father allowed him his peace here.

"Viktor Grigorivich!" came the shout.

Viktor stumbled out of the bathroom and into his bedroom, dressing by the beginnings of the light from the coming dawn at his back from the tapestry. He'd managed to get his trousers on and half fastened before his father walked into the room.

"Viktor Grigorivich!" he shouted. "You..."

"Papa, is best to be knocking, was to be getting dressed."
"Is to be hurrying then. Is needing," Grigori Krum's eyes were just as dark and intense as his son's, "to be talking to son."

Viktor groaned and fastened his trousers, then pulled on a shirt bearing the colors of the Vultures. "What is needing to be speaking to Vitya about?" he asked.

"Is hearing rumor, Vitya, that Neville Longbottom was gifted family tapestry. Being of dawn," Grigori's eyes looked meaningfully at the tapestry on Viktor's wall.

"Is not being rumor. Was gift as part of courtship."

"Vitya!" Grigori Krum looked at him with disbelief.

"Papa," said Viktor calmly, "was always intending to be giving."

"But Vitya... is being only second week. If is giving now, what is to be expecting by end?"

"Is thinking he is expecting me to be showing what is wanting from him," said Viktor, "and is wanting to be sharing. Is being thing that Vitya loves most, papa, sight of sunrise in morning. Is knowing this."

"Will he even appreciate it?" sputtered Gregori. "Is priceless tapestry!"

"Is tapestry by ancestor of Nevya. Of course is appreciating."

"Reporters are hearing rumors. Famous tapestry. Someone at school is recognizing. Is hearing from Skeeter asking if is being sold. Is not knowing what son is wanting for me to be saying."

Viktor shook his head. "Papa. Is not to be being surprised that Vitya is pursuing Nevya with intent. Is. Papa, is having intent. Is meaning for Nevya to be accepting more than just suit. Is meaning for Vitya to be..."

"Is loving him? Is only days, Vitya."

"Is knowing that is happening quickly. Is not like Lyusha, who slowly snuck into heart. Is... is very different. And yet feeling is still powerful. Is bringing Vitya to knees with jealousy, and pain when is thinking is to be losing of Nevya," Viktor slowly shook his head. "Is being real, papa."

"Is being real to you. What about to him? Is asking if is willing to be bearing heir of Krum house? Is asking whether is taking to name of Krum? Is courtship, Viktor. Is knowing is not needing approval of father for this," said Gregori softly, "but is still asking of you to be sure of these things." The man swallowed as he gazed at the hard glare in his son's eyes. "Is asking for you to do these things, my Vitya, my son. Is asking, not telling."

"Cannot just to be asking such things! Is needing to be... Papa, is needing to trust Vitya, is still needing him to be falling in love. Is not wanting for him to be thinking all is looking for is vessel for heir. Is not being true. Is wanting man to be loving of Vitya, is most important thing to be finding. Will bear heir myself if is needing."

"But Vitya..."

"Papa. Is true. Is giving to Nevya tapestry. Is Vitya's to give. Was not to be asking of tapestry hanging in home of father. Was giving of tapestry was having in sanctuary."

"What is it that was happening," asked Gregori, "that was giving gift of final week?"
"Was appearing in newspaper. Was having girl on arm. Was to be protecting Nevya from press, but was not to be discussing first with Nevya. He. He is not wanting to be hiding from press. Not wanting to be embracing of press either. He is wanting. Papa, he is wanting Vitya to be open. To be..."

"Already is kissing this boy," said Gregori, "on front page of Prophet."

"But Vitya was allowing that and then making to go away. Press is seeing girl on arm and not caring about kiss of last week, but of girl on arm after game."

"You will be letting press to be taking of pictures?" asked Gregori. "This boy was being photographed in position most compromising with Vitya's friend Oliver Wood."

"Da. Nevya was being involved with Olya. Is being over. Was to be talking to Olya before was pursuing Nevya. Olya and Lyusha both were telling Vitya that was being needful to be open about relationship or would be losing." Viktor shook his head. "Vitya should have listened more closely to friends. Was almost losing precious Nevya, and over something... Papa. Is to be open with Nevya. Is not to be hiding again. Is not so strong to be hurting in this way again."

"My son, is not being money that is issue. Is worrying about Vitya. Is not wanting for him to be... is putting great deal, my Vitya, into this courtship. Is hoping boy is being worth it."

"Is still to be letting Vitya to woo him with gifts and words," said Viktor, sitting on the bed. "Is forgiving of Vitya mistakes. Is writing with purpose. Is writing with questions even you, Papa, would be appreciating. Now, is finding it needful to spend time alone to be preparing of gift for my Nevya. Is still to be going to master today for apprenticeship. And in afternoon is training for game."

"Is dismissing me?"

"Da. Is needing to be getting ready, and already the beauty of my Nevya was distracting Vitya in shower."

"Was not needing to be knowing this!" exclaimed Gregori. "Fine. Is going. Is just wanting to be sure that Vitya is being careful."

Viktor watched his father go and then returned to his desk and read Neville's letter again. He smiled as he wrapped the parcel.

My Nevya --

Is glad to be hearing that Trevor is having much improvement in health. Is happy for Nevya, as is knowing this was being much on mind of beautiful herbologist.

Is not needful to apologize for being jealous. Is not needing, I think, to be explaining that is nature of wolf to be jealous when is involving mate. And is wanting you to be mate of Vitya, so is warning in advance, Vitya is also getting jealous. Is not good trait of Vitya, is knowing, but when is thinking of hands on Nevya... is wanting only hands of Vitya to be touching. Is flaw, is knowing.

Is not being surprised at admission of feelings for Lyusha. Was telling Nevya at start, is not being troubled that is saving place in heart for Lyushenka, as Vitya is also having place in heart for him, and is not wanting to forget ever love that is having for Lyusha. Is knowing this is still fresh wound for Nevya. Is wishing Vitya could be making this easier for Nevya.

Is not intending for undergarments to be scandalizing. Is definitely glad to be hearing of time spent
in shower. Is glad Nevya was keeping from crossing out. Is making Vitya to be feeling less awkward for also spending time in shower thinking of Nevya wearing gift of Vitya. Is not wanting to be feeling embarrassed. Is telling Nevya from start, is very sexy. Is thinking would be sexy in silk pants was sending with robes. Is not ashamed to be wishing Vitya had Nevya this instant in bed of Vitya, wearing only silk.

Is hoping is not stepping over line to be saying this. Is not wishing for Nevya to be uncomfortable. But is part of purpose of courting, to be honest about all needs. Is hoping Nevya is wanting to be sexy for Vitya, just as Vitya is wanting to be sexy for Nevyenka moi. Is knowing cannot be seeing of full dress. That courtship is keeping us, both of us, from touching. But is wanting Nevya to be knowing, on day of dancing, Vitya will also be wearing such things beneath formal robes, and is hoping that Nevya will be imagining.

Is having work for apprenticeship today, and training for game in evening. Is glad to be busy, as is distracting from wait of long day to be hearing back from Nevyenka. Is wanting for Nevya to be understanding that is not to be jealous of past with Lyusha. Was finding this photo of the two of you together from feature in Witch Weekly. Was contacting photographer for original. Is spectacular. Is seeing love Lyusha is having for Nevyenka in photo. Anyone who is knowing Lyusha would be seeing it. Is wanting you to be remembering this always, as is knowing was treasuring of time together. Is much regretting that Vitya is not having similar photo, but is glad to be finding photo for Nevyenka. Is knowing this is wound very recent, but is wanting to know, is respecting of love Nevya is having for Lyusha. Is knowing is being hard for Nevya.

With deepest affection
- Vitya
Chapter 23

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Neville struggled to keep from tears. It was a touching and thoughtful gift, and he was grateful for it. Viktor had been absolutely right, you could see that Luke loved him in his eyes as he gazed at Neville. Still, the photo was painful. He didn't have anyone to look at him that way. And he thought he saw the start of that look from Viktor but... but he couldn't be sure.

Unfortunately, Neville's day was every bit as busy and crazy as Viktor had suggested his was going to be. A relatively minor potions incident in the lab had left Noah quarantined with his class, and as the closest thing on staff to a Hufflepuff, Neville was taking head of house duties while Draco covered potions classes from one of the other classrooms.

Unfortunately, this far into term, many of the first years were having moderate to severe issues with home sickness. This meant that following classes, Neville was sitting next to students who were weeping on him. It was not his preferred activity. Indeed his note to Viktor had been, by necessity, apologetic and short.

Neville had endured first year tears before, of course. One of his many regrets about that final year at Hogwarts had been that while he'd often taken the *Cruciatus* intended for others, especially the younger children, there were always some for whom he had not been there. Ones who came to see him after in desperate pain and tears to cry against the only person left they could see as a hero with Harry gone.

Neville collapsed in his bed at the end of the night. He wanted to sit at his desk and write a note for Viktor, a longer apologetic note. But the brief nothing he'd sent to Viktor... he hoped he'd been honest enough for all his brevity that Viktor would understand. Their relationship was fragile enough without help to break it apart.

--

If Viktor hadn't been so exhausted from training, he might have found fault with the brief note he'd received from Neville. But the explanation was forthright, honest, and apologetic. And there was an undertone of something that seemed very like regret. Like there was something Neville had to leave unsaid and desperately wanted to say. And there was concern also, for both Luke and Noah.
In the end Viktor had been frustrated, but, like Neville, he had just collapsed exhausted on his bed. They had been fusing the wand cores into wands today, a process that took abundantly of the energy of the wand maker. He'd been allowed time, briefly, to continue the necessary work on the Karelian birch, which had needed the second stage potion bath. His master assured him he was on schedule, but Viktor was still worried that it would not be ready on time.

Viktor had almost hoped for the interruption of a late night owl, but instead found himself waking just before dawn to another miserable rainy day. And there was training again that evening. It promised to be a miserable week in general. Viktor showered, lathering himself up under the water and wishing he had time to explore his fantasies of Neville in silk. Instead he finished the shower with only the briefest explorations in self-pleasure and dressed quickly. Today was a day of intense training. The Vultures were still down to just the reserve keeper, which meant the whole team had to work to compensate. He would not have the glimpse of Nevya this game to spur him on.

Viktor sat at his desk briefly, fumbling with wrappings for the gift. He'd endeavored as much as possible to do the work himself, rather than passing it to house elves. When he was done he turned to pull out some parchment and began to write.

My beautiful Nevyenka,

Is not being embarrassed to be admitting that dreaming of Nevya is extending to sleep and not just to time is spending in shower. Is wishing could be being here with Vitya. Is not so practiced at building of friendships and intimacy in letters. Is wishing could be expressing what is feeling face to face, but is fearing even in person would be having difficulty.

Is hoping mate of Lyusha is recovered from ordeal of yesterday. Both to be freeing of time for Nevya, and for worrying of Lyusha. Is remembering of school and of how busy teachers were always seeming even when not being in class. Now is understanding better and is feeling for Nevya. Is being something that Nevya loves? Is hoping is passion if is taking of so much of time.

Is not being secret that passion of Vitya is flight. Is so loving to be in air that is often uncomfortable to be walking on ground. This was being drive to play Quidditch, for more time to be in flight upon broom. And now is being job to fly. Is troubling Vitya that is to be in sport and career to be having time limit. Is wizard and living, is hoping, for long time. But can be playing Quidditch only for a few more years before is being displaced by new players. Is not in Vitya to turn skills to being coach. Is what public is expecting of Vitya, and is not to be doing.

Still is to be loving of flight. Is hearing from Olya that Nevya, that he is not being comfortable on broom. Is hoping can be persuaded to share this joy of Vitya's. Is not to be pressuring of Nevya. Just to be asking that is finding way to be sharing freedom that is sky to Vitya.

For gift, is offering this instrument. Is enchanted to be playing almost anything is imagining, and is knowing that will be finding use. Is knowing that is playing music to plants in greenhouse, but also is thinking of quiet dinners to be enjoying with romantic music, alone together. Is hoping gift is finding favor of Nevya. Is to be cherishing dreams of Nevyenka moi.

With deepest affection
- Vitya

--

It was several hours before Neville could unwrap the violin, which conspicuously followed him and played such beautiful and heart wrenching music that Neville spent half the day near tears. Viktor had sent extensive instructions on the enchantments on the instrument, but Neville hadn't
had a chance to go through them at length. As a result he ended up lecturing on the beneficial use of music in Herbology for his morning classes. It was a topic close to his heart and an effortless one for him to use, but Neville was still much relieved when he was finally able to find the necessary wand cues to convince the instrument to float quietly and await instructions in his study.

He had his Slytherin/Gryffindor fifth year class that afternoon, and the students remained stumped. Perhaps as a show of loyalty, Miss Appleton had not revealed her secret to any of her classmates, and even the other two Slytherin students who had shown some aptitude in Herbology had not figured out just what plant Neville had used for his display. Neville looked at the essays that were piled on the worktable after he dismissed the class. Why had he given himself that much grading when he really just wished to write to Viktor?

He groaned and floated the pile into his office, preparing for the onslaught of sixth year students. He looked a little longingly at his quill and bottle of ink and groaned. His sixth years were working with Devil's Snare, and for that he required time to blot the light of the sun from his greenhouse for a time. Sadly that task would need to take priority. And yet for all his frustration with the fifth years, the sixth years were almost a renewal. These were the students who wanted and loved working with plants, who found Devil's Snare as fascinating and beautiful as dangerous. These were the students that made him luxuriate in his comfort and love of Herbology.

Neville stayed after class to answer the questions of the students and then sat in his office for a long time, reading the essays of his fifth years. True to his expectations, only two students had bothered to put the necessary time into the subject. Three students in all of fifth year Gryffindor and Slytherin. One who had evaded the essay, and two who had offered rich examples of defense against Herbology when used as a weapon. And among the rest, two love letters, three essays that he suspected had duplicates in Professor Mayers office and a whole lot of drivel that filled the three feet of parchment without actually saying anything at all. Neville groaned in disgust, happy to have been fortified by his sixth year class. Instead of awarding marks for the drivel, Neville set it aside, pulled out some parchment and began to write.

Dear Vitya -

The violin is beautiful and I love it. I hope it can play something romantic for us soon.

First of all, Noah is fine. The incident in the lab was minor, but Noah felt strongly that the procedures needed to be followed to help instruct the students on how and why the procedures are in place. It could easily have been much worse.

I know I struggle and complain about the students and the lack of free time, but I love Hogwarts. I love teaching the students who understand and admittedly struggle with the students who can't be bothered to try. But I have an opportunity to help people see a beauty in nature and in the earth and in the love of being surrounded by living and growing things and I love that. I get to combine a passion for plants with the love of nurturing young people and helping them be better because they can be and they just need to find it in themselves to believe it.

I'm guessing that your plan for the future involves this mysterious apprenticeship that you've mentioned now a couple of times. You don't have to share it now, but I confess to being rather curious about what it is that has so captured your fascination. Like so many of your fans, I'd expected that you would turn to coaching, or to a life of leisure. As a professional athlete, you surely have no need to work after a successful career, even if you did not have family money to fall back on. I would have guessed the coaching, as I struggle to imagine that you could tolerate not doing anything for very long. But apparently there is something else that captures your fascination as well...
I confess, I have a bit of fear for riding brooms. I fell off a broom my very first time on one, and I've not felt particularly secure on them since. It's not a fear of flying so much as one of flying on a broom specifically. I managed to fly all the way to London on a thestral during fifth year with Harry and some of the rest of our defense group. I'm willing to try Vitya, just be patient with me. I know most of your friends are Quidditch players and I'm never likely to be able to fly like that. To be honest, I don't even own a broom. Never have.

I am enclosing something to give you inspiration. I hope that you appreciate it when you shower.

- Neville

Neville smiled as he prepared his own little gift for Viktor and sent it off with a house elf. He shuddered. The feel of silk was rather pleasant, really.

--

The owl came in the middle of the night, as it had so frequently. Viktor smiled and lit a candle, opening the letter. It was folded strangely as though holding something in. Once it was unfolded Viktor found himself looking at the back of a wizarding photo. In the corner was scrawled in Neville's careful script: Vitya: hoping you're inspired. Viktor gulped softly and flipped it over.

Neville was wearing Viktor's gift. Just the bow tie and the silk pants, reclining in a tall wingback chair, one leg up and bent, the foot resting on the arm of the chair. The angle and the spread of his legs showed off the tightness of the red silk as it stretched tight against his ample half-hard member. His right elbow rested on the raised leg, his chin on his hand as he slid his left down the center of his muscular chest, slowly down the chiseled line of his defined abs to the low waist of the briefs and pulled them down just enough to see the soft tufts of hair. Neville pursed his lips in a kiss at the camera and the scene repeated. Neville... he was beautiful. So perfectly beautiful.

Viktor shook and closed his eyes. Already he could feel his body reacting. Could feel what it wanted to do. He looked at the picture again. His Nevya... his shy cautious Nevya had done this for him. Viktor gulped and headed to the shower running the water as cold as he could make it. He was never going to survive another eighteen days.
Chapter 24

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-----

Sweet, sexy Nevyenka moi,

Is knowing that Nevya is asking not to be calling handsome or sexy. Is trying to find other word to be saying, but command of English is not great strength of Vitya. Is still trembling from sight of you, so beautiful. Is wanting for you to know this, that Vitya finds you beautiful. To be seeing photo and not to be touching... this is torture for poor Vitya, who is wanting to feeling curve of muscles under fingers. Is trying to undo me, my friend, with these images of you. Is finding them great inspiration, but is only to be wanting to be touching more.

Is hoping this is indication is wanting to be touching Vitya? Is wanting Vitya's hand on waist at dance? Is wanting Vitya thinking of that, of Nevya in stunning silk? Of Nevya in chair after dance, looking to be sultry? Nevyenka moi, is thinking of little else since seeing of photograph! Wanting so much to... to be telling...

Is having long day training today. Is good, because physical work of training is taking mind of muscles away from curves of Nevya's flesh, but is to be being miserable, because is cold rain, near to freezing and is expected also for game to be so. Be wishing for Vitya strength in charms for warmth.

Is wanting again to be sending of something risque, after seeing photograph. Is wanting, but is waiting. Is hoping you are wanting to be seeing. Is hoping that Nevya will say. Perhaps is insecurity in Vitya that is making of this hope. So is sending instead simple gift. Is feeling, is confessing, a little awkward. Is to be giving to Nevya gift that once was giving to Lyusha. Is giving quill. Is to be changing of ink color, and to be correcting if is wishing, and is also to be. How is saying? Transcribing? Taking of dictation? Is to be writing words as is speaking. Is thinking this is useful for Nevya... for taking of notes while is having hands full of earth.

Is having game tomorrow. Is wishing could be making plans for evening, but is knowing, my Nevyenka, that is not able to be making such plans with match. Could be lasting of hours or days, is no way to be knowing how elusive snitch is being.

Is looking forward to note from Nevya. Is giving hope on rainy day for victory.

------
With deepest affection  
- Vitya

Neville smiled at the familiar quill, so very much like the one that Luke used when writing his novels. He was surprised to find out that if he used it routinely, it would adapt to his handwriting, and express, with the right commands, the strength of his emotion by varying the characters and adjusting the pressure on the nib. It was also able to write in a startling array of colors, and could change the color on command. He blushed as he examined it when he realized that Viktor had arranged to have the expensive indigo ink he favored included as an option, the commands for use of that color carefully handwritten into the lengthy manufacturer's instructions.

Classes at Hogwarts were blissfully quiet. It was a Hogsmeade weekend, and none of the students were risking their privileges, since this would be their last chance to go to Hogsmeade before Christmas holidays, and for many of them it was their only shopping opportunity for the holidays.

Neville skived off lunch, pleading with a house elf to bring him food in his office, and sat there over a blank piece of parchment. His photo session yesterday still left him blushing, but the thought of Viktor trembling over the photo had him delightfully excited. He took the new quill in hand and began to write.

Vityenka moi -

So it inspired you? The photograph? Did it... did you touch yourself, pretending that it was me? I hope you did. I wanted you to. To do that for me. Because I can't yet... and I think that I want to. That I want your hands touching me. I... I really like the silk. It's so smooth where it touches my skin, and it feels so close and intimate. I slept in them, you know. To feel close to you. I dreamed that you... that you would come find me and. I'm not going to finish that. I'm going to let you imagine what I might want you to do to me... with me.

I wish I could see you. I'd love to be able to just talk. To share a meal or walk by the lake. I wait for your letters every day, but it's not a substitute for getting to spend time with you. I find myself just wanting you to be here.

I know you'll do fine in the game. I just wish I could hold you after. I know I could warm you better than any magic charm. I wish I was allowed to do that for you. To be more than just your friend.

Good luck tomorrow, my Vitya. I've... I've included another photo. I hope it inspires your game as much as your shower.

- Neville

Neville folded the letter and stuck it in his robes. Later that night, before his planned dinner with Draco and Harry, he'd recruit his assigned elf to take the picture and then send the letter off. He hoped that Viktor would appreciate it. He couldn't help but be nervous. He wasn't good at this trying to be sexy stuff. But he'd found, especially after the first photo, that he wanted... he wanted Viktor to want him, to ache for him, to beg for him.

--

There was no bow tie on him in this photo, though Neville was still clad in the same slinky red silk. He was slid low on the wingback chair, his body framed by the red padding, his legs bent and spread, stretching the silk even tighter so nothing was left to the imagination. Across his chest, painted in the same maroon paint he'd used on his face for the game was the name KRUM.
Viktor nearly came on the spot seeing it. Neville marked with Viktor's name. Neville choosing to mark himself with Viktor's name. There, on his chest. Viktor spent a long time in the shower. He didn't bother to make the water cold. He let his hand stray, he closed his eyes, and he let himself dream that the hand that stroked his flesh belonged to his Nevyenka. His Nevyenka who had marked himself with Viktor's name. He shuddered as his knees buckled and he fell to the floor, still stroking. And when he came, it was a howl that filled the manor and echoed in the halls.

He sat under the water for a long time, panting, as he waited for his body to recover. For his skin to lose its fur. For his eyes to return to normal. He felt the twinge of a tingle in his neck. He was still shaking when he finally managed to stand again to lather his body with soap and wash. He was still shaking when he towed dry. He was still shaking when his nervous hands took hold of the quill and wrote the daily letter to Neville and wrapped the gift and his hands still had not steadied when he set the owl on its way to Hogwarts.

He watched the rain fall from entry to the balcony as the dawn rose over Durmstrang, showering him with light.

--

The stands were crowded, a sea of umbrellas that rippled with every gust of wind.

"Enjoying the extravagance, Longbottom," asked Lucius.

"I appreciate your son's generosity," said Neville. "I hope I'm not intruding."

"It can do the family name no harm for you to be in our box," said Lucius, dropping his binoculars for long enough to glance at the young professor. "Though I rather understood from Draco that you lacked finesse on a broom."

Neville laughed. "It's true, as it happens. I'm lousy on a broom. Never really got the hang of flying."

"Hmm. How is Potter? My son will never say."

"He's getting close. The pregnancy is showing rather more than he lets anyone see except Draco, I think."

"They'll take the children early?"

"It interests you?"

"They are the heirs to my house," said Lucius. "Of course it interests me."

Neville stood at the railing, watching the Quidditch players soar past. In the rain the players could barely see to stay on their brooms, so Neville was not surprised that Viktor hadn't noticed him. He had not wanted Viktor to be watching for him. Not today, not with the rain. But he'd wanted to be here. He was quiet for a moment before he said into the air, not bothering to turn, "And Teddy?"

"Draco swore an oath, and I will not break it."

Neville turned and his eyes shone. "See that you don't."

"I am not foolish," snapped Lucius. "The boy has pack protection from Durmstrang. A small army of wizards properly trained in magic that would make even most Slytherin cringe. Luciano Grimaldi made that perfectly clear to me at the wedding."
"I wouldn't cross Luciano," said Neville softly. His fondness for the man made the words crack just slightly. "Or the pack." He turned back to the game, his hands clasped on the railing. "Or me." This close to the edge, he was getting wet, but with Viktor hovering so high in search of the snitch, it was the only way to get a good look at him.

"So it's true is it?" asked Lucius.

"What?"

"The rumor that everyone but the Prophet seems to be printing. The one that they're not confident enough to put on the front page. That you and Krum are..."

"Nothing so vulgar."

"Surely you know the boy is a..."

Neville glared at the man. "So was Luciano. That didn't stop me from loving him."

"So love," said Lucius, stepping forward to the rail. "Is that what this is?"

Neville looked up at Viktor, floating high over everything. "I don't know yet."

"And yet you're here..."

"... with a man who tried to kill me," finished Neville, his eyes not straying from the game. "Yeah. You could say I have strong feelings for him. Were you planning on telling anyone?"

"No," said Lucius softly. "I. He doesn't know that you're here, does he?"

"Not this time."

Lucius nodded. "As you wish. Come, Mister Longbottom. Nibsy has lunch for us."

Neville found it rather surreal that Lucius had managed to remain polite throughout, acting a gracious host, and continued to, even when the sky grew even darker. His heart sank when the sun fell completely from the sky. He'd hoped that he would be able to catch Viktor and have dinner.

Some hours after nightfall when the pitch was lit by powerful *Lumos* charms, Lucius took his leave, instructing Nibsy to bring Neville anything he required. Neville stayed. The stands had cleared of all but the most dedicated fans, though this was the Vultures, and there were many. The rain still fell, cold and bitter against the flesh and Neville marveled at the fortitude and dedication of those in the general stands. Already he could feel the gentle warmth of the spells that Nibsy was renewing in the box. A chair and a small table were brought, along with a warm drink.

"Thank you, Nibsy," said Neville absently, his eyes still on the drenched figures flying over the pitch.

"Nibsy is happy to be of service. Did you need dinner young Master?"

Neville sighed. Well, it was still dinner with Viktor, after a fashion. "Please."

Nibsy returned not long after with several steaming platters and then he set out a second chair. "Young Master is having guest," explained the elf.

Neville looked at him, a quizzical expression on his face. "Is Mister Malfoy coming back?"
Nibsy just gestured as a man in the conservative black robes and dress of a gentleman approached from the stair. His hair was black and oiled back, his eyebrows dark and bushy, his body tall and muscular. The hook of a nose was unmistakable.


"Is to be hoping that Mister Longbottom is not to be minding. Is having own box, of course, but is hearing that is here. Was thinking while son is searching for snitch that we might be speaking."

Neville nodded nervously and gestured to the seat Nibsy had set opposite him.

"Is thanking you for permitting. Is knowing is awkward. Is not alone in feeling this, yes?" said Gregori Krum, taking the seat and nodding at Neville to sit with him.

Neville took his seat and stared up at the flying figures. "I didn't really expect the game to last this long."

"Is occupational hazard for Quidditch player. Son is having eyes like to eagle, and yet in downpour, is hard to be seeing of snitch even for him. Delay is not good for team. Vultures are having..."

"... a reserve keeper," said Neville. "I know. Viktor mentioned it in his letters."

Gregori took a few bites of the steaming plate of potatoes. "Is writing every day."

"It's a courtship, Mister Krum," said Neville plainly.

"Is good to be seeing son smiling," said Gregori softly. "Is thinking you are reason for this sudden giddiness in son."

"I... I'd like to hope I bring him some happiness," said Neville, his voice very quiet.

They sat quietly for some time, eating, each of them taking quick glances at the sky, searching for Viktor. The players all looked miserable.

"You are being worried for him?" asked Gregori.

Neville sighed and looked at the man. It was rather like looking at Viktor, only twenty years older and taller. "Surely you can't object to that."

"Is not to be objecting. Is just observing. Is indication of deep feeling. Is not being displeased to be seeing such feeling in Mister Longbottom."

Neville looked at the plates and motioned to Nibsy.

"Yes, Young Master."

"Please get a plate of rare steak. Bloody. For our guest," said Neville quietly.

The elf disapparated with a soft pop and Gregori looked at him again, this time with a shrewd expression. "Was not sure was knowing what is to be courted by wolf."

"Luciano never hid his ancestry from me, and neither has your son," said Neville.

"Is understanding?"
"No," said Neville, looking down. "And it scares me, a little," Neville shook his head, "A lot. I see what Noah... I've seen what a claim can be. But I won't let it scare me away from happiness either."

"Is knowing son would not have to be claiming."

"I'm. Forgive me, sir, but I'm not really comfortable talking to you about this," said Neville.

Gregori Krum narrowed his eyes a bit and nodded. "Is not to be blaming. Is hard thing to be considering. For him also. Is having to decide whether is living life without claim. Is drive of wolf to be wanting to claim. This is what is frightening, yes?"

Neville didn't answer immediately, just looked into the sky at the falling rain, at Viktor flying about in a desperate search for the snitch. "He's been rather dashing."

Gregori laughed. "Is dashing, my son. Is also being romantic. I was not being somber influence on son most is expecting. To protect son from Grindelwald, I was being educated at Beauxbaton's. Is place where importance of courtly love is much emphasized. Is likely why son is even wishing to try such thing, stories of father and mother, courting."

Neville didn't say anything, he just quietly ate his potatoes, and waited for Krum to continue.

"Son was studying Mister Longbottom for long time before risking of courting. Even with recommendation of shared former lover, was being uncertain. Was saying that is thinking both are lost souls, who are finding each other. Is being lost soul, Mister Longbottom?"

"After a fashion," said Neville. "I like your son. Rather a lot. It's." Neville made a point of looking into Gregori Krum's eyes. "It's not love yet, I don't think. But it's strong, and it's getting. I think it could become that, is what I'm saying. I. I don't even think it would take much."

"Was seeing picture of Vitya giving of snitch to Longbottom in room of Vitya. Is thinking is closer to that point already than is admitting to self."

Neville gulped. "Are you trying to scare me off, sir?"

Nibsy returned with a pile of meat that had been seared, but only just, and set it before Gregori. "Most sorry sir. Nibsy was not knowing your preferences, sir."

"It's okay, Nibsy," said Neville.

Gregori looked at the plate of meat. "Were you trying to make me show..."

Neville shook his head. "Luciano always preferred it that way too. Don't think you'll disgust me. I remember what it..."

Gregori looked at him and then tore into the meat with an inhuman fervor. When he was done he wiped a bit of dripped blood from his face. Neville was still looking at him without any sign of discomfort. "It doesn't bother you?"

Neville shook his head, and then turned again to the game. He smiled slightly. "He's about to catch the snitch."

A hand touched his shoulder as Gregori rose. "Is not to be warning off of war hero. Is just wanting to be knowing of concern for son. Is wanting to be sure is knowing heritage now, to give honorable way to back out."
"I. I don't want to back out," said Neville softly. "I want us to have a chance."

"Is going down to congratulate son. Is wishing to come?"

Neville shook his head and pulled a letter from his pocket. "If you could give him this?"

Gregori nodded, taking the letter, and walked to the top of the stair. "Mister Longbottom," he said softly.

Neville turned and looked at him.

"Is not to be offended if is being called Grisha by noble hero of war."

Neville's sat, stunned, as Gregori Krum made his way carefully down the steps.
Chapter 25

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------

Neville arrived in the comfort of his rooms to find that Grizbit, his assigned house elf, had taken the letter and parcel from Viktor's own and set them on the bed. The shape left no doubt what the gift was. Neville shucked his damp robes and slipped onto the bed, grabbing hold of the letter and opening it.

My Nevyenka -

If was dying of heart attack, would be fault of sexy Gryffindor, sending me such photos!

Is cause for much inspiration. If is being honest, yes, was to be pleasuring self while thinking of photo in shower. Is so hot, this picture. Is not being able to resist. And with encouragement of beautiful Nevya, was to be standing under hot spray of the water, and considering of what would be doing if was having Nevya there in shower with Vitya until was screaming of your name. My Nevyenka... is wanting you very badly. Wanting to be touching of Nevya, kissing of lips, touching of parts concealed under silk.

And is dreaming also of sweet Nevya. Dreaming of finding you in silk. Dreaming of taking it off of Nevya slowly, and of touching. Nevya, tell me these things are dreams is sharing. Please to be telling Vitya this. Is to be dreaming of taking Nevya slowly, of being one flesh in that perfect way of lovers and... and is wanting my Nevyenka to be lover. Is sensing is struggling, that Vitya is calling 'just' friend. Is wanting Nevya to be knowing, this is not what is meaning. Is not having word for this in English, is thinking, for friend that is intimate in this way. To be closer to lover than simply friend. To be intimate and close and to be sharing of...

As much as is wanting, is knowing is needing to be having understanding of many other things first. Nevya, Vitya is needing to fly. Is knowing this is difficult for you. Has been in touch with Madam Hooch at Hogwarts, and she is suggesting older model broom, but still much respected. Silver Arrow. Is broom she was learning on, and still is singing praises. Is promising, will teach. Is wanting to fly with Nevyenka. Is not letting Nevya fall from broom ever again. Please, my Nevyenka. Try for me.

Is. Father is pointing out that is necessary to be talking as courting is progressing about things other
than attraction. About realities of life. About things such as subject Vitya avoided when was saying to be needing to discuss of finances. Is wanting to be learning about Nevya. And wooing. And touching. And making Nevya to be wanting of Vitya. But father is also right. Vitya is still... Nevya, is knowing what it is that courtship is leading to... is being prepared for this?

Be wishing of luck for game.

With deepest affection,
- Vitya

Oh, fuck... Vitya had screamed his name. Neville smiled. Maybe he wasn't so bad at this sexy thing!

--

Gregori Krum made his way down the wooden staircases of the Vratsa pitch to find his son surrounded, a circle of growling youth around him facing outward. A number of other men, males all of them, eyes glossy and black, were trying to break through the circle to get to his son.

Gregori rushed forward only to be very nearly bowled over from the strength of scent hitting him. How were the wolves surrounding his son, protecting his son, how were they resisting it? His son was in heat. Gregori shuddered as the scent filled him, grateful he had no preference for the same sex.

A quick flick of his wand had the defenders separated from the attacking wolves by a shimmering wall of crackling energy. The attackers were deep in their beast, turning on him as one with a growl. Gregori stood implacable, his wand drawn and his back straight.

"Is not being wise to be trying," he said calmly.

They growled at him, but he simply bared his teeth and let them take a moment to catch his scent. The scent of power, of the strength of his wolf. He growled and accepted the whimper of the wolves as they skulked away from his wall of power. Gregori himself simply stepped calmly through it. The young men inside stepped back their teeth still bared.

"Be stepping away from son."

"He summoned the pack. We will guard him." There were many voices, and all at once.

"He is safer," said Gregori, "at home, behind wards no one else can pass."

"You are not part of the Durmstrang pack," said the leader, a rough looking man with long brown hair that hung wavy half-way down his back. "You will not touch him."

"Is to be backing away from my son and heir. Is to be doing this now, or you will be finding power of Krum," said Gregori, his eyes on the moaning figure of Viktor behind them.

They bared teeth at him again and this time Gregori did not hesitate as the black filled his eyes and his face grew feral and fur began to cover him. "Is telling you to be backing away from son."

"We have to..."

"Let him by," said a calm voice from outside the wall of energy. Gregori turned to see the figure of Luciano Grimaldi, covered in golden fur, his wand drawn. He was visibly shaking.
"We were going to find a Muggle. Lyusha, you of all people know that we have ways to deal with an inconvenient heat!"

"He's courting, Sasha. He would never forgive us for that. He's pack leader. Do you want him angry with you?"

"But Lyusha..."

"Silence!" said Luciano calmly. "I'm the pack defender. It's my choice. Give him to the care of his father."

"Why can't you?"

"Because if I get any closer," said Luciano, "you'll be protecting him from me. Or have you forgotten?"

"It would be a good mating for the pack, Lyusha," said Sasha. "You and Vitya."

Luke shook his head. "I am promised, Sasha. And Vitya gave up being mine a long time ago. He made that choice, our pack leader. This courtship, it's what he wants."

Sasha growled and spit on the ground. "He's courting, which means he's taking a mate that isn't wolf. A pitiful weakling."

"My mate is also not wolf, Sasha. And he could tear you apart with his wand in seconds. And Vitya... he is courting the best of all men. You spit on the earth at his weakness? Because the man is not wolf?" Luciano shook his head.

"Is needing to be taking him now, before more are coming!" said Gregori, his concern bleeding through the confidence in his voice.

Sasha growled and bared his teeth.

"Do not think to challenge me," said Luciano, keeping his voice strong and doing his best to stay calm, though he still trembled with need from the scent of Viktor's slick. He turned to Gregori. "Boyar, unto you we give the care of our pack leader. He is the life of our pack. Return him to us safely when his heat is ended."

Gregori nodded and lifted his son. A few naysayers in the pack growled but were swiftly silenced by Luciano. Gregori looked at Luke and nodded, and then with a crack he was gone.

"Lyusha, he..."

"Silence!" said Luciano. "You endanger the pack with this foolishness. The boyar offered a place of safety and security for our Vitya, and you tried to keep him here to secure your own place in the pack."

--

Gregori carried his moaning and struggling son to his room and set him in the bed. The young man was writhing now and moaning softly, his body shaking with need. How long... had he felt this on the broom during the match? No wonder the game had gone on so long! It was a small miracle he hadn't fallen off his broom completely.

"So empty..." moaned Viktor, his voice plaintive, begging, "Is needing. Is needing. Please..." He
clawed at the soaked Quidditch gear still plastered to him, soaking him.

"Oh, my sweet son," said Gregori softly, kissing Viktor's hand gently. Gregori sighed softly. He must have passed the first full wave of his heat on the broom. This was just aftershocks of a sort. Soon the full heat would take him again. It could drive him mad if he didn't find someone to...

"Is he..."

"Be staying back!" shouted Gregori, his wand drawn. "How were you..."

"Vitya has always let me through the wards freely."

"You said..."

"I am promised," said Luciano, kissing the ring on his pinky and setting alight the proof of his promise on his flesh, an elaborate tracery of silver just under the skin that ran up his right arm and shoulder twining up the side of his neck and extending down his side to the knee. It pulsed with a soft glow, silvery blue, that followed the lines of the mark, pulsing in softly as though to a heartbeat. "And I have claimed my mate. It is... uncomfortable, to be sure, but I can resist."

"The pack does not know of your..."

"Not yet."

"Vitya?"

"Has pledged pack protection to the pup of my flesh."

"Your claimed, he is carrying?"

Luciano nodded.

Gregori waved his wand with a soft swish and a flick and then gestured for Luke to come forward. Luciano approached, but still kept his distance.

"Is Vitya... is he entering heat before?" asked Gregori.

Luke nodded. "He's gay. Of course he has."

"They would be finding a Muggle and letting them..."

"Letting them take advantage. Yes. And then *Obliviate* them for their trouble. For a wolf to do it..."

"Would be claiming of one in heat."

Luciano nodded.

"The promise, it is protecting you, but also..."

"It prevents me from doing what needs to be done," said Luciano softly. "If Vitya is to continue his courtship of Neville, he will have to..."

Gregori closed his eyes. "Is not to be losing only son!"

"Vitya is strong, he can endure."
"You are being Master of Dark Arts, yes?"

Luciano grunted.

"Is way?"

"No," said Luke softly. "The Dark Arts, they are means of attack. I could use them to take advantage in ways that would shock and disgust you as a man and as a wolf, but nothing that will. I can't help him that way."

"Vitya, he is saying that you were offering of courtship gift."

"A long time ago," said Luciano.

"How long is having?"

"Perhaps half an hour before it starts again. Perhaps a day before it drives him to madness if he doesn't mate."

"Could we ask Mister Longbottom..."

"Neville would do it, I think. But it would break the courtship. Neither of them would..."

"My Vitya would be alive!"

"He was pushed into his heat," said Luciano softly. "If he'd expected it... Vitya would have known if a heat was expected, he would not have courted if..."

"Pushed... How is being pushed?"

Luciano edged carefully along the wall to the desk. He hissed. "Fucking sexy, Nev," he whispered. "This," he lifted the picture with Krum's name across Neville's chest. "He doesn't know. I mean, he was trying, I expect, to say that he was supporting Viktor in the match, to say he was going to try to be sexy for Vitya, not that..."

"To be allowing of marks is act of submission. It's..."

"Fucking sexy. And Vitya is in love."

"With man who is," Gregori gulped, "afraid to be being claimed by wolf."

"How... how did you?"

"Was dining with Neville Longbottom at pitch. He was confessing fear of wolf blood, but professing certainty that would be getting past it. That fear would not to be keeping from happiness."

"I... when I finally decided that I was claiming Noah... there was... Once it started, I don't know if anything could have stopped me."

Gregori nodded. "He was losing of his control. He needed to be claiming or proving own willingness to submit. And so body is submitting." He closed his eyes, took a breath and then opened his eyes. He trained his wand on Viktor. "*Incarcerous Totalus*," he whispered softly, wrapping Viktor in heavy ropes and chains, shackles locking his feet and hands together. He looked at Luciano. "Is needing to be going to Krum ancestral home. Give to me your hand."
"Should we be..."

"Be giving to me your hand, now, Luciano Damienivich!"

Luciano extended his hand, and felt the pull of apparition, and then they were in another room.

"Follow me," said Gregori, leading Luciano swiftly into the depths of the Krum estate to a small stone portrait room. The room held only a single portrait, ancient and beautiful, a woman with raven hair and a strong nose. Intelligent eyes surveyed them both.

Gregori immediately bowed his head.

"Grisha, you do not need to bow before me. You are family."

"Is needing wisdom of the Vyedma."

Luciano looked at him, confused. It was the word for witch, but he was saying it with a peculiar reverence.

"This one is not family."

"Is being about Grisha's only son. This man is knowing better than even Grisha."

Cold, intent eyes surveyed him. "He has the blood of a natural born wolf, the child of one born as a pup in a litter." She looked at him and nodded. "The children of wolves are mine, however distant." Her gaze fixed on Gregori. "Speak, child of my flesh."

"My son is taken by his heat. He is bound by vows of courtship to abstain, and yet even now is suffering. Is the last of your line, great lady."

"He will not suffer the dissolution of his courtship for his life?"

Luciano stepped forward. "I loved him, great lady, and I know his mind. This courtship, he had embraced it and left his heart open. He has offered it, and suffered the heat to avoid making a claim he feared was unwanted."

"If his courted loves him, surely he would suffer the claim."

"The world fears those of our blood," said Luciano, "and that hatred of our heritage... we feel it. They were not there yet, Vitya was not ready to confess his heart."

"And this man, this courted. He has feelings for Vitya?" asked the portrait quietly.

"I believe he does," said Luciano. "Far stronger than he wants to admit. He suffered the loss of a love quite recently, and his heart is yet fragile. He has begun to open it for Vitya, but he is still afraid."

"How long has the grandchild of my flesh been in his heat?"

"A space of hours. The first wave of the heat has passed by, but he will soon enter another," said Luciano quietly.

The eyes of the portrait narrowed and then grew thoughtful. "His heat can be satisfied in dreams, if the courted's feelings are strong. But it would require a potion made from the petals of the rose that was my gift to the Krum family, the rose that shows the truth of the heart. Have you preserved my mother's rose?"
"Vitya gave one to Neville as a courtship gift," said Luciano, his whole body shaking as he realized who the woman was.

"And the boy accepted a flower as a gift for a suit? Your son has found a wise man to court, Grisha."

Gregori nodded. "Is also being most impressed."

"Listen then," said the raven haired witch. "And do exactly as I say..."
Chapter 26

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Neville groaned. He was tired and someone, someone very persistent, was knocking at his portrait door. He stumbled to the door and opened it to find himself staring into intense chocolate brown eyes.

"Merlin, Nev, I thought you were never going to answer the door!" said Luciano with a bit of frustration.

"What the hell, Luke, I was going to bed."

Luke let himself smile a bit. It had always been a point of contention with both Neville and Viktor that Luke loved to sleep late. He blamed it on all the years of early morning chores at the farm. Neville liked to rise early while the dew still kissed the plants, and Viktor, of course, rose just before dawn. It was one of the multitude of little things that had convinced him that the two were perfect for each other.

"Stop smiling at me like an idiot and tell me what the hell is going on," said Neville. "I had to sit today for hours with Lucius Malfoy. He was polite, but it was bleedin' Lucius Malfoy! And I didn't get to have dinner with Vitya. And his father of all people came to sit with me and talk to me about our relationship, which is just beyond awkward..."

"You sent him a naughty picture last night didn't you?"

Neville's eyes grew horrified. "He didn't show you... he wouldn't..."

"He didn't show me. Nev... Vitya, he's," Luciano gulped. "Nev, he's in heat."

"I. I don't. What do you mean?"

"You were trying to be sexy for him..."

"Luke, that picture... I mean..."

"You succeeded. Beyond any measure you expected. His body has gone into overdrive... he's ripe
and begging and he physically needs to be taken and," Luciano swallowed again, "and bred, Neville, or he'll go insane."

"I don't... I don't understand."

"You do. You remember, Nev. That one time. With me."

Neville's eyes grew very wide. He did remember but he half thought it had been a dream, fucking for days with Luke all slick and wet. "But I thought... I thought you just..."

"I did. I wanted you. But Nev, it lasted three days. That was a heat. My body... it needed you. A wolf in heat, they need to be taken. It can drive a strong man mad with the need."

"But we're... we're courting..."

"Exactly. He needs to be taken and he can't be. Not without," Luciano shook his head, "not without giving you up."


"He needs you, Nev."

"But I'll... if I do it I'll lose him!"

"No. We. Did you keep the rose, Neville?"

Neville nodded and gestured to the mantle where the rose was beginning to open.

"There's a chance, Neville. A potion... it'll let you. It'll let you take care of his need in a dream. It'll let you hold him and keep him sane and take him in the way he needs."

"And it needs a witch rose?" Neville shook his head. "I've never heard of such a thing."

"Yeah, well, my Noah is also somewhat taken aback. But we need to do it now, Nev. He's... he's almost entered the second wave of the heat and if he has to suffer through that without," Luciano shook his head. "He needs you."

"It won't interfere with the courtship?"

Luke shook his head. "But we need to do it now."

"W-what do you need?" asked Neville softly.

"Is he your heart's desire?"

"My heart's desire is the fire of passion, Luke. Whether that's Vitya or not... I just don't know yet."

"I need you to prick a finger and harvest one of the petals while it is still revealing what your heart wants," said Luciano. "And then the thorn, with your blood, and the petal, need to go down to Noah to add to his potion. You'll both have to drink. And then..."

"What's going to happen? I've... I've never heard of this. Is it Dark Arts?"

"Probably. But it will save his life."
"But... we aren't there yet, Luke. I... I didn't want to rush the physical part. We were having this really wonderful anticipation game going. This could. It could ruin that."

"How ruined will it be if he's in St. Mungo's with your parents?" said Luke coldly.

Neville closed his eyes. "That was unnecessary."

"It was what you needed to hear. There's no time, Nev."

"It's..."

"We might already be too late."

Neville went to the mantle and gently pricked his finger on one of the thorns, and then with flawless skill perfectly broke the thorn from the stem and peeled from the flower a single pristine petal that danced with the colors of fire. He dropped them carefully into a glass jar and looked at Luke and they both stepped together into the flames of the Floo, emerging in a flash of green fire into Noah's office.

Noah looked at them both, troubled. "You're sure this recipe... I've never seen anything like..."

"Will it work?"

"It's hard to be sure. I've followed the recipe exactly, but some of these techniques are revolutionary. Where did you get this?"

Luke handed him the glass jar with the petal and thorn. "How long?"

"If the recipe is right, moments. It will flare, for a moment only, and then the potion will take on the colors of the rose petal. It'll keep for no more than four days and need to be administered every twelve hours. Six drops, directly on the tongue."

"Can you administer it to Nev while I take half back for Vitya?"

"You're going to tell me where you got this recipe, right?"

"If I'm allowed," said Luciano. "Please, bubby."

Noah nodded and with three anti-clockwise stirs added the petal and the bloody thorn. There was a flash and then the potion flared as though made of liquid fire. Noah poured half into a vial and handed it to Luke. "I'll take him to our guest room. It'll be easier for us both to monitor him if he's there."

Luke nodded. "I'll go directly from my office," he said quietly, stepping quickly into the Floo.

"Come on," said Noah, "I understand we need to hurry."

They rushed quickly through the halls. It was not far, truly, from the potions master's office to their quarters near the kitchens. Not for someone who knew Hogwarts well. They entered the suite and Noah had him sit down.

"If I'm any sort of potions master at all, I can tell you this will make you sleep within seconds of taking it," said Noah. "I don't know what this is going to do."

"I have to take it, he could die."
"This could kill you."

Neville shook his head. "Luciano would never give me a potion to kill me."

Noah grunted and then administered six drops very exactly.

Dimly, Neville recalled a sensation like falling.

Once Viktor had taken the potion, Gregori conceded to allowing the restraints to be removed. Viktor's sleep was fitful, his moans still plaintive, his body still trying even through the force of the potion to find something to satisfy his body's need to be full.

"Mister Longbottom was taking of potion?"

"He is concerned about Viktor's feelings. They weren't ready for this step."

"Is thinking they were both more ready for this than were thinking. Was not only picture in skimpy silk of Longbottom being on desk."

"That he was ready to be seen as sexy," said Luciano, "does not mean he was necessarily ready to have sex."

They both watched the struggling young man on the bed. "How is to be completing courtship. Heat, usually is being three days. At least two is not being able to be sending gift."

"Hopefully he'll be coherent enough in between doses that we can help him," said Luciano. "Neville has to answer the gift before the next can be sent. Did he... Fuck. Did he respond to the one today?"

Gregori Krum nodded and pulled a letter from his pocket. "Was giving to me to give to Vitya. Was not having chance. Vitya was already in throes of heat."

Noah levitated Neville carefully into the bed of one of the guest chambers in the suite he shared with Luciano. He summoned Glinty, their house elf, and asked to be brought a light snack, and tea service for two. And so it was that when Minerva McGonagall, Hogwart's headmistress and the formidable former head of house for Gryffindor, appeared at their portrait demanding explanations, the tea was in her hand within moments to calm her tirade from a fury to a scolding.

"You mean to tell me," said Minerva quietly, after listening to his explanation, "that you fed this boy a potion you've never tested?"

"Luciano swears the source of the recipe is unimpeachable. Whoever wrote it... they're a better potions master than I. Some of the concepts, the recipe is a piece of artwork."

"Can I..."

He nodded and pulled the recipe out of a pocket. She scanned it and her eyes grew wide. "Surely this is a joke."

He shook his head. "The concepts are extremely advanced. It'd take a potions master to even attempt it. But everything is sound and worked exactly as the recipe describes."
She continued scanning the page. "Witch rose!" she exclaimed suddenly. "Where did you get such a thing?"

"From Neville. And you should be grateful that ingredient came from Neville, and not from Hogwarts' stores."

"Neville? He had a fresh petal from a witch rose? A thorn? How?"

"That's... I can't answer that," said Noah.

"You can't, or you won't?"

"It amounts to the same thing, Minerva. You might recall, he made a living selling the rarest of rare potions ingredients until he joined the staff here." Noah set his tea cup aside and stood, moving to the bed to check on Neville. He'd been virtually silent since receiving the potion.

"And what's the purpose of this potion he's taken?" asked Minerva quietly.

"To preserve something he cherishes," said Noah, "before it's lost forever."

"You would not care to be more specific?"

"No," said Noah.

--

Neville woke to find himself on a beach. It was sandy and he was barefoot and his Muggle denims (curse Harry for ever getting him into the things!) were rolled up halfway to the knee. His shirt was white, loose cotton, the buttons undone revealing his chest. KRUM was painted across his chest in giant maroon letters, dark enough to read through the sheer of the white cotton that covered most of the 'K' and the 'M'.

Except for the sound of seagulls and the rolling slap of the waves hitting the beach, the vista was quiet save for a subtle whimper. Neville got to his feet and walked into the soft wet sand where the waves lapped up against the beach. He'd only been to the beach once, with his gran. She wouldn't let him near the water. There was too much chance of him getting into trouble, she'd said. He smiled at the feel of sand squishing between his toes and he walked toward the sound.

Vitya would love this. Somehow he knew. It's funny. They had so much to talk about. He'd wanted so badly to tell Vitya that he wanted to walk on the beach, together. Hand in hand, with their toes getting wet in the sand. But at midnight under the light of the moon. There was something in the way. Something that was keeping them from...

Harry had told Neville once that Remus had considered Harry very wise for fearing Dementors as a sign that it was a fear of fear itself. Neville always thought Remus needed a talking to about that. Fear was necessary. Not that it didn't sometimes get in the way. And so it was that when the Dementors swooped in on Neville that he was ready, his Patronus shattering them. It was odd, he'd never seen a Patronus actually shatter a Dementor before... but then, his Patronus had never been a wolf before either. He had a niggling feeling it was significant, but he kept walking none-the-less.

It took a while to find the whimper. A bed, anchored in the sand where the water rushed underneath it as each wave hit the shore. It was a big bed, solid wood. The sheets were a deep black, the duvet a crimson like blood. A man was strapped to the bed, whimpering, desperate. Neville gulped. His Vitya.
He rushed to the bed, too conscious that each time he should be able to reach it, it rose on the waves and floated down the beach. By the time he reached the bed, the man on it was screaming.

Neville leaped onto the bed, catching hold of the posts this time as the waves lifted and moved the bed again. He held tight, and when the bed settled, threw himself fully on top of it. His Vitya was crying.

"Shhh. I'm here," said Neville softly.

"Have to run, my Nevya," said Viktor softly, his voice hoarse, broken. "Is having of my heat. Will be... courtship will be over... is not wanting this."

"Shhh," said Neville, and kissed Viktor gently. Viktor trembled violently, shaking the bed.

"Nyet! Is not to be losing of courtship..."

"It's okay," said Neville softly. "My Vityenka, it's okay. I'm here," he kissed Viktor again, this time rather seriously. Viktor sobbed openly as Neville pulled away. Neville's finger shushed him, and then Neville kissed him gently on the forehead.

Viktor wailed. "Empty... empty my Nevyenka."

"Not anymore," whispered Neville.

They were naked and moving together. Neville was so sure they had just been... they'd been dressed. He'd wanted to undress Viktor, he'd still never seen the man less than fully dressed. Which made it seem very strange, because they were definitely naked, and Neville... Neville was leaning over Viktor, staring into those intense eyes, and he was inside of Viktor, and Viktor was...

Neville was conscious of very little other than a sense of oneness and an overwhelming sensation of pleasure that pooled at his groin and grew until he came. It was a glorious feeling, not just because he'd not done that, not inside someone, since his goodbye with Luke, but because this had been. They were so. It was. His lips met Viktor's and tasted him, butter and herb and Vitya... his Vitya.

--

"Nevyenka!" screamed Viktor as his body jerked and spasmed and an arc of cum splattered against his shoulder and then down the length of his torso. He flushed, embarrassed. He was... he was alone.

"Vitya... are you..."

His father. He was naked and covered in cum and his father... his father had heard him cry out. Fuck.

The door opened and Viktor cursed, looking desperately for a wand. He was... fuck, he was sitting in a pool of wet slickness. He was. He was in heat. He... he couldn't be in heat.

"Your father is waiting outside," came a familiar voice. "I'm here to help you clean up if I can."

"What is doing in house of... why, Lyushenka moi..."

"I'm not doing long explanations again," said Luciano, walking calmly into the room and closing the door behind him. "This is the third time."
"Nevya was being. Lyushenka... he was... Can't. Ruin chances. Courting."

Luke shook his head. "Calm, Vitya," he said, sitting on a stool beside the bed and pulling from underneath a bowl of warm water and a cloth that he used to clean Viktor, gently.

"Could be using of wand," said Viktor.

Luke shook his head. "You're in heat. If you... we have to get you through it carefully. The pack wanted to give you to a Muggle, like we used to do in school."

"They... is not succeeding?"

"It was Sasha, mostly, and no. I was there. Your father brought you home and I followed."

"Lyusha... is having such dreams..."

"It's just the side effect of a potion, Vitya. We're... you know how dangerous..."

"Nevyenka, he is not seeing?" asked Viktor very softly.

Luke shook his head. "Only in your dreams, apparently. You keep calling his name."

"What is being day... is needing to be writing of letter. To be sending of gift." He whimpered suddenly. "He was not responding to Vitya, after was sending broom! Was knowing was being poor choice. Is hating flying."

"Calm down, Vitya."

"But is not responding! Is to be losing of courtship because..."

"Vitya. He was at the game. He gave the response to your father to give to you. They sat and had dinner in the Malfoy box and watched you catch the snitch. He didn't want to distract you, so he went home, but the letter is there, on your desk. Doesn't say much, he'd come to the game before the gift arrived, I think, so he was just accepting it in advance." Luke looked at Viktor seriously. "He likes you a lot, he wouldn't be risking it either."

"Is needing to..."

"Don't worry," said Luciano, patting Viktor's hand. "There's enough time before the next wave of heat hits to write to him. For now I need to get you covered up so you can eat."
Chapter 27

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------

My Nevyenka -

Is hoping was not making Nevya upset with gift of broom. Is knowing there are being some things in any relationship that must be simply accepted. Vitya is needing to fly. Was hoping Nevya would be willing to share this joy with Vitya. Is still hoping.

Is hearing that you were being at game. Is wishing had seen Nevya there. Is longing to be having your face close. Is hoping father was not to be trying to scare Nevya. Is knowing he can be formidable presence when trying. My Nevya, is knowing you were being there in hopes of dinner with Vitya, and this was wish for Vitya also. But that is there for Vitya and in support of team, this is to be making of Vitya very happy.

Is falling ill during game, and is making of Vitya tired and cranky. Forgive me. But is not wanting to be forgetting to write. Courtship is important to Vitya, because Nevya is important to Vitya. Is wishing had been able to be responding to questions of letter. Is being prepared for what is happening at end of courtship? Is wanting?

Is wanting Nevya to be knowing that photos is sending are inspiring such dreams. Is being so sexy. Is saying it, sexy. Is no other word for purity of desire is feeling when looking... when looking at chest that is being marked with name. Nevya, for Vitya, for wolf, to be seeing such a mark... it is being powerful aphrodisiac. But is knowing was to be showing support, not to be marked as wolf might be wishing. Is wolf, Nevya moi, and is needing... needing to be speaking about such marks.

Is being told should be better by Tuesday. In meantime, is thankful had gotten some gifts for Nevya in advance! Be finding gift enclosed. Is ancient work of mythological and legendary plants. Is reading section on witch rose, and both fact that is having such section and that everything written suggests is having witch rose in possession when writing, this is making Vitya hopeful is good source.

Is not wanting letters to become negotiation of terms, my Nevya. Please, is missing flirtatious writings of Nevyenka. Is wishing was being well enough to be enjoying of photos in shower, but is settling for dreams. And Nevyenka moi, such dreams is inspiring!
With deepest affection,
- Vitya

Neville looked at the book. It was Erickson's *Legendary Plants and their Function*. Neville had to laugh. There were only six copies known to exist. Neville had felt lucky to have been allowed access to one for research in the Ministry library when he had been working on finding rare plants for his business with Casey. Reverently he set the book aside.

"Noah?"

Noah came in from the other room where he'd been brewing. The man was always brewing.
"Yeah?"

"Does Vitya... does he know?"

Noah shook his head. "I don't think so. He's. He's not all that lucid."

Neville held up the letter. "He's sounding pretty lucid to me."

"I haven't seen him, Neville. I can only tell you what Luke tells me."

Neville grumbled. "When is the next... do I have time to write?"

"It's best that you do, really. I mean, if you miss a letter that's it." Noah frowned. "Twenty minutes? Is it enough time?"

"It'll have to be," said Neville softly. He set a lapdesk on his lap and began to write, wishing he had his own quill. His own parchment.

Sweet Vityenka moi -

I won't say the idea of flying excites me. But knowing you will be there, behind me, arms wrapped around me while pressed tight to my back... that is exciting me quite a lot. I will fly with you, Vitya, if that is what you need. I can't promise that I'll love it. But it is time spent with you and I am missing that. Sitting at the game and watching you fly in the rain, worrying for you, that is not the same.

You don't need to pretend that... I know you're in heat. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean, I didn't know that the photo would. That seeing me marked that way... I rather liked having your name on my chest, knowing it was there for you and no one else. So it's sorta my fault. I'm just glad that our loved ones together were able to find a way to mitigate your heat in a way that doesn't compromise...

I need to tell you because I think they didn't. The dreams, Vitya, it's me in the dreams. Me meeting you deliberately. Me doing those things to you, the things that you need, to satisfy your heat. I'm so sorry, I thought they'd told you, and I don't... I don't want things to get awkward again. I... I'll tell you about this, in the dream, or try. The dreams for me are so real when I'm there and then they fade and it's hard to concentrate and know what's going on.

I love the book. It's something every herbologist wishes was in their personal library, but so few copies exist that most of us have never seen one. It's a treasure and I love it, and I'm so honored that you would search out such a thing for me.

I know we have things we need to talk about. But I am also wary of our letters becoming bogged down in details of finance and houses and what do we want. I don't want that to interfere with this,
with getting to know you. With building on our feelings. Because I feel for you, Vitya. And it's deep, and I want to explore that.

- Neville

--

The sky above was stormy. Viktor was standing at the precipice, overlooking the roiling waves below.

"Vitya?" Neville still wore the faded Muggle jeans, rolled up halfway to his knees, and his shirt was loose and open, KRUM still painted on his chest.

"Is knowing is not resisting you when is seeing that," said Viktor, glancing over his shoulder at Neville.

Viktor turned. Neville walked up behind Viktor, who still faced away towards the ocean and the crashing waves below. He set one hand on Viktor's right bicep and slid the other against his stomach, then kissed Viktor gently on the side of the neck. Viktor closed his eyes and then leaned back and turned to meet Neville's lips.

"A precipice?"

"Was feeling like was about to fall," replied Viktor.

Neville gulped. "I promised to talk, Vitya. I'm here."

"Is being in heat. Is to be hitting again soon."

"I'm sorry."

"Is not wanting for apologies. Was to be taking Nevya, to be making claim. Would have been ending courtship as surely as this."

"It's not an end," said Neville, pulling Viktor's back against his chest. "It just means we'll wake with some awkwardness. I'd rather have awkwardness than lose you forever."

Vitya turned. Neville's shirt was gone, Viktor's name plainly written across his chest. He traced the letters. "Is not knowing what this does to Vitya."

"I'm a top," said Neville softly. "I... I know if we're together I can't be. Does it bother you that I want to know that I've... that I've touched you here," his hand grasped Viktor's arse, "that I pressed myself into you and came with your name on my lips?"

"I'm in heat," said Viktor. He slid his hand down into his pants and withdrew it, covered with a slick oily substance. "It's supposed to drive you wild with desire. If you were wolf it would have you forcing me already."

Neville sniffed at his fingers and then hesitantly licked them. "It smells like you, tastes like... I. It makes me want to." Neville blinked his eyes flirtatiously. "I don't want to force you, ever, unless you want to do that as a sort of play, for excitement. But I do want, very much, to..."

They were kissing and he could feel Viktor's skin against his. The rain started to pour over both of them, soaking them. "Come inside me," whispered Viktor. "I'm in heat... I need it. Glad. Glad it's you."
Neville laid him down and entered him in a stroke. Viktor whimpered softly, his hands roaming against Neville's torso and hips as Neville pushed deep into Viktor over and over, thrusting hard. It wasn't long before he was getting close. "It's what you want?" asked Neville softly.

Viktor whimpered. The maroon paint on Neville's chest was at his neck, over his heart. Just wide markings of it, as though of a love bite that had grown out of control. Viktor was losing himself... his wolf exposed as Neville thrust into him, hands running through the fur that now covered Vitya's body.

"So sexy, Vitya," he mumbled. "So hot..."

A lengthened nail traced against Neville's neck. "Is needing. Needing to mark you..."

Neville's voice was a pant, a moan. "Yes, Vitya... yours. Want to be inside you forever..."

"Is wanting to mark..."

"Yes. Mark me Vitya. Please... I... I want..."

Viktor's nail scratched against his neck, scratching the letters of his name into the maroon, deeper, so deep. His fingers moved over the heart. Neville was close and so was Viktor, now, the thrusts bringing with them blinding flashes of white and pleasure. His nail scratched deep again. Krum across his heart. Viktor kissed it and then the mark at the neck.

"Is wanting you to be mine," whispered Viktor.

Neville was thrusting deep now and his lips sought Viktor's and kissed him soundly, hot, open mouthed, passionate. He pulled away, his hips still snapping into Viktor, kissed the furry chest, stroked the soft fur on his face. "I..." his hips snapped forward again, "I think I want that," he moaned, and then he came hard and deep as Viktor pressed his lips over the name on Neville's chest and came...

--

Viktor came in violent spurts, splashing the sticky fluids over his chest. He shook for a long time, laying there in the wet of his slick, spread over the sheets from his frantic movements in the dream. He was sore. He looked at the closed door and noting that Luciano was absent, he let his fingers move to his arse. It was just a dream, a beautiful dream about his Nevyenka, spurred on by the changes of his heat. He let his fingers touch himself and slid them just inside himself, pulling out and then looking at the fingers.

A tear dripped down the side of his face. A beautiful dream that had left his arse filled with Neville's cum. Could Neville ever forgive him? He'd done all but claim Neville in the dream. And fuck Neville had said that he... that he might want that. Viktor screwed his eyes shut. Neville would never let him go even as far as he had in the dream. Neville would never embrace Viktor's beast, would never stroke his fur, would never take his mark.

"Lyusha!" shouted Viktor. He was weak from the strength of his heat, from being taken over and over in the dreams. Taken by his Nevyenka.


Viktor held up his fingers, his eyes narrowed. "When the dreams, they are leaving cum inside Vitya's arse, is to being hoping is thinking to cast charms."
Luke shook and stumbled back against the wall.

"How real are dreams that Vitya is having from heat meant to be? What is being potion is feeding that Nevya in dreams is leaving traces in world of waking?"

"More real than we thought," said Luciano softly. "Vitya, I'm sorry."

"Be stopping apologies and be casting charms for Vitya. Feelings for Nevya are being very strong, but is not to be creating of heirs before is even convincing of Nevya to be accepting final act of courtship."

Luke retrieved a bowl of warm water and washed the sticky mess from Viktor's body. Then he pulled his wand and pressed it against Viktor's palm, searching for signs of new life in Viktor's body. When he was satisfied that there were none, he began to cast the usual charms.

"There was nothing, Vitya," said Luciano softly. "I'm... I'm sorry. We knew the potion was allowing your body's need to be fulfilled in your dreams, we... we didn't know it would do that."

"Is being Nevya?" asked Viktor. "In the dreams?"

Luke nodded. "We checked that it wouldn't interfere with the courtship. It..."

"We were not being ready to take this step."

"I know," said Luke. "And so does Nev. He's rather upset. He feels like taking it this far this fast... he felt like the teasing and flirting in the letters was building something strong, and that this, this makes it fragile again."

"Was still doing it."

"His only other choices were coming here in person and breaking the courtship, or risking you sharing a room with his parents at St. Mungo's," said Luciano. "Of course he did it."

"He was realizing in the dream... that you were not to be telling to Vitya whole story. Was telling in letter and in dream after. Apologizing," Viktor shook his head. "Were not being ready. Is right, was enjoying slow pace. Was enjoying looking at pictures of Nevya... Nevya who is so shy, and yet is taking such pictures for Vitya. To be teasing of Vitya. And was being good. Now is having awkwardness. Is fearing this... to be losing him."

"If you'd. You're a wolf, Vitya. At some point you have to just talk about these things. About marking and claiming and being pack. About what he should do if you howl or grow fur... what if you don't talk and you knot him, Vitya?" Luke sighed. "Neville had me in a heat and never really even knew what it was. I was afraid to tell him." Luke poked Viktor in the chest with a forefinger. "Don't let that happen."
Chapter 28

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------

Noah watched as Neville writhed in the bed, moaning Viktor's name. He watched as the scratches appeared on Neville's neck, on his chest. Watched as Neville begged to be marked. Did he even know, consciously, that it was what he wanted? Sometime soon, he was going to need to have a talk with Neville. No one else was doing it, and someone had to, someone that knew. Someone that was not a wolf, but loved one.

Noah swallowed and let his fingers stray to the marks on his own neck. Deep permanent marks made when he was writhing and begging in the way he had no doubt that Viktor Krum was now. The heat he could manufacture with a potion was strong, but it was a shadow of what afflicted those with the blood. Did Neville know how powerful he was right now? That all he had to do was draw blood from Viktor's neck and say the words, mean the words, that Viktor was his. A heat was so powerful because it was submission, offering the body as a vessel for a child. Offering completely. A claim made during heat was made forever.

Noah smiled and set a hand on his stomach. Luciano's daughter, his daughter, she grew inside him, a child of his heat, a child made from their love during his act of total submission to Luke.

Neville moaned again suddenly and his body tensed, his face contorting into a mask. There had been no ejaculate. Noah could only hope they were providing Viktor with the necessary potions or charms at the other end. Given what had been in that potion, Noah did not need to wonder why. The physical act in the dream was being made real.

"--

Neville smiled at Viktor. They were on the beach, their toes making fists in the wet sand. "I want to do this for real," he said. "Walking on the beach. In the moonlight."

"Dancing?" asked Viktor, swinging Neville in a circle and sending him stumbling into the waves.

Neville laughed, catching himself before he could fall and tackled Viktor, sending him sprawling into the wet sand. "Yeah," said Neville, kissing him fiercely, "dancing too."

Viktor tore the shirt off, his eyes growing glossy black at the sight of his name scratched deep into
Neville's flesh at the neck and heart. "Marked..."

Neville leaned in and kissed his neck, the waves lapping over their legs. "Yes..."

"Nevya, is liking being marked?"

"I like this... being with you," said Neville. "Walking on the beach. Dancing." He grinned. "And I want us, I want us to share the things we want to do. Even flying."

Viktor smiled and kissed him again. "And is to be forgiving of Vitya?"

"It's over?"

"Is suspecting this is last time. Is being so sorry, my Nevya. Was trying..."

"I know," said Neville. "I pushed you with those photos. I'm sorry."

"Is not to be apologizing," said Viktor. He was breathing hard and they were suddenly naked. And fuck, Viktor was surrounding him, squeezing and begging and slick. "If was not to be pushing, we wouldn't have been having this..."

"Oh god... oh fuck, Vitya... so tight... so hot..."

"Mmm, Vitya would not... oh fuck, so deep... Vitya would not... would not be knowing that is wanting Nevya inside. That is wanting to be fucked."

"You. Want. This?" asked Neville, punctuating each word with a deep thrust.

"If is saying yes?"

Neville thrust again hard and came. "I... I want you."

Viktor's legs wrapped tight around his waist holding him inside. "Be saying again."

"I want you, Vitya."

Viktor's hand caressed his cheek. "Is forgiving for marks?"

Neville leaned in and kissed his forehead, his lips, his ear, whispering, "I wanted the marks."

--

Sweet Nevyenka -

Thank you. Is knowing neither of us were being ready for intimacy, but much is concealed by intimacy of dreams, which already are growing distant in memory in way that dreams are doing.

While is still remembering. Is taking to beach, to be walking in moonlight, with feet bare upon sand. Is knowing you were wanting this and is thinking is being romantic. Is wanting this for us. To be walking on beach. Is wanting to be knowing what is wanting to be doing together. Is glad you were telling Vitya, even if was being in dream.

Was loving photos. Is knowing some of mystery is being taken by dreams, but in way of dreams, experience was incomplete. Is knowing to be with Nevya, it is being more than any dream could be. And is hoping, maybe when courtship is over... if is to be accepting of... would like to be finding intimacy with Nevya is what is trying to say.
Is being pleased! Was not realizing that book was rare treasure, and so am beyond happy that was able to be giving this to Nevya. Has still many gifts requiring Vitya to be leaving of manor, but this one is thinking will be liking. Is knowing Nevya is having sweet tooth for chocolate frogs. Was knowing they are coming in other flavors? Neither was Vitya. Was discovering by accident during Quidditch World Cup. Is discovering many flavors are being particular to individual countries, but is finding service that is sending box, half traditional flavor and half in one of many unique flavors that is changing with each month. Is hoping Nevya will be sharing with Vitya!

Is wanting Nevya to be knowing, is still thinking beautiful. Is still wanting to be touching. Is still trembling with passion is sharing with Vitya. Was not being ready, but is not regretting having of Nevya inside Vitya.

With deepest affection
- Vitya

Neville smiled as he read the words, gently massaging the gel into Trevor's skin.

"I think he liked it," said Neville distractedly stopping the smooth spreading of gel onto Trevor.

Trevor croaked at him and nudged at his hand. Neville smiled and began spreading the gel again.

"Sorry about that, Trev. I just. It could have..."

Trevor croaked again, and set a foot on Neville's hand.

"Yeah, I know," Neville glanced at Noah, who was watching him closely. "I think it's a good idea too."

"You aren't really talking to that toad," said Noah quietly.

"He helps me think," said Neville, a little defiantly.

"I see.
Is it over?"

Neville nodded.

Noah walked up to him and looked him over. He glanced significantly at the mark.

"Do you need to talk about it?"

Neville closed his eyes and shook his head. '"I... it's not a claim, Noah."

"You need to be careful. It could become one easily enough, if you let it." 

"I... I liked it when he..."

Noah smiled. "I understand. I do. But a mark is necessary for a claim, and it... it suggests he wants to."

"Should I be this afraid?"

"You should be cautious. You should be mindful and thoughtful of what you want. You can come to me, Neville, if you need to talk. I meant it."

"I'm not ready."

Noah chuckled. "Day sixteen? There's still time."
Neville stood up off the bed and scooped Trevor into his arms. "I should go," he said, pocketing the letter. The chocolates had already been brought to his rooms. "I still need to send Vitya a response. And I doubt Minerva is anxious to have me miss another day of classes."

"Your day today was cleared with Minerva ahead of time," said Noah. "But you've an early morning tomorrow. And what you had the last several days was not exactly sleep."

Neville grunted. His memory of the dreams was already fading, a fact that had him conflicted. Their couplings in dreams had been fragmented, jumping about strangely. He didn't want a fragmented experience like that as a first time with Viktor, and so the dimness of it, the fact that it was a dream, gave him an opportunity to choose to see their first time as something in the future. But he'd also filled Viktor with his seed, and he knew he should be asking him about whether he'd used charms.

"I have to send the response first," said Neville softly, "so I'd probably ought to get to it."

"When you're ready, Neville. Please, don't be afraid to talk to me. I'd hate to see you throw away happiness because he's a wolf."

"You think I'd do that?"

"I think you're scared of what it could mean," said Noah, "and I don't blame you."

Neville sighed and nodded and let himself out. The Floo could aggravate Trevor's condition, so he had decided to walk up to the tower. He handed out several detentions to students who were out during proscribed times, wincing at the extra work it meant, though at least it meant he'd not need to dig all the trenches for planting over the holidays himself.

He reached the portrait that guarded his chambers and gave the password, glad to be back in his own quarters and, importantly, not to be watched constantly. He was a little mortified that Noah had been able to watch as he engaged in rather intimate acts in his dreams, and he hated to think what he might have said while he was sleeping, dreaming of being with Viktor. He went quickly to his bedroom, setting Trevor on the warm rock there and renewing the spells on it. Then he stripped down and showered. He'd been without for days during the heat, and he felt grimy and dirty.

He sat down at his desk in a fluffy robe and wrote.

--

Viktor was grateful to be able to send away his father and Luciano. He just wanted to be alone. Tomorrow he would have extra work from his master for his absence and that meant even less time to work on the gifts for Neville. Of course that had not kept him from standing on the balcony in pants in the middle of the night, waiting for what he hoped was still an inevitable owl.

Neville had been thoroughly decent about their push into intimacy, promising to work with Viktor to find a way through the awkwardness of the situation. And Neville had been the one to tell him that what they were doing was real. Viktor shook his head. Luke swore he hadn't known.

Viktor smiled when he saw it, the large brown owl from the Hogwarts owlery. The parchment was a perfect cream, the ink a brilliant indigo. Neville was back in his own quarters again. Good. Viktor tossed the owl a treat and returned to his room, sitting on the bed with a quick charm for light to read.

My sweet Vityenka -
I love chocolate frogs!

I know this is awkward. Already the dreams play with my memories. I remember the feelings I had while I was inside you, I remember bits, pieces of the experience. I remember intimacy. But I don't... I can't remember enough.

I wasn't ready. To touch you, yes, but not to... not to fuck you. Because my feelings aren't there to make it what I want it to be. And I wanted that to happen first. So that we never just fucked. So that it was always something more. And now we have. And I don't regret it, but I do wish I had been ready. That my feelings were certain in a way they aren't yet.

I know we have a lot to work through, a lot to discuss. I think... I think you're worth that working through. I want to find out.

I still want to be sexy for you. I... I hope you want to be sexy for me. I hope you still want to take that walk on the beach. I hope you still want to go dancing.

I still want to fly with you.

- Neville

There was a picture, the words "never doubt it was real" scribbled in the back corner. And the front, Neville clad in red silk, his right leg up on the arm of the chair, his right hand forming an 'L' that framed the name KRUM, carved into his flesh over his heart. He looked straight at the camera and blew a kiss, and then turned, facing to the right, stretching his neck to reveal the same mark, repeated where his neck met the shoulder.

Viktor shuddered. Neville was wearing his mark. Wearing his mark and wanting Viktor to know. Wanting Viktor to see him as sexy while wearing the mark. Viktor smiled. At least being up this early would allow him to indulge in a lengthy shower.
Chapter 29

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-----

Viktor's master seemed pleased with the progress of the Karelian birch wand. Indeed, more than simply impressed. He admonished Viktor not to let it be his only project, reminding him to keep trying with thestral hairs and his intriguing idea about rusalka hair, and left him to mind the shop for the afternoon while the master went to negotiate with a herd stallion for unicorn hair.

Viktor spent the time carefully studying each wand he currently had in the potion baths, making a series of spell motions with each. Some he retrieved from the baths and removed, others he allowed to remain. He scribbled copious notes in a log book, and then he went carefully to examine the Karelian birch. The wand itself was intricate, the patterns of the wood so beautifully striking. Slowly and ever so carefully he began preparing it to receive a core. It was a process that could take days and had to be done carefully or the wand would be weak, prone to break or crack under the force of a spell.

Viktor immersed himself in his work, stopping only once for a customer who had come to purchase a replacement wand. He helped the witch, the shop enduring minimal destruction as she tried several wands before finally selecting by a rather short firm elm wand, with a twist at the end making a handle and a unicorn hair core. Pleased by the wand's selection of her (she'd deemed the wand rather pretty before lifting it), she paid the cost of the wand and left the shop happy.

Viktor returned to his work and hummed happily as he prepared the Karelian birch wand for its core, his feet up off the ground on criss-crossed supports of the stool. His mind was on Neville, and that was good, at least while he made this wand. It needed to be made with the fullness of his feelings in his mind, so that it was filled with the love... so it was filled with care for his Nevyenka as he himself was and would choose Neville over any other.

He was whistling happily when he closed the shop and took the Floo from the local tavern to his manor. His dinner was quiet, the house elves serving him several of his favorites and wishing him good health, happy that he had recovered. He smiled at them and gave them some praise. House elves lived for praise, and these beamed happily at him, and offered him some pudding.

That evening he went to St. Mungo's to consult with their potions research division. The department head, a fastidiously clean man in the green of a Healer, glared at him.
"Is to be ready in time?" asked Viktor.

"Why are you doing this?" asked the Healer.

"Is done arguing over this, Jenkins."

"These are resources better spent elsewhere!"

Viktor narrowed his eyes at the Healer. "Is dismissing potion as not worthwhile, because is being expensive. Is understanding this. But is not resources of St. Mungo's paying. Is Krum. Is paying for time and for ingredients. Is not to be understanding why is objecting."

"You could be doing better things with this money," said Jenkins. "Helping cure people who can be helped."

"Is true. Is foolish to be thinking Krum does not already do these things. Krum family is funding many potion studies, as is right for the Boyar. This one is being personal, for dear friend. Is knowing is not efficient use of funds. Be doing anyway."

"He rarely visits."

"Is painful for Nevya to be visiting of parents, Jenkins. Is loving them. Is proud of them. But is never knowing them. Will be ready?"

Jenkins grunted. "Yes. Two doses. I need another week, but that fits into your schedule. You understand..."

"Is knowing limitations. Keep seeking ways to be extending of time, or increasing of frequency."

"I'm doing that," said Jenkins, "But the research was well funded initially. There was still a lot of hope then. It was considered a dead end, and I doubt that will change much."

"Be examining advances in field and trying. If is all can be offered, then is to be offering. Was cruel to be doing to child, to be saying that it was not being worth it. Now is harder. But I will be giving Nevya that choice, not to be making for him."

Viktor turned and left, making his way to the small private room that held Neville's parents. Augusta was there, sitting with Frank Longbottom's hand in hers. She looked up when he came in and glared at him.

Before she could say anything, Viktor spoke quietly, "Was enduring Howler already. Is thinking you were saying enough then."

"He could do better."

"Is agreeing with you. Nevva is best of men. Was honored he was accepting of suit." Viktork looked at the chair next to Alice Longbottom. "Is permitted to be sitting?"

Augusta glared at him, but nodded.

Viktor sat next to Alice and studied her carefully. Even the powerful sedatives given the Longbottoms could not conceal the twitches and whimpers. Viktor shook his head sadly. "Is terrible thing, *Cruciatus*."

"As if you know," spat Augusta.
"Is Dark Arts Master. Part of this is training to endure this curse. Is not worst of spells is knowing, but is..."

"Dark Arts Master! And you want to be near my Neville!" screamed Augusta.

"Be calming down. Was not Nevya with Luciano for many years?"

She glared at him, but nodded.

"Luciano and I studied together. Were at Durmstrang. Different years. Both being best in class at one subject. Neither is being proud of this."

"The Grimaldi boy was..."

"Is. Dark Arts, Certified Mastery, as Vitya. Is not meaning what is thinking. Is thinking grandmother of Nevya is old enough to be remembering, Dark Arts is not being evil, simply meaning requires of sacrifice."

"Losing your soul."

"Or of blood, or of heat, or of senses," said Viktor, "is meaning sacrifice. For wizard wishing to do evil, soul is often choice. Is limitless, and so offers great power, and yet is exacting terrible price when moving from this world."

"It's Unforgivable."

"Because is one curse that is only accepting part of soul for price. Is more evil even than killing curse, which can be cast as defense when life is threatened."

"You gave my son a flower. He tells me it's rare. He says it's the rarest flower in the world, that you gave him a fortune. I don't believe it."

"Is sorry your faith in Vitya is not strong," said Viktor, his head down, as he gently grasped one of Alice's hands. He whispered a spell softly, and her whimpering subsided.

"What are you doing!"

"Is spell, is using to endure of curse. Cannot be hurting her."

Augusta looked at Frank. "What was it? The flower? He told me a fairy tale of a rose. What was it really?"

"Is finding of much truth in folklore if is looking," said Viktor, stroking Alice's hand lightly. "Is sorry if you are doubting the Vyedma. But was giving rose that is telling of truth of heart."

"He said it was valuable."

"And true to Vitya's hopes, Nevya was not to be selling."

Augusta turned away. "I'd expect it of you, to spend a fortune on him to buy him. A boy whose every luxury was stolen to care for his parents."

"Is not purchasing mate. Is wooing man to become husband. Is difference."

"What?"
"To purchase suggests that Nevya can be bought. Is seeing ever the ice that guards the soul of Nevya? Is not to be bought. But perhaps can be won. Is not trying to buy heart of Nevya," said Viktor, looking at the witch in her prim outfit and outrageous hat, "is looking to be winning of heart so that is wanting to be joining house of Krum."

"You're lying. I hear things, you know," said Augusta. "*The Dawn over Hogwarts*? And you say you aren't buying him?"

"Was to be giving of sunrise to offer new hope after row. Is best sunrise is knowing, but if was pauper, still would find way to give sunrise. Would be to painting myself, or to be writing of poem, or taking of photo, or sculpting from flame. Is many ways to be giving this gift. But tapestry... it is Longbottom legacy. Was able to be giving this to Nevya," said Viktor, "was wanting to be giving. How is this being wrong?"

Augusta started to say something, but Viktor was not done.

"Is reminder to Nevya. Reminder of greatness of family. Family of artists. Family of heroes," Viktor nodded to each of Neville's parents in turn. "Family of such determination and endurance. Reminding Nevya that is able to be great, because is being told all of life, is not being great. And is wanting Nevya to be seeing in him, what it is that Vitya is seeing. That is being more beautiful in soul than sunrise."

"And the rest?"

"A tie tack that is precious memory for Vitya? Framed reminders that though is to be standing always in shadow of others, is still being hero in own right. Shoes for the dancing. Chocolate frogs, because is being favorite of Nevya. Is not to be choosing of gifts for value. Was giving to Nevya rose, because was knowing that Nevya is being one of few that is recognizing on sight this rose. Night Blooming Siberian Witch Rose. So rare as to be thought is myth. Flower given as gift to Natasha by the Baba Yaga, so would be knowing truth of heart's desire of her intended."

Augusta shook her head. "It's a myth."

"Flower was turning to black so deep is almost blue, the color of Natasha's hair."

"That's not in the story," said Augusta with a glare.

"Is being how daughter of the Vyedma remembers it," said Viktor quietly. "How she is telling children of her flesh, when is old enough to be knowing duty to protect it."

"Children of her flesh," said Augusta, her eyes widening.

"Line of Krum. Is knowing you think us filthy wolves. Is true, we keep wolf in family always. Is part of legacy. And this means children of Vitya with Nevya, they will be wolf, and taught to embrace this part of themselves. Is not being shame. Is being pride of family."

"He is the last," said Augusta bitterly. "There are no others. Our line will end."

"Nevya is knowing this. Is knowing could be losing of Nevya, because of respect he is having for his parents, for his name. But is respecting Nevya enough to let this be his choice. Is hoping he will be choosing Vitya. Is honorable ending of line, with hero who is following heart."

"You think he could love you?" said Augusta.

Viktor flicked his wand and extended his spell to Frank Longbottom also. "Is hoping."
"I don't believe it. That you're descended from the Witch."

"Is for you to choose to believe or not to believe," said Viktor. "Is not making less true."

Augusta looked at him. "You came on your own?"

"To be caring for Nevya, it is to be knowing how important this is for him. If is to understand Nevya, must also be understanding of this room," said Viktor. "And of them," he gestured to Neville's parents.

--

Neville was nervous when no owl came by lunch time. He did his best to stay calm, to focus on classes, but his mind was still very much on Viktor. He was grateful for his NEWT level classes that afternoon, because at that level he was forced to concentrate on his work, on teaching the students, and his concern for Viktor faded into the background until dinner.

He sat at the staff table, tapping his foot and his fork. Hagrid hadn't noticed, though Trelawny noted that his distemper was probably a sign of dire portents and cast a bit of salt over her shoulder. It was an immense relief then when Viktor's snowy owl flew into the hall and dropped the expected parcel and letter in front of him.

He'd been nervous about sending that photo. About showing Viktor how real their experience in the dream had been. It was nearly healed now, the mark. The scratches had been deep, but wizards healed quickly and his plants left enough minor scratches during a day that he routinely rubbed himself down with healing oils that helped a wizard's natural healing along. He smiled at that. He'd love to have Viktor rub those oils into his skin...

"Neville!"

"Yeah, Hagrid."

"Gonna open that?"

"Yeah, in a minute. Want to finish this while it's still hot," said Neville, hoping that would put attention off his gift. As much as he might get frustrated by early morning deliveries, they at least meant that this, the attention that the students and staff were paying to his mail, was usually absent.

He finished his dinner and then slid his chair backwards and opened the letter.

My Nevyenka -

Is being so sorry to be writing late. Master was working Vitya hard today, minding of shop while wearing glamour, and so was much drained by end of day. Is telling Nevya truth that is keeping from world. Is being apprenticed to wand maker. Is soon to be finished with apprenticeship. To be able to open shop of own. This is plan of Vitya for after Quidditch, to be known for wands. Because of Dark Lord, many wand makers are being dead or broken. Is meaning there is place to be name in business of wands. Of course will also be Boyar, in time, but to also be known, like to Gregorivich or Ollivander, for wands is making. Is thinking would be fine thing.

Is glad Nevya is still wanting to try. Is knowing is awkward, but is wanting Nevya to be knowing, is wanting this, still. Wanting even what is being coming. Is being nervous, is being scared even, but is still to be wanting. Wanting enough to be telling even of these secrets that even father is not knowing.
Dreams in heat were being very real, and not just in marks was leaving on beautiful Nevyenka. Beautiful marks on my Nevyenka. Is wondering if is understanding how hot is making Nevyenka, to be showing marks in this way. Is driving Vitya into an unseemly passion. Was needing much cold water in shower to be distracting Vitya from this. But is not only reality of dreams. Was in heat, Nevya, and was receiving of seed of Nevya while being ripe. Is knowing that you are knowing what this means.

So is bringing to one of many subjects is dancing around. Is heir of Krum family. First and only son of the Boyar. Is meaning is needing heir of own flesh for family. Is meaning is needing to be having children. Is using charms when is discovering truth of dreams, because is not ready, either of us, for possibility of pups. But is needing to be discussing of this. Is not to be asking to bear for me, is wanting Nevya to be knowing this. Would be making Vitya very happy, but is also being willing. But is needing to know. Is needing to be sure that is understanding, is needing children. This cannot... is end of bloodline, Nevya. As Nevya is also. Is needing of child to be bearing of Krum name.

Is knowing has been killing mood with this. Nevya is sending to Vitya of sexy photo that is having Vitya burning with desire, and Vitya is demanding to know if Nevya is wanting children. Is knowing this is not to be sexy to be talking about, but still is hoping is wanting.

Not to be further killing of mood today. Is still much to be discussing. But is also to be building of feelings and relationship even that is being built of words. Is pleased to see Nevya trying to be sexy for Vitya. Is hoping is knowing that it is success of this that is driving of Vitya into heat! So sexy, my Nevyenka. Was saying once that Vitya is also being sexy. Is hoping. Well. Be to open in private, please, today's gift.

With deepest feeling,
- Vitya

Neville looked a little quizzical, but set the package aside. He smiled as the pudding appeared on his plate, slipping the letter into a pocket of his robes and digging in. Hagrid seemed similarly impressed, though his modest portion didn't last long. Neville on the other hand savored it. He hadn't eaten properly for the past days while he was drifting in and out of the dream state satisfying Viktor's heat, and now that he could eat, he found himself rather ravenous.

After dinner he headed to the greenhouse, sending a house elf with the package to his rooms. The students from the previous night were waiting for him, grumbling. He set them to digging while he saw to details around the greenhouse, making sure his absence hadn't harmed the plants. Fortunately a few days hadn't harmed anything and even the dragon's eye rose bush that had suffered so much this term seemed to be in good condition.

True to form, the students staying out in the halls on a Monday evening past hours were mostly older students getting into mischief. Students who had spent time digging before and, mostly, ones who were just grateful not to be scrubbing cauldrons. When they were done, Neville dismissed them and returned to his quarters.

He sunk into a chair in the lounge, calling for his elf to bring him tea. He sat for a while, watching the fire. This was something else he wanted to do with Viktor, to sit in front of the fire... to make love in front of the fire. He wasn't ready to say that to Viktor yet, but he wanted it.

When his tea was drunk down to the dregs he set it aside and found the package Viktor had sent to him. He opened it carefully and gasped. A promotional poster for the Vultures, Viktor Krum in full Quidditch uniform, robes, leathers, all of it, staring intently. Attached was a brief note. "Was saying was sexy this way. - Vitya"
It was cute, Viktor sending him... wait, there were more. Had he sent him the whole series? It was rather famous and some of his housemates in Gryffindor had bragged about having them all when they were still in school.

Neville shook as he pulled aside the poster. It was a framed photo of Vitya. He was wearing the flowing robes of a Quidditch player, open, the heavy boots, the leathers protecting the hands. His broom stretched up from one foot across his body to his right hand. His chest was bare, revealing black hair thick across his chest and narrowing and thinning at the stomach, save for a thicker patch just around his belly button that extended past his waist and framed the heavy thick cock that was revealed, half hard and resting against the shaft of the broom.

An attached note read "is hoping is finding this one as sexy. - Vitya."

Neville gulped. There was one more. It was taken from above. Viktor laying down, his flowing Quidditch robes spread out beneath his body, the dark fabric framing his pale skin. His legs were spread, his right hand toying with his nipple in the deep bed of his chest hair, his right stroking his fully hard cock. The attached note read "is thinking of Nevya and hoping for future. - Vitya."
Chapter 30

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------

The owl arrived in the early hours of the morning. Viktor gave it the treat it required and then it flew off.

Dear Vitya -

I'm not one of those gay wizards who hates children. I want to have children, a family, to give them what I did not have, a family. Because I didn't have a family. I had a gran who resented me and loved me as what she had lost, loved me for my father, but never loved me or respected me for me. I want my children to have a family and happiness and parents who love each other.

I know we're both still trying to find our feelings. But if we get there. If you ask me and I accept, I would not accept that from someone I wasn't willing to bear children for. I can't say the idea doesn't scare me. As one of Harry's closest friends, I've watched him go through hell trying to bring his children safely to term. Only being here at Hogwarts, with both Noah and Madam Pomfrey, has kept him from losing his children.

I didn't realize you were studying to be a wand maker! It's a rare gift, the ability to construct a wand! I... I hope you can tell me about it sometime. It's a gift I can relate to, as there's a lot of Herbology involved in the selection of appropriate lengths of wood. Knowing which parts of branches and trees will accept a magical core... it's a fascinating field. I hadn't realized that you had such a grounding in Herbology, though with your courtship gift, and the care and respect you've shown for my specialty, I should have suspected.

I... I don't know how. I mean, we need to talk about it, Vitya. What we're going to do. I still have a flat in London, almost a house really, with its own greenhouses. I shared it with Luciano, and with Ginny Weasley and Casey Hughes. But I don't... I don't want to go back to living with friends, especially in a romantic relationship. And it would make work difficult, needing to Floo to Scotland every day. I... I love my job, Vitya. I would give it up, but I... I hope you won't ask that of me.

I still think you're sexy. Especially in Quidditch leathers. I know what a show of trust that was, to offer pictures of yourself like that. Knowing how the public sees you. Knowing how easily I could
turn that into financial security. I won't. I hope you know that. I'll treasure them as what they are... a bit of Vitya. Because Viktor might be a Quidditch World Champion, but Vitya, I think, is a little playful. A little willing to risk being sexy for me. And I love that you want to be sexy for me.

- Neville

Vitya smiled as he read the letter. And frowned. And ran his hand through his hair in thought as he sat at his desk. He fingered the small package that had come with the letter. He opened it and the scent had him shuddering. Neville had sent him his scent. He'd pleasured himself and cleaned himself off with a pair of old Y fronts, and sent them to Viktor. The smell of Neville and sex. A tiny scribbled note read "this is what you do to me." Viktor smiled, went back to bed, and slept with his nose buried in the scent of his Nevyenka.

--

"Sorry Neville," said Harry. "I know I should have... I know you're going through stuff. I should have been around more."

"It's okay," said Neville. "Thanks for stopping by."

"I figured, after the scene yesterday with everyone staring at you that you'd probably prefer breakfast in your quarters. Kreacher will bring us something."

Harry went to the table and looked at the chair and sighed. "Nev, can you," Harry looked embarrassed. "I just need some help sitting down. I'm sorry."

"No, don't be," said Neville, moving quickly to help Harry sit. His quarters didn't have a kitchen like Harry's, but he did have a little breakfast nook with its own broad window overlooking the forest. He helped Harry get seated and then sat across from him.

"Draco told me about the tapestry," said Harry, still shifting awkwardly to get comfortable.

"Yeah. It was," Neville paused for a moment. "It was unexpected."

"The other gifts?"

"Except for the rose and the tapestry, they've been subdued. More thoughtful than expensive." Neville shook his head. "No, they've been expensive, really expensive, some of them, but. I mean, he spent a fortune on gels for Trevor. Not like fancy paintings or things like that. But things meant for me."

"Except the tapestry..."

"It's a Longbottom tapestry. And there's... I mean, if you read the letters you'd understand."

"Well give'em here then," said Harry.

Neville laughed. "Um... no. They're private."

"Oh please, Nev. It's not like you're talking dirty..." Harry's eyes widened as Neville flushed beet red. "You are! You're exchanging dirty nasty letters with Viktor Krum!"

"It's not..."

Harry was beaming at him. "Seriously? Dirty letters..."
"Not in the way you think," said Neville. "But. We don't see each other, so we flirt a bit. And... and I may have sent him some photos I wouldn't..."

"Nev!"

"Nothing like that!" said Neville quickly. "I mean, nothing indecent. Just me in. Well, he sent me some rather sexy silk underwear. And I may have posed in a photo wearing it." He was turning red again. "Maybe... maybe more than one photo."

Harry was shaking his head. "I'd never have believed it of you."

"Well, it's. He calls me sexy, Harry."

"You told him not to do that."

Neville let a hint of a smile touch the corner of his mouth. "Well. I mean, he sent me silk pants. Least I could do is wear them for him. He wanted me to wear them dancing so he'd know I was wearing them. I mean, since we can't really do more than kiss yet." Neville's grin got mischievous. "Photos were my idea. Though I tell you, it was right embarrassing getting the house elves to take them."

Harry burst out laughing. "House elves took them?"

"Well, it's not like I have a fancy camera that'll do it for me."

"Did he appreciate them?"

Neville looked up and waggled his eyebrows.

"He did! Nev! That's good, right?"

"Well, it's certainly not bad," said Neville.

"Come on, Nev. You forget I've seen you digging."

"I'm not that sexy when I'm digging. You and Luciano, always saying that."

Harry rolled his eyes. "We say it because it's true, you git."

Kreacher popped in then, setting a plate of food in front of each of them.

"Thank you Kreacher," said Harry.

"I live to serve the noble house of Black," said Kreacher, disappearing with a pop.

"We talk about serious stuff too," said Neville, moving his food around his plate with his fork.

"Like?"

"He's... he's got a plan for after Quidditch. He hasn't told anyone about it, but he has one. It's really not what you might expect."

"Can't tell me?"

Neville shook his head. "Not till I'm sure."

"And you're not."
"I'm... I'm a lot closer than I thought I'd be," said Neville, stuffing food in his mouth to keep himself from saying anymore.

"So you like him?"

Neville gulped. "Very much."

"More than Oliver?"

Neville closed his eyes and nodded. "Yeah. Yeah, I think so."

"Why?"

"He's... he's very dashing."

Harry shook his head. "I think there's..."

"Of course there's more to it. He... he wants to know how Trevor's doing. He wants to know that we can share things. He wants to know me, to do things together. We're going to go walk on the beach in bare feet, Harry."

"Okay."

"It's... it's something I want to do with him and he wants to do it... together. And I want that. I..."

"You want to spend time with him."

Neville nodded. "With Oliver, it was like... I mean, he's a friend and he was keeping me from being lonely, but we... we didn't... sharing meals and having sex wasn't enough, Harry. We needed more in common. I needed him to appreciate the things I enjoyed. There wasn't enough to build a life together on."

"And you feel like with Viktor..."

"Yeah," said Neville, smiling. "Yeah, I do."

"That's good though, right?"

"It's a little scary. Harry... he wants kids." Neville looked down at his plate. "He needs an heir, but I think... I think it's more than that."

"You think he'd want you to carry."

Neville shook his head. "He needs an heir and he expects to be the one to carry. But Harry. I think. I think I want to. I. Fuck Harry, I'm not supposed to want to get buggered."

"Why not? Getting buggered is right brilliant, mate."

"I know. But I'm a top. And I thought. I mean for years I was content being a top. And now I... I want him, Harry. Like that. Inside me."

"And you'd carry for him?"

Neville smiled. "Yeah. I really think I would. I. I think I want to. Fuck, I'm totally screwed, aren't I?"
"Well, I'd say your feelings are a wee bit stronger than you admit to yourself," said Harry with a smirk. "Given that they include wanting to have his children."

"It scares me."

Harry looked down and rubbed his immensely distended belly. "I can understand that. As Pomfrey says, it's natural for a wizard, but our bodies aren't really designed for it."

"I'm scared, Harry. Not just about that. I lost Luciano. It's a hole in my heart and it won't go away. I don't... I tried to *Obliviate* myself. Can I risk that? Risk having pain like that?"

"You're the bravest man I know, Neville. Don't let a bit of fright keep you from. I mean," Harry took a deep breath. "Is he reciprocating, Nev?"

"I'm not the only one flirting with pictures," said Neville, his cheeks touched with pink.

"He sent you... never mind. I can't imagine it and I don't think I want to..."

"Not exactly the ethereal marble cast beauty of Draco Malfoy," said Neville.

"But sexy?"

"Oh fuck yeah."

"Isn't that what matters, Nev, that you..." Harry was interrupted by the knocking of an owl.

Neville grinned and swung the window open, letting the owl in. He summoned a treat and tossed it to the owl, taking the parcel and the letter and petting the owl before it leapt out the window and flew off towards the sunrise.

"Reminds me of Hedwig," said Harry, his voice tinged with sadness.

"Me too," said Neville.

"It's his then? The owl?"

"I think so, yeah," said Neville, looking at the letter. "Um. Sorry Harry, I..."

"It's okay, read."

Neville broke open the seal and read the letter quietly to himself.

My Nevyenka -

Is cruel man, sending your scent to me like that. Is wanting to be rutting like beast when is receiving such provocation. Is not sure this is bad thing. Would be liking to be holding Nevya close and taking of him fiercely. To be taking Nevya like beast from behind. Is knowing this fantasy may be scaring Nevya, but is sharing because it is what is in heart, and is wanting over all things to be honest about desires.

Is understanding fears about children, about pregnancy. Is not wanting Nevya to be fearing. Vitya is sincere that is willing to bear. Would also be giving Nevya chance to be topping Vitya. In dreams was finding this rather pleasant, and is not minding thought of needing to be doing again and again until Vitya is carrying pup. Of course, if Nevya was being willing... would dearly love to make pup inside of Nevya. To be filling with seed and feeling and heart. To make a soul from love. Is wanting this with Nevya, is understanding?
Is not needing to be deciding now. Is something can be deciding later, as long as result, to be having of heir for Krum family, to be raising heir together as child of both, is something we can both be agreeing is wanting.

Is knowing Nevya is being nervous about what is to be doing after courtship. Is making Vitya so happy that is having these concerns. Is making happy because is picturing success of courtship. This is more important to Vitya than any details of arrangements.

For gift then, is giving to Nevya proper men's cologne. Was thinking this morning of Nevya, and scent of seed that was burying self in since receiving letter. Is loving this scent, but is wanting to be for Vitya. To be precious and shared between Vitya and Nevya alone. This is scent to be smelling across table at dinner, and when dancing, to be mingling with earthy scent of Nevya. Is hoping you are liking scent.

Hoping for future,
- Vitya

Neville unwrapped the parcel and gently touched the cologne to his wrists, rubbing them together vigorously and then smelling.

"Cologne?" asked Harry.

Neville nodded and extended one wrist for Harry to smell.

"Very nice," exclaimed Harry. "Don't recognize the scent though."

Neville sniffed his other wrist. "I wouldn't expect you too. He made this, or arranged for it to be made. I'd bet a whole pile of galleons."

"Hey, that's extra effort..."

Neville smiled. "It is. He's really sweet, Harry."

"No picture?"

"The ones he sent weren't little. They were... well, poster sized. And exquisite. And I'm not sharing!"

"Risque?"

"Very," said Neville.

They finished breakfast rather quietly.

"Is he good to you, Neville?"

Neville closed his eyes and nodded.

"Then give him a chance, yeah? He seems to really care about you."
Chapter 31

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courtship demanded an attention I could not give them in a fic based around Luke/Noah and
Harry/Draco. So here it is. The whole story of Viktor and Noah's courtship. I hope you enjoy it.

-----

Neville was glad to have an easy day of classes. His students were, for the most part, well behaved,
and the worst offender was just given a bit of extra work, six inches on the dangers of standing too
close to poisonous magical plants. Well, that and a trip to Madam Pomfrey, which he was sure
she'd find more unpleasant than the essay.

With no detentions, and the greenhouse in good shape already from the work he'd done during
detentions the day before, he was able to take the Floo to his rooms early. He sat at his desk and
 glanced at the pictures hanging directly across from his bed. Viktor, in Quidditch leathers, so
beautiful.

He picked up the quill that Viktor had gifted him, and he began to write.

My dearest Vitya -

The cologne is lovely. Sweet. That hint of vanilla, it's sexy. Will it drive you wild if I wear it? I
hope so. Looking at your photos... it makes me wish you'd leap from the picture and land in my
bed. So hot and sexy. I always wanted to see what was under your formals and now... the truth is so
hot it makes me desperate to touch you.

I'm sure you'll be delighted to know that I have a thing for a hairy chest. I love the feel of a hard
chest, and of the hair sliding so soft through fingers. It makes me hard just thinking of it. Almost as
hard as the thought of you leaping on top of me and taking me like a beast from behind. If that's
your fantasy, my Vityenka... I hope you know, being taken that way is one of mine. I think... I
think I really want you to do that to me. I know I should cross that out, but I'm not going to.
Because I do want it. I do want you.

I'm shaking. To admit that. What I really want. I'm afraid of it and I want it at the same time. I love
Luciano so much, but I think you know I never... I never let him do that. And I think that I want to
do something like that can only be a good sign, but it also frightens me. I don't know what it
means. That I want something with you that I would never have let him do.

I know we're starting to get close. That the time for decisions is getting closer day by day. I wish I
could just know what I felt. I wish I didn't have to think about it. Can you help me not need to think about it? I wish we could take that walk on the beach and just talk. Except right now I am so desperate to touch you I'm almost afraid to do that, to be alone on an empty beach.

Help sort me out, my Vityenka. I need you.

- Neville

--

It was late in the evening when Noah finally stumbled past the portrait of the large man with his pug and into the rooms he shared with his promised. Luke glanced up as he entered and smiled.

"Long day?"

"I have so much more sympathy for my professors. All it takes is one student," said Noah plaintively, "and your evening is suddenly shot to hell."

Luke stood up and walked over to him. "Poor baby," he said, stroking his cheek, "I love you."

Noah grinned and leaned forward to kiss him. Luke met his lips eagerly pressing against him. They parted, panting heavily, with their foreheads touching. "It's all worth it," said Noah, "to be owned by you."

Luke looked away, but he couldn't help that his hand moved automatically to reward his mate with a stroke of his hand against the mark that had Noah's eyes rolling into his head as he moaned.

"I let you offer..."

"I offered," said Noah. "I don't regret it, love, not for a moment."

"I just. I think about Nev and Vitya, and I worry about them."

"Because Viktor is a wolf?"

Luke nodded, still not meeting Noah's eyes.

"He loved you," said Noah. "And last I checked, you were a wolf too."

"I... Noah, it wasn't the same."

"You never claimed him."

"You know I didn't. A claim..." Luke pressed a hand against Noah's chest. "This, what I did to you. Taking you as mine forever. It's... bubbly, it's..."

Noah caught hold of Luke's chin and nudged him to look up at him. "When I offered myself to you in my heat... I begged you to own me and make me yours. And, love," his fingers stroked around both sides of Luke's face, flirting with touching him, like he was so precious he barely dared, "being yours makes everything worth while."

"You still... you still want..."

"Always," said Noah his voice choked.

"I need..." Luke ripped open Noah's robes scattering buttons, "need to touch skin."
"Your skin... your body," whispered Noah. "I belong to you."

"Wanna take you... bubby. Can I... can I take you?"

Noah grasped the hands that were running over his chest. "I gave myself to you, love, so you'd know that you never have to ask."

Luke's eyes grew dark with lust. "Right here?"

"I thought you wanted to talk about Neville?" Noah felt the teeth nipping at his claiming mark and shuddered.

"Need to..." Luke's voice was raw and torn.

"After then?"

Noah didn't resist as Luke pushed him against the wall. Hands fumbled with his belt buckle.

"Bubby," Luke sniffed along his neck, "so hot..."

Noah smiled as he leaned his head back and luxuriated at the touch of his mate, touching him, holding him, seizing total control of this, of them. His pants were ripped off. He could feel the nails ripping skin in haste. He pulled his wand and whispered the charm to ready himself before letting the ivory length fall to the floor.

He was held then against the wall as Luke's teeth laid claim to his neck and his heart and the marks of their promise pulsed with intricate light beneath their skin.

"Love this... love you..." whispered Noah into Luke's hair as Luciano laid another claim on his neck and thrust into him pushing him hard against the wall.

Luke didn't respond, but his teeth clamped tighter and his thrusts grew more frenzied. Noah smiled as he held Luke's head against his neck, tightening his legs against Luke's waist. They'd needed this. He needed this... his Luciano inside him.

"Yes... Luciano, fuck..."

Luciano's hands gripped his buttocks, holding him up as Luke thrust deep.

"So good, love you... love... inside... oh fuck. Luke. Oh Merlin FUCK!"

Noah felt the moment he let go. Felt Luciano tense and the heat of his seed inside. He was trembling, leaning them both against the wall so they wouldn't fall.

"Better?" asked Noah.

"Mine!" whispered Luciano fiercely as Noah held him tight.

Noah slid his legs to the floor and waited a moment before letting them bear his weight, then he carried Luke to bed, letting their shredded clothes fall to the floor. He slid into bed and held Luke's head against his chest, letting their legs entwine loosely together. He could feel Luke's smile against his chest, Luke's hand caressing the claim mark over Noah's heart. Luke loved to do that. Making constant little jolts of pleasure that sunk deep into Noah.

"What is it that has you worried, love?" asked Noah.
"This," said Luke, scraping the mark at Noah's neck and sending a shudder through his body. "It... it seems like it's easy, but it's not. You know. I mean... you *gave* yourself to me. Forever."

"You think Viktor would do that to Neville?"

"I just. When I first laid a claim on you, Noah. I didn't. I didn't tell you. I didn't let you choose."

"I chose," said Noah. "I chose when I offered."

"But you didn't know," said Luke softly.

"I was willing to take the risk," said Noah, kissing the soft blonde locks as Luke rested, still pillowed on his chest. "I needed this," Noah touched the bloody mark on his neck. "I wanted it."

"But will Neville?"

"You think he'd claim without?"

"I worry that they haven't talked, bubby," said Luke, holding Noah tighter. "Nev needs to have that choice. I... I don't want Nev to..."

"What if he wants it, Luke?"

"How," Luke looked pained at the marks on Noah's chest. "How could he want it?"

Noah kissed Luke gently, "I'll talk to him, okay? But don't... if he wants it, Luke..."

"But if he doesn't?" Luke shook his head gently against Noah's chest. "What if I've done something horrible by..."

"Luciano," said Noah softly, "they seemed happy to me. And I think... I think they're talking about this," he gestured to the marks on his chest and neck, "more than you think."

"Nev is scared."

"I'd lay odds that he's in love," said Noah, squeezing Luke gently. "You know how terrifying that can be."

"You think?"

"I do."

--

Neville's letter had arrived while he was at training and he was so used to waking up for the owl in the middle of the night that he didn't notice its absence until just before dawn when he woke, wondering when it would arrive, and sat to compose his letter only to find Neville's letter, the lettering showing the truth that he'd been shaking as he wrote the last half.

Viktor read the letter several times before clutching it to his chest and holding it there for a time. Neville wasn't going to anyone else to figure out his relationship, he was asking Viktor. They could... they could build from this.

Nevyenka moi -

Is being here to sort you out. But is struggling to be reading past place where is writing is wanting
of Vitya to be taking you from behind like beast. Is trying again to be giving to Vitya heart attack? That is wanting this of Vitya... Oh, my Nevynkena... is wanting to be making this come true for you. But is also mindful that is wanting you to be sure of feelings before is doing this.

Is knowing time is to be getting rather close. Is not wanting Nevya to be worrying. Is getting close, but still is being time to be letting Vitya woo Nevya. Is still being time to be figuring out of feelings. Is still being time to be experiencing of dreams and deciding if is reflecting true desires of heart. Tonight is knowing will be dreaming of hands of Nevya on chest, and cherishing this truth is sharing with Vitya.

Is wanting Nevya to be knowing many truths of Vitya that is hiding from world. Is needing Nevya to be knowing. Is not to be fair to be asking of Nevya to be spending life with cranky seeker if is not revealing truths is hiding from world.

Is not having patience, my Nevya, and so is understanding that is difficult to be so close and wanting to be knowing as universal truth. Is this what is feeling? Is this being love, or is being something else. Is knowing, Vitya thinks, what is hope of Vitya. But Nevya must be coming to understanding of feelings in own time. Is to be sharing of wants and desires, Nevynenka moi, but is needing also for you to be sharing. Is this, the knowledge of common wants, of common desires, that is telling us if this is being right.

Is believing is right for Vitya, if was not, would not to be courting. Is thinking Nevya is knowing this. But is not wanting, Nevya, to be taking away what Nevya is wanting. This is why, the courting, it is a choice. At beginning, to be considering of Vitya for mate, and at end, to be committing to Vitya. Is wishing this was easy decision for Nevya. In some ways, is being glad. For many choice would be easy one simply because of gold in Krum vault! Is thinking Nevya is looking beyond this.

Is caring very deeply for you, my Nevynenka. Is promising to be speaking more of this when seeing you. Is seeing you soon, is hoping? Please to be accepting of gift. Is seeing blush in cheek of Nevya that is telling Vitya that is having friend, or elf perhaps, to be taking of pictures. Is hoping camera is giving will erase blush from cheeks. Is not needing anyone else. Camera will be taking of photos for you. Is beyond hope of Vitya to be seeing beautiful photography of Nevynenka?

With deepest feeling
- Vitya
Chapter 32

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Rationally, of course, Neville had known that Viktor had loved the pictures. Loved them so much that somehow they had pushed him into a heat. This made Neville rather nervous, truthfully, that Viktor could have needed to be with him so badly that he'd incapacitate himself with the need for it. Especially with them both in the midst of a courtship and unable, save for this mysterious potion, to do anything about it.

And that was another thing. Where had it come from? Noah didn't know. Noah was a potions master, as coolly competent in his way as Snape had been, enough so that Snape complimented him frequently even when they were still in school. So how had they come by this potion that required the witch rose? So many questions.

And the gift... a camera. A beautiful wizarding camera. A camera that would follow verbal instructions. That would take series of connected photos. That could create photos that would repeat an image lasting for a period of minutes instead of seconds.

Neville tested it on the rose over his mantle, watching the resulting photo of the rose as it bloomed in translucent icy beauty. He smiled. He'd send that to Viktor. Neville suspected, given his own recent gift that Viktor was hoping for something a bit more risque, and Neville found himself surprisingly excited by that idea. By what he might do on camera if a house elf wasn't watching. But this would at least show his appreciation for the gift.

He sat quietly at the desk and began to write.

Vityenka moi -

I know you're trying not to put pressure on me. I appreciate that. I just. I feel like what we did, like it. I wasn't ready and having done it feels like pressure. And I know it wasn't by intent, my Vityenka. My wonderful wolf. I know that's not what. But I was there. I was inside you and it was glorious and I know that's not what US would be. Because I know.. I know that you'll want to be inside me instead. And even though I. I think I might. It's hard, Vitya. It's hard for that not to create pressure for a closeness that I... I think I want, but I'm not sure we're... I'm sorry, Vitya. I wish I was ready for that. I wish I had been. And now it's...
I don't mean to complain. I look at these pictures on my wall in the bedroom. The pictures I go to bed looking at... you, so glorious with that chest that makes me... Anyway. I know you're trying to bring us back with some normalcy as though it hadn't happened. But it did. And I loved it, but Vitya. You... you grew fur. Is that. Is it normal? Is it real? I love Luciano, and I even... we did that once. Had sex during his heat. And I didn't know and he didn't tell me until much later and I felt like...

I hope you know I'm not telling you things like this... things like my feeling like I want you to take me from behind that way, I'm not saying them to get you worked up. At least not just to get you worked up. I'm a top and those feelings, that desire to... to submit to you that way. I don't know where they're coming from. But they're real and they're vivid and they make me scared that we did things in those dreams that... that I don't remember. That I liked it. And that's why I. Did you take me Vitya? Like that? You would tell me, wouldn't you? If you had. You wouldn't hide that from me?

We're getting close and I know you say we'll talk when we see each other, but I'm afraid. The last time I opened my heart, I had it trampled and crushed. And that was from someone, by someone, that I trust even now not to hurt me. I want you to promise me somehow you won't do that. And I know that you can't, and it just makes me very scared. Because my heart is open, and I'm there, so ready to fall.

- Neville

He put the photo in with the letter as he sealed it, and sent it out with a house elf to the owlery. Then he stripped and slipped into bed, and lay watching the picture of Viktor stroking himself, and wished desperately that the man was here, in bed, rather than hanging on the wall.

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The picture of the rose blooming was exquisite. Something beautiful that Viktor often paused to watch, the blooming of that rose.

Neville's pain was so tangible in the letter and it troubled Viktor, as he slowly packaged up the gift for the next day, that Neville was so confused. And the concern about the dreams, it was heartbreaking. When he'd finished packaging the photos, he sat down, almost reluctantly, and wrote.

My sweet Nevya -

Is wanting to say first to be clear. Was not to be taking Nevya this way, from behind as beast, in dream of heat. Would not be doing this. Was suffering heat because. My Nevyenka. Vitya was forcing self into heat because was feeling such burning need for Nevya, such strong desire, that was fearing to be claiming. Is needing to be wolf to be understanding this drive, that is claiming. Is wishing Vitya could be explaining. Is wonderful and terrible and is something that is... well, is not wanting Nevya to be worrying. Would not do this to Nevya. If Nevya was wolf and was wanting... perhaps not even then.

Is not trying to pressure Nevya. Is hoping pictures are not to be taken as this. Pictures were offering of trust, but also to be showing that is listening so carefully to what Nevya is saying... that is finding sexy in Quidditch leathers, that is wishing to see more beyond what is seeing in formals. Is knowing this was wish of Nevya, and was trying... Trying to be sexy for Nevya. Was Vitya moving too fast? Is not wanting to make Nevya afraid.

Is true, Vitya is preferring to top. But is knowing, especially now, my Nevyenka, is wolf. Will be
entering of heat, and has already been saying to my Nevya, is expecting to be bearing of heirs to Krum line. Is meaning will be taking of Nevya inside, will be letting Nevya to be possessing Vitya completely during heat. Over and over, as in dreams, for days. And is good. Is wishing to be doing when can see eyes of Nevya, when can be certain is knowing that is doing because is wanting and not because is entering of heat at inconvenient time. Vitya is feeling very strongly for Nevya, but also was not to be ready for this step. Was hoping to have Nevya with feelings very strong before was happening.

Is seeing fear in Nevya, and is not wanting to be afraid. Is sometimes to be growing fur, when is losing self to beast. Is not to be happening when is in control, but heat, is being definition of not being in control. Is knowing were long time in relationship with Lyusha. Was growing fur? Is knowing wolf blood of Vitya is being stronger, but not so much stronger to be making of much difference in this. And yes, is knowing is differences. Vitya in heat is... could not be passing off as something else. Is thinking you are knowing this. Was hearing of Vitya to beg. Was feeling slick of Vitya, seeing, smelling, tasting of it. This is what is heat for Vitya, excepting without the gaps that are happening from haze of dream.

My Nevyenka, is not wanting for you to be afraid of Vitya. If is inspired by Vitya to be wishing... wishing of submission, this is honest wish of Nevya's heart and nothing Vitya is pushing on Nevya. Is not to be saying is unhappy. Is dream of wolf to be having submissive lover. Is dream of Vitya. But is not to be pushing. If Nevya was to be having dreams of taking Vitya as if was beast from behind, Nevya, Vitya is wanting to be making truth of dreams. Vitya would do this for Nevya. Not as regular way of sex, but as for special occasion. Because is dream of Nevya, and dreams of Nevya, they are important to humble Vitya.

Is wanting to be treating heart of Nevya with such care, and yet is offering gift is thinking could be painful for Nevya. Is not to be needing explanation, is thinking. Was searching for long time to be finding. Nevya, is to be forgiving Vitya... but is thing to be cherished through the pain.

With deepest feeling,
- Vitya
Chapter 33

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Luciano was surprised to find Minerva McGonagall waiting at the door of his study.

"Yes, headmistress?" he said.

"Minerva, please, Luciano."

Luciano grunted, looking rather like he'd just tumbled out of bed, and unlocked the door. He gestured to her to enter and then followed, finding his usual comfortable chair. He summoned Glinty and asked that he bring hot tea and biscuits and then turned his attention to the headmistress. "What can I do for you?"

"Do you know what's going on with Professor Longbottom?"

"With Nev? In what way?"

"He missed class on Monday," she said quietly.

Luciano nodded. "Noah told me he was ill. I was away."

"Noah claims he got the potion recipe from you."

Luke shook his head, "I merely passed on the recipe."

"And the source?"

"Is unimpeachable. And I am sworn to silence concerning it."

"Witch rose petals?" she asked.

Luciano considered for a moment before finally sighing softly. "Neville received a single witch rose from Viktor Krum as a gift. It should not surprise you that he was able to keep it clinging to life. I understand it will outlive him now, that single rose."

"Why is Viktor sending Neville such gifts?" asked Minerva. "I know they've been exchanging
"Their communications are a confidence, Minerva," said Luciano. "And they are both dear friends. I'm afraid if you want to know, you'll need to ask them."

"And this illness on Monday?" asked Minerva, pressing.

"Neville was trying to preserve something. Successfully as it happens. I'm sure he regrets missing classes. He's mentioned to me that his classes seem to be recovering from the absence rather well."

Minerva glowered at him. "Have you seen him this morning?"

"Minerva," said Luciano with a laugh, "I just got up. Can't you tell from the hair?"

"With you, I'm never sure," she said, "whether it's an intentional hair style or a mistake of nature that wasn't tamed in the morning!"

Luke laughed heartily at that. "Well, this morning it's the just got out of bed thing. I had an idea, he looked pointedly to his idle quill, and I wanted to get it onto parchment as soon as possible."

"Neville looks... he looks unwell. Not sick but... during that year, he... he often held things in, and he looks like that, like he did when he was witnessing the depravities of the Death Eaters that had taken the school." Minerva shook her head. "I haven't seen Neville in that state in a long time."

Luciano grew concerned. "Do you know if he received an owl this morning?"

Minerva nodded. "I'll check into it," said Luciano softly.

"Now?"

Luke shook his head. "He'd know I was checking for you if I did that. Between classes. To see if he'd like lunch privately here."

Minerva smiled. "Yes, that would do." She looked at him over the lenses of her glasses. "Do encourage him to stop moping about. I realize he's been hurt, but I really feel that he... he should be looking to his future. That he's settled into a pattern from his past is a bit alarming."

"I'll talk to him, Minerva," said Luciano. "Now, if you don't mind, I need to get to my story. Romances don't write themselves, you know."

She nodded and took the Floo back to her office.

Luciano stood looking at the flames for a little while and then whispered a word. The quill leapt from it's spot and poised excitedly over the parchment.

"So to what do I owe the pleasure," said Neville. He was looking down at the small table. They were both, Luciano and Neville, sitting in large overstuffed chairs by a window in the tower room that was Luke's study. A small table between them held a small selection of sandwiches and a couple of butterbeers that sat on Grimaldi coasters.

"Nev, you don't need to hide from me," said Luke softly. "I haven't seen you like this..."
"It's nothing," said Neville, perhaps too quickly.

Luke laughed and pushed one of the butterbeers closer to Neville. "Yeah, you always say that. But you're looking down and your shoulders are slumped. Your whole body... Nev, did something... I don't mean to pry and I know it's private. I'm not trying to interfere, but..."

"Nothing happened with Viktor if that's what you're asking," said Neville, his voice carefully even.

"Yeah. Viktor. Right."


"Nev?"

"I thought you couldn't interfere?" sneered Neville. It wasn't a pretty expression on him.

Luciano sighed, his voice soft, resigned. "Nev... he's going to mess up sometimes."

"Did he write you?" It was an accusation.

Luciano shook his head.

"Then why?" asked Neville. "You told me... you said you wouldn't..."


Neville closed his eyes and twisted his face away. "Fuck, Luke, can't I just have a bad day? Won't she just... I'm having a bad day!"

"Is that all it is?" asked Luke.

Neville shook his head. "He didn't," Neville slammed a fist into his thigh. "He wasn't trying to upset me, okay. We're fine. I'm just. I'm angry and he's an easy scapegoat at the moment."

"Calling him Viktor, it hurts him," said Luke harshly. "He takes it as you pushing him away, and you know it."

"I... I just said it to you. I. I wouldn't do that to him," Neville looked away sheepishly. "It wouldn't be fair," he finished rather quietly.

"Merlin, Nev, what did he do?"

"I was always. He sent me pictures, Luke. Of me. With my parents. I mean, my gran has a few, but I was. I was always told that there just weren't many. And he found them. If they," Neville screwed his eyes shut in a way that was all too familiar to Luke. He was trying not to cry. "If they existed why... why wasn't I ever allowed to see them?"


"My other gran. She had boxes that were sent to the Ministry Library. At the time, I mean, my parents were heroes in their day, Luke. Real heroes."


Neville nodded glumly. "Yeah, I guess. Anyway, apparently they were shelved because my parents
weren't dead yet, and then just sat in a box all this time. Because somehow if my parents had fucking died," the anger in Neville's voice was palpable, "then they would have been important enough."


"He found them. He thought to do it. I just... I trusted everyone. I was told there were no pictures, so I never even looked!"

"Oh baby... shhh," Luke took his hand and kissed it. "He just... he wants to give you something special," said Luke quietly. "Something you'll treasure."

"I just... I think about them in their beds... always sick in their beds. And they... they played with me. I never got to play. Gran didn't like it. I mean, I think she was just afraid. So afraid with dad gone, that if anything happened, I'd be gone too. So she tried to keep me from. Everything, Luke."

"I know."

"I just. An owl or a cat, those were too dangerous, so she gave me a toad."

"I thought that was a cost issue," said Luke.

Neville shook his head. "I don't think it was really."

"Vitya wasn't trying..."

Neville patted Luke's hand. "I know. I know what he was trying to do. That's why... it's why I haven't written him yet. I don't. He's trying so hard and I don't want to take out my anger on him." "Who then?"

"Me, mostly," said Neville. He sighed. "Slytherin third years, possibly, a little."

"Nev," said Luke, standing back up. "Minerva is going to..."

"She needs to stuff it and come to me herself if she has an issue, Luke," said Neville fiercely. "I mean really. So I'm having a bad day. She could just ask. Instead I'm having an awkward talk with an ex-lover about my current... my current..."

"Lover."

"That's not what we are," said Neville sharply.

Luke held his hands up in surrender. "I'm not trying to put words in your mouth, Nev. It's just... I see what I see."

"It's what you want to see."

Luke nodded. "I won't deny that," he said, flopping back down into his own oversized chair and seizing a sandwich. "More pleasant topics, then. How's Case?"

"Still with Gin," said Neville, letting a hint of a smile appear on his face.

And so they talked over sandwiches and butterbeer about Casey and Ginny and the potions supply business. They talked about Luke's current masterpiece. They talked about Luke's foundation and philanthropy. They gossiped about Draco and Harry a little and talked about Noah's pregnancy.
They talked about old times and reminisced until the sandwiches were gone and Neville had to flee to class or risk being late himself.

Before Neville could take the Floo, Luke seized him by the shoulders, rubbing each arm from shoulder to elbow. "I love you, Nev. Just. Write him okay. He was trying to show he cares about you."

A smirk made it's way briefly across Neville's features. "I know. I love you, too, you know."

"I know," said Luciano softly. "And I'm sorry."

Neville slapped Luke hard against his left arm. "He's trying, Luke. Least I can do is to return the favor."

Luke nodded, blinking back a tear and tossed the Floo powder into the flames, leaving Neville to call out softly, "Herbology office," as he stepped into the flames.

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Neville sat at his desk during his free period that afternoon, grateful that the students considered his subject soft. They were busy bugging Noah for help with potions and Flitwick for help with charms while Trelawny and Neville were left blissfully alone. He finished his grading quickly enough and pulled out the store of parchment and ink he kept in his office.

Vitya moi -

I. Forgive me. I. I know what you were trying to do and it was sweet and endearing and I wish I could reward you for that. But what I felt... I was so angry, Vitya. I was always told those photos, I was told they didn't exist. And I didn't look and that's my fault. And maybe part of me didn't want to. Because of this. This anger.

I've lost my parents. I'll never get to do more than see them. At least on good days it's like they're just asleep. But the bad days... it's worse, I think, than if they'd just died. For them to be there kept like that. Gran and I fight about it sometimes. What to do, when to visit. How often. It's hard. She... she resents that I lived. The mediwiches still don't know why. They attribute it to youthful resilience. But the reality to gran is that I woke up while my dad sleeps fitfully, able to feel only pain.

Gran tried. I'd hate for you to... I mean, she resented me, but she still tried to raise and love me. But there were no other voices to hold her back when she... I think she wanted me to redeem her son. To prove that he died for something. Because that's what it is, a living death. And Herbology, I think you probably know, is not what she had in mind.

She was proud of me just that one year. For me standing up to the Death Eaters at Hogwarts. For winning that medal. For being the hero she'd seen in my dad. And then I ruined it all by starting a business with Casey. By pursuing Harry. By living with Case and Ginny and Luciano and rejecting her plan, which was following in the footsteps of my parents, becoming an Auror.

I've had enough of Dark Wizards to last a lifetime, Vitya. I couldn't do that. I just wanted a family, the kind I never had. And when I saw the pictures... I sorta realized that I did have it and it was taken away. And somehow that was harder for me to deal with than never having had it. To know that someone took it away.

I got angry. At you. And it wasn't fair, Vitya. I'm sorry. It was just. It was easier to be mad at you. I love the photos. It just hurts. To see them and know we lived like that, that we were happy, and to
see it, how they really loved me.

I feel like I'll never have that life. Never be able to give it to anyone else. And I know better, because I... I was happy with Luciano. And that means that I have that potential, to be really happy. And I'm sorry to worry you, but I want you to know, I'm beginning to really think that this, that what we have, whatever it is. That maybe it could become that. I'm beginning to really think that I want it to.

- Neville
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Nevyenka moi -

Is knowing this was difficult gift for Nevya. Please to be forgiving of Vitya. Was hoping cherished memory, to be having photos would be making to remember more clearly. But perhaps is this that is making painful? My Nevyenka, is not meaning to be making unhappy. Is sharing of burden, if is needing. Is wanting to be sharing of it.

Is promising Nevya to be telling things, to be discussing of serious subjects. Now is wishing could to be delaying, knowing Nevya is angry in his heart. But is wanting strong foundation, and is promising to be telling. Vitya has been sharing bits about his life, but is offering to be answering questions still is having about Vitya.

Is telling Nevya about being wolf. About desire to claim that was so great was to be forcing of self into heat. Of fur that is growing on skin. But is wanting to be preparing Nevya. Is answering yesterday in hopeful way. Is answering today with complete honesty. Is not so impossible that Vitya could lose control of wolf, not with Nevya, who is so very beautiful. If picture of Nevya can be driving to this loss, to need for claiming, then touch of skin could also be driving. Is hoping love of Nevya for hairy chest is extending when time is coming for fur that grows on back. Is also growing nails, and teeth they are becoming sharp.

Is not wanting to be scaring of Nevya. But is not wishing for Nevya to enter bed of Vitya and find in heat and not be knowing. Is thinking this unlikely, but for Vitya to be losing of self to wolf in lovemaking... is not being so impossible. First sign is being eyes, to be fading to black with no whites. Is knowing has been seeing this before, if only in dream. Can be, perhaps, calling back of Vitya if catching at this stage. Then is nails and teeth. In depths of wolf, is to be growing of fur in all places of body. Blood of wolf in Vitya is strong. Is not to be knowing if Lyusha was ever letting loose wolf to be seeing golden fur, but is being thicker on Vitya.

Is drive of wolf to be possessive. To be marking. Is thinking you are knowing this already. Is this that is causing reaction when is seeing name across chest, when is scraping name into skin in dream. This is wolf that is needing to mark. To be seeing Nevya wearing mark, is such pride for wolf, such good feeling is not easy to be describing.

Is hoping Nevya will wear marks of Vitya, but is wanting also to be clear. Mark by self does not
make claim, but there can be no claim for wolf without mark. Is always to be asking Nevya first. Always be letting Vitya ask first. Cannot to be claiming of Nevya unless Nevya is offering of self, so always when is being marked, be letting of Vitya ask to mark first. Vitya will be asking, Vitya is loving marks on Nevya. Is safe to take of mark if first is being asked.

If is to be taking of Vitya inside body of Nevya, is needing to be... is awkward. Wolf when... when is mating, sometimes is creating of knot. Is not knowing how is best to be saying. When is being inside, is possible, when... when is wanting to be making pups, for wolf to be knotting, to be swelling of member inside of mate until cannot be withdrawing so as to preserve of seed within mate. Is never happening to Vitya before, but is temporary thing when is happening, is lasting for long enough for seed to be doing work of making pup, perhaps the greater part of hour, but no longer. Is greatest intimacy possible for wolf, to be knotting with mate. Is not to be ashamed of hoping to be joined with Nevya in this way.

Is giving of much information, and is hoping is not too much? Forgive Vitya. Is knowing that Nevya is having concerns, and is not wishing to be brushing aside and then for Nevya to have worry that is festering. Is wishing had something whimsical to be offering to Nevya to be lightening of mood. Instead is offering of something to be defeating whimsy.

Is hearing that for professors is difficult to be teaching sometimes because of influx of joke products from Weasley store. Is having great respect for Weasley, as George Weasley is being good friend through Olya. Is hoping will be respecting, that Nevya is never revealing to other professors. But is sharing with Nevya this device. It is indicating what is effect on student that is caused by potion or curse or charm from Weasley store. Never to be having student who is feigning illness without knowing. Never to be needing to deal with mischief of students in this way. Is always knowing. Also when is being set off, detector is to be telling who was activating. Is knowing Nevya can be finding use without eliminating all fun of childhood from students.

Is wishing Vitya could be there to be comforting Nevynka moi. Is knowing this anger is feeling, and is glad to be hearing is being tempered by hope. Vitya is also having this hope.

With deepest feeling,
- Vitya

Viktor smiled as he wrapped the gift. It had taken incessant pleading with George Weasley to get hold of the device, a duplicate of something the twins had developed to help them during testing of products. George was still cursing himself for ever allowing Viktor to see it and had given him a copy of the device only after learning it was for Neville.

Viktor gently attached the missive and parcel together to his owl, and gave her instructions before sending her into the night.

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Neville brooded quietly. He'd already made good use of Viktor's gift, much to the chagrin of the students who had been in the halls abusing the Weasley products in question. But Neville was still uneasy. The letter had been open and honest and what he'd needed of Viktor, but it also frightened him. Now he had a known to fear.

His response to Viktor had been gentle but firm.

My Vitya -

I appreciate your offer to share the burdens of my past. I wish it was that simple. I'm afraid I'm not
writing a lengthy letter to you today. Your letter has given me a lot to think about. I appreciate your honesty. I needed your honesty. But it also frightens me.

The gift was very thoughtful, especially as term exams approach. I've already put it to good use, and you can assure George that his secret is safe with me. I don't want you to worry for the brevity of this letter, I just... I need to think. I wish so much that we could speak in person. This distance is hard.

I've sent your owl back with treats for you both. I feel bad, knowing that you've asked after Trevor so many times, and I've never as much as apologized to your owl who bears such heavy parcels over such distance. I'd love at least to know her name.

I'm sorry I could not make the Quidditch match today. I'm afraid here at the end of the term, with Harry so close to his time, that I am needed at Hogwarts. I'd hoped... I'd hoped to at least glimpse you at the game, though at missing the game means I'll be spared Lucius Malfoy's company, however gracious he might manage to be.

- Neville

--

Viktor read the brief letter quietly, sitting in the wee hours as he'd become accustomed. He sighed and dipped his quill into the bottle of ink and began to write.

My Nevyenka -

Is understanding is having need to be considering of what is writing. Is knowing to be offered choice of wolf as mate... for so many is being less than ideal choice. Is still hoping Nevya will look beyond heritage of Vitya, to be seeing what is Vitya that is more than just wolf. Is knowing... is knowing this is not beyond possible for Nevya. Is calling Vitya your 'wonderful wolf' and is hoping to be this for Nevya.

Is winning of game, and grateful that Nevya was not traveling for it. Was miserable again, with rain very furious and beastly cold that was chilling even of Vitya, who is much used to cold. Is now to be season of winter balls, full of dancing, and is to be attending too many. Is arranging to be skiving off of first ball tonight, as was game early in day, and no assurance of being done in time. But is still several more balls in coming week. Is wishing could be taking of Nevya. Is not forgetting promise to be taking Nevya dancing.

Owl is being named Vasilisa, after character of folklore. She is faithful friend of Vitya since school. Is important for Vitya to have owl that is protecting of privacy, and Vasilisa, she is doing this.

Is not to be wanting to give Nevya too much to be thinking about at once. Is hoping fears of Vitya being wolf, is hoping that will be passing. Is not to be giving more fears. Is Sunday by time is receiving of parcel, and so is day of rest for Nevya. Is hoping that is free from duties and celebrating of having day free of responsibility. Perhaps this day is giving Nevya time to be doing of thinking.

Is thinking Nevya in red silk is being quite fetching. Is hoping gift of today is finding as much favor. Is sleeping the night with nose buried in scent of Nevya, and wishing scent was being fresh.

With deepest feeling
- Vitya
Chapter 35

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Neville didn't open the package or the letter right away, he just gave the owl her treat, patting her head gently before sending her off with a juicy mouse for her trouble. He set the parcel aside and sat at his desk for a long time before going down to the greenhouse. He had students serving detention digging, and those that did were treated to a sight as Neville stripped down to his faded Muggle denims, worn and ripped and clinging tightly to the muscle, and began to dig.

The eyes of his students popped open as they saw muscle flex, corded and bulging beneath smooth skin, already growing slick with the thin sheen of sweat. His shovel pushed deep, a swift press of boot sending it deeper and then the dirt was lifted and piled. Over and over, his skin growing slicker as he dug lengthy trenches. The students stared. None had guessed that beneath the dull brown of his teaching robes that he was muscular. Beyond muscular. Years of digging to relieve stress had developed in Neville bulging arm muscles and tight toned calves and thighs, and the development spread across his chest and down his core, leaving him a creature of unexpectedly sculpted beauty. Sweat mixed with cast off dirt on his chest and arms and back, leaving trails of dirt and brown running down his body.

Neville stopped only to drink, one liter of cold water every half hour, pouring a second over his head and then stooping back to his task. His mind was clear and empty and focused. In this dirt and earth and the burn of muscle and exhaustion was his nirvana, his perfect place to exist and be. When he'd reached it and found that focus he began, selectively, to let things in, slowly.

Vitya. His Vitya. Would he marry a wolf? He'd known from the beginning, that's what it leads to, a courtship is love and marriage and children. His children with a wolf. Wolf pups of his blood. His digging grew more frenzied. And marrying a wolf. To avoid claiming him, his... was Luciano right, were they lovers now? His lover had forced himself into heat. And it was glorious. And frightening. Could he bear Vitya inside him, Vitya swelling to lock them together, Vitya marking him?

Could he bear to let Vitya claim him?

He knew that was what Luke had with Noah. But was Noah happy? He'd seemed so, dancing with Luciano at Harry's wedding. He'd seemed quietly pleased to be bearing a pup for Luciano. He'd seemed... he'd seemed wonderfully and perfectly content.
But those marks, those claiming marks, tearing at the flesh of his neck, of his shoulder, savagely rending the flesh over his heart. It scared Neville. Those marks. The pain. And Neville knew and understood pain like an old friend that wouldn't be let go. Could he really bear to add to that pain? To the constant stir that still shot through his nerves under stress. His price for escaping the fate of his parents, to live with the echo of *Cruciatus*.

He was afraid. Neville paused in his digging, a quick *Accio* summoning him water, and then pouring it over his head and his chest and his back. The water felt good running down the legs of his pants, trickling under the waistband. He shook his head and set the bottle at the edge of the hole, and he continued to dig.

Viktor. Vitya. Gels sent by owl for his Trevor. Pictures celebrating the memories he didn't have with his parents. The sun rising in his chambers as the rain descended in a deluge outside. Vitya in Quidditch leathers, almost naked, wanting him. Neville gulped and opened his eyes. Vitya was worth it. Whatever chance, whatever risk. Vitya was worth it. He couldn't lose him. He... he loved him.

Neville slipped as the realization overcame him in a moment of perfect clarity, clutching handfuls of earth to keep his footing. His voice was soft as he whispered the *Accio* that would bring him water. He drank it hungrily, his whole body trembling. He loved him.

Neville climbed out of the hole he'd dug for himself, now actually a good several feel deeper than his own height, some quick wand work creating durable foot and hand holds.

The students had all finished their assigned digging. He grumbled. It was acceptable work, if only just. He scanned the greenhouse and checked the dangerous plants to be sure none of the students had been unintentionally eaten, and then he went to his office, robes and shirt cast carelessly over one arm, and took the Floo to his chambers. They'd still be having lunch. For once Neville felt an urge to go. He slipped quickly into the en-suite, showering swiftly and then dressing in his usual brown teaching robes. He preferred black robes, but working with dirt required sacrifices.

He took note of the whispers and stares as he strode purposefully to his place at the staff table and tapped the plates to make the house elves aware that he was there. He almost laughed when the large pitcher of water appeared in front of him. The house elves must be trying to send him a message.

He did not return the glances that Minerva sending his way. Not now. That was one person he knew would never approve. She struggled enough with Luciano and Noah. Maybe if Luciano had been a Gryffindor... no. It was clear in her gaze looking at Noah's marks. He wondered if she ever said anything to Noah and glancing at him, he shook his head. No. Noah wouldn't tolerate it. He had been Snape's favorite and his mentor's presence followed him. Noah even had the whole robe billowing thing going. Had Snape taught him the secret? Somehow, Neville thought it rather likely.

Neville spared a moment to take in Harry's condition. He'd had a few stumbles, his balance off from the pregnancy. Draco had taken to walking him everywhere, and Neville could tell that chaffed his old friend. Still, it was hardly necessary to guess why it was necessary, as he could barely stand without help. He looked rather pale, if Neville was honest, and it worried him a little, knowing Noah would be going through that. That Noah had given Luciano what he himself had always sworn to Luke that he would. It had never been real enough to them, the finality of their time together, for them to try. Neville wiped away a tear and tried to imagine Viktor in Harry's place. Pregnant and bearing for his mate.

Neville laughed aloud, drawing a few stares as he settled into a knowing smirk and ignored them all. He couldn't reconcile the image of Viktor, all covered with hair with his belly distended.
Neville expected it to be him, really, bearing the Krum heir. And surprisingly, he felt rather okay with that. His gran would have a heart attack, but then half of what he did anymore had Augusta Longbottom in palpitations. The realization hit him again... he was in love with Viktor Krum. He poured himself several glasses of water, draining them one after another, returning Minerva’s concerned glare with a quizzical one of his own.

Neville dismissed his afternoon detention group with admonishments to study for the end of term exams and then returned to his rooms, carrying a pile of letters up with him to the Astronomy tower to think. The open air of the tower was frigid, the steps cold and icy. Neville's breath came in great clouds of fog as the heat of his body met the air. In the cold his muscles felt the ache of the work he'd put them through, and Neville groaned in response, knowing he'd pay for his over-exertion later.

He stood for a few moments, breathing deeply of the frozen air, then he pulled out the letters, and he read them aloud, one by one. This was his treasure trove. Viktor's feelings as plain as day in the words on the page. In the care. In the fear and honesty of his words. In his careful framing of the letters. In his thrill to be sexy. In his touching choice of gifts. In declaring Neville more beautiful than the sunrise that was his joy every day. He'd been too angry to reward Viktor for his loving gift. For the pictures that he was still afraid to look through and hang in his gallery.

He could fix that.

Neville climbed from the Astronomy tower and slowly made his way through the passages of the castle. He ignored the gossiping and nodded approvingly to the students who were actually studying in the nooks by the windows. The one student to whistle and cat-call he fixed with a glare so deadly that she broke out crying at once and he felt so bad that he neglected to even give her detention. The other students noticed though, and word spread faster than he moved through the castle. By the time he approached the tower where Gryffindor was housed, students were fleeing from his path before he even got close.

He whispered his password to the portrait that guarded his door and walked inside, going to the bedroom and smiling to note that the house elf had already cleaned and laundered his dirty clothes from earlier. He hung his robes in the closet and loosened the tie he habitually wore. It was a Quidditch tie today, and Vitya's gift was flitting about the field. Seeing it made Neville smile broadly. He removed the tie-tack and the tie and pulled his shirt loose, leaving it unbuttoned over the plain white t-shirt he wore beneath.

He sat quietly at his desk. He had a study, he even used it, writing all his owls to his gran from there. But writing Vitya... somehow he... he needed to do that here. Smiling he broke the seal on the missive from today and read through it quickly.

He'd known already about the weather. It was nice to hear it though, from Viktor, that he was missed, but that it was better that he hadn't gone to the match. He could have gone, of course. His agreement with Minerva had been clear. The weekends were his, to pursue a love life. To have for his own. Still, it didn't hurt to be doing a favor for Harry. It was good really, to have friends.

He opened the parcel with a smirk, knowing what it would be. White silk, black silk, blue silk. More red. Lower cuts and careful styles that would emphasize his arse. Laced fronts like an american football player's shorts, backless, corded fabric open like a window to frame his arse and leave it bare. Silk boxers and thongs that would hold his privates and nothing else.

Neville smiled and then looked a little longingly at the giant poster-sized photos on the wall. His Vitya. His Vitya being sexy. Neville slid the heavy cream parchment out and began to write.
Vityenka moi -

I worried for you in the rain. I wish I was there to warm you after. I wish I was there to dance with you. I bet you look even more spectacular in formals than I remember. I wasn't conscious enough at the time to dare to look, but I remember enough. Crimson red and black and accented by a fur pelt. Exotic and beautiful. You and Hermione dancing. You were handsome and gallant... and you still are. For me.

I want to dance with you Vitya. I want to hold you in my arms and spin and twist and move together. Pressed close. Lips almost touching. Hips pressed so tight together you can feel me hard against you. My want and need forestalled only by the beauty of our movements together. To move with joy to music. To let it fill you and express it. I want to dance with you my Vitya. I want to feel your breath close against my face, to smell your skin, to feel your hand on my waist, your hand in mine, and to see your eyes, those beautiful intense eyes, meeting mine in perfect communion as we spin together. I want to dance with you Vityenka moi. You promised.

Vasilisa. It's a beautiful name, for a beautiful owl. I'm glad that you have her as a friend. I know Trevor brings me great comfort. He's croaking now. He knows I'm talking about him. He's funny that way. He'll be really quiet and you mention his name or even just write it and he starts croaking at you. He's better, you know. Since you got the cream for him. So much better.

I never said, Vitya, my sweet Vitya, that being a wolf made you less than an ideal choice. Luciano is a wolf, and I offered, more than once, to bear him a child out of my love for him. Because he was an ideal choice for me. And that he was wolf... it was something I knew and didn't think about, because I loved him before I knew. And I think... I think that's what makes this harder, is that the wolf that I know should not matter is in the way, not because it matters... but because my feelings didn't start fully formed. They didn't start fully formed, my Vitya. That doesn't mean... that doesn't mean there's not hope for us.

I think you've given me more underwear than I've owned in my life. All of it rather skimpy. I take it you don't like Y fronts then? I... I hope this makes it all worth it.

With sweet affection,
- Neville

Viktor looked surprised as a photo fell from the opened letter. His heart quickened. With the photo was another letter, a red letter. Fuck. A Howler? After that... that touching letter? What had he... Viktor broke the seal and the picture of Neville, half naked on his bed, began to move.

"Oh fuck... Oh Vitya... I," Neville's words came from the Howler, preternaturally loud and echoing. His breath was gasping, echoing through Viktor's room. Neville was gasping in time with the words being spoken in the photo. "I want you to touch me, Vitya," he rubbed the tip of a finger around the pink tight flesh of his nipple, "like this. I want..." he leaned up and tossed and pulled the shirt off, and the undershirt he'd had pushed up nearly to his neck with it. He was a sight to behold, Neville, shirtless and smooth and rubbing his finger again like that, in circles around his nipple. He was moaning and Viktor could hear it, fuck so loud, echoing around his bedchamber.

"I like watching you... watching you stroke yourself. You said you were thinking of me. I can guarantee... oh god, dreaming of your hands on this flesh, I can, I can, fuck I want you..." his hand slid down and unbuckled his pants, opening them just enough to see the shimmer of silk. "I want you to dream of it. I want to feel you, here," his hand dipped beneath the waistband, spreading the unfastened trousers to reveal sleek black silk that clung obscenely to the swollen flesh of Neville's
masculinity. "These were a gift from you... did you imagine I might do this for you?" he asked. "Put on a show... oh fuck, feels so good." His hands slipped back up and he rolled his hips up and pulled off his trousers, throwing them to the side.

Neville's body was laid bare now, save for the black silk that clung tight to his waist, so tight against his bulging member that the deep lines of the veins could almost be made out. His hands rubbed up and down his body. "You like this. Imagining your hands on my body. That you could make me writhe like this, underneath you. I bet you're thinking it now," said Neville as his body undulated on the bed, "what you'd do if you had me like this."

Viktor gulped, his whole body shaking.

Neville took a small vial of oil and poured it on his chest, making little zig zags as it touched the tiny narrow triangle of hair around his belly button that trailed enticingly beneath the black of the silk. His hands were in the oil now, slicking his body up, it looked vibrant, alive, so beautiful. Viktor's breath caught as he watched Neville's hands move in great strokes, sensuous, with fingers splayed and moaning all the while. He slicked his arms after, letting his biceps bulge as he spread the oil over them. "I'm all slick, Vitya. Bet it'd be hot, your body rubbing against... oh fuck, it's getting me all wet just thinking about it."

And it was, Viktor could see the spreading wetness around the swollen tip of Neville's cock, the fabric darker, the sheen of the light different. Viktor swallowed softly.

"See the thing is... I don't do this for just anyone," said Neville, his arms crossed across his chest, fingers splayed as he, so slowly, so sensuously, moved them in a smooth motion down his chest and torso to the black silk. "I think you want to see... to see the proof that you drive me wild..." he gripped the waist of the silk and pulled it down revealing a tuft of soft brown hair. "I think you... I think you want to see more..."

Then Neville was rolling backward revealing a hint of tight arse and muscled back and the silk was gone. Neville let his hand settle around his cock. "I... I... oh fuck so good," he stroked up and down, just once, "I like to think you're watching this... that you want it. To touch my cock," he stroked again, slowly, deliberately, "just like this. Oh my Vityenka... I want that..." He let go of his cock and pulled his legs up by the knees.

Vitya stumbled to grab hold of a chair, then flailed backwards toward the bed. The name Krum was written down the length of the back of each thigh.

"I think you know what I'm going to do..." said Neville softly, pouring oil over his cock and his scrotum and letting it drip into the crease of his arse, and then suddenly letting it flow, slick over his arse. "I want you to think of this when you sleep," said Neville softly, dipping a finger into the tight furrowed muscle and pushing until it sunk slowly inward. "I want you to think how you made this possible. For me to lay here, my fing... oh fuck... oh yes... my finger up my arse. Fucking myself with a finger... oh Merlin FUCKING YES. Like this, just like you will. A second finger. You'll do it slowly... oh,... oh GOD. You'll... just a second finger." Neville panted for a moment and then the fingers started dipping in deeper. "You'll be thinking what it would be like... Fuck... I know you will. To dip your cock into this hole. Oh fuck... I want it, Vitya!"

He rolled over and said something that the letter translated as a "Mmmph," but the camera followed him as he sank to his knees and buried his face in the mattress, presenting his arse, wet and slick with oil, spread and open and ready. "I want it," said Neville, his voice echoing from the force of the Howler. "I want you," fingers dipped deep into his arse, wiggling about in the camera lens. "I'm a dirty naughty boy, Vitya. Your dirty naughty boy. And I want it."
The Howler exploded calmly in flame. Dimly Vitya was aware that in the midst of Neville's display that he'd come, hard and wet in his trousers, thick gushing white cum bleeding through the layers of fabric. He sat against the edge of the bed, trembling in shock, as the photo began Neville's wanton performance again.
Chapter 36

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My dear Nevyenka -

Is tortured all night by dreams of Nevyenka. By thoughts of beautiful man in black silk. By images of name written down length of thigh. Is knowing, Nevyenka moi, what this is doing to Vitya. And Howler! Is cruel, Nevya, now is having no record save for memory of words of Nevya, but was... Nevya was wanting of Vitya... please to be saying is true. That is wanting touch of Vitya...

Is Vitya daring to hope is meaning Nevya is, perhaps, moving beyond fears of wolf heritage? Is daring to hope that Nevya is considering what is meaning that Vitya is courting of Nevyenka?

Is having nothing against Y fronts. Is assuring Nevya that Y fronts is sending with scent so precious of Nevya at most intimate, these are with Vitya every night, to be falling asleep with scent of Nevya close. Oh, my Nevyenka, is cherishing this scent, as is cherishing new photo of Nevya. Is liking this glimpse past ice in eyes of Nevya. Is liking this sight, this trust in Vitya that is showing of most intimate parts.

Is daring to hope the whispered desire of Nevya's heart is being more fully realized? To be presenting so, with arse in air and ready and being wet... is like to being what is seeing in heat, and is provoking... my Nevyenka, is wanting to be pouncing now! Is hoping is realizing cruel torture is making of final days of courtship.

Is living, both of us, in desperate times, and is needing sometimes the measure of luck that is being woven of power and skill. Is making great sacrifice to be procuring for Nevya, to be enduring of social engagements and owls for years, is knowing, but is arranging with Horace Slughorn for these three vials of liquid luck for use when is needing most. Three, because if is giving only one, Nevya will be saving against dire need, instead of feeling the freedom that is knowing is safe to be taking.

Do not be afraid to be using, my Nevva. Is offering as gift, for my most precious Nevyenka.

With deepest feeling,
- Vitya

Neville read the letter with a smirk, carefully stowing the box with its delicately cushioned vials of liquid luck into a locked drawer in his desk. It was a princely gift. Liquid luck was among the
trickiest brews to master, disastrous if gotten wrong, and Viktor knew Neville could trust it, as Harry had received and used liquid luck brewed by the portly potions master during school. Three vials. Only someone like Viktor could have gotten the wily potions master to part with that much. And Viktor would be paying for years, no doubt, with owls to be answered and tea parties to attend for favors purchased.

Unfortunately, creating such temptation for Viktor had left Neville rather frustrated. He'd satisfied the purely physical urge, of course, in the shower as he washed the oil from his body, but the need. Merlin, it was a need. And as much as he wanted it, needed it, ached for it... it scared him. Except for a few times with Oliver, during which he'd accepted a foreign role as the bottom because topping made him think of Luciano, lovely Luciano spread beneath him, begging... he'd always been a top. And he wanted it. To be full. But it was more somehow, and the more frightened him.

And so for his classes, there was a surliness to Neville's manner that did not escape notice. Neville's classes were not thought of as soft for his work, for he assigned, in his own way, more academic work than many other professors. But his usual style was a relaxed one, one that allowed for error, one that encouraged repetition, one that forgave tardiness. Only the practicals in his class were unforgiving, and for those no one questioned.

Minerva had noticed, too. He'd seen her questioning glare, and ignored it. And this time when Luciano was recruited to talk to him about it, Neville ignored that too. He... he couldn't be clouded by the still hopeless loss of Luciano. Luciano had Noah. Luciano would always have Noah, and so Neville had to focus on the reality. And it was such a reality... a Quidditch World Champion wanted Neville Longbottom. To be courted by the likes of Viktor Krum, it was a dream. One that might get him disowned by the Longbottom family, from the tone of his gran's letters, but it was still a dream, a chance, a hope.

But Viktor... was he tempting fate to be provoking those responses in Viktor? Viktor had said from the start that to be claimed, that it was something that could only be offered willingly, never taken.

Neville found his way after classes to his rooms. There were no detentions. Students were being careful around him. He let himself smile just a twinge. It was probably best that he seemed surly now and then. As a young professor, one who was a student still when the oldest students had first come to Hogwarts, it was still too easy for them to take advantage of him. And he allowed it. He shouldn't, but he still did sometimes and he knew it... but so did the students. It wouldn't be so bad if he was just sometimes kinder than the others, but when the students knew. It was a recipe for disaster. Besides, his bit of surliness had granted him a break when he needed it. That and term exams.

He sat at the desk in his bedroom looking longingly at the pictures of Viktor. Would Viktor be his? Was that... did he want that? He sighed softly and began to write.

My sweet Vitya -

I'm glad you enjoyed my surprise. I wanted you to dream of me. For you to reach to touch yourself and see me there, naked and oiled and slick. For you to want me ready for you. And you want me ready for you, don't you? I know you do. I know you felt something watching me. Was it desire? Lust? Something... something stronger?

It felt good to do that for you. To do something purely to make you feel good. I know it made you feel good. It may have tortured you in your dreams, but that moment, when I pulled my knees up and let you see the marks I'd made for you... I know you felt something. Tell me what you felt, my Vitya. Tell me what it means.
I... I didn't intend to roll over on my knees. I got all hot and I felt empty, so empty, even with my fingers, I was empty, and I wanted you. I wanted you on me, Vitya, I wanted you wrapped around me and pounding into me. I wanted to feel the hair on your chest against my back. I wanted to feel it. How can I want that? Why can't it be simple? Why can't I be dreaming of my cock sheathed in your arse with you begging for me? That's what I had with Luke. That's what I know. It's what I wanted. And now I'm so unsure of what I want. I just... I want it with you. Whatever it is. Do you understand... I mean, do you know what I'm saying to you? If you figure it out tell me. I'm still very confused. But I... I want to explore it. With you.

But what you... I know it's not simple. And I know you're a wolf, and truthfully it's not that. It's not even the idea of being a bottom, although that is unexpected, that I would want that. It's... fuck Vitya, I look at Noah and what Luke does to him... and if I didn't see the promise marks, if I didn't know what they meant, I would be afraid for him. It looks like he's injured and I think of Luciano, the Luciano I remember, such a tender and submissive lover, and then I see the marks and I can't... I just can't reconcile the two.

I know we can resolve this. I want to resolve it. Because Vitya, my Vitya... I want to kneel like that for you. I want you to take me like a beast and I love that I want that. I just need to find a way to know that it doesn't mean... I need to know that I...

Oh Vitya. I need to see you. Soon, please.

- Nevya
Chapter 37

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The Howlers were not unexpected. Viktor endured them, letting them scream at him and then explode and wishing he'd learned the art of avoiding such letters. His father had taught him from childhood that every word from the people was to be cherished, whether screamed or shared quietly with a nod of approval, and so Viktor listened as the girl's father yelled.

Refusing to attend the second winter ball had consequences. He'd known it would, of course. The rank and status of the various noble families were a delicate balance, and who the son of the boyar decided to take to a winter ball mattered. It mattered to the families of the nobles, to the balance of power. He shook his head. His father would be furious. No doubt Gregori Krum was up next to *the Dawn over Beauxbatons* listening to the same angry parents screaming about Viktor's failures as a son of the boyar.

He was writing his daily letter to Neville when his father arrived at his sanctuary. The older man stood and glared at Viktor. "Why was not taking girl to ball?" he said firmly.

"Last time was in public with girl, was hurting my Nevyenka. Is not to be doing again."

"Is still to be thinking boy will be accepting of you after witnessing of heat?" asked Gregori.

His son shook his head. "Is not important. Is loving him, papa. Must to be trying."

"Is knowing pain is going through to be calming of girl's father?"

Viktor glared at him. "Is not to be taking just anyone to ball. Was not taking someone else, was simply not to be going."

"It looks bad, Vitya, my son, when son of boyar is neglecting of social scene."

Viktor gulped. "Is another ball tomorrow."

"Is good," said Gregori, his expression easing somewhat. "Choose girl to be taking."

"Is wanting to be taking Nevyenka mo. Is wanting to be taking public of courtship, papa."

"You are my son," said Gregori firmly.
"He is courted, papa, properly," said Viktor, standing. "Was teaching Vitya that there is no shame in this if is loving him."

"To the other boyars, this will be same as declaring of mate," said Gregori Krum, his expression dark. "Is needing to be very sure."

"Papa, was being sure on fourth day."

"And Neville Longbottom," asked Gregori, moving to stand next to Viktor. "Is he also feeling this?"

Viktor looked over to the photo of him standing on his broom handing the snitch to Neville. Neville stroking his face with that expression of love and adoration. "Is only to be asking whether is realizing this truth in heart, or still being afraid to admit it."

"Vitya..."

"Papa, courtship, it is making Vitya very happy, to be sharing these things with Nevya. Is wanting to be offering him..."

"Will accept claim?"

"Was knowing at start that no wizard would be accepting claim. Papa, is being a quarter. Is strong for wolf blood, claim would be savage. Is knowing no wizard that is not sharing of wolf blood..."

"Should be wanting if is mate!"

"And did Mama?"

"Is being different," said Gregori quietly.

Viktor shook his head. "Not different. Is knowing was loving Mama. Courted her, as Vitya is doing with Nevyenka moi. Is to be passing down of name. Krum will endure in child of Vitya and Nevya. Is being," he grasped Gregori's arm. "Is being what has told Vitya from early age is wanting."

"Only if he is loving you."

"Is what courtship is to determine. But look," said Viktor, pointing forcefully at the photo over his desk. "Be looking at expression on face of Nevyenka. What is telling you?"

"Is having six more angry Howlers tomorrow, this is what is telling me."

"Is courtship, Papa. Law is protecting of sanctity of this practice."

Gregori turned away. "Be going to ball. Is not for father to be choosing partner for dancing, but is important over all things to be going."

"Even if is taking Nevyenka?" Viktor called out at his departing father.

"If is taking Neville Longbottom, be sure to be dancing with him. Boyars will be knowing is not serious if Vitya is not dancing."

"Papa. I love him."

Gregori stopped for a moment. "Then is best to be winning him soon. Is having left very little
time." Gregori hesitated a moment more and then strode away.

Viktor sat nervously and resumed his letter, finishing it and packaging the gift before lifting Vasilisa off her perch and gently attaching the items before sending her off.

--

Neville grumbled at the owl as it tapped impatiently at his window, but he understood why quickly. The package today was rather heavy. He set the parcel aside and opened the letter.

Nevyenka moi dorogoi -

Is spending day yesterday with master working on wands. Is wonderful work, to be spending day with essence of magic, to be training it to focus and adapt and work with magic in air and drawing from magic of wizard to be creating of something beautiful and powerful. Is wishing could be sharing of what is meaning to Vitya, to be creating wands. Soon, my Nevyenka, will be understanding. Is hope of Vitya.

Is in seasonal break from Quidditch games, as is knowing, and not to be having new games until start of year. Is not stopping from training, which is necessary to be maintained, but is glad to be having break. Is sick of hearing from teammates of parties and balls. Is wanting to be spending quiet time with length of wood and phoenix feather and to be making of it understanding that is more than just Vitya, that will join and partner with wizard.

Father was to be visiting today, to tell Vitya how is being miserable son for failing to be taking of girls to ball. Do not be misunderstanding. Is loving Papa, but is sometimes being the Boyar, and in these times, is being pain in arse of Vitya. Father is unhappy is missing so many balls. Is to be expected of son of the Boyar to be going. Who is taking, is making news and gossip and setting of delicate web of relationships between all of boyars. So to be simply missing of balls is making of Vitya's father much anger and frustration with Vitya.

Is not needing to be telling Nevya that what is feeling when is looking at picture of Nevya, stretched and open and presenting... this is not simple thing. Is feeling first drive of wolf, to take, to claim, to breed, like as to beast. Is knowing is wanting of taking part, and is to be nervous about breeding part. But is thinking what is scarifying of Nevya is claiming part. Is Vitya being right about this? That is not to be afraid of Vitya as wolf, but is afraid that is being claimed by Vitya?

Is grateful for confusion of Nevya. Is not wanting to be surrogate for Lyusha. Was loving him dearly, sharing of heritage and bodies together. Loving each other. Is knowing, Vitya is thinking, that is not to be terribly tender or submissive in manner of loving. Even when Nevya was taking in dreams of heat, was not being like this. And is good. Is meaning that what is building between Nevya and Vitya is standing on own, is new and separate and cherished for Nevya and for Vitya and not for memories that cannot be living in. Is not against taking of cock of Nevya inside and begging for more. Will do this for Nevya in heat. Will scream for Nevya. Is wanting to be screaming for Nevya in this way.

Knowing that is moving to knees, that this is impulse of Nevya, to be presenting this way for Vitya, is not knowing how much is meaning to Vitya. Is seeing this sight, of Nevya laid bare in this way, stretched and aching for Vitya and is barely holding at bay the beast that is living in skin. And is knowing this is scarifying Nevya, and is wishing... We will be exploring this, my Nevya, to be finding what is meaning together. This is what is wishing, not to be dictating of terms, but to be finding what is meaning to be both Vitya and Nevya together. Is seeking mate, sweet Nevya. Is wanting it to be you. Is hoping that it is being you.
Is knowing it is being very difficult for Nevya to believe that beast is living inside of Lyusha. That when is mating with Noah, the beast within is marking and claiming of Noah in this way. Is knowing that... Nevya, the marks of a claim are being, no doubt scary to witness, to see openly. Is knowing is appearing savage, like is tearing out of throat. Is mark of trust to be offering neck so. To trust that mark will be one of claim. To trust that will be biting deep enough to be laying total claim on body and not to be damaging. And is knowing that Lyusha is making deep marks. But mark on neck is truth of claim on body, that Noah is belonging completely to Lyusha, and is able with these marks to be making Noah feel such pleasure. To be surrendering completely.

Mark on chest is claim on soul and on heart. Mark is always vicious and deep. To endure this mark is showing of love for wolf. Is giving of heart and soul to wolf to cherish, and wolf is showing that heart and soul are claimed with mark. To touch such a mark... is knowing when is touched there that is loved completely, that soul is being shared and cared for. That is safe with mate.

Is not knowing what is feeling of wolf to be making such marks, because has never been making. But is knowing that for mate claimed in such a way, is not meaning pain that Nevya is thinking, not in way that Nevya is thinking. Is act of total love to be marking of mate in such a way, and cannot be done in violence. Is knowing, to be marking in such a way is seeming by itself to be violence, because it is a bite, it means some pain for the mate being marked, but to wolf this is. My Nevya, please, is not trying to be scaring of Nevya, only to be explaining. Is knowing is hard for Nevya to see Lyusha that is thinking of in this tender submissive way to be scaring Noah by making of such marks.

My Nevya... is to be seeing you soon. Is promising Nevya this. Is giving to Nevya many oils for massage. Was making of Vitya very hot to be seeing Nevya rubbing of oil over body and is wanting to be doing this for Nevya. To be touching Nevya. To be using hands and oil to be making of Nevya whimpering puddle of desire. Is able to be doing this, and hoping for opportunity to be sharing this skill with Nevya.

With deepest feeling,
- Vitya

Neville looked over the box of massage oils. He couldn't help but feel a twinge of excitement at the idea, Viktor's hands rubbing him that way, massaging the oils into his body. Neville smiled at the thought.

My dearest Vitya -

I can't write much today. We're near the end of term and I have a day full of practicums for the students that require not only care and attention during the exercise, but also a great deal of set up time, and for those who prove less capable, a great deal of time to undo their damage. This means, sadly, that I will be busy late into the night tonight.

I wish I wasn't. I wish I could sit on this bed for you and make you desperate for me. I wish I could hear you screaming my name as you come, looking at those photos of me. I want to believe you scream my name. I want to believe that you stroke yourself looking at me stretching myself open for you.

I wish there was something I could do to help with the winter ball situation. I'm sorry that your father is making difficulties about it. I thought... I thought he was understanding about this... about us. I'm not wrong, am I? That there is an us? Merlin, I want there to be.

I love hearing about the wands. I love knowing that there is so very much more to you than Quidditch. It makes me proud to know you share these things with me. Maybe that's silly, to be
proud for something like that. But it thrills me. To think that you share that with me, that you trust me, that you want for me to know the thrill of touching a wand and a core and making it something more. I want to make us something more.

You're right, it's the claiming aspect that scares me. And I know you've said that it requires me to offer. But what is an offer? Saying that I want you to mark me before you ask to mark me? It scares me that something as simple as wanting that could put me in danger of being claimed. Because I... when we were in the dreams you made such wonderful marks on me. And they made me feel...

So massage oil. Does this mean you really want to touch me? I think I want to let you. I know I'm still afraid, but that... it doesn't mean I don't want this. For there to be an us. For you to touch me. I need to see you, Vityenka. I need to know that we're okay, that this fear isn't destroying what we've built.

- Nevya

By the time the day was out, Neville was sure that his third year Ravenclaw/Hufflepuff class wanted nothing more than to give their poor professor a heart attack. Fourth year Slytherin/Gryffindor was little better. By the time he'd finished cleaning up the first year's mess in the greenhouse, he'd proven his prediction right. He stumbled wearily from the greenhouses making his rounds of the corridors. He looked a little longingly down the corridors that lead to the dungeons. He should be talking to Noah. Noah who could tell him what it meant to be owned. Noah who could tell him from experience what being claimed was like. But Noah hadn't avoided it... he'd embraced it, and that embrace of it scared Neville a bit.

Finally, grumbling, he did the circular patterns of the night rounds, refusing to assign detentions but taking more than just a few house points. By the time he'd made it to Gryffindor tower, he was sure Harry and Draco were going to kill him, as he'd taken something nearing fifty points from Slytherin. Not that Gryffindor had fared all that much better. Their solution to stress seemed to be to shag in the broom cupboards. Neville was young enough to be willing to turn a blind eye to some sexual activity, but when it was open enough that the first years could stumble into it, he had to act.

He didn't go immediately to sleep. Not that he wasn't tired, it was just... the last days of letters had been so draining, all the talk about wolves and claiming and everything. He didn't want to lose the central truth. The one he hadn't told Viktor. That it didn't really matter. He was in love. No fear would cause him to lose that.
Chapter 38

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Viktor read Neville's letter with somber, intense eyes. He'd known, of course, that he would never have an opportunity to claim Neville. That Neville would never allow him to truly yield to his beast, to take Neville as he'd wished to be, brutally, bestially from behind. Perhaps they might achieve some shadow of that act, but the reality, no matter how much they might desire it, would elude them.

Viktor took a deep breath. With luck he would see Neville today. He would get to touch him. He might even get to kiss him. Tonight they'd dance. That joy was enough to forestall even the reality of knowing as a wolf that he'd never get to know the ecstasy of claiming.

My Nevynka -

Do not be fearing for this. Is something that should be talked about together, not through lengthy process of letters, but face to face, so is knowing and seeing feelings of other. Is to be admitting wish to touch Nevya, and is hoping that you will be sharing of oils with Vitya, that hands of humble seeker might be to rub of oils into skin. Is wanting that.

Was waking today to greet sunrise, as is habit. Waking alone, in bed that was missing something. Was missing of Nevynka. Was missing of Nevynka sharing of bed. To stroking of hair. To be watching as eyes are fluttering open and having joy of seeing azure fire burn beneath ice. Is wanting to be waking together like this, for first sight to be only thing more beautiful than sunrise, for first sight to be eyes of Nevynka moi.

Is wishing that Vitya could have shared with Nevya beauty of sunrise. Of blue slowly being overcome by light of orange and red and brilliant orb of sun, rising over the snow. Is getting to see reflection in snow, and is devastating in beauty. Today there were being clouds, to be catching of reds and orange from sun. Is loving to see this sight. Is most perfect beauty existing in world, the proof that every day can start with such loveliness. Is watching as reds and oranges become yellows and sun becomes heavy in sky, and too bright to be looking at.

Is to be invited to another ball this evening. Winter balls is being most frustrating events, my Nevya, for they mean escorting sequined girls who is wanting in bed of Quidditch player. Is not wanting to go, but whole of team is going and insists. Is not wishing to go on arm of pretty girl. Is wanting to have Nevya on arm. Is to be making worse, even though Quidditch training is
completed, is having charity match, and is meaning to be spending of day surrounded by teammates who are being excited by prospect.

They is hearing, of course, about kiss, but is not believing. Is thinking they have promised six different girls that Viktor Krum will escort them to ball. Is thinking everyone in for surprise. Nevya moi, be coming to ball with Vitya. Will arrange with headmistress. Please, my handsome friend. I is wanting to dance. Is only time I is enjoying having feet on ground.

Was promising to be taking Nevya dancing. Was promising to be doing this publicly. Is fulfilling of promise, if Nevyenka is being willing. Is chance to see and touch each other. Please, Nevya moi, is wishing to be holding you, to be tasting of your lips. Is only to be feeling of hand on face once, so many weeks ago. Intimacies of dreams, no matter how real is being, are not being same as touch of flesh, as hand on face, as lips and tongue... is wanting to be tasting of Nevya's tongue, to be touching of lips, to be pressing of bodies together.

More than anything, is wanting to be dancing, to be holding of Nevya and letting go of world, for on dance floor there is only Vitya and Nevya, allowed to touch and hold... Is daring to hope for kiss on ballroom floor. Is daring to hope that Nevya will be proud to be seen with Vitya.

Is knowing that invitation to be dancing is not being proper gift for courting. Is knowing as youth Nevya was gifted with Remembrall. Harry has mentioned, in talking of how he was becoming seeker. But is knowing from description that Remembrall given was being very basic, only to be turning of gasses within red when is forgetting of something. This is much better model. Is not only to be turning red when is forgetting, but to be telling also what was forgotten, and to be giving reminders for crucial events. Is thinking could help with class schedules and duties at school, but also for many details of planting in greenhouse.

Nevyenka moi, is to be seeing you tonight. Please do not to be denying Vitya in this. Will speak to headmistress to make arrangements.

With deepest feeling,
- Vitya

Minerva McGonagall was most distressed to be awoken by fire call, but she saw the value in reminding the wizarding public that a hero was teaching at Hogwarts. With some reluctance she agreed to approve the time away and then shooed Viktor from the grate.

Viktor grinned wildly, completing his morning training before going to the Vratsa Quidditch pitch. The others were only beginning to arrive, and Viktor took his time in the showers before pulling on the heavy leathers that would insulate him from a Bludger blow or a fall if he was hit.

"You okay, Vitya?" asked Burkov, the reserve keeper who the team had been stuck with since Kazakov had been hit in the head by a Bludger early in the season.

"Is fine."

"You're grinning."

"Is thinking that Vitya is never grinning?" said Viktor, focusing his intense eyes on the swarthy keeper.

"It's that secret admirer isn't it?" asked Burkov, looking intently at him.

Viktor sighed. "Perhaps will be finding out tonight at ball."
"No! I promised..."

"Is not to be taking any of gaggle of girls is being promised Vitya as date for ball," said Viktor, turning away. "If is going, is to be taking someone most special to heart of Vitya."

"Kovachev," said Burkov loudly, "Vitya has a date!"

"Is not saying this," said Viktor quickly.

"Wait, I promised my sister..."

"Is not taking girl to ball just because teammate promised. Was not even going to ball."

"But you are now," said Kovachev, a man built entirely of muscle and one of the best beaters in Quidditch.

"Perhaps."

"Is good, can be taking sister then," said Kovachev.

"Is not doing this!" said Viktor, "Is not taking sister or cousin or best friend of girl is shagging. If is going, is to be taking..."

"Someone *special*," said Burkov, lacing the word with innuendo.

"Da. Someone special."

Hadjiev, one of the team chasers, walked in, adjusting his gear. "Vitya, iz havink owl."

Viktor's eyes lit up. "Be excusing me," said Viktor, pushing past Kovachev.

"She'd better be pretty!" shouted Kovachev. "Otherwise my sister will never forgive me!"

Viktor growled, a throaty deep sound that rumbled deep in his gut and rolled out his throat. "Is not to be taking of sister." He paused for a moment and looked over his shoulder at them. "And is being very beautiful. Will be seeing if is able to come to ball."

Hadjiev shook his head. "Owl iz bitink. Couldn't even zee who iz from."

Viktor smiled at that. It turned out that Hogwarts owls were protective of privacy generally, as they frequently carried confidential student information. Viktor reached the gate of the pitch and gave the owl a gentle scritch, sending it off with a treat. The response was hastily scribbled.

Vitya -

Headmistress approves. Will meet in Hogsmeade at Three Broomsticks and apparate from there. Want to share a quiet drink with you before the ball. I've missed you.

- Nevya

A howl echoed over the Vratsa Quidditch pitch. Later his teammates would say his flying that day was inspired, but the truth was that he flew with a celebration in his heart, and it reflected in his flight and stunts that he pulled to awaken the fervor of the crowd. The Vultures, of course, won the match.

Viktor kept the reply close to his heart in his robes throughout the match, and gave the snitch to a
young man who had lost both legs to a curse during the war, handing it to him with a promise that
the Boyar would see to his care.

He ignored the catcalls from his teammates, giving them all a glare before taking the Floo from the
pitch to his sanctuary. The game had been lengthy, a showpiece for charity, with both seekers
allowing the snitch to escape them several times to heighten the excitement and give the crowd a
feeling of value for the hefty price they'd paid to gain admission. The sun was already low in the
sky when Vitya stood at his balcony taking deep breaths. He showered at length, enjoying the
water, imagining that Neville was there with him, sharing touches and caresses.

Viktor oiled back his hair with care, shaving carefully and close, his skin smooth save for the van
dyke that framed his mouth. This too he trimmed carefully, then applied some aftershave, wincing
as he always did over the bit of burn. He walked starkers into his bedroom and began to lay out his
clothes.

Like most Durmstrang students, Viktor still wore the formal outfit of Durmstrang to most events.
He slipped into pants, allowing himself to wonder if Neville would wear the robes he'd sent him,
would wear the entirety of the outfit. Viktor felt his body's response to that, and slipped on a
smooth undershirt of brushed cotton that hugged tantalizingly to his body.

The formal shirt was a black that sucked the light from air, smooth and shimmering and fitted
perfectly to allow just a hint of black at the cuff when worn with the coat. Lyusha had never worn
the formal shirt. Viktor smiled at the memory as he fastened the tiny ebon buttons. The trousers
were a matching black that hugged his arse tight like a second skin. The crimson jacket was heavy
on his shoulders. Too much fabric that would be between him and his Nevya, but he was also the
first and only son of the Boyar. Across his chest were the medals that indicated his masteries.

He slung the heavy pelt that acted as a half-cloak over the other shoulder, a rich soft brown that
lent a softness to the severe almost military cut of the Durmstrang Institute formals. He examined
himself in the mirror. Yes, this was Viktor Krum. But would... would Neville be able to see Vitya
underneath? He added just a touch of a spicy cologne and then carefully secreted away the rose
he'd gone out into the woods that morning to pick carefully, wrapping it in magic and power to
keep it safe.

He took the Floo to the Three Broomsticks and waited. It didn't take long for Neville to appear. He
was beautiful in the dress robes Viktor had given him, simply beautiful. The gold buttons that
adorned the stylish waistcoat, touched with hints of red, lent an air of graceful formality to him, but
the first thing that Viktor noticed was the delicate scent of vanilla, the scent of witch roses.

His beautiful Neville. His mate. Now if only Neville... if only he would also realize it. "Nevya moi!
You... you are being a vision. Just... breathtaking." Viktor covered his mouth and Neville could see
the effort he was making not to cry. Viktor seized him in an embrace and then they found a quiet
table.

"The gifts were all lovely, Vitya," said Neville with a smile when they sat. "But I'm glad of the
chance to touch you." Viktor reached his arm across the table and Neville did the same, letting
their fingers tease each other.

"You smell lovely, Nevya moi," said Viktor softly, "is wonderful."

Neville blushed. "It's the cologne you gave me. It's... you use the witch rose to make it, don't you."

Viktor smiled and nodded. He was proud of the work to create the scent he'd made for Neville.
Potions had never been his strength. "Is fragrance for only one person, Nevya. Is making special for you."

"Vitya, that must cost you a fortune."

"Is fortune Vitya has to spend," said Viktor with that warm smile, quietly and openly letting Neville see the smile he did not grant to others. "Is hoping you liked watch. Was not being sure. Traditionally watch comes from family, and was thinking grandmother probably was not knowing."

"It was a good guess," said Neville, self-consciously patting the waistcoat pocket that held the watch.

The waitress came then with huge frozen fruity drinks. Victor looked at them uncertainly, sniffing at them with a morbid curiosity. He was used to hard liquor, these were something new.

"Trust me Vitya. Harry got me hooked on them," said Neville sipping greedily from the glass. "They're exquisite. One will keep you lightly and pleasantly buzzed the whole evening, and they taste rather sweet."

Viktor looked rather dubious. "Is believing in good strong drink, Nevya."

"I promise I'll try some of the homemade plum brandy you always talk about another time," said Neville anxiously. "They didn't have it here anyway."

Viktor smiled as he relented, taking a deep drink. "Is not mattering what is drink. You are being here with me, alone," he said, his fingers brushing again against Neville's. "Is perfect."

After they'd been talking for about an hour, Viktor stood and offered a hand to Neville, tossing a few Galleons onto the table that would more than cover their bill. "You are being certain, Nevya. This is first time in public since..."

"We were going to a ball, Vitya. I was promised dancing." He stepped close to Viktor and breathed, "Want to be close to you like this on the dance floor."

Viktor's eyes grew even darker. If they weren't courting he would probably have lifted Neville off his feet right then and taken him home. He needed so desperately to touch him. Viktor seized Neville's arm and the familiar twisting of apparition overtook them.
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The apparition destination was quiet. Neville looked questioningly at him and he smiled. "Is advantage in being very famous. Asked for quiet space where could get properly ready. Is thinking I is looking dashing," he said with a smile to Neville, stepping close, "but is thinking formal robes of friend missing something." He pulled the rose from within his tunic and let the spells on it fall. Neville's breath hitched and Viktor could see the tremor of his hands.

Viktor pricked his finger and the rose changed just slightly. Translucent petals edged themselves in white as the inside of the petals grew brilliantly cobalt blue. A beautiful blue fire behind ice. This was his heart's desire, the echo of Neville's eyes. Neville blinked back tears as Viktor quickly spelled the rose so that it would be frozen in that color, just beginning to bloom, trimmed off the stem and attached it to the lapel on Neville's robes with a quick sticking spell.

"There," he said, brushing trembling hands down the front of Neville's dress robes. "Now my Nevya is also properly dashing."

"Vitya, I..." Neville's voice caught. A true master of his craft, he couldn't fail to know the truth of the rose's admission.

"It is right that Nevya should know," said Viktor, setting a trembling hand over Neville's heart. "Is being dinner, and dancing, and meaningless pleasantries. Also, I fear many photos by press. Is ready?"

Neville, raised pure blood, had the ever present handkerchief of a gentleman in his pocket and quickly retrieved it and dabbed the tears from his eyes. "I'm ready."

"Is being lovely. Is first time attending event like this with person of choice on arm," said Viktor. "Is making feel rather giddy, yes?" He stroked Neville's cheek gently. "Is being happy tears, is hoping."

Neville nodded and wrapped his arm in Viktor's as the Quidditch champion led them from the room. A house elf met them and directed them down a narrow hallway and out a door into a throng of people filing into a great hall, each stopping to be announced at the top of the stairs. Viktor looked around the throng of people, recognizing many. Before he'd disappeared from public view outside of Quidditch, Viktor had attended these events regularly as a duty of his station.
A rather tall house elf met each person or couple just before they got to the stairs and brought their names to the announcer, who stood arrow straight at the balcony in formal robes, pounding a staff into the floor when announcing the most famous or prominent. There was a steady litany of those right now as the heads of several major families had arrived.

"The Honorable Lucinda Walsh, Head of House Walsh, Senior Witch of the Wizengamot!" announced the man. The woman in the famous peach color robes she favored floated down the stairs in an elegant swirl of color.

"Lord Zabini and Miss Parkinson!" he continued.

There was a great echo as he pounded the staff for the next one. "Minister of Magic, Kingsley Shacklebolt."

Viktor watched as teammates were announced, pretty girls on their arms. He smirked. None of them had seen him yet, had witnessed the beauty that was his Nevya. Of course there were many society names. Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy were there, their star burning brightly since Harry's wedding to Draco had softened the black marks on the name of their house.

He noticed the start in Neville's step when Seamus Finnigan was announced. The young man was looking somber, there with a girl on his arm. Viktor did not remember Seamus well, except that the boy had a flair for pyrotechnics, but he was surprised by Neville's reaction, and gently steered them away from the young man. It was just as well, the press circled around Seamus like vultures. He'd built a reputation as a playboy over the years, but his eyes looked haunted.

And then there were the foreign dignitaries, of which there were many. The line of the more well known continued, and indeed that included many names Viktor recognized as classmates of Neville, as people he'd known, peripherally, during that year at Hogwarts. Viktor and Neville finally reached the top of the stair. The announcer looked at the house elf his eyes wide. He pounded his staff into the floor sending sparks from the base of it and an echoing thunder through the hall. "Ladies and Gentlemen, assembled guests, we are honored to welcome Professor Neville Longbottom, of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Order of Merlin, First Class," he bellowed, the crowd giving the appropriate awed deference to the announcement, "escorted by Quidditch World Champion Viktor Krum!"

Viktor guided Neville quietly to the top of the stair and held him there for a moment as the crowd hushed.

"What are they looking at?" said Neville as he murmurs filled the hall.

"You are being hero, my young friend. Greatest honor our world can bestow. Is what, ten living who have such honor?" he sighed softly. "No one was believing photos of us kissing, Nevya," he admitted. "Was expected here with pretty girl, any one of several, and be trusting Vitya, teammates were giving many options. Instead is being here with hero of war on arm."

Viktor set a precise pace down the stairs, one he could tell seemed too slow to Neville. Of course Viktor was used to this. Neville could feel the eyes of Viktor's teammates on him. When they reached the landing the announcer continued calling out the names of the guests, but the room ignored the litany of names, still watching the pair.

"Would be putting to rest doubts," said Viktor quietly, not daring to hope, "if was sure Nevya would be..."

Neville leaned over and kissed him then, cutting off his words as they reached the lower landing of
the stair. Viktor could feel the hot flash of wizarding cameras as the press took the picture. Could feel the flush rising to his cheeks as Neville gave him what he most desired. The kiss was too brief, leaving Viktor with visions of heat, of their bodies together, filling him with a rather desperate urge to do more than just kiss. Neville was lucky to have traditional formal wear. Viktor's desire, on the other hand, was readily evident in his tight black trousers. Viktor found himself unexpectedly glad rather than embarrassed.

They reached the floor and were quickly set upon by the various dignitaries. Viktor tried to remain calm but quickly grew flustered, but he was stunned by Neville's unexpected air of tranquility. Neville responded to the pleasantries with the quiet assurance of a pure blood, automatically greeting the dignitaries and offering the customary pleasantries. Viktor hated this part, but he responded when Neville prompted him, taking reassurance from the hand on his arm, from the quiet scent of desire that wafted to him mixed with Neville's cologne.

The reporters, amazingly, stayed back, save for one emerald clad witch in form fitting robes trimmed with ermine. She studied them curiously before she approached, slinking up to them casually but forcefully, as though daring the others to contravene her rightful place to ask the first questions.

"Ms. Skeeter," said Neville, his scent growing dangerous. Viktor squeezed his arm gently in reassurance.

"Isn't this lovely," said Rita, looking pointedly at famous seeker. "Any quick quotes for your fans, Viktor?"

"Vitya is..." began Neville forcefully.

"Is okay, Nevya," said Viktor softly, brushing Neville's arm lightly with a hand before securely entwining their arms again. "Has promised Ms. Skeeter three answers. Is being sure before answering that this will count as one?"

Rita grimaced, but nodded.

"Be asking then," said Viktor, his voice oddly loud over sudden quiet. Viktor did not answer reporters' questions, and the other reporters were looking with pure hatred at the ermine clad witch.

"Is this a date?" asked Skeeter. "You and Mister Longbottom?"

"Is thinking, Ms. Skeeter, that you are wasting question with obvious, but yes, is date. Is very pleased," said Viktor, looking at Neville with undisguised caring, "for first time to be having real romantic interest on arm at ball."

"So you're gay?" asked Rita

"Is being second question," said Viktor firmly.

"Bloody literal minded... fine then," said Rita, her frustration plain. "But a proper yes or no answer, and reasonable explanation, Viktor."

"Yes, is being gay," said Viktor, his voice growing a little distant. "Is having preferred company of men for romance since school. Being hidden... is giving relationship poor chance of success. Lost someone precious once," Viktor sighed, receiving gentle reassurance from Neville's gentle squeeze as he grasped Viktor's arm, "because of unwillingness to have him on arm. Is not taking chance with Nevya."
Rita looked surprised and smiled as her quill continued scribbling. "Thank you, Viktor. That is the most honest answer I think you've ever given me."

"Is not normally to be giving answers at all," said Viktor plainly.

"Too true," said Rita. She swirled around them, running a finger along their backs before facing Neville. "Mister Longbottom. Can I call you Neville?"

"No," said Neville, glaring at her with a gaze so cold it burned.

She calmly returned the glare. "And we were being so friendly," she said, and then let out in an accusatory rush. "Did you dump Oliver Wood so you could add Viktor to your list of conquests, Mister Longbottom?"

"Vitya promised you answers, Rita, not me," said Neville, his voice still cold. "But I will answer if and only if you count it as the third promised answer and leave us be for the rest of the night. No grainy photos of sex on the shore of the lake. We'll grant you a posed shot, and allow a candid shot while we're dancing, but that's it."

She gave him a look. "You're rather more dangerous than anyone gives you credit for, aren't you?"

"Yes." Cold fire burned in Neville's eyes behind the icy chill.

"Done."

"Viktor is not a conquest. He is courting me under the formal traditions that cover pure blood relations outside of promise bindings. A proper courtship. It is true," Neville looked pained, "that I ended the relationship with Oliver under less than ideal circumstances. He was in love with me," Neville looked directly at Viktor, "and I know what that is. I couldn't return his feelings, not like that, and having been in love before, I wouldn't settle for something less," he shook his head sadly turning back to Rita, "never something less. It was an amicable parting, Ms. Skeeter, and Oliver is a good and close friend."

"To both of us," added Viktor firmly. "A very good friend. I would not be betraying friend like that. Was asking permission of Oliver as courtesy before courting Nevya. He was awaiting early responses with Vitya, while was biting of nails waiting. Is hoping Oliver is being happy for Vitya, that is having such joy with Nevya."

Skeeter looked to be about to ask another question or six and Neville cut her off. "That is four answers. Three from Viktor, one from me. Photos?"

Rita nodded and gestured towards a hallway where her staff photographer awaited. The photographer was efficient, if demanding, but they managed to get through the formal posed picture quickly and then returned to mingle with the crowd.

"Mister Longbottom," said Lucinda Walsh, floating closer. Luciano's grandmother. Lovely. "I had hopes you and my grandson would reconcile."

"I will always love him, Ms. Walsh," said Neville. Viktor could immediately sense his mood sinking.

"Then maybe..."

"No," said Viktor firmly, pushing himself forward. "Lyusha is making choice. Lyusha has claimed mate, there is no tearing them apart."
"But..."

Viktor's eyes burned, dark and intense. "Pack is supporting choice of Lyusha, Ms. Walsh," said Viktor flatly. "You is needing to accept this. Noah is making Lyusha very happy. More happy than is ever seeing him."

"I..."

"Accept it," said Neville softly, grasping Viktor's arm tightly. "I have."

The witch looked rather taken aback. "I thought..."

"Do not be getting caught in past. Noah is future of our Lyusha. Is thinking you will be bearing much regret if you is not realizing this," said Viktor, his voice still flat.

"But Neville is a hero!" said Lucinda.

"Is knowing this," said Viktor firmly. "But Noah is being mate of Lyusha. Chosen mate. Claimed mate. Is thinking that not work of promise binding, but of love they have for each other. Is loving Lyusha too. Is hard to be letting go, is hard to be trusting him to other hands. But is being what Lyusha is wanting. Is having respect for choice of Lyusha."

"Also," said Neville with sudden fierceness, "If you didn't notice, I'm taken." He smiled as he wrapped his arms around Viktor affectionately. "And happy."

"Is being happy?" asked Viktor, flashing Neville that too rare grin.

"Mmmm. Very," breathed Neville into Viktor's ear.

Viktor beamed and took Neville's arm, nodding formally in parting to Lucinda as he pulled Neville away and weaved his way through the crowd to where the guests had already started to be seated for dinner. They were seated with a rather eclectic group that contained none of Viktor's teammates. Viktor breathed a silent sigh of relief at that.

They ate dinner quietly, making small talk, and flirting gently with each other. Every so often Seamus Finnigan, who had been seated with them, would try to include Neville in the discussion, though Neville steadfastly refused to address the playboy even when Finnigan pressed him. Viktor was about to act himself, noting Neville's obvious discomfort when Neville fixed a gaze upon the Irish firebrand and said simply, "I don't know what she did, Seamus. But I know if you push me any further, I'll ask her to do something worse." Seamus blanched completely white and didn't say another word.

"Was thinking he might be ex-lover," said Viktor when they finally got away from the table.

"No," said Neville, glancing back, "thank Merlin, but he'd always wanted to be."

"Something else..."

"Yes, Vitya, there's something else going on there. No, I'm not going to tell you what. We all swore," he pressed a finger onto Viktor's lips. "Please don't ask."

Viktor grunted but took Neville's hand. "You wore them... the robes is meaning."

"Did you think I wouldn't?" Neville sighed. "I don't really own anything else appropriate anyway."

Viktor moved close. "Is fixing this for you," he said quietly. "Is thinking is looking perfect. Could
be watching you all night and be thinking time well spent."

Neville smiled. "You look fantastic. I always thought Durmstrang formals were rather dashing. And the medals... what are they anyway?"

"Is subjects of mastery at Institute. Is like to receiving highest score on NEWT levels. Not only subjects is receiving recognition, but those for which received true mastery."

"Herbology?"

Viktor nodded. "Is sharing love of subject with Nevya moi."

"So are you wearing something sexy underneath all this?"

"Is Nevya wearing full outfit was sending?" countered Viktor softly, his body so close now, his voice low and sultry and meant only for Neville's ears.

Neville leaned in, "The silk is driving me mad, you know."

Viktor trembled. "Is wearing same silk," he said softly. "Is wishing is all was wearing, to be close to you, both of us..."

"At least I can touch you," said Neville, stroking a hand over Viktor's ear and through the slicked back hair. "I was going mad with need for just the feel of you."

"Come," said Viktor, seizing his arm. "Is thinking I promised dancing."

Neville leaned in for a brief kiss. Short but affectionate, leaving the taste of him on Viktor's lips. "I like that idea," he said, letting Viktor lead him out onto the floor. It was obvious that Neville normally led, but he was graceful in taking direction from Viktor. And Viktor, always unsteady on the ground in normal circumstances, was as graceful as he was in the air once on the dance floor, spinning Neville around effortlessly, dipping him, kissing him openly and often, and then swinging again in delicate steps around the floor.

Neville felt the heat of the flash of a wizarding camera as Viktor dipped him low and kissed him again. Viktor ignored the press of the cameras. That the picture would be front page news only fulfilled his vow to Neville to be open about their relationship. Right now his focus was Neville, to hold him and touch him and cherish him. They were being watched. There were other skilled dancers on the floor, men like Lucius who effortlessly glided about the floor with Narcissa in his arms. But Lucius dance was a technical masterpiece, spinning like clockwork. Vitya, he had them moving as though the music were living and organic and expressed through them. It had an entirely different character... it was a fire, and Viktor had made Neville its heart, letting Neville feel his passion.

It was late when they finally stood at the gates of Hogwarts in the early hours of the morning. Viktor held him, trembling. "Is not wanting to let Nevya go."

"You could come up with me," Neville said softly, knowing his offer would be refused.

"Is wanting very much," said Viktor, "to be touching you this way, but would be breaking courtship."

"Do you really intend..." asked Neville, making sure to look him carefully in the eye.

Vitya looked at him and nodded. "Is right. Is always intention, but is going into it joyously."
Neville gulped. "I... I wish I could..."

"Is being Nevya. Is thinking this is best gift in world you could be giving Vitya. Is only gift is ever needing, for Nevya to be himself with Vitya."

"Kiss me?"

And Viktor did, deeply and passionately, pressed close against him in the cold of the morning air until the sun shone over the towers of the castle. He was reluctant to relinquish his grasp as Neville finally pulled away. Viktor stroked his face gently. "Will be missing you," he said, his body aching with a desperate need for more.

"My Vitya..." Neville said softly, moving in for one final kiss, too brief.

"Is remembering from time at Hogwarts, is already having breakfast in castle."

"I wish I could..." began Neville.

"Go. Soon, my Nevyenka."

Reluctantly Neville turned and walked up the long path to the castle. Viktor stood for a long time, watching until Neville disappeared in the distance. "I love you, my Nevya," he whispered fiercely, and then with a soft crack, he was gone.
Chapter 40

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Luke sat on the worktable of the greenhouse where Neville held his classes, waiting. Neville had only remained at breakfast for long enough to eat before the stares and mutterings of the students in the hall had proved too much for him and he'd quietly excused himself. Luke could feel the pain in his gut. Neville had looked stunning. The dress robes were new, Madam Malkin's finest. He didn't need to guess... they'd been a gift from Viktor, part of the courtship. But Neville had made himself look sexy, the hint of stubble, the styled hair. And the rose, the witch rose spoke more clearly than words. Viktor was admitting to being in love with Neville. Admitting in a way that Neville, among the world's top herbologists, could never fail to recognize.

Neville glanced up when he entered the greenhouse. The dress robes had been replaced with rather plain brown teaching robes, his face once again clean shaven, his hair no longer playfully arranged to make him look sexy. Now he looked serious and professorial, and his face was too young to carry it off, like a boy trying to wear a suit.

Luke looked at him, letting Neville read the question in his eyes.


"You know what that means, Nev."

"I do," he said quietly. "I want him so badly. I almost gave it up last night. I asked him..."

"With just a few more days left?" asked Luke, shaking his head firmly. "He'd never let you. He wants this. Wants you."

"I know," said Neville grinning suddenly very broadly. "I." He looked up at Luke meeting his eyes, a deep chocolate meeting blue. "I think he loves me."

"The rose."

Neville nodded, the smile lingering on his lips.

Neville gulped, trying to look away again. "Can you forgive me?"


"Luke..."

"Does he make you happy, Nev?"

Neville blinked back tears as he nodded.

"Then love him, Neville. Don't hold back for me," Luke stepped forward and clapped his hand over Neville's shoulder. "Don't you dare. Let him feel your strength."

"Will it be enough?" asked Neville. "I'm just a teacher."


"But what if... what if he wants to claim me?" asked Neville softly. "I think he wants it, Luciano, I think he..."

Luke shook his head. "Don't let wolf blood keep you from being happy, Neville. You were happy with me. I had it too."

"You never tried to claim me!" said Neville in a rush. "I... fuck. I think I..."

"Nev?"

Students started arriving and Neville looked uncomfortably at Luke.

"Talk to Noah," said Luke softly, turning to leave. "If that's really what you fear, talk to Noah."

Luke made his way through the castle up to his study. He glanced out the window and sighed. He had something he still needed to do. He scribbled a quick note to Viktor and sent Masha with it, then stepped through the Floo to his Foundation offices.

--

Lunch in the great hall was a sobering collection of catcalls, reproachful glares, and Neville playing oblivious. It was easy for him, expected. In truth he was rather hurt by the reactions, by the disbelief. At Hogwarts a part of Neville would always be the young boy who had so lacked confidence, and so the obvious disbelief that Viktor Krum would want Neville rumbling through the great hall hurt Neville rather deeply. He was a hero and yet here he found that self-conscious boy so hard to run away from.

He reached into his pocket and withdrew a single petal of the Night Blooming Siberian Witch Rose. It was the only witch rose to show the truth of the heart. And he was holding Vitya's. Blue fire. Looked at closely he could see the cobalt blue burning, it was on fire, because to Vitya, his eyes burned. Neville blinked back tears. He wasn't a boy. He wasn't self-conscious that way. He knew what he wanted. "Vitya..." he whispered softly. He slid the petal back into his pocket and allowed himself to glare across the hall.

Neville didn't know, but his eyes were burning. The students who had spent the morning gossiping about him were being allowed to see what Vitya saw, and they were stunned by it. The great hall
hushed, all eyes suddenly drawn to Neville, who gazed over them. Slowly, one by one, the students turned away, humbled by what they saw. A gentle soul that had sacrificed everything to stay and protect the students. Beauty and quiet power, burning unnoticed. But just now they noticed, and they felt the cold fire, and were scorched by it.

The conversation shifted then, the students finding other subjects to discuss as the owls swooped down over the tables and began delivering the mail. Neville wasn't surprised to see the Howlers. He wasn't surprised that the first, powerful enough to begin screaming when he touched it rather than waiting for him to open it, was from his gran. That didn't stop him from quietly incinerating them all, unread, his gran's voice dying before it even finished saying his name.

Neville calmly dusted away the soot and ash and pulled out the one letter he cared about, the letter from Viktor.

My Nevyenka -

Dancing has left in Vitya an ache to be touching you. Letter is being brief this morning, Nevya moi. Master is giving of Vitya time off for holiday, but soon is needing to be shopping for gifts. Is embarrassed to be admitting, but is so absorbed in finding of perfect gifts for Nevya, that is neglecting others in heart of Vitya. Is hoping to be remedying this today with day spent at Diagon Alley to be shopping. Is meaning, especially after dancing with Nevya, to be enduring of reporters. Shall I tell them you are tasting sweet, my Nevya? Is thinking you would be liking this.

Is knowing that Nevya is having only two more days of classes. Is staying at castle for holiday? Is nearing end of courtship, my Nevyenka, is nearing end and is hoping to be standing before you soon. Is too much for Vitya to be hoping?

Is knowing that gifts can to be overwhelming. Especially now, is final days of courtship and is to be... is to be proving of care is having for Nevyenka. Is thinking rose was doing for Vitya last night, but is still wishing for Nevya to be knowing is sincere in desire to be holding Nevya, always.

Is supposed to be overwhelming you with extravagance of gifts. In some ways, perhaps, is still to be doing this. But today is offering something else. Is to be showing of Nevya part of Vitya that is never showing to anyone. Mama, she passed away when Vitya was only small boy. Was barely to be knowing her. Is knowing my Nevyenka understands this pain. Papa, he would come to suites of Vitya each night, and sit with Vitya, and be telling to Vitya stories. Folk tales of wizards, as from Beadle the Bard, folk tales of region, stories also is thinking father is simply to be making up. And then he would give to Vitya little stuffed wolf toy and be saying, "Take good care of pup. He is also to be having no mama to be caring for him. Is loving you Vityenka moi, my son."

Was lost little boy, and could not be showing. Viktor Krum was son of the Boyar. Always to be image of poise. Always to be showing confidence when is not to be feeling. Always to be under robe clutching of stuffed wolf pup. Until Vasilisa, was being only friend of Vitya. Was confidence and strength. Is offering to Nevya this trust. Confidence and strength of Vitya. Is not needing, if is having strength of Nevyenka to be leaning on. To be trusting in all things. Be taking care of wolf pup for Vitya. Is heart of humble seeker is holding.

With deepest feeling,
- Vitya

The parcel was small, and plush, squeezing softly in Neville's hands. He wiped away a tear and tucked it gently into his robes. He had a feeling that the admission of Viktor's letter, that this baring of his heart, had not come easily for Vitya.
Leaving the lunch room, unfortunately, meant crossing paths with a determined Minerva McGonagall. Silently, Neville cursed his inner Gryffindor, the bit that would not allow him to flee through the main doors of the great hall, and did his best to smile pleasantly at her.

"You were to give me a full report," said Minerva.

"You want a blow by blow detail for my dates, Minerva?" asked Neville, his voice quiet but critical.

Minerva raised an eyebrow at that. "Nothing so crass, Mister Longbottom, but I think perhaps it best if we were to have tea this afternoon?"

--

Neville entered the office of the headmistress to find her seated next to a small table by the fire. Tea. Lovely. As a Gryffindor he knew what that meant... a questioning of everything important in his life. Advice, meant to be taken as a directive. It was all from love, Neville knew that, of course, but just now he'd wish the headmistress hadn't inherited the previous headmaster's penchant for meddling. Of course, that very tendency was likely why Dumbledore had selected Minerva as his deputy, why she was made headmistress by the Board of Governors when Hogwarts reopened. Why he was going to have to endure this tea if he wanted to continue to teach.

"Minerva," said Neville, trying to keep the frustration from his voice.

"Ah, Neville, please sit," she said with a gesture, pouring a glass of tea from the small teapot. "Cream and sugar?"

"Two sugars, please," replied Neville, automatically, sitting across from her, "as if you didn't know," he added under his breath. She dutifully added the sugar, pretending not to hear his frustration, and slid the tea cup on its saucer over to him and waited while he stirred his tea.

"Is... Is everything alright?" she asked in the tone she used when she knew everything was absolutely not alright. This was never a surprise to the students, of course, as they were never summoned to tea when everything was alright.

"I'm just a bit tired," he said in a hedge that had always helped him stall for time. "Didn't sleep?" asked Minerva.

"I'm sorry, Minerva, I know I shouldn't have been out that late," he admitted. "We'd just. We hadn't seen each other for weeks and with things just starting out, it felt so good to..."

"I saw in the paper that Viktor is courting you," interrupted Minerva, using a rather more forceful voice than the one to which Neville was accustomed. She sipped delicately from her teacup. "Is it true?"

Neville's eyes narrowed. He couldn't help but catch the disapproval in her tone and he didn't like that one bit. "There are twenty six gifts in my room," he said as evenly as he could.

"Do I need to be looking for a new..."

"I won't give up my job, Minerva," said Neville. "I love Hogwarts. I love teaching. But I'm not giving up a love life either, nor should I have to. I made that clear when I came." He accompanied the last with a defiant glare he was certain he'd never directed at her before. Then again, she'd never deserved it in the way the Carrows and Snape had.
Minerva nodded. "Yes, you did," she said, avoiding the depths of his gaze. "I'm not trying to make this awkward for you, Neville. I was your head of house. Unlike the Golden Trio, you at least sometimes confided in me and came to me for advice." She tapped her fingers against the edge of her teacup. After a moment she took a sip and then closed her eyes. "So, it's Viktor Krum? He's..."

"Amazing," said Neville with total conviction. "He's bloody amazing."

"He's wolf," countered Minerva. "At least an eighth."

"So was Luciano," said Neville, his voice cold.

"Exactly! I'm just concerned," said Minerva. "Courting leads to only one thing, dear boy. I see the marks on Noah and I..." she looked down. "It terrifies me that you could let Viktor hurt you that way. That I could let you do that without at least trying, Neville, to talk you out of this madness."

"Do you think Noah is hurt?" asked Neville. "Do you think that's what Luciano is doing, hurting his mate, the man he loves?"

"Look at the marks on him and tell me," said Minerva, setting down her tea as her hands began to tremble. "Such shameful marks on that beautiful boy. I was supposed to protect him. Don't. Neville, please don't do that to yourself."

"It can't be taken. Only offered willingly," said Neville softly, looking down at his tea, trying to find calm in the ripples of the liquid. "That's what Vitya told me. He managed the fortitude to meet her concerned gaze. It was almost pitying and he hated it. "I believe him."

"Neville, surely you can do better..."

"He's a Quidditch World Champion," said Neville, trying desperately to keep his cool. Did Vitya face this everywhere? This unreasoned shame at being wolf? "I'm supposed to do better than that? He's... he's very romantic, Minerva. He makes me feel cherished."

"And when he owns you, will you feel cherished then?"

*Oh, fuck yes.* Neville shuddered as he envisioned Vitya's teeth on his neck, at wanting to belong like that. He'd never actually allowed himself to think of what it meant, to think of himself in that position. He'd always been too scared to think of it that way. He was so turned on in that moment that it was painful. *Fuck*. He was so screwed. "More, maybe. If I let him claim me," said Neville, managing, barely to keep his voice even as he set down his tea. "It's something I haven't decided. What is this really about?"

"I want to make sure you've thought this through," said Minerva, looking at him over the lenses of her glasses. "I know you've lost... I know you feel like you've lost love. And maybe you don't feel you can find someone. But there are people like Oliver Wood and Seamus Finnigan... good Gryffindors who would be proud to..."

Neville's blood boiled. It was bad enough that Ron was still trying to help the bastard. "Please tell me you didn't put Seamus Finnigan on any list of good Gryffindors, Minerva."

"Finnigan was a..."

"Miserable excuse for a human being," snapped Neville with an anger he rarely let loose. His voice grew considerably softer and had an air of affection as he continued, "I'd have been proud to be with Oliver though. I would have. But. He was in love with me, Minerva. And I just wasn't. I couldn't lie to him about it, and I can't live a lie like that. Please don't ask me to," he made sure he
was looking right into her eyes as he finished, "It wouldn't be very Gryffindor of me."

"And you are in love with Viktor?" asked Minerva, her ire showing in her dismissive tone.

Neville closed his eyes. "Very much so."

"You are sure this is not just..."

"It's not."

"And what if Viktor claims you?" asked Minerva, the fear obvious in her voice.

"Then... if he claims me, Minerva," said Neville very quietly, suddenly very certain that claiming was exactly what he wanted, "it will be because I ask him to. Because I want it to happen."

"And could you stop him? If he wanted it and you didn't?"

Cold blue eyes regarded her with a calm determination she hadn't seen Neville display since that final year at Hogwarts. "Yes."

Minerva felt the chill sweep through the room. Neville's power could be terrifying. She wondered if Viktor knew that. "And does Viktor love you? Gifts I expect, lavish ones even, but what do they tell you?"

Neville pulled from his pocket a single perfectly preserved petal of a witch rose. "Viktor Krum's deepest heart's desire, Minerva, azure fire behind ice."

She looked at him bewildered. The echo of his eyes... there was a story, an ancient story about a witch and a rose. But it was a legend!

"Forgive me, Minerva. You've given me a lot to think about. If you would, I believe I should spend some time talking to Noah. He, better than anyone else, knows what it is to love a wolf."

Minerva stood. "Be careful, my boy. I worry about you."

Neville turned in the doorway. "There will be students Minerva, a lot of them now, coming to this school with wolf blood. Good witches and wizards, like Teddy. It's only shameful because you make it so. Luke loves Noah. You know it. It's written on his skin, and I don't mean the claim. Will you consider all of them as less than what they are because of their blood? This is the new blood purity crisis for us at this school, the blood of magical creatures, and you are not ready for it." He paused quietly and looked her in the eyes. "Get ready." And then he left, running down the stairs with a quiet unspoken haste and a need, a desperate aching need to speak with Noah.
Chapter 41

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When Luciano finally stepped through the Floo to his study in the Divination tower, he was surprised to find Viktor sitting there, drinking fire whiskey.

"You has been being gone long time, old friend," said Viktor in a tone that let him know that Viktor had been there for rather a long time.

"I wasn't expecting you to come," said Luke. "Not really. I only wrote because.

I just... I'm concerned for Neville."

"Is doubting intentions of Vitya?" said Viktor. "Who you is knowing all these long years?" Viktor's voice was combative, angry, made more so by the fire whiskey.

"Fuck, Luciano hadn't meant to make him angry.

"No," said Luke, holding up his hands, palms forward. "I. I'm an eighth, and I feel the call to claim, I felt it with Neville. I felt it with you. I felt it every time I was with someone."

"You're a quarter. He's afraid, Vitya."

"Vitya is not monster," he said, slamming his glass onto the table causing the liquid within to slosh over the side. "Claiming can only be done to the willing. It must be offered freely. Is wolf, my Lyushenka, is knowing this!"

"Neville is not wolf," said Luciano, slipping into the seat opposite Viktor. "Like Noah he might offer without knowing. He might..."

"Is this how you claimed your mate then, in secret?" asked Viktor angrily. "You think I would do this thing to Nevya moi, that I could?" Viktor's eyes burned with intensity as he glared angrily at Luke waiting for an answer.

"No," said Luke, burying his face in his hands. "But I'm scared that you want to. I. I always did. I wanted it Vitya. How you can not..."

Vitya sighed and lifted his glass, tossing it back. He let the liquid burn on it's way down. He poured another glass and then looked at Luciano, whose face was still buried in his hands. "Would be lying if I said this is not what is wanting. Is aching for it. Lyusha is knowing this feeling, Vitya knows this. But you. We had sex with the fire and the passion. Both wolves. Allowed each other to
surrender to our wolf heritage in our beds. Was taking you, Lyusha with tooth and claw and letting
you see the beast inside of Vitya. And neither of us ever was claiming the other. You is thinking
after that, I is being unable to hold back? Lyushenka?"

"I need to know he's safe," said Luciano in a voice that seeped with pain. There were tears in his
eyes as he looked into the intensity of Vitya's eyes.

"Is Noah safe, Lyushenka moi?" asked Viktor. "When you sink your teeth into his neck and take
him and own him and make him yours. Is he safe being loved by Lyushenka?"

Luke rubbed his hands over his shoulder and neck where the most visible of the marks were on
Noah. "I am terrified of what I do to him, Vitya." His voice was small, almost a whisper.

"He is marrying you, Lyusha," said Viktor wish a quiet certainty. "He is mate. Is loving to be
claimed, is seeing in eyes when is looking at Lyusha, when is touching mark and thinking no one
is seeing as he thinks of his love. Is not to be terrified of you at all, your Noah. Is very lucky wolf,
Lyusha. I is never having that." Viktor sighed and there was a palpable regret in the departure of air
from his lungs. "Nevya moi... he is loving me I think. Is seeing in eyes when handing flower at
ball, and is trusting instinct in this. Loving for longer is thinking than even Nevya would be
admitting to himself. But he is not I think offering neck in submission to Vitya ever."

"You are disappointed?" asked Luke. "To have seen his love for you in his eyes?"

"Nyet, Lyushenka moi. Is being disappointed will never be knowing what it is to have claimed.
Am not ashamed to be admitting this. Is in nature of wolf to wish to claim mate," said Viktor. "Is
nature to want it, to need it. Is enough man to be keeping control of beast. Is knowing risk of
choosing mate with no wolf blood. Is hard loss. Has never been claiming and never will. Is
thinking Nevya is being worth it. Is knowing this. To be loved by such a man, my Luciano. Is
knowing, you had it too. Was being enough, is thinking."

"You mean to go through with it anyway, then?" asked Luke hesitantly.

"If all Vitya was wanting was claim," said Viktor, pausing to toss back another full glass of fire
whiskey, "would still be in sorry loveless relationship with Vanya, who was always pressing Vitya
to make claim on his flesh. Wanted claim. Wanted marks. Wanted fortune of Krum family. At least
Nevya is being honest in fears of being taken."

"Does he know, that you really intend to..." Luciano sighed. "Does he know you want a mate and
not just a husband? That you want to love him?"

"Is being pure blood, my Nevya. Courtship is being rare. Is not to be being permitted to marry for
love, pure bloods. Marriage is by promise or by courtship, is being only honorable way. Nevya
was being sheltered from this, but is still knowing, I think. Thirty gifts. A declaration of love. A
declaration of intent. A token." Viktor looked with heartbreakingly uncertain eyes. "Is Nevya
accepting, you think?"

"If he loves you. If he's convinced you love him," Luke hesitated, they both knew those things
were true. "If he can make peace with your wolf."

--

Neville headed from the headmistress's office to a small locked laboratory tucked away in the
dungeons. His steps did little to mask his fury at the headmistress, his frustration, his
bewilderment. It was good that they were showing those things, rather than the emphatic
realization he'd come to. Why had he never let himself consider it? Why had he been so afraid to even think he might... Fuck. He needed to talk to Noah. When he reached the laboratory's entrance, an iron door that looked like it belonged in a bank vault, he gave the password and entered a small office where Noah studied a small blob of a tangible something in glass box very nearly as large as the room itself.

"Noah," said Neville very softly as the door swung shut as silently as it had opened.

Neville gulped. "Yeah, I think I really do."

"I wasn't sure you were going to," said Noah, walking calmly around the glass box to study the blob from a different direction. He glanced briefly at Neville. "Come to talk I mean. The bit about loving him was obvious. Has been for days."

"You don't sound surprised," said Neville, his voice still very soft.

Neville sighed. Noah was right, he had studied enough to know it. "I knew she wouldn't. I thought you might. A bit odd that the former Death Eater is less of a rule breaker than Hermione."

"Sorry, Neville," said Noah. There was real regret in his voice, a shadow of what had been there since Noah had taken Luciano from him. Since Noah had pursued the promise that now marked him and Luciano both as bound. Not that he'd really had much choice.

"I think... I think Vitya loves me," said Neville, looking at Noah. "I'm not sure how that happened."

"Yeah," said Noah. "It was like that for me with Draco. The realization. It snuck up on both of us and then it was there, untouchable, perfect, and painfully terrifying."

"The courtship is almost over," said Neville plaintively.

"He'll propose then," said Noah calmly and with the same certainty with which he might say the sky is blue.

"You really think so?" asked Neville, the self-conscious boy leaking into his voice.

"He loves you, Neville," said Noah. "I know that can't be a surprise. I saw the rose. You of all
people must know what that means. That rose, echoing your eyes."

Neville stammered a bit as he spoke. "He's a wolf, Noah. I thought I'd be coming here to ask... to ask how I could love him and not get claimed, because it scares me, the idea of being claimed."

"You'd have to dominate him," said Noah simply. "He'd let you, I think. There are ways, if that's what you want. I can..."

"Isn't... that isn't what I came to ask though," said Neville hesitantly, looking at Noah.

Noah met his gaze, his expression suddenly deadly serious. "It can't... it's a final decision, Neville. This sort of claim, like the one I have here," he indicated his shoulder, "and here," he set his hand on his heart, "If you let him make those marks, you're his. Forever. Owned, Neville."

Neville nodded, a tear coming to his eye. He brushed it away. "I know. I think that's what I wanted with Luke too. I was just too afraid to ask. Maybe... maybe it's best I didn't. Maybe this is how it's supposed to be. The marks. When he makes them," Neville's eyes glanced toward Noah's shoulder, "does it hurt?"

"Of course it hurts. But I've seen you take more *Cruciatus* than any person I've ever known... and come through it sane. I don't think the pain is the real concern," said Noah. "You're afraid that hurting you that way will mean he doesn't really love you."

"A little," said Neville very softly.

"Do you think I worry about that with Luke?" asked Noah, making a quick gesture stroking the promise mark and setting it alight. Their love written on his skin.

"It. I'm jealous that he chose to do that with you," said Neville softly. "I was planning a life with him. Planning to ask him..."

"Let's not talk about me," said Noah. "Or about Luke. A claim is about two people, you and Viktor. Tell me. What makes you want this with Viktor?"

"I... I've always just had me. My parents. You know what happened to them, Noah. So it's been me, just me. And these expectations, from everyone because of my parents. And then I was never good enough, not for anyone. Even now, I'm a hero and I teach at the best school in the whole world for wizardry and witchcraft. I'm at the top of my field, Noah. I want to not need to be that. I want to be able to surrender to someone. I want someone not to care about any of that but to want *me*. I want..." Neville struggled to find the words.

"My family," said Neville softly after a moment, "is just a string of memories in a hospital room. I want to belong to someone because they know me, the real me. Not the me that's a shade of my father," he wiped a tear away. "I am the hero. I am. I fought the Death Eaters and I stood for the light when everyone, everyone else had given up. I deserve that title, and I do know it. But Vitya... he sees the boy that knows beauty and cherishes it. He makes me belong. He makes me feel so much like I'm his that it feels natural to give it to him. Because I can. Because I love feeling like I'm his and I want to really be. I think... I think he'd cherish me being his, Noah. I think giving that to him is something we both need." Neville gulped softly. "I think we both need it. Not me, not him. We need it. Both of us."

Noah watched the fire rise in Neville's blue eyes. Watched the blue become fire and piercing fury. Watched the colors of that rose show. Slowly he nodded.

"You're afraid of the pain."
Neville nodded. "I've lived my life in pain, with the echoes of *Cruciatus*. You... Noah, you know what that's like. It never goes away, not completely."

"If you want to be claimed, the pain won't matter," said Noah. "When you offer yourself you want it. You have to. You're exposing yourself and it's as intimate and pure an offering as spreading your legs to get buggered. You've bottomed. Tell me it isn't painful."

"I... It means more than just spreading my legs, Noah," said Neville, blushing.

"I know. But the pain is very similar," said Noah. "Because it is a high that comes from giving. Giving totally of yourself. Exposing yourself completely. But more... because you're not just giving him your body, you're giving him your soul." Noah looked seriously at Neville. "Are you willing to do that?"

Neville closed his eyes. "Yes. Yes, I want to do that."

"Does he know?" asked Noah. "That you're going to give yourself to him that way? I mean, he's courting you. In what, four days? He'll be proposing to you. That makes it Christmas eve. And he'll be on fire with need by then. Only allowed to kiss you. You taking him in his heat rapidly becoming the shadow of a memory of a dream. Must be torture for both of you."

"I want him to know I mean it, Noah," said Neville with a fervent intensity. "I'm just. I'm not sure. I think... I think I need him."

"There isn't a half-way here, Neville. He'll have to own you. Take you and breed you and make you his. Are you willing to do what you need to do to be his? Bear his pup if that's what he needs from you? Give him a pup to bear if that's what he wants of you? Be his to use? You have to want it desperately, Neville, you have to need him to give you that, for him to be able to own you, you have to offer it and want it, want him."

"I do want him. I want to feel him inside me. I need it, Noah. Fuck I'm a top, how can I need him so badly?" He shook his head. "It doesn't matter. I'll be a bottom for him. Fuck I even want to be a bottom for him."

"If he claims you, Neville," said Noah softly, "If you're his, he can still demand that of you. To be taken by you and filled."

"He can? But will he?"

"If he owns you... and that's what you need. Being owned... it means being taken care of. You are there for his use, but he will need to be there for you. To make you belong and feel loved. Even if that means bottoming for you." Noah winced a little. "He'll have to claim you to do it. Rather more forcefully than usual. But it's. It's rather intimate to be claimed that way... while you're inside him rather than the other way round."

"I need to belong that way, Noah. I need it. I can't... I can't explain it any better than that. Not to belong to anyone else. But to belong to him. To give that to him. To trust him enough to know he'll be careful and cherish what I've offered to him."

"And do you trust him?" asked Noah, his voice very serious.

"I love him," said Neville.

"But do you trust him?"
"Yes. I do."

Noah hesitated for a moment. He stripped off his robes and his shirt and Neville's eyes couldn't help but rake over the lean chiseled body he revealed. Smooth and pale, it was alight with the silver tracery that framed his right side, slender and elegant and intricate, pulsing with light. It was beautiful, the light an echo of a heartbeat. Two beats, Neville realized. A second pulse, the life of the child inside him.

The left side revealed the marks that Neville had known were there but had never seen quite so clearly. The marks at his neck and shoulder, those he had expected, known. They were what made him afraid, the flesh ripped and scarred, the marks of the bite tangible, almost like he could feel them even at this distance. They were terrifying and primal and brutal. And he could feel them, there wasn't any 'almost' about it, a sense of Luke exuded from him in a terrifying presence that screamed "MINE" into Neville's senses.

"You belong to him," said Neville, terrified and awed.

"I am owned," said Noah.

"But he hurts you..."

Noah shook his head. "I am owned. This is the love of my mate, Neville. If you think of it as pain, you'll never do it."

"It's his love?"

"More than this," said Noah, a slide of his finger lighting the promise in pale blue light. "It's beautiful, but this was a desperate plea to accept our fate together. These," he gestured at the marks, "are Luciano's love. Marked on my flesh to make me his."

Neville swallowed.

"You still want it?"

Neville closed his eyes. Vitya seizing his neck, taking him, letting himself surrender to loving... Fuck. Yes, he wanted it. Slowly Neville opened his eyes and nodded.

"Your mate is a quarter. You understand what it means?"

"He's not my..."

"You are giving yourself up for claiming. He's your mate, Neville. Accept it now. It'll make this," he gestured to the claims on his flesh, "easier."

"I... I know he's a wolf. I don't know... I don't know why it matters that he's a quarter. Does it?"

"The distance from a wolf is a strength of blood, of the beast within. It's not the only measure," said Noah, "but it means. It means that these marks are a shadow of what Viktor will do to you."

"They'll be..."

"Deeper. His link to the beast is more primal, closer. His teeth will bite deeper, He'll tear you up, Neville, rip your neck and chest apart with his claim."

Neville swallowed. "I. I need it, Noah."
"Even if it means this?" asked Noah, moving closer.

The feel of Luciano's scream of "MINE" of that massive presence overcame his body and his knees buckled. "Oh fuck, yes!"

Noah tilted Neville's chin up and searched his eyes for something. "I think you're right. I think you want it." Noah helped lift him to his feet and rubbed his neck where it met the shoulder. "He'll take you here first, Neville."

"Why?"

"It's the claim on your body. He'll. He'll want to do it from behind probably, the first time. It's a primal need, he'll want to bend you over something or take you to your knees and..." Noah paused. "Neville, I mean it literally when I say he's claiming your body. He'll take it and own it, it'll be forceful and brutal and he'll do it with his teeth sunk into your neck. The tearing is because it's difficult to keep hold while he's... while he's taking you. He won't slow down, he won't be gentle. He'll take you. Your body will be his. I meant it when I said..."

"I know."

"It's pleasure. Once it's done. When he touches you here, you'll feel pleasure. He'll be able to touch you here and you'll come, just from a kiss or a nip or a touch, or his breath softly against your neck, because he wants you to feel that pleasure, and your body is his to command, giving you that pleasure is a reminder both that you're his and that he loves you. And because it's pleasure... this isn't the mark that hurts. Not really, not once it's made. Because even when he bites you, even when he sinks his teeth in deep, you'll be lost in the pleasure he wants you to feel." Noah blushed. "That's the real reason I don't let people touch it. It makes me. I mean, that's his, for him to do, to make me feel that."

"This one hurts?" asked Neville his fingers moving to the mark on Noah's chest.

He fell backwards as the force of Luciano's presence overwhelmed him again. "MINE!" the sense was overwhelming and terrifying and Noah's eyes were rolling back in ecstasy even as Neville was pushed away.

Neville managed to right himself. "Right. Don't touch the marks," he said.

Noah smiled. "They are his. As I am his. He's very protective."

Neville gulped and nodded.

"You still want it?"

"Those look deep," he said hesitantly. "How does he miss your heart... I mean, how does he not hurt you..."

"He hurts me. He's never missed my heart. Not once."

"But..."

"You have to trust him. Your love has to be complete, Neville. You're trusting him enough to give him your heart and your love. And when you do that. When he's sunk his teeth into your heart and claimed it as his, you give him your soul, Neville. As part of that trust. You give it to him, trusting him to give back your life and your soul. But when you do that. It belongs to him. Your soul, your heart, your love, your body, your life, Neville. Everything you are. You've given it to him,
and you're his. And that hurts, because we aren't meant to trust or love anyone that much. But you do. And you trust him and he takes it Neville, and it'll. It's painful."

"Then why?"

"Because he's always here," said Noah. "I'm his, and he never leaves me. I'm always his, I'm always protected, and I'm never ever alone."

"And you feel that..."

"The presence is inside me. It never leaves. I'm always his. I always know I'm his. I always know what that means, to be owned and loved completely. There has never been a more satisfying pain. To know with certainty that you will always be loved that way? You'll beg for it, Neville, you'll need it and want it. And he'll give it to you, because he'll know how much it means to you, to be his, even though he knows it causes you pain to mark you that way. Enduring that pain is his proof, Neville, that you want to be owned, that you still want to be his."

"Oh god. Am I crazy to want this, Noah?"

Noah shook his head. "No. But you have to trust him. You have to know you want it, that you need it, that he loves you so much that he'll do this terrible thing to own you." Noah looked at Neville, looked him deep in his eye, crystal blue meeting azure fire. "So, do you trust him? Are you that sure that you can do this, that you can trust him with your soul?"

"It's... it's already his, I think. He just doesn't know it yet."

Noah smiled. "It's the submission for a wizard, Neville. That makes you his. Not him claiming you. His wolf thinks that the marks are what does it, but it's what you just said that makes it real for you."

"So how do I make him realize..."

"You let him claim you. You've made the offer, but you have to make it in a way he'll understand. Naked and begging and offering him your neck and pleading with him to take you."

"I want him to do that," said Neville, stunned by his own certainty. "I do."

"And you're sure, absolutely, that you trust him with this. With you. With your heart, with your soul?"

Neville nodded. "I'm sure."

"Luke's claim on me is so strong because he claimed me in a heat. Claimed me as his mate over and over for days. You. You've seen a heat, Neville, you know what it means."

"I'm... I can't... Oh god, fuck that sounds glorious... how? How did you..."

Noah smiled. "It was. It was also painful here," he set his hand over the claim mark, "and there... because in heat there is no gentle. He would need desperately to take you. He would... he would need to claim you and the mark it would be... it would show, like mine, and it would never heal, because it is meant to be sensed and seen."

Neville looked at Noah. "You don't have any wolf blood... how?"

Noah glanced over at the cauldron in the corner. The cauldron he couldn't use because he was
carrying Luke's pup. The brew wouldn't keep. He just couldn't bear to throw it away. Weeks of brewing with ingredients that cost... he just couldn't toss it.

He walked to the corner and carefully poured a portion into a vial then turned to Neville. "If submitting... if it's truly what you want. If you're sure you trust him. If you want him to own you in your soul. Be sure you're alone with him. Be sure you have a space of days. And take this."

"What... what is it?"

"It's your heat, Neville," said Noah. "You know what that means... you'll be wanton and desperate for him. He will claim you if you take it. He'll claim you and he'll take you and he'll breed you for days. This... there's no spell or charm, Neville. This is offering up your body to him in the most primal way possible. You'll be ripe, and he'll be breeding you. Over and..." 

"I'll get pregnant."

"You're a wizard. There are no guarantees. But if you're not willing to bear, then tell me now."

"I want to. I want his... I want his pups inside me. Oh fuck. How did this happen?"

Noah sealed the small vial, making it impervious with a quick charm. "He'll claim you, Neville. He wants to. Just. Be sure, before you drink it. You can't ever take it back."

"I think. I think I've been sure for a long time."
Chapter 42

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Note that this is a side story based on the events of Promised, a fic written for the Nuke Bigbang 2012 that combined a Nuke and a Drarry fic.

IMPORTANT: This story is a side story and is based on the events of my previous story, Promised. This story begins before the events of The Redemption of Seamus Finnigan and shortly after chapter 90 of Promised.

A/N: So this is the last chapter update before I go on vacation, and therefore the last chapter for a full week. Enjoy. I'll post again over the weekend next week.

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Neville spent a long time looking in the mirror that night, looking at his neck and shoulder and chest. Closing his eyes and imagining what he'd seen on Noah, on his chest, on his neck and shoulder. Knowing there must also have been marks on Noah's back that he hadn't seen. But that presence... would Viktor... would he declare that forcefully that Neville was his? Neville prayed powerfully that he would.

Neville returned to his bedroom, dropping his clothes and selecting something skimpy and silk the blue of his eyes to put on. He sat at his desk and clutched the little plush wolf that had been Vitya's cherished childhood companion to his chest. He smiled. He could smell Vitya. He could smell him powerfully enough to know that he'd taken this plushie into his bed well past puberty. It smelled of man, of Viktor, of the oil he used on his hair, of the musk of his sweat... of the salt of his tears.

He set the little toy on his desk and began to write.

My Vitya -

I am honored by your trust. Your heart is safe with me here, and I cherish it, to know that it was your companion and kept you safe for me. I am here, my Vitya, to keep you safe.

I too have neglected shopping for Christmas, and I haven't planned well, I fear, as I didn't even think to add Harry's boys to my shopping list. Madam Pomfrey was considering taking them from Harry as early as Christmas, and that date is looking more and more likely now. Certainly Teddy should have something, at least. I hope I haven't forgotten anyone else!

Tomorrow is end of term and the beginning of holidays for me. Harry and Draco and Noah all have an extra day of duties as heads of house, getting everyone to the train and making arrangements for students who have to stay. I'll be here, of course, through the holidays. Hogwarts is my home, my wolf. It's my home. I'm giving Ginny and Casey their space. I haven't told them yet, but I think the secret is safe with you... I've paid up the space for another year.

I know it might seem extravagant, but the greenhouse for the business is attached to it, so it's not entirely a kindness. Frankly it saves me from doing some rather angst ridden packing up of belongings that will make me think too much about what I lost with Luciano. I love what we have, Vityenka moi, I do, but that still hurts. Perhaps... perhaps when I'm ready, you could help me? I'd
What happened with Seamus... I wish I could tell you, Vitya. I don't want you to think I'm keeping secrets from you, because our openness through this courtship, it's what's making it work, my Vitya. It's what... it's what makes me feel close to you and I don't want jeopardize that. But Hermione bound us from speaking of it. I think you know a magical binding from Hermione is not something easily defeated, and she put it there to protect someone else. So I hope you'll understand.

I wanted to get that out of the way because of everything that happened, that was the part... Vitya, you were... I mean, just beautiful. I think about you in those clothes, and I just am breathless. You looked stunning. Was the silk underneath red, like mine? I want to see. I want to touch. We were so close. And you were there, there with me, and I wanted it to last forever having you close like that. I can still taste you a little, on my lips. I can still feel your hand at my waist, like you didn't quite let go. Never let me go, my Vitya.

Luciano and Noah are getting married in just over a week. Have I mentioned that it hurts? I am so proud of him, Vitya. I'm so proud of him and I love him and I know that I lost him a long time ago. But it hurts, to see him claiming someone else. Even someone like Noah, someone that I know to my core loves him the way I loved him. To know that I... that I'll have to see it. Six months ago I was happy and I was buying a ring for him. To ask him to be mine. He doesn't know. Not that part. I was happy. And I thought... after he told me about the promise, I thought I'd never be happy again.

Case is going to be his best man. He was going to ask me, but I asked... I didn't want to do it. I didn't... I couldn't do it. I remember looking at Noah's face at Harry's wedding and wondering how he could live to have to stand outside and guard the door knowing Draco and Harry were together consummating their marriage. That he was losing Draco in that instant. Casey is his best friend since they were kids. It should have always been Case. I feel a little less of a Gryffindor for not doing it. Don't tell anyone, okay?

And it's going to happen now. He's getting married. The final rite of the promise. And it's Luke, so he's not doing it half-way, he's turned it into a claiming rite. He's declaring to everyone that he owns Noah. Don't pretend you don't know. You're the pack leader, my wolf. I know you know. And I know it's hard for you too, to witness him doing that with someone else. I'd ask you to sit next to me and help me get through watching it, but I know a lot depends on what happens four days from now. Do you know what you want to happen, my Vityenka? It scares me a little, not knowing.

I know its natural to have doubts, so I want you... I want you to see.

For you, my Vityenka,
- Nevya

He whispered a word and the camera was afloat. With what he intended to do, it seemed silly to keep flirting this way, but it was... No. It was good. This was Vitya. He had hearty hopes, desperate hopes of leaving pictures like this on the bed, of still flirting like this. He climbed up on the bed and whispered more commands to the camera. He was going to do his damnedest to be sure Vitya had no doubts.

--

It had been a grueling exhausting day. He was not ashamed to admit that even though he'd gone shopping for all the people he'd forgotten while courting Neville, that at least half of what he had gotten had been for his Nevyenka. He knew what he was going to do at sundown on the thirtieth
day. He'd known for a long time. He only hoped. Did Nevya still hurt too much? Viktor had known from the start that it was a chance, and the possibility hurt so much it was paralyzing.

He was not, however, surprised to be woken by an owl at what had become the usual time. The large brown Hogwarts owl came as usual, dropped the slightly larger than usual parchment, accepted the treat Viktor tossed it gratefully, and flew off. Viktor knew what that size parchment usually meant. He smiled broadly as he opened it. He was careful to slide the photo aside and not look at it, not yet. Instead he read the letter intently, trying to sense, to feel. He'd all but confessed to Neville, whose knowledge of plants, of their magic and their power, was peerless. To have pricked his finger openly with the rose of the Baba Yaga, it was a confession. He'd revealed his heart's desire, and there was no way Neville could not know what that rose meant.

He read the letter several times but his eyes kept returning to one line. *Never let me go, my Vitya*. Reading it made his heart skip. His hands were shaking a little still when he finally took hold of the photo, reading the careful script "Never doubt, you make me happy, my Vitya, my wolf." Hesitantly he flipped it over.

Neville had his back to the camera, on his knees, a sheet wrapped around his shoulders. His eyes and head were face sideways, his gaze down. He turned and looked at the camera, waggled his eyebrows and dropped the sheet. A pair of very slinky silk underwear in a blue that matched his eyes hugged his arse, his back was glorious, muscular, perfect. He crawled toward the camera, crouched low to the bed, like a panther stalking, then he lifted his torso sinuously up. "Do you want me?" was written on his chest in bold letters, unmistakable as he slid his hands down his torso, pulling them down to catch the waistband of the blue silk and reveal the tantalizing tuft of hair, but no more. Then he rolled over and buried his face in his pillow, turning his arse to the camera and wiggling it a little. He poured a vial of oil across his arse, causing a dark thick stain across the blue, letting it sit for a few moments before pulling the fabric down his arse. The oil was slick and heavy and wet, running down his crack and streaking the letters KRUM, painted across his buttocks.

Viktor thought it possible he might have stopped breathing a little after the third or fourth time watching it. But he couldn't bring himself to stop. That beautiful man, with that beautiful body marking himself for Viktor. If only... If only he could. If only he would...

It was too much to hope for, and better that he didn't. But it made him powerfully aroused, it made him want it, want Neville, want... of course it did. A part of him wished Neville would stop sending them. Photos meant to tempt him. But right now he felt like leaping onto Neville's back and tasting that beautiful flesh, marking it, claiming it, making it his. And Neville... he had to know by now, didn't he? That marking himself was dangerous? That it made Viktor want to do that, to claim him.

Viktor closed his eyes and let his hand drop, let his mind run through the photograph's message. Let his hands express to his body what he wanted, let himself come in gushes across the photo. And as his body let loose his desire for Neville Longbottom, for his Nevyenka, he howled into the night.
Chapter 43

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A/N: Back from Vacation, posting will resume fairly regularly.

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Neville hoped he hadn't gone too far with the last photo. It was a delicate game, this flirting via letters, and it amused him that he was only now feeling like he had the hang of it, now that it was to be over. Of course, once it was over, he'd... he swallowed softly. Viktor was going to propose to him. This wasn't just about sex or touching or kissing. Viktor was going to propose. He'd be asked for a joining of hands and houses. For them to bind together.

He'd have to talk to his gran, and he was not looking forward to that. Of course it would help if he'd actually listened to the Howler. He sighed very deeply. He'd have to visit. After classes. He had none after lunch, having arranged the practical for the first year students in advance to give the inexperienced students some time to pack their trunks for the holiday. He'd... he'd go then, after lunch. After the mail was delivered.

He sat in his nook and called for his house elf, ordering breakfast in his chambers, and he ate quietly. He'd also. He'd need to talk to Luciano. Fuck. That would hurt. But he had to do it. He couldn't... he had to do it. He finished his breakfast quickly and went directly to the greenhouses. The morning was taken quickly by fifth year practicals. The greenhouse stank by the end of it, filled with the stink of bubotuber pus. Neville shook his head. If he'd been thinking he'd have had this exam for the students earlier... except then half his classes would be vomiting from the smell. He groaned at the work ahead of him, but once the students were gone, he left it as it was and took the Floo from his office to his rooms.

Midday showers were not the norm for Neville, especially when teaching, but he wasn't going to risk the oils from the bubotubers getting on his skin, not when Viktor was going to see him naked, he hoped, in just a few days. He discarded his robes and clothes, careful not to get the remains of the oils on himself, and summoned an elf to launder them with special instructions. He slipped into the showers and washed thoroughly according to the protocol, disappointed that the careful washing meant no chance of relieving himself of his frustrations at not being able to touch or see Viktor in the shower.

He dressed quickly, choosing rather nicer teaching robes than he might usually wear for classes, in a shade of dark blue that matched his eyes. The rest of his clothes were the usual trousers and white dress shirt he might have worn even when a student, and of course a tie, one of the many beautiful silk Hogwarts ties that Viktor had gotten him earlier in the courtship. He walked to the great hall, doing the customary checks of the corridors on the way.
Blevins, he noted, with a self-satisfied grin, had pushed past the shunning of his teammates. The sixth year nodded at him as he walked by, and Neville returned the nod. All the professors had considered Draco and Noah's solution, to require them to witness Draco's pain and fear over Harry's injury in the Pensieve, trapped in the memory for the duration, as tough but fair. None of the students knew the punishment or the exact circumstances, but none had doubted the results either. They had a Quidditch team again. To a Gryffindor, that healed many wounds.

Neville walked into the great hall and took his seat. Draco nodded to him as he came in, as did Noah. Luciano, it seemed, was not dining with the staff today. Professor Sinistra was overseeing a squabble at the Gryffindor table and not looking happy about it. Neville shook his head, surprised. Minerva had granted Aurora leave for the holiday, and Flitwick too. Indeed, for most of the holiday, Hogwarts would be run almost entirely by the junior staff. No wonder Draco looked so miserable... with both Slytherin and Ravenclaw on his plate, he'd have less time with Harry, who had never been a calm or happy patient and was currently stewing in the hospital wing.

Hagrid would still be there, of course. Hagrid who had managed to remain completely oblivious to Neville's situation, thankfully. Neville wasn't particularly happy to be explaining it to anyone, but somehow the idea of explaining it to Hagrid made his skin crawl. He never wanted to have any discussion involving sex with Hagrid, least of all one involving Neville deciding to mate with a wolf. Neville sat next to Madam Hooch, who slyly worked brooms into the discussion and asked if Neville had gotten the hang of flying.

"I know he got the suggestion for the Silver Arrow from you," Neville had responded.

"And have you taken it out yet?" said the no nonsense Flight instructor.

"Not yet, he's going with me."

"Personal lessons from Viktor Krum, Neville. You're a lucky man," replied Madam Hooch. "People would be envious, if they knew."

"I imagine just that I know Vitya makes people envious," said Neville. "Flying is something I'm undertaking reluctantly."

"It's time for it, Neville. You're a good flyer on a thestral, so it can't be the flight that scares you. You got right scared that very first time for the best of reasons, but it's far past time for someone..."

"I'm going to let him teach me, Rolanda."

"Well, good. You eating those?" she asked, pointing to his untouched potatoes.

"Favorite are they? You know the house elves would..."

She smiled and scooped them off his plate. "Yes, but Pomfrey would hear, she always hears. Do keep it secret, will you?"

Neville nodded an assent and watched as the first owls began to descend. More Howlers. He cast a stasis this time before his grandmother's rant could begin, and incinerated the rest. The letter from Vitya, that he took quietly along with the parcel and concealed both in his robes. He nodded again to Rolanda, slipped along the back of the table, and quietly whispered a thanks to Noah as he passed him. Then he slipped out the back door and up to Luciano's office.

"Don't you have class?" asked the blond, noticing him immediately at the door, despite being
tucked into a ball with a quill staining the corner of his mouth as he sat in thought facing the window.

"Done. First years had their practical early so they could have a little extra time to get ready for the train."


"Gran sent another Howler."

"You're surprised?" asked Luciano, setting the quill and parchment aside.

"Not really."

"Is something..." Luke took a close look at him, at the shy hesitance. "You've decided."

Neville nodded.

"Does he know?"

Neville shook his head. "No."

"Are you going to tell me?" asked Luciano, his voice cracking.

"You can't tell him."

"I wouldn't," said Luke, looking directly at him, "not during a courtship."

"I'm answering with vows," said Neville softly.

Luke rolled off the chair onto his feet. "Immediate vows?"

Neville nodded. "Is it a problem?"

"The pack isn't happy with either of us, but our positions are secure. It's the presentation to the pack that's an issue, for both of us. Noah's presentation will be... he's claimed, properly claimed and carrying my pup, they can't touch him. But you, Nev..."

"They can't... they can't take Vitya from me, can they?" asked Neville softly.

"They can challenge you. Nev, they're Durmstrang. Some of them have mastery..."

"Like you did?"

"I never dueled you, Nev."

"Will they? I'm a hero."

Luke stepped up to him and brushed a hand against his face. "They might. You're not wolf, baby, and he hasn't claimed you."

Neville blushed.

"You're..."

Neville nodded.
"Nev... he. He thinks he's never going to know what it is to claim."

"He's wrong."

"Nev, you don't know..."

"I do. Noah and I talked, Luciano. We talked. I. I need this, Luke. I think I always did."

"You were," Luke smiled and his dimples beamed, "so dominant, Nev. So forceful."

"And you were sweet and submissive and you used to beg for me, Luke. And I loved it, that tenderness. But that was us," said Neville, brushing bangs away from Luciano's face. "This is what's right for Vitya and for me. He makes me... I want him to have it, Luke."


"It'll be savage and brutal and worse than what... he's a quarter. Noah made sure I understood."

Neville caught Luke's hand. "It'll be his. I'll be his."

Luke shook his head, tears in his eyes. "Nev, baby..."

"It's good, Luke. It's what I want. Help me, please?"

Luke gulped and squared his shoulders. "Don't worry about the pack. I'll take care of it."

"He can't know."

"He won't."

"I'm seeing gran today... do I need to..."

Luke sighed. "No. No, his father knew this was what Vitya wanted. But he'll make you endure a state wedding after. This is his only son."

Neville closed his eyes. "But I'll have him... I'll be his, and we'll be..."

"I promised I wouldn't interfere, and I won't... I. I'll take care of," Luke gulped and cupped a hand against Neville's cheek. "The pack, don't worry about them, okay. Worry about you, and Vitya."

"It's what I want," said Neville. "I love you, Luke. But you and Noah, you're right together. And this thing with Vitya? He's going to take me Luke. I'm going to offer my neck and he's going to claim me. I need. I need to know you're okay with that."

"I wish..."

"We both wish that. But it's not how it happened. And you have Noah, and a daughter, Luke, on the way. This is what I have," said Neville. "I have a man who loves me. And the purest expression I can give to that love is to let him embrace his beast and take me. And I'm willing to do that for him, Luke, because I love him. Like I loved you. And I know you love him, too, Luke. Can you imagine... he's been alone for all this time, and now he's going to have something he never... he's going to own me Luke. And I want that."

Luke sniffed and wiped at his eyes. "You really love him."

"I really do."
"Then go talk to your gran," said Luke quietly. "I know she's a stubborn old bat, but she doesn't deserve to find out in the paper that you've gotten married."

"I... I have to tell someone else first." Neville blinked back tears. "I know they can't hear me. But I..."

Luke smiled and hugged him, the kind of hug he'd missed. It was a Snyder hug, the kind the grabbed and held the whole body and made him feel a part of something wonderful. "They'd be proud of you, baby."

--

Neville stood quietly in the room where his parents twitched in an endless sleep of barely suppressed pain. It was worse than death, what had been done to them. It might have been better if...

He pushed the thought from his head and moved quietly to the chair in between the two. He gently grasped their hands, each of them. "Mum, Dad," he said quietly. "I think you should know I'm getting married. I know this isn't the first time I've come to tell you that. And yes, it's still a man, but I think you sorta knew that. It's a proper courtship this time. And he's not promised to anyone else. I'm. I'm going to be his, and I'm a little terrified. But I love him."

He sat quietly and squeezed their hands. "I want you to know. He makes me happy. I hope. I hope you'd be proud of me."

Neville set their hands back on the bed, and he sat with them still for quite a while afterwards, and then he kissed them both gently on the forehead. "I have to go. I still have to tell gran, and she's... she's not going to take it well."

He walked to the door and turned to look at them one more time. "I'll bring him here, I will, after. You should meet him. He's brilliant." Neville gulped. "I hope... I hope you'd be happy for me. If you could..." He screwed his eyes shut. "I love you."

Neville made his way to the public Floo, his steps measured, determined. No one stood in his way or blocked his path. There was something, just then, about the look in his eyes that made people immediately remember all the things they knew about the fact that Neville Longbottom was a hero of the war and get out of his way. He swept up to the Floo, casting powder into the flames as he muttered the grate address of his gran's floo connection and stepped through in a swirl of blue robes.

A quick sweep of his wand removed all trace of soot the moment he was through. A detection spell told him his gran was out. He grumbled. He still had shopping to do. He sat in one of the ancient deep cushioned chairs and muttered an *Accio* to summon the fire whiskey that his gran kept for those nights when the memories got too horrible. He sat, and he waited.

As it happened he didn't have a long wait. His gran appeared at the door perhaps forty minutes after he'd arrived. When she stepped through the door he threw Howler into the air and incinerated it in front of her as it began to scream his name. His eyes gazed piercingly at her and he took a sip of the fire whiskey. "You had something you wanted to say?"

Her eyes narrowed. "I didn't know you could..."

"Still think I'm near a squib?" Neville shot back. "That all I am is stupid and brave?"

She shook her head. "I never thought that."
"Why?" said Neville, glaring pointedly at the pile of ash.

"Because I think he's going to ask you. I think he's going to ask you to join his house, to clasp his hand. I think he's going to marry you and our line will be gone, Neville."

"He is."

"You know for sure?"

"I know he loves me. I know he's trying desperately to make me love him. Yes, he'll ask."

"And you wonder why I... Neville, my child, our family name..."

"I'm ending it honorably. With me. I will bear him children for his line as his husband, Gran."

"They'll be wolves!"

"They'll be loved," countered Neville.

"He's a Dark Arts Master," she said her voice almost a shriek. "Trained to do things like the Death Eaters did to..."

"I know," said Neville, interrupting. "So was Luciano. They're a lot alike. It made it easier for me, but it's not why I love him."

"Oh, Neville... this. He's a wolf!"

"A beast. Yes. And I love him. He's going to ask, Gran. And I'm going to say yes."

"Neville... why?"

"He's passionate and loving, dashing, gallant, stunningly beautiful. You want more?"

"I want the real reason."

"Because rather than trying to make me forget my lost love, he helped me celebrate that love. Because he remembers my toad's name, and asks me how Trevor is doing. Because he knows I love chocolate frogs. Because he makes me feel like I want to be sexy for him. Because when I was beneath everyone else's notice, he remembered me and that I loved to dance. Because as a very rich man able to give me virtually anything, he knows me enough to know that sometimes the most appropriate gift is a toy from his childhood, and an open heart."

Augusta Longbottom gulped, watching the changes in Neville's tone and posture as he spoke. Her shoulders slumped, defeated. "You love him."

Neville nodded. "I'm answering with vows, Gran. When he asks, I'm answering with vows. I'm going to marry him. I hope... I know you don't approve, but I hope you can still be happy for me."

"Neville, I..."

"We'll visit, Gran. After," said Neville softly. "Try to be happy for me by then."

There was a loud crack, and Neville was gone.
Neville sat at Fortescue's in Diagon Alley eating ice cream. Madam Malkin already had most of the gifts he'd arranged for Viktor ready, and promised to have the rest sent by owl the next day. The Daily Prophet offices were only too happy to provide the photo he'd requested, and the visit to the jeweler went smoothly, with the jeweler promising delivery of the resized ring on Monday with delivery by house elf. His whirlwind visit to the shops at Diagon Alley had actually netted several bags full of gifts, leaving him relieved and ready, he hoped, for the holidays.

His encounters with Minerva and his gran were not sitting well. Indeed, they were most certainly responsible for him sitting and eating ice cream, his favored treat for sulking. In many ways they made him worry for the one thing most out of his control... how his parents would have felt knowing that he was giving himself to Viktor Krum. That he was marrying a boy... no, that they'd have known, if they'd intended a promise to Luciano, then they must have known. But a wolf. Luciano's wolf blood was a secret, something he'd always hidden and confessed to Neville in a rush before they'd become physical.

Neville scooped a bit more of the strawberry ice cream into his mouth, letting himself savor the rich flavor. His day had been emotional enough, between his confession to Luke and the visits to parents and to his gran. At least he'd... he'd end the emotional ride with a high. He pulled the letter from Vitya from his deep blue robes, scanned quickly for reporters, knowing from earlier experience on the street that tomorrow's Prophet was going to be full of speculation about his purchases, and then excitedly broke the seal.

Darling Nevyenka moi,

Is breathless to be watching photo of Nevya, in beautiful blue is being like to eyes, making such sexy movements for Vitya. Is hoping Nevya is never to be doubting that Vitya is wanting. Is wanting to touch, my Nevyenka. Is wanting to be feeling that skin, and is being driven mad, is thinking by this desire. But is hoping... Nevya, my Nevyenka... so beautiful. Is wishing you could be seeing what is seeing when is looking at you. So strong and deep of feeling. Is more powerful to be seeing in your eyes than to be looking at chiseled abs. Is liking these too, but is wanting Nevya for more than this. Is knowing? Vitya is hoping.

Photo... was putting of name on arse, my Nevya. Was making to be wet like in heat. Was wanting to be diving in and tasting of Nevya. Was wanting to be more than tasting. My Nevya, is being dirty naughty boy to be sending such images. To be tempting of Vitya in this way... is making
Vitya hot with passion for Nevya. So hot. And is trying to be saying to Nevya that is more to feelings than just desire to be mating with Nevya, more than just wish to be one in our bodies. Is wanting to be one in feelings. Is wanting, Nevya to be sharing...

Perhaps is not being best time to be saying. Is knowing that my Nevya, that is not yet to be making decision. Is knowing is being scared of Vitya, that is wolf. Is never wanting to be frightening of Nevya, but is knowing, to be wolf, is to be beast, and is not always having control of beast. Is torture to be admitting to this, knowing could be losing Nevyan. Pleading again to be hearing Vitya in person before deciding. Is thinking after dance, that is closer to accepting this? Is hoping is closer to accepting of wolf in Vitya. Is not something could be setting aside, even for Nevya.

And so is sitting in sanctuary, manor that is only Vitya's. Is lonely here, and is being rather cold. Is sitting wrapped in furs in bed, writing of letter, looking at photo that Nevya is sending. Photo that is daring of Vitya to surrender to beast and take of what is wanting. Is not to be ashamed is to be dreaming of Nevya like this. Is really to be willing to be dirty naughty boy for Vitya? Is really wanting this? That is even possible is like heaven to Vitya, who dreams of spending days wrapped together in furs, enjoying each other in cold of winter.

Is thinking of Nevya, stuck in castle that is quiet, is thinking, in winter. Is knowing there are still being students, some teachers, but is thinking of Nevya in his tower, cold from chill, and being so alone. In childhood, papa would sometimes let Vitya to pretend room was tent in woods, and would make up fire, and sleep on furs in front of it. And would be making of wizard's s'mores. Is knowing was growing up only with gran, and was not being most popular of students in school. Is thinking is never sitting on furs before fire, to be squeezing of chocolate frog between sparkling marshmallow and cracker, and watching as heat of marshmallow is melting of frog. To be sipping of fine hot chocolate by fire. Is wanting to be sharing this with you... is wanting to be making of s'mores and feeding to each other. Is wanting to be drizzling of marshmallow and chocolate on belly and feasting on skin of Nevya. Is wanting to be making love on furs before fire, and screaming name of Nevya. Is wanting to be laying on furs, naked and sated in flesh of each other and sharing hot chocolate in glass held in podstakannik.

Is hoping is also wanting, but is giving of furs, and of chocolates, and of marshmallow and of fancy crackers and biscuits, and hot chocolate and glasses with podstakanniki, for you to be having this evening is remembering. Is hoping that Nevya will chose to be sharing of this with Vitya, after courtship is over. Is knowing is being forward of Vitya, but is saying from early on that is not to be crossing out when is writing honest things that are frightened to be sharing. Is daring to be letting Nevya know, but is giving to him childhood memory, and allowing him to chose.

Is caring for Nevya so deeply. Please, my sweet, my Nevyenka, be thinking of Vitya. Is needing of your strength to be surviving until seeing you.

- Vitya

The small packet contained everything he had said, from the chocolate frogs, in a variety of chocolate flavors, to giant magic-infused marshmallows that did everything from just sparkle to glowing in the dark, to the crackers. And the hot chocolate... it wasn't a mix, it was a massive thermos enchanted to take milk and cream and chocolate and mix it into a thick luxurious frothy beverage and then keep it hot. The glasses were plain, but the podstakanniki, the metal glass holders, they were silver, pure and bright, and beautifully antique, each of them inspired by Slavic folklore, from the firebird to the vicious Koschei to the wandering hut on chicken legs. All of it carefully shrunk and packed away with what must have been three large beds worth of furs.

Vitya wanted... oh fuck. Neville's hand was shaking when he lifted his spoon full of ice cream to
his lips. Suddenly his mind was alive of all the other things he could do with the ice cream, of how it would taste to lick it from Vitya's lips, off his chest. He croaked out a request for coffee to a serving girl, carefully folding the letter and returning it to the inside pocket of his robes. He wrapped the parcel back up, putting it carefully with his other packages.

He sat with his coffee, sipping quietly, surrounded by packages, painfully aroused and scared to close his eyes for even a moment lest he become more so. Every blink brought his the sweet torture of imagining Viktor licking chocolate and marshmallow off his cock, of licking ice cream off of Viktor's chest, of the sweet taste of hot chocolate on his lips. He was going to have that. He was going to have that and more... Vitya on a bed of furs making love to him... he'd even used those words, that he wanted to make love to Neville.

Neville sipped his coffee, waiting out his arousal. He could wait. He would wait. His Vitya, his wolf, was waiting for him and they would be together. So soon, they would be together.
Chapter 45

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Note that this is a side story based on the events of Promised, a fic written for the Nuke Bigbang 2012 that combined a Nuke and a Drarry fic.

IMPORTANT: This story is a side story and is based on the events of my previous story, Promised. This story begins before the events of The Redemption of Seamus Finnigan and shortly after chapter 90 of Promised.

A/N: Starting the next installment of my ATWT/Drarry crossover. I promised Neville a happy ending, and in Promised I gave it to him. But those characters: Viktor, Neville, together, and their courtship demanded an attention I could not give them in a fic based around Luke/Noah and Harry/Draco. So here it is. The whole story of Viktor and Noah's courtship. I hope you enjoy it.

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Viktor waited quietly in the night. Sleep had eluded him. His sleep was filled with half remembered images from a dream that wasn't quite a dream, of the taste of Neville on his lips, of the fervor of heat, of waves lapping against naked calves on a beach. They were beautiful dreams, but he was aching for the real, for the touch of Neville's skin. And no owl had yet come with Neville's response.

He sat in the bed, the furs wrapped around him. They warmed him, but there was nothing like the warmth of a body, sleeping tight, naked flesh to naked flesh, to make the sleep come. He looked to his desk, to the small pile of photos. He wanted to so badly. He wanted to take the photos and let himself pretend and come in a stream over Neville being naughty in blue silk pants. He shook his head. He'd never forgive himself for staining the photo the once he'd already done.

He grasped the wadded fabric in his hand and brought it to his face. The fabric was white, the stains yellow, crusted, the scent so powerful, sweat and cum, his Nevya's scent. He inhaled it deeply. "Is missing you, my Nevya, k," he said softly. "Is having dreams, as Vitya? Is struggling to be sleeping?" he sighed. "Is wishing I could bring at least my Nevya to be sleeping. Is afraid to be hoping for dreams."

A tapping began at the window, a persistent tap-tap-tap and a flutter of brown in the flurrying of white. Viktor winced openly as his bare feet touched the cold of the flagstone. He winced as he

Somehow not knowing made it feel colder. At least Durmstrang taught pyromancy! He whispered a soft spell and the fire rose fiercely, blanketing the room with heat, but the winter cold was too strong, even pyromancy couldn't dispel the chill completely. Viktor shivered beneath the furs. "Is thinking of you," he whispered into the empty room. "Is hoping, my Nevya, that is understanding what is meaning, that is up at all hours, because is dreaming of you."

A tapping began at the window, a persistent tap-tap-tap and a flutter of brown in the flurrying of white. Viktor winced as he
stepped across the floor and felt the blasting chill of the cold air as he opened the room to it to let the storm beaten owl into the room. With a quick word he transfigured an old comb into a perch for the owl and set it to rest near his own Vasilisa. He wasn't sending the owl back into this.

He swiftly gave both owls a treat, and took the letter back with him to his bed, opening it greedily. The relief at the sight of Neville's familiar script was tangible. He even felt warmer holding it as we wrapped the heavy furs back around him.

My lovely Vityenka -

Well, the first term is over and I confess to having mixed feelings. I really love teaching, and yet there is a wave of relief that comes with knowing the responsibility is past for a time, and I can focus on my life outside Hogwarts... I can focus on you. At least that's what I want to do. Except I can't.

Harry is about to burst... they're still saying Christmas and I can hear the fear in Poppy's voice when she says it. I got very good at hearing that fear in seventh year, and he's... it's going to be dangerous, Vitya. In some ways, at least, it allows me a distraction. I'll be spending a lot of my free time there while I await your letters for the next few days. And I'm covering for some of Draco's head of house duties, so that he can shop for everyone. And helping, of course, with Teddy. But I've... I hope you know, my Christmas eve... I'll be here, waiting for you. I want you to... I cherish every letter, my Vitya.

Luciano and Noah are getting married, as you know. And I feel like I should be doing something to help with that as well, but Hermione and Casey are working with the headmistress and the Minister. He's not thrilled that it's a claiming rite. He hasn't outright said so, but he asked me about it, because he knew, of course, that Luciano and I were... I mean. He knew. The Minister, he tried, after the war, to get me into Auror training. What a fight. I wasn't sure which of them was more ready to blow a gasket... first losing Harry when everyone had expected him to go directly into training, and then not being able to convince me. And Gran, she refused to speak to me for months. Said I'd shamed my dad by... I still don't think I've forgiven her for that. For saying he'd have wanted me to do something I'd have hated.

Anyway, he wanted to know why it was a claiming rite, why I'd let that happen. I tried to explain, I mean, as if it's anything I had any control over, but I think actually that Harry helped more. Harry brought up the shade of Remus Lupin and Teddy and argued passionately that this was the ceremony they wanted, and that for this, their wishes over all others should be upheld. I shouldn't need to tell you... well. Minerva doesn't much approve of her favorites dating wolves, permission to go dancing with you aside. She knows better than to actively interfere, but during the last tea she actually tried to get me to consider Seamus bloody Finnigan instead of you.

My Vitya, I know your blood is boiling right about now. I know mine was. She means it to protect me. From suffering such shameful marks. I don't think they're shameful, my Vitya. I... I think Noah rather likes his marks. I think he's proud to be owned by Luciano. And for him to stand up, as he did at Harry's wedding, and openly bare them, openly declare that he belonged to Luke. I don't think I'd ever seen Luke quite so happy. And I'd... I'd seen Luke pretty bleedin' happy.

I don't want you to worry though, is what I'm saying. No one, not Gran, not Minerva, no one else is making this decision for me. I've been thinking a lot about it, my Vitya. About what I'm going to say. About what I hope you'll say. Do you know yet, my Vitya? Will you ask me? Everyone thinks they know. That they know what you're going to do. What you're going to say.

A courtship isn't something entered into lightly. That you asked me to begin with, that you offered me what you did. I think I've known for a long time that this was coming, that you were really...
You've cherished me, my Vitya. From the start you've... you've made me feel wanted and cherished and I want you to know how much that means to me.

I hope... I hope I've not gone too far teasing you. I've found that I quite like sending you such dirty lascivious things... and knowing... Oh, my Vitya, are you holding them now? Those old Y fronts stained with my cum? I think you are, or that you have been tonight. I think you've looked at my photos. I think you've wanted to touch yourself, thinking of me.

I think right now your right hand is teasing against a hard nipple, all pink and hard from the cold, and you're rubbing it through all that wonderful hair on your chest. I want you... I want you to think of me kissing you, gently along your jaw. I want you to feel my hand running through your gorgeous thick fur... I want you to feel the tips of my fingers against your side. Can you feel it? The kiss of my lips against your neck, against your chest, teasing against that nipple that you got all hard and ready? I want to suck on it gently. I know you want that. For me to tease it with my teeth and suck deep. I'll leave a mark, not a big one, nothing you can see through that glorious fur, but you'll know it's there.

I love that your hair goes all the way down. I love that it's lighter on your stomach, but I'm glad it's there. It means friction, sweet Vitya, when you fuck me and I thrust against that hot gorgeous stomach, and I'm thinking about that as I slide down your chest and kiss along that line of muscle that makes me thank Merlin you love Quidditch so much, because you're beautiful. So I'm going to kiss you there, on your stomach, and lick a trail down that central crevasse. And I'm going to tease your belly button, and then bury myself in the scent of your pubes.

I bet they smell glorious. And I'm going to touch you, Vitya, my hands running through your hair, that glorious hair. You have no idea how turned on it makes me. Thinking about my fingers in that hair. And I know you're big... so I'm going to kiss you along the edges first, licking down the sides. I bet it jumps, when you get stimulated like that. I bet it jumped when you read this. I'm going to lick it and run my lips wet up and down the side, on both sides, before I swallow you whole. And I will Vitya. I'm blessed with not having any gag reflex at all, and when I swallow you you'll go down my throat and I'll actually swallow, and the muscles in my throat, they'll pull on you automatically when I do that, and it'll be tight and hot, it's going to make you scream.

I hope it's my name. What you scream. I hope it's coherent, that it's a word, and that when I swallow you, when I take you down my throat and I swallow and I suck and my tongue teases against your shaft, I hope it's my name that you scream. I hope you want it to be that too. And then you'll move, my Vitya. You won't be able not to move. It'll be so exquisite you'll want more, and you'll fuck your way down my throat as hard as you think I can take it... except it'll be harder, because Vitya... I am that good. It'll be harder and you'll be screaming... yes, Vitya, touching you that way... I bet you can still feel my hands in your chest hair... I bet you can feel my tongue on your cock.

I'm sliding off it now, teasing the head, teasing the ridge around your cock, and licking the precum off it. It's salty and sweet and it tastes desperate. Do you want it, Vitya? For me to suck down your cock like I need it to live. For me to slobber down that velvet flesh and suck on you until you can't help but grab my head and fuck for all you're worth...

I knew you wanted it. I could feel that, my Vitya. You losing your cool. Your nails sinking into my skull as you pounded and let go. It's so salty and sweet and creamy and I'm choking on it a little. There's a dribble running down my chin. Will you lap it up and kiss me? I want you to...

I know you just came. I know you wanted me so badly that you let yourself read this and you came, because you want it just as badly as I do. Because you miss touching me as much as I miss
touching you. Because the dreams were not enough for either of us. I know you just came. And because you did you'll be able to sleep.

And because I did, I can too. And tomorrow, my sweet, I'll read your letter. And I'll see your gift. And I'll cherish that you care so much.

- Nevya

A picture slid from the folds of the page. Neville, bare and naked, bucking wildly in bed as he came in gushes across his chest and over his hand. He lifted the hand to his lips and licked the cum off wiping a trail of sticky wet cum from the edge of his mouth down his chin. He looked at the small pools of cum on his chest, and with a finger drew the letters KRUM onto his chest with the cum, then his head fell back and the light glinted on the wet sticky letters on his chest, and the scene repeated.

True to Neville's prediction, Viktor Krum fell very promptly asleep, covered in pools of his own cum, with the letter fluttering to the side of the bed, and a sticky cum stained pair of Y fronts held close to his face. Somehow, the cold didn't touch him the rest of the night.
Chapter 46

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A/N: Starting the next installment of my ATWT/Drarry crossover. I promised Neville a happy ending, and in Promised I gave it to him. But those characters: Viktor, Neville, together, and their courtship demanded an attention I could not give them in a fic based around Luke/Noah and Harry/Draco. So here it is. The whole story of Viktor and Noah's courtship. I hope you enjoy it.

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Neville had almost always left for holidays as a student, so seeing the truth of Harry's grief and loneliness each year, seeing the truly small number of students who remained, was a shock to him. The numbers were so starkly small, that with Luciano and Noah closeted away with Minerva discussing the wedding plans and Draco begging favors of Neville to watch the great hall for breakfast so he could eat with Harry in the hospital room, Neville was left alone with only Argus Filch for staff members in the great hall.

Argus looked disgruntled, and understandably so. Argus' heavy handed discipline on the students had been unchecked during the Death Eater's regime, and Neville had borne the brunt of the punishment.

He surveyed the hall calmly, though he felt the loneliness of the staff table rather keenly. Just now he could use something, anything really, to distract him. He knew, of course, what he was going to do, but the waiting, the anticipation of it was driving him a bit mad. It wasn't difficult to see that Slytherin still struggled to recover, with many students from homes broken by the war, and so many stuck at Hogwarts over the holidays.

Neville remembered well the sadness that had afflicted Harry so often this time of year, and he empathized. Harry's loneliness had been here, Neville's at home. He'd had his gran of course, and she'd tried. But with the Longbottom resources so tied up in the care for his parents, holidays were a string of evenings spent outside a hospital room, to be ushered in to find his parents propped up, a moment of false hope as he saw them, and then the crashing devastation as he realized that once again they were to be puppets, meant to make him feel a part of something when he was truly alone.

Neville watched the students carefully as they ate, taking note of which ones showed the clearest signs of needing a parent figure. Blevins had stayed, his parents serving him a punishment of their own by neglecting to bring him on holiday with them.

Hufflepuff was too close knit to need anyone. A house of close friends, they as a community would ensure that anyone left behind not only felt needed, but included. He'd heard, and wasn't surprised, that the Hufflepuffs had gotten gifts for some of the poorer students in their house so that they...
didn't need to feel embarrassed by having nothing to open on Christmas morning.

Which left Ravenclaw, and there, like Slytherin, there was some concern. The distraction of emotion, however human, defiled the logic of most Ravenclaws, and so the younger students especially might struggle. Neville sighed and wished he had Hermione to help. Instead he jotted down a few notes... some Slytherins for Draco and two Ravenclaws for Noah, whose cool competence had a chance, at least, of getting through their logic. The Gryffindors he resolved to take care of himself, Blevins would help, he was sure.

He was rather pleased with himself by the time he'd finished his plate, relishing some rather delicious bacon. The soft hooting of owls filled the hall then as mail was delivered. Neville noted with some relief that the number of Howlers was down to a reasonable few, which he incinerated immediately. He also had a letter from his gran, and of course the parcel and letter expected from Viktor, as well as several parcels from Madam Malkins.

He set the parcels all aside, still surveying the students. Mail could be devastating at the holidays, especially if someone had no place to go home to. There were a few students who had the expected homesick reaction... but they were those already on his lists, so he let it go for the time being. Most students would appreciate being given at least a day or two to try to come to terms on their own.

Quietly he opened his gran's letter first. It was, surprisingly, contrite and apologetic, promising to give Viktor a chance if Neville's love for him was indeed so very strong. She asked pointedly, but politely, when he might care to come to St. Mungo's for the traditional Christmas with his parents. Neville didn't have an answer for that. He didn't feel a strong need to see them, having just been, but as silly as it might seem, he did want them to meet Viktor... for Viktor to meet them. He just wasn't sure he wanted his gran, with her clear prejudice against 'filthy beasts,' to be there too. He tucked the letter into his robe and called for Grizbit to come and take the packages to his study.

He didn't notice the students leaving. His attention was too fixed on the letter from Viktor. He flipped it nervously over and over in his hands. Finally he slipped that too into his robe pocket. It would be easier to read it when he was watching Harry. When he looked up only a few students remained. Neville stood quietly and walked up and down the length of the tables doing the usual checks for lost and forgotten belongings, and by the time he was done, the last few students had also left.

He sighed softly. He could go see Viktor. He wanted to go, this instant, and see Viktor. They were allowed to see each other. But since the dance... he didn't dare. He'd been so close even then to abandoning the courtship. He wanted Viktor so badly, the idea of seeing him, of touching him... sure he'd love it, but could either of them keep from doing something about it? He doubted he could, and with all the temptation he'd been giving Vitya... it just wasn't a good idea. It was a brilliant idea. Just one that would completely destroy what they were trying to build together. Neville took a series of long deep breaths to calm himself. Three days. He could do this.

With classes out, there were no rounds of the castle to distract him. Instead he went his quarters and set about calmly wrapping gifts in blue and silver wrapping paper. They would look pretty under the tree he'd planned. He knew it was hopeful thinking. He knew he was risking a fall that would be just as bad as his disastrous attempt to recover from his memories of Luke by eliminating them from his memory. His hands stilled over the packages and he closed his eyes and tried to center himself. It... it still hurt. But this... this felt so right and good. Wrapping presents for Viktor to put under a tree. Their tree.

Would Viktor stay? Neville allowed himself a grin. He was going to joyously enter a heat for the sole purpose of allowing Viktor Krum to claim him. He'd be taken and bred and loved, and
Viktor... they'd come back to themselves here. And there would be a tree and gifts. It would be perfect.

He returned to wrapping gifts, setting the ones for Viktor on the bed. He used a different blue and white for the gifts for Harry, Draco, and Teddy. He looked at the bags and the wrapping paper and wondered if most rich families had house elves do this part. He shrugged and kept wrapping. White paper with blue ribbons for Luna, blue paper with white ribbons for Ron and Hermione. A brief letter explaining the housing indulgence for Ginny and Case, though he'd used his quill to write it in letters that changed from red to green to gold. A red and gold gift bag for the bottle of elf wine he'd purchased for Minerva.

Finally he was done.

"What do you think, Trev?" he asked, looking over to his toad, who croaked gleefully.

"Exactly. Grizbit!"

"Yes Professor Longbottom," said the elf, appearing behind him.

Neville quickly went through the instructions, letting Grizbit know which packages needed to be delivered where. The ones for Viktor he asked Grizbit to leave on the bed. He was watching Teddy tonight, and they would put up the tree together and put the presents underneath it. He smiled as groups of packages disappeared until only the blue and silver of Viktor's gifts remained.

"Does Professor need anything else?" asked Grizbit.

"Please bring this to Hagrid... he's delivering the tree this afternoon."

"Anything for Hogwarts, Professor."

--

The hospital wing was cold. It had always been that way, and this year was perhaps even worse. Harry grumbled, bundled in furs with a heating charm keeping his head warm. Here in the hospital ward, where his usual glamours were not permitted, his size was more than noticeable. Always possessed of a small, compact frame, Harry had grown over the years, but was still rather short compared to most of his peers. His belly was swollen and distended in a great bump that was too round to be fat. And the boys were active inside it. Neville could see the little movements and accompanying discomfort. Just now though, the belly was covered, the only signs of the boys' activity the occasional wince from Harry as they kicked.

He was propped up on pillows, grumbling, loudly over his lunch.

"Why do I have to eat this stuff!"

"It's good for you, Mister Potter," replied Madam Pomfrey curtly.

"But it doesn't have pickles!"

"No, Mister Potter. You've had enough pickles. This is good for the babies," replied Poppy, looking matronly and severe as always in her mediwitch garb as she sat next to him and cast several diagnostic spells quickly.

"Can't I have..."
"No, Mister Potter. I can't believe Mister Malfoy has been indulging you so..."

"Draco takes good..."

"Yes," said Pomfrey, wiping his brow with a towel. She felt his face and neck. "Are you feeling well? This is more..."

"I just have too many blankets," said Harry, "body can't decide if it's hot or cold."

"I see." She glared at the unfinished food on his plate. "Finish that. I'm leaving you to Neville. And trust me, he's more afraid of me than you. He will make sure you eat it."

Harry gave a sour look to Neville, who was sitting quietly in jeans and a t-shirt next to the bed. "You will, won't you."

Neville laughed softly and nodded. "Not because of her though. Draco. If he finds out I let you evade one of her directives, he'll curse me into the Dark Ages."

Pomfrey huffed and walked off to her office. Poppy rarely ate with the staff, so Neville guessed she must take her meals privately. He looked at Harry who was still staring daggers at him. For Harry to refuse food, he must be... "Eat half and I'll banish the rest, yeah?"

Harry grinned at that and set in with renewed gusto.

Neville in the meanwhile was rubbing cream into his Trevor's skin, which was now glowingingly healthy. It would remain so as long as Neville kept up with the treatments, and for Neville, Trevor's contented croak was a special reward.

"There!" declared Harry.

Neville grumbled. He'd eaten closer to a third than half, but Neville banished the rest anyway and took the tray to set it on the bedside table of the next bed before returning to applying the gel to Trevor's skin.

"He looks good," said Harry, shifting on his pillows.

Neville nodded. "Gel works wonders. If only it didn't cost ten galleons a day."

"He'll be alright if you and..."

"It's a fund in my name, attached to his care. All of his care, actually, not just the gel. He'll. He'll be taken care of for as long as I have him."

"Whoa. Wasn't that..."

"It's hardly the most expensive thing he did."

Harry shifted again. "Bloody hell," he grumbled. "I wish they'd stop kicking my bladder! Draco is fucking brilliant, but if he gets me pregnant again, I'll kill him!"

"Does it hurt?"

"Oh... ummm, sorry Nev. It's just. They bounce on my bladder and kick it and I end up feeling like I have to piss all the bleedin' time."

Neville looked at his belly. "It'll be worth it, Harry. To have kids of your own. A family. It's what
you always wanted."

Harry grinned. "I'm excited, mate, really. I just. It's bloody hard, and I can't teach and I can't fly and I can't apparate and I can't take the Floo to the Burrow for the holidays. And I miss Teddy."

"He's been..."

"Of course he has, but it's not the same seeing him here as it is in our suite. I wanted to take him home to Grimmauld," said Harry, "and now I wonder if I'll ever get back there."

"Hermione's really grateful, you know," said Neville, "that you let her..."

Harry swallowed. "Something's going on with her. She won't tell me what, and I don't see her. You don't know what it is, do you?"

Neville shook his head. "I don't. And before you ask, Noah won't say. I've gotten the same impression. He just gives this classic dark sad look and walks off. Reminded me of you a bit, honestly."

"Viktor?"

"He might, if I asked. I... I don't really talk to him much about that. We've been. Selfish, I guess."

Harry shook his head. "Not selfish. Has he sent you more pictures?" asked Harry waggling his eyebrows.

"If you mean are we still flirting... yes. Three more days. Merlin, Harry, three more days..."

"No more tapestries?"

"You mean is he giving me a fortune? Closest is probably that cologne that I got when you were... and well, it was a very fancy camera."

"Wait. He gave you a camera?"

Neville nodded.

"So you're still sending photos," said Harry with dawning understanding.

Neville smirked.

"Naughty photos?"

"Right pornographic ones, yeah."

"Neville!"

"Don't tell anyone, okay," said Neville. "I mean. You figured it out, so I... you're the safe one to tell."

"So Luke doesn't know?"

Neville blushed beet red. "That's different."

"I understand, you were with him..."

"No, not that," said Neville. "He saw. Visiting Viktor, he saw. It wasn't intentional."
"But you're still talking to," Harry winced, "Bleedin' hell! Stop kicking my bladder!" He breathed in and out several times and then turned back to Neville. "Sorry. But if you could talk to Luke, why..."

"I love him, Harry. I can't... I don't want to rub it in his face that I moved on..."

"He has. He's getting married next..."

"I know, but... I can't make him feel bad about it. He's trying. Viktor. He came to me because of Luke. And... Harry, I..."

"So you're still flirting with pictures," said Harry. "Sexy undies?"

"God, even Draco would be in awe of my underwear wardrobe," said Neville, the blush rapidly returning to his face. "He got me... must be more pants than I've owned in my life!"

"As a courting gift? Neville?"

"I... I was sending him pictures, I mean. Well, more than one in the same silk pants he'd gotten me with the dress robes. I mean, he'd intended to just know I was wearing them, but I thought... he got me sexy pants, I'll... I'll wear them for him. But I sent him," he coughed, "quite a number of pictures, in the same... And then one of the letters just said that I looked lovely in red silk and hoped that I liked these as much."

Harry laughed so hard he started choking and had to stop himself. When he finally recovered he looked at Neville. "You're a dirty kinky boy, aren't you?"

Neville gulped. "Maybe a little. I thought... it was a joke, mostly, the first time. But I... it felt so good, knowing he was looking at that photo and wanting me..."

"Nothing wrong with that. Before I started to show... I would do strip teases for Draco."

"You can't dance," said Neville incredulously.

"I know, but he doesn't seem to mind," said Harry, still grinning. "Hey, Nev. It's good he likes you that way."

Neville pulled out the envelope. "Three more," he said softly.

"He seems to have done well so far."

"No... he has, it's just. I'm afraid he'll do something else like the tapestry. And it was sweet and romantic... he was giving me the sunrise. It's what he loves most in the world. But I can't... I can't give him things like that and I..."

"So... you going to open it?" asked Harry.

Neville nodded. "Yeah."

"Read me the steamy bits?"

"No," said Neville. "I don't think so."

"So he gets steamy bits from you, but you don't get any from him?" Harry shook his head. "Doesn't seem fair, Nev."
"I get steamy bits. He... he said he wanted to make love to me in front of the fire. He said... I get steamy bits, okay," said Neville, suddenly flustered and red again.

He took a deep breath, broke the seal, and began to read.

My sweet, my Nevyenka -

Is yet in rapture over sweet words of dirty, nasty Gryffindor, whose words are touching Vitya in places is... My Nevy, is wanting you to know what is doing to Vitya. Is wanting you to be knowing that was falling asleep in pools of cum, over chest and stomach. Pools conjured by words of Nevy, and by photo... is never to be regretting gift of camera, ever. To be seeing Nevy in ecstasy... is wanting to make you feel this, what is feeling as is coming over chest in photo. Is wanting this to be for Vitya. Is hoping name written in seed of Nevy is indication is wanting this too, but Vitya, Vitya is wanting to be tasting it after, kissing... Oh, my Nevy. Is going to be difficult days, waiting and hoping.

Gift for tomorrow is requiring much advance preparation, and is hoping that will be finding pleasing to Nevy. But is meaning cannot be to write of long letter today. Please be forgiving Vitya. Is to be trying to cherish Nevy in way no one has ever been cherishing, in way that will be making of Nevy wanting to be answering of question of Vitya. Is knowing still nervous. Is nervous also to be asking, but is knowing, Nevy, cannot be putting off of question. Is courtship. Will be...

But is knowing that Nevy is knowing this. Is feeling cherished! Is singing heart of Vitya that is feeling cherished, because is wanting this for Nevy always. To know that gentle soul is cared for completely. To know that Vitya... Vitya is being ready, my Nevy, ready to be standing beside you. To be holding you always. This is wish of Vitya, to be doing this. To be doing this, Nevy, as mate. To be raising of children. To be family.

And Vitya is knowing, cannot be doing this without understanding family. Is having conversations with grandmother of Nevy. Is thinking she is not liking Vitya much. Is thinking she has fears like to Nevy, about claiming. About blood of wolf. Please, my Nevy, is talking to you about these. But also is talking about family. To be telling her about family of Krum. Is knowing wolf blood is being hard for Longbottom family. Cannot be shamed for this, my Nevy. It is heritage of Vitya, and is being proud to be wolf, to be pack. Father of Vitya is half.

But also important to be understanding is parents of my beautiful Nevy. Has been to be observing of their care and sitting with gran of Nevy with them. Is knowing, my Nevy, that to be understanding you, is meaning to understand also this... what it is for you to be living with parents so long is this state. Is hoping you will be forgiving of Vitya for this forward action. Is wanting to know all of Nevy, not just of body, but of heart and soul of beautiful man that is...

My Nevy. When parents first were coming to St. Mungo's, there was being much research. Were heroes, your parents, and money was poured into coffers from family and even Ministry to support making them well again. Is thinking that Nevy was never being told that there is potion. Is not being cure. Is difficult, but even with funding was being decided that potion is not to be cost effective. Is hating these words. Is not to be putting price on moments with family that is loving. But St. Mungo's, they is putting price, and deciding not to pursue. Is giving you one hour, my Nevy. Only one. And because of toxins in potion, is able to be taking only once each year. Is taking such time to be breaking down in body of poisons that otherwise would be killing parents. But Nevy, will be making of them conscious. Is making them also alert, and free of pain for this time. Will be able to know you and remember from year to year. Is only hour, but is thinking, my Nevy, that even hour is being worthwhile at any cost.
Is funding for you this potion. Was not to be wanting to say anything until was holding of potion vial in hand. Is realizing this is a hopelessly difficult choice, Nevya moi, to have parents awake and be spending time with them only once in great time is hard, is knowing. But should be choice not dictated by finance. Toxins from potion build up, and because of this, is not possible to give longer or more frequently. Is directing to continue research, but is little hope of improving this particular draught.

Is loving you very much, Nevya moi.

With love in heart,
- Vitya

Neville started crying halfway through the letter, by the end he was clutching desperately to Trevor, who was croaking wildly with concern.

"Neville?" asked Harry as Neville set down the letter.

Neville shook his head. "Just... just let me..." He wiped at his eyes, trying desperately to stem a tide of tears that were threatening to emerge.

"He didn't break up..."

Neville shook his head again, his hand seeking the handkerchief he'd been trained to carry from childhood in his pocket. He wiped furiously at his eyes, pulling Trevor close against him. "He..."

"Nev?" Harry sat up in the bed, swinging his legs ponderously off of it. "What is it?"

"I... I can't." said Neville handing the letter Harry.

Harry looked at him with a question. It was private, he wasn't going to read it without... and then Neville nodded, and Harry read. His ears turned bright red.

"You can... you can skip down a bit. Only the beginning is..."

Harry swallowed. "You weren't kidding about the dirty talk, were you?"

Neville shook his head. "The... the important..."

But Harry was still reading. "Bloody hell," he said after a moment. "He. Did he actually send it?"

Neville gulped and nodded.

"Your parents..."

Neville began to cry again, and he didn't stop for a long time.
Chapter 47

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-----

He'd broken down again in front of Harry. After he'd finally taken back the letter. After he'd talked to Harry at length about what this might mean. After he'd confessed his terror that his parents might not approve of Viktor. After he'd endured Harry’s good-natured ribbing over the beginning of Viktor's letter being rather dirty... over what it implied, that Neville hadn't been kidding about sending pornographic photos to Viktor. After Neville had admitted to trusting Viktor with that side of him.

He'd read the letter again. He'd read it again and this time he'd seen it. *Is loving you very much, Nevya moi*. He'd seen the rose, it wasn't like it was new information, but that Viktor... he'd admitted it, in writing. He loved Neville. And he'd admitted it and done this, he'd funded... Neville was lost. This was beyond anything he might have hoped or dreamed. And Viktor, his Vitya, had done this for him, because Viktor loved him.

Neville pulled Trevor to him and just rocked in his chair, back and forth quietly. Harry watched him, and talked at him, but little registered. Finally he was brought back to consciousness with a question.

"Daddy, why is Uncle Neville so sad?"

Neville's eyes shot open at that, to behold Teddy, his hair Draco's platinum blonde, staring at him with those intense gray eyes.

"Not sad, Teddy."

"But you is cwying, Uncle Neville."

Neville blinked back his tears, reaching for his handkerchief only to find his too soaked to remedy anything.

"I has one of those, Uncle Neville. Poppy says a gentleman always cawwies one." Teddy stuck his hand in his pockets and pulled out a handkerchief. "See?"

Neville looked to Harry's broad smile as Harry pulled the small boy to him, tousled his hair, and
kissed him sweetly on the top of his head.

"Hey," said Teddy, swatting Harry's hands away. "What was that for?"

"That was for listening to your Poppy," said Harry. "It makes me very happy."

Neville had managed to get his tears back under control while Teddy tried to wriggle out of Harry's grasp.

"Daddy!" screeched Teddy and Harry let go. "Poppy says he misses you at night."

"I bet he does," said Harry with a smile. "And do you miss me?"

"I miss the bedtime stowies. Kweachie and Poppy don't agwee on what I should be allowed to wead."

Harry laughed heartily and tousled the boy's hair again. "So, who brought you?"

Teddy looked back at the door. "Uncle Luke. He says I have to spend the afternoon with Uncle Neville."

Neville smiled. "That's right," he said. "We're going to put up the tree and decorate it so it looks nice for the holidays. How do you feel about that?"

"Poppy won't let me touch the twee... he says I might bweak something."

Neville glanced at Harry. "Heirloom ornaments," said Harry. "He's broken three. We're doing it differently next year."

Neville smiled at Teddy, though the trails of the tears still burned. "I have a tree, Teddy. And you can touch mine. But you have to be careful, okay?"

Teddy grinned. "Can I put ownaments on the twee?"

"Yeah, you can put some ornaments on the tree. I need help. It's just me. But I bet, if YOU helped me, I could get the tree ready."

"Who you getting it weady for?" asked Teddy.

"Someone special Teddy. You'll get to meet him soon. He's pack."

"Pack like Uncle Luke?"

"Yeah. Just like your Uncle Luke."

"Cool," said Teddy. "Can I pet Twevoe?"

"Carefully," said Neville, "and not too hard, okay. He's a very old toad."

"I like Twevoe," said Teddy, anxiously sitting and waiting for Neville to gently lift the aging toad and set him on Teddy's lap. Teddy stroked his skin gently.

"Just like that," said Neville. "I'm glad you remember."

Teddy smiled and looked at his dad with a big grin on his face.
Neville turned and looked at Luke.


Neville nodded. "Just a little... I'll. I'll tell you later, okay?"

Luke narrowed his eyes and studied Neville for a moment. "You're still..."

"Nothing's changed. He's maddening, and I love him."

"Wait!" said Harry. "You love him? You're sure?"

Neville gulped and nodded. "I've been sure, Harry. For quite a while, I think."

"It's for him. The tree," said Harry, suddenly understanding. He looked at Luke. "You couldn't have shared?"

"He only told me yesterday," said Luke. "And I didn't want to jinx it."

"I'm done," declared Teddy. "Twevoe is cwoaking at me."

Neville stood up and lifted Trevor, tucking him carefully in his arms, and looking at Teddy. "So, tree?"

"Twee!" squealed Teddy excitedly.

"Give your dad a kiss and a hug goodbye, and we'll go."

Teddy wrinkled his face, but his affection for his dad was plain in the hug he gave to Harry, who tousled his hair one more time. "I'll see you again tonight before bed," said Harry, "I promised."

Teddy though was busy seizing Neville's hand and dragging him toward the door.

"I'll have him back after dinner. He can eat with me in the hall," said Neville, "and then he's Draco's for the night."

"But I was gonna have pizza!" screeched Teddy.

"Shh. It's a secret," whispered Neville conspiratorially, as though Harry couldn't possibly have heard him.

"Oh!" said Teddy, pressing a finger to his lips. "Sowwy, Uncle Neville."

"Come on then, let's go," said Neville, holding Teddy's hand tightly and nodding at Harry and Luke.

They were about halfway to the tower when Teddy asked him, "Why were you cwying, Uncle Neville?"

Neville stopped and squatted down next to Teddy so he could look him in the eye. "Uncle Neville found out something that made him very happy, Teddy, but very sad at the same time."

"So happy and sad both?"

"At the same time, yeah."

"That sounds compwicated," said Teddy.

"I'm don't like it when I cwy," said Teddy. "It makes me feel stwange. And I don't like it."

"I don't either, Teddy," said Neville softly. He wiped the platinum blonde locks away from Teddy's face. "Harry's so proud of you that you can do that, you know. Change your hair. He says you get it from your mum."

"I never met mum," said Teddy. "Gwamma Dwomeda says she was pwetty."

Neville gulped. He hadn't really known Tonks. There was a divide between the Order of the Phoenix and Dumbledore's Army, and only the Golden Trio and the Weasley twins had straddled it. "I bet your dad has pictures," said Neville. "I... It's important to look at them and remember."

"Daddy says... he says that sometimes you get sad, Uncle Neville. I don't want you to be sad."

Neville managed a weak smile. "Well, it's good I have you to cheer me up, then, isn't it?" he stood up and took Teddy's hand again. "Time to decorate a tree, alright?"

"Yeah!" squealed Teddy.

Hagrid had set up the tree where Neville requested while Neville was out and about, and it was waiting when they arrived. Teddy rushed over to it as soon as they reached the sitting room. "It's pwetty big Uncle Neville!"

"Well, bigger than you are, at least," said Neville. "What first?"

"Lights!"

"Hmm. What color?"

"Can't you change it?"

"How about blue?" asked Neville.

"Un-uh. Pink polka dotted!"

Neville shook his head. "Well the ornaments are all white and blue and silver."

"Just white... faiwy lights though, that move!" said Teddy.

"Okay... I think I can do that." Neville pulled his wand and whispered a few spells. Shortly the tree was lit by lights the flickered in and out of being, around the outside of the tree, occasionally drifting into the room randomly, sometimes even rather far from the tree. The effect was a bit surreal.

"More!"

"Not this time," said Neville. "I'm going to put these in the little bits of shadow, all over," he said, pulling out several trays of small dusky black ornaments of wolves.

"Oooh... wolfies!"

"Yeah, a lot of them. Point out places for me to put them, okay?"

He started picking places and Neville deftly caused the ornaments to appear in each of the places Teddy indicated. Then he added several more deeper in the tree, so that the entire tree had a feeling that there were wolves in the branches watching.

"What about these?" asked Teddy, indicating the other ornaments, blue and white and silver, a mix of glass balls and tear drop shapes.

"Those we hang the Muggle way, Teddy. You'll get to hang them. I'll help lift you."

"I get to hang them way up there?" asked Teddy.

"Absolutely," said Neville. And they set about doing it. One ornament after another.

When they were nearly done, Teddy held tightly and lifted as he placed ornaments near the top of the tree, Teddy grimaced. "Uncle Neville. When did you get owneded. You wasn't owneded befoe and now I think you are."

Neville almost dropped him. Clinging tightly, he managed to keep hold. His breath caught in his chest. It took him a moment to answer. "Why do you say that?"

"You smell. Like you belong. Can't smell who. It's iwitating. I want to know and I nomally can tell."

"How, Teddy?"

"I can smell the marks. Like on Uncle Noah. His smell like spit and blood and that other smell. He smells so stwong of Uncle Luke. Sometimes I can even smell it inside him. And he's owneded and markeded. But you. I don't smell marks. But you belong," he said the last word reverently. "I can tell. Someone ownses you."

"You can't tell anybody, okay? No one knows yet."

"Did you suwwender to a Mate, Uncle Neville?"

Neville set Teddy down and squatted next to him. "Has your Uncle Luke talked about that? About marking and owning?"

"A wittle. He says I need to understand stuff."

"You know Uncle Luke and Uncle Noah, they..."

"He says Uncle Noah suwwendered to him so that he could own him and make Uncle Noah his. He says that means Uncle Noah loves him lots and lots, more than anythings. And now Uncle Noah is marked and belongs. You belongs, Uncle Neville."

Neville let himself smile just a little bit. "Teddy, you're right. I belong to someone. But he doesn't... he doesn't know it yet, okay?"

"Not wight to be belonging without marks, Uncle Neville," said Teddy, making tut-tut movements with his finger. "Uncle Luke said it had to be both." He brought both hands together lacing the fingers and squeezing.

"Teddy," said Neville, patting the boy's arms, "Your Uncle Neville loves someone lots and lots, just like your Uncle Noah loves your Uncle Luke. And... I'm putting this tree together just for him, so he and I can spend Christmas together."
"Oh. Is he going to own you at Christmas?"

"Yes, Teddy," said Neville softly, tousling the boy's hair. "He's a wolf, and I'm his mate. He's going to mark me and own me."

"But you need him to do that soon!" said Teddy. "Other wolves will smell. They'll know you is weady to be owned and they'll take you!"

Neville shook his head. "Your Uncle Neville won't let that happen, Teddy, okay."

"Does that mean I'm gonna have another Uncle?"

Neville laughed. "Yeah," he said. "It does. Would you like that?"

"Is he fun?"

"I think so. I love him more than anything."

"Is that why you was cwying?" asked Teddy.

"It's complicated," said Neville. "Happy and sad, both at the same time, remember? He makes me very happy, Teddy. But what Uncle Noah does for Uncle Luke. To love him that much and be owned. It's very scary to do."

"But you has alweady done it. He just needs to mark you and make you smell like him."

Neville gulped. He was really looking forward to that bit. "And he will. Soon. But if we don't finish this tree, he won't come."

"Weally! I'm sowwy, Uncle Neville," he turned and looked at the tree. "I think it needs icicles!"

Neville groaned. He'd seen those, little stringy bits of silver the Muggles covered their trees in.

"It needs them. You want him to see the twee and love you wight?"

Neville rolled his upper lip into his mouth and furrowed his brow a little bit, then with a deft swipe of his wand he covered the tree with snow and ice, delicately, but thoroughly, and wrapped the ice in charms to keep it from melting. "Like that?"

"Awesome!" said Teddy. "That's not how Daddy does it though!"

"Yeah, well, these are better though, right?"

"You pwomise you won't tell Daddy if I say they are?"

"I promise."

Teddy helped him set all the presents under the tree, asking the expected questions (where were his gifts) and when they were done they surveyed the tree, glittering in the fairy lights, blue and white and silver and ice. The dark wolves gleaming from the shadows. Teddy looked at the pile of presents. "If anyone gave me this many presents, Uncle Neville, I would mark them!"

"Shh," said Neville. "You should only ever do that if you love someone so much it hurts, the way you love Daddy and Poppy. And only if they want it from you so much that they're begging for it." He tousled the boy's hair. "Trust me, if it comes time, you'll know."
And they had pizza, courtesy of Kreacher, who called a Muggle pizza delivery and had it delivered to Grimmauld Place, apparating with it to the castle. Teddy played with the cheese more than he ate, though conspicuously every bit of the all meat toppings disappeared. When they were done Luke came through the Floo and took Teddy back to the hospital wing to see Harry.

Once Teddy was gone, Neville went to the bedroom and sat down. Trevor croaked softly from his rock, where Neville had stashed him as soon as they arrived. Neville buried his head in his hands. Noah had said it was the submission for the wizard, that it was his own surrender that made him owned. He'd said it, but Neville hadn't really believed it until Teddy had... Fuck. Teddy knew. That he was...

Neville drew a deep breath. The potion bottle glittered on his desk. An hour with his parents. He closed his eyes. He wanted to use it. He would use it. But not yet. He swallowed. His parents would meet his husband and mate. They'd meet the man who owned him. He shook a little. It was good. They should meet the man that he is, not who they might have wanted him to become. He just hoped that Viktor would go with him when the time came.

He looked at the potion for a few moments and drew out the usual sheets of creamy parchment and the quill that Viktor had gifted to him, and he wrote:

Dearest Vityenka moi,

I just don't know what to say. I'd never imagined. I never thought, even an hour, it's more than. I only have these hazy remembrances. Mum singing me a song. I'm not even sure the memory is real. And then there was pain. For so long. And they were gone. Comfort and love and it was gone and all I had was my gran, and a hospital room.

And they'll finally know me, all grown up and being courted and it scares me... what they'll think. Do they share gran's nervousness about your blood, Vitya. Do they... will they be proud of me. I'm hoping they will. I'm hoping. But I don't know and that kills me, that something you meant out of love could... that it could hurt me so. And yet I have to know. I have to at least give them the chance to know the man I became. I have to at least let them know that I love them.

Do you know what it means to me, Vitya? Knowing that you love me? You said it. You know I knew, because of the rose, but you wrote it in your letter. And because of the rose, I know it's true. I've kept a petal of the rose, you know, blue fire, cold ice, in my pocket since. To remind myself. To look at and know you're there. To know that you love me. That I... that I'm the deepest desire in your heart. Me.

Fuck, Vitya, knowing that... I can't even begin to say what it means. That you love me. That you would do these crazy things for me. From s'mores to tapestries, every gift, Vitya, has been touching. Even the camera, which was, you must admit, a little self-serving. You had to know that I might get a bit more risque if the house elf wasn't watching. And I did. And I'm glad, my Vitya. I WANT you to see me that way. I want you looking at me and devouring me with your eyes. I want more than that.

Will you give me more? The more that I want? I'm afraid, because I don't know if you will. I'm afraid because I've been scared for a while, and I don't want our relationship to be about that fear. I want it to be about us.

Two days and it feels like an eternity. I know you've worried for a long time. That what happened with Oliver might happen to you. You're in love, like Oliver was, and you've been waiting. You had to know that I was... that I did things for Oliver. I let him take me, Vitya, when I'd never let anyone else. Because I couldn't stand to think of topping him. Of giving what I'd given to Luciano
to anyone else. But I gave it to you, Vitya. It was in a dream, but it was real. What we felt was real. The cum in your arse, it was mine. I'd bred you. And I think you know that we weren't ready, and I curse that. Because I felt this then, and everything was fragile and confused.

And I almost didn't recognize this. What I feel. My love for you Vitya. I almost didn't recognize what it meant. When I felt the pull and the tug and the need. When I discovered I was in love with you and tried to pretend it was that we'd fucked, when we... we never just fucked. And I didn't understand. A potion needing my blood and the thorn and petal of a witch rose after I'd pricked it? It only worked, my Vitya, because I am in love with you. Because I was in love with you then.

I am waiting for you. I'm scared and nervous and I wish I knew what you were going to say. I hope that I know. I hope that we're both wanting the same thing.

My Vitya... I love you.

- Nevya
Chapter 48

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Viktor Krum was having an excellent day. He'd slept deeply, exactly as he had described to Neville, with cum drying on his skin and matting his hair. He'd suffered for that in the shower this morning, but he was not ashamed to admit that he'd expressed his devotion for Neville's body, for Neville's temptation, for Neville's explosive statement of desire, by wrapping his hand around his cock and hoping and dreaming for the day when he could lick Neville clean.

After a long shower he'd emerged from his sanctuary and gone to the shop of his master to check on the wands and complete the Karelian birch. Today the core would need to be fused into the substance of the wand, a process that would drain him terribly, but would leave the wand complete, never having touched the flesh of another wizard. It would be ready to know Neville.

His master awaited him there, nodding to him and watching him with each step. A wand with a witch rose core was a new concept, one that stretched the theories and practice of wand making, and the master sat, cool and calm, his eyes intent as he watched Viktor focus his magic on the wand and command the components to fuse together.

Viktor was no less intent, he'd concentrated his love into the making of the wand, carefully plucking each petal frozen with his heart's desire, and then wrapping them carefully and lovingly around fibers from the stem of the rose. The core was a fused amalgam of the rose, stem, thorns, petals, all carefully preserved and carefully inserted into the tunnel drilled painstakingly through the center of the Karelian birch. It was lovingly made, pliant and blessed with natural knotting that matched the placement of a hand exactly Neville's size. It was made for Neville, with love and care and magic that sung his name and burned with the azure fire that was Neville's strength.

Now Viktor was concentrating his own substantial power to fuse the parts together, to help lock the conduits of power. The wand burned with blue flame, trying to escape the bonds of service to which Viktor was binding its power. But Viktor's power held it vise-like in place, held it firm, let the power roar and burn within the wand until it shrank back, an ember to be roused at the need of its master.

Viktor collapsed backward into a chair. His face was covered with sweat. It seemed an easy process, but this wand had such power to contain.
"Intense, I see," said the master, his eyes sparkling as he walked calmly in a full circle around the wand. "It fought you. Such power!"

"Life of plant is stronger than most is thinking," said Viktor, his chest still heaving with exertion.

Viktor's master simply pulled his own wand, tapping with quiet spells in the places around the wand and watching the power flare up. He muttered to himself softly and then whispered the necessary spells, one after another, to check the power and potency of the new wand. He shuddered as the power filled and consumed him, wracking his body with an intensity he'd not expected.

"Your friend is a powerful wizard to be receiving this wand. Can he handle the..."

"Is being hero, my master. Is no one is to be trusting more."

The master narrowed his eyes and nodded, pulling forth a box of the appropriate length and preparing it. Then carefully pulled on shoulder length dragon's hide gloves and set the wand inside. He closed the box quickly.

"Seal it. Be sure to key the wards on the box to your hero. He must be the first person to open it and touch it, or the precautions you took will mean nothing. Someone else will claim it. You... you must know you cannot send this by owl."

"Is to be handing to someone is trusting to give only to Nevyenka."

"Good." The master looked around the shop. "That's enough. Go prepare yourself, my apprentice. Tomorrow is the last day, is it not?"

"Is being near to end of courtship, but is not being end. Tomorrow gift is wand. Is being one more gift after."

"He'll say yes?"

"Is not daring to be asking. He is... he is much fearing of blood that flows like beast in veins of Vitya."

"Surely he loves you..."

"Is knowing. But is Nevya in love with Vitya. Is not being the same, and is knowing this difference matters to Nevya. Is telling him how Vitya is feeling, that is loving him. But is wishing that Nevya..."

His master shed the glove and patted him on the shoulder. "Go. Your Quidditch team is taking you to a late lunch."

"Is what?"

"They asked, Viktor. You must know they figured out long ago where you disappeared to when you weren't in training."

"Was not knowing. Is not..."

"It's okay. They are your friends, Viktor. They've known for years. And they've kept your secret. I think they sense the end of your time on a broom is near, and they want to talk to you. You should. This was your masterwork," nodded the master to the wand in its box. "And I find it acceptable work. You are no longer my apprentice."
'But is...'

"Enough. It is for me to decide. There is nothing more you need to learn from me about the crafting of wands. It's in here," his master said, pressing a hand to Viktor's heart. "You've always accepted that wand making comes from here and not from your head, and you've learned it well. Now go. Eat. Make sure to invite me to the opening when you open your shop."

"Is still to be a few years yet."

His master smiled. "My workshop is open for you, if you need one in the meantime."

"Master..."

"Not master. Not anymore. You have been a good apprentice, Viktor Gregorivich. You made your master very proud."

Viktor bowed formally, carefully whispering the wards on the box and placing it in a long coat pocket. Outside he found Burkov, Kovachev and Hadjiev. They smiled at him with broad grins.

"How long is knowing?" asked Viktor firmly.

"Don't worry," said Kovachev, "we haven't told anyone. Not even anyone else on the team."

"Is secret for reason!"

"All of professional Quidditch will fall apart if they find out you aren't taking a coaching job?" asked Burkov.

"Is secret for..."

They all tilted their heads and gave him a look.

"Is being fine. So, is lunch?"

They grinned and grabbed hold of him, dragging him down the street to a restaurant not far off and sitting him down. Shortly they had drinks in front of them and people staring and there were three sets of privacy wards covering the table.

"So..." said Kovachev. "You said she was beautiful..."

"Was saying date is beautiful, and is not to be taking of this back!"

"Iz beink concerned that iz beink what iz right for Vitya," said Hadjiev. "This iz beink all. Iz wanting Vitya to be happy. Iz beink happy?"

"Is courting. Beautiful man, who is more than just being beautiful, Kovachev. Did not want to be taking of sister and sleeping with her because is what she is expecting and then sending away. This is what is happening to dates, you is all knowing this."

"But not to this man," said Burkov.

"Nyet. Is being one. Perfect mate of Vitya. Is to be asking in only two days."

"Wait!" said Kovachev, "You're... you mean the courtship is over?"

"Tomorrow is giving gift of wand made of own hand. Then there is one more gift, and is to be
declaring intent."

"And you're... you're asking him?" asked Burkov.

"Is in love. Is hoping he is also being."

"Iz good," said Hadjiev. "Stars are beink in proper places for wedding. Iz marryink him?"

"Is question of intent, not wedding!" exclaimed Viktor. "Vitya is still only to be hoping of happiness of Nevya, that is to be saying yes. Is needing this answer before can be to plan of wedding!"

"Good!" said Kovachev, "Because we expect invitations. Plus guest. Don't skimp, we all know you can afford it."

"Is being dry affair. State wedding. Is knowing this."

Kovachev laughed. "Dry and dusty affair where we could be meeting wives!"

Burkov and Hadjiev both laughed, but their grins said they felt the same.

"Is being state wedding. Is knowing father will be inviting all of co-workers. Not to be embarrassing of Vitya in front of Nevyenka moi."

"But we'll be invited?" pressed Burkov.

"Of course is inviting! Is not to be surrounded only by politicians interested in chosen spouse of son of the Boyar. Is wanting to be friends, and is having few outside of team. Is knowing this," said Viktor.

"And the wand making..."

"Is plan for long time. Is burning desire, to focus of magic in this way. To touch the wood with care. Is process of heart, and is finding in it same satisfaction that is feeling when riding on broom. Is knowing is not for Vitya, this sitting on sideline and coaching of team. Is not on broom. Is this part of Quidditch that is loving, and will be leaving Quidditch at proper time to be focusing on making of wands."

Viktor turned to his plate of chicken, the potatoes sitting in the pooling butter and herbs released by the chicken as it was sliced.

Hadjiev looked at him serious. "Iz wishink you had told us, Vitya. Iz havink friend, handsome Quidditch seeker, who iz needing hunk of man to be keepink warm."

"Pierre?"

"Iz knowink?"

"Is knowing all of gay men in Quidditch. Is only being five, is easy to be keeping track. Pierre, he is not right for Vitya."

"Iz beink lonely."

"Olya?" asked Burkov. "He had a broken relationship with that Muggle, and then... well, I assume you knew about him with Neville."

"Da, was knowing, Olya was giving of permission before pursuing of courtship."

"Well, why didn't you..."

"Is fascinated by not so sudden concern in love life of Vitya," said Viktor under his breath, "but is being happy with Nevya. Is to be asking to be sharing with Vitya, to be having of life together."

"He's said to be happy at Hogwarts," said Kovachev. "You can't seriously think he'd leave."

"Is not to be asking this of Nevya. Is wizard. Will be finding way to make lives of both work without sacrificing of selves."

"You think he'll say yes," asked Burkov.

"Is knowing only that Vitya will be losing much of heart if is saying no."

"He seems very fit," ventured Kovachev.

"Is having no idea," said Viktor, "is being very beautiful, my Nevyenka. Is very lucky that Nevya was accepting suit." Viktor closed his eyes for a moment. "Be forgiving of Vitya. Is appreciating of lunch, of acceptance of friends. But is needing to be preparing for final gifts. Is wanting for Nevya to be saying yes. Is needing everything to be perfect for Nevyenka moi."

They all nodded to him and threw down a pile of galleons on the table to cover the bill. "Iz hopink you are happy, Vitya," said Hadjiev.

Viktor laughed. "Be to ask of Vitya after new year."

Hadjiev laughed and clapped him on the back. Then they were gone with a crack, and Viktor was focusing his own determination to take him back to the sanctuary.

He was meeting Professor Sprout tomorrow. He hadn't told her why. Only that he was needing her expertise for a gift for Neville as part of his courtship. He looked at the table, the paper waiting for him to write the letter. He... he still had to...

He looked at the picture, at his Nevya letting himself go while thinking of Vitya. Writing Viktor's name on his chest with the sticky fluid of his own seed. It was very nearly an offer, to do that so intimately, and Viktor had to school the response of his wolf quickly to head it off.

Viktor took the Floo to the Krum estate and walked deep into the bowels of the manor, to a small stone room holding a portrait. He quietly closed the door and bowed his head. "Great lady," he said softly.

"I was wondering if you would come," said the raven-haired witch in the portrait.

"Is needing to be sure of heart," said Viktor softly.

"My Vitya, my grandson... you have been sure for a long time."

"Is asking, great lady."

"I know."
"Is for final gift offering something that. Great lady, the Vyedma, she will be..."

"Offer it from your heart, my grandson, and she will forgive you."

Viktor looked rather concerned still. "Is knowing gift that..."

"Don't be afraid, my grandson. The gift may have been created by my mother, but I gave it freely to you, as a trust. To my family. You are not giving this away without thought. You are offering it, a true treasure, in a gesture of love to a man you intend to take as your own, to be your family." She paused. "He is worth this trust."

Viktor swallowed. It hadn't been a question. "I love him, great lady."

The woman looked at him shrewdly. "He is yours... hold him, protect him, and above all show to him your love."

"I. He is afraid of my blood, lady," said Viktor. "I will not claim him."

"Claimed or not, my Vitya, he is yours. Show him your love and tenderness, and in time he may wish to feel teeth upon his neck."

"But lady... how can I dare to hope. I cannot lose him. I intend to promise him freedom from the claim."

She looked at him seriously for a moment and sighed. "There is no taint in being wolf, Vitya, no reason to hide it, to promise to tuck it away. He will not thank you for this."

"Is yet being what I must do," said Viktor softly. "He is life of Vitya, and is not to be enduring of loss before is even sharing it together. Is in love. Perhaps should have heeded father and searched for she-wolf with golden fur. Instead is having Nevyenka. But is not surrendering to claim. I is not asking for this of him."

"The desire in his heart is passion and fire," she said, "a complement to the ice within his eyes. Do not discount your fire. He loves you for it."

"Is knowing Nevya is wanting Vitya. Is just not to be knowing that is loving Vitya. That is being in love with Vitya," said Viktor nervously. "Is fearing for this. That at end of suit would be left alone after opening of heart."

"My Vityenka," said the woman, stepping out of the painting. The earth shook and a crack of thunder could be heard overhead. Viktor's eyes opened, terrified.

"When I was lost and in love with a wolf, my mother gave to me a rose. It would glow, she said, when I touched someone who I could come to love. And if they pricked their finger upon it, it would show to me their heart's desire. She told me that I must trust the rose. But Vitya, my love, the one I feared did not love me, he was a wolf, and I was afraid." Paint shifted as the woman revealed her shoulder. The marks were vicious, deep. They were the marks of a true wolf, closer even to the blood than Viktor's father. "He loved me, not the idea of marking or claiming me. But me. Your Nevya, I think he's seen your heart's desire. I think he knows. I think he is more at peace with your wolf than you know."

"But is to be risking losing him."

The woman slowly faded, reappearing on the canvas. "Perhaps. Or perhaps you could discover each other." Her posture began to become rigid. "Go, my grandson. Prove to him that you love
him."
Chapter 49

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Viktor returned to his sanctuary to find a large brown owl waiting for him. He smiled and threw the owl a treat after taking the letter, watching it fly off back into the night. He opened the letter and read it slowly. It was a letter not unmarred already by tears, and Viktor's soon joined the ones already on the page.

Viktor clutched the letter tightly to his chest and held it there for a long time, letting the tears well up. His Nevya confessing to loving him. His Nevya confessing to being in love. Now he had fear only that Nevynka would so fear his beast that he would be refused for the wolf in his blood.

Would Nevya do that to him? Could he?

Viktor thought of the cold determination in Neville, the ice that rose in his presence, that chilled the air, that kept out anything but the cold necessity of what he had to do. Yes, his Nevya could do it. He could only hope to have reached the blue fire at Neville's core and swayed him. Despite his ancestor's words, he still feared for what Neville wanted, for what he would say. Viktor closed his eyes. For this love that Neville offered so freely on the page, he would give up the ecstasy of a claim.

But then he'd seen Lyusha and how happy he was with Noah, with a mate who embraced Lyusha's beast, who embraced the whole of him. They were beautiful together, Lyusha and Noah, the power of Noah's surrender a palpable presence that radiated from him, unshakable, untouchable. Noah belonged to Lyusha alone, owned. And he wore the marks of his love openly. To see that made Victor desire it in ways he knew that he should never have...

But he had. And now he felt a loss keenly that he had once simply known as a fact. He'd never dared to hope to claim. To see Neville's flesh, to see Neville casually marking himself with Viktor's name... it set his passions aflame. It made him want it. Want to take Neville and own him. Viktor shuddered as he read the letter one last time, tracing the last lines with a finger before kissing the letter and setting it aside.

He seized his quill and he wrote:
 sweetheartnevya --

Is knowing from Lyusha that you have struggled with your wand. Current wand better than using of father's, but still lacks heart. Is understanding. Best living wand makers were being killed outright by Dark Lord near end of war. Is not being Ollivander, but skills strong enough, I think, with guidance of master to make this wand for you. He is thinking choice of core makes Vitya crazy, but on hearing of you, is agreeing with choice of Vitya. Being very proud, master gives compliments only rarely.

My Nevya... is putting love of you into this wand. Is putting petals of deepest blue and ice and white from rose with magic of great witch of Russian steppe. Is merging fibers of stem and sharpness of thorn. Is polishing birch branch from rare birch of Karelia, worth weight in gold. Is seen in beauty of patterns in wood once polished. Is rare and precious, is thinking Nevya will agree. Wand bends, like the love is coming to know, gently but still is strong. Longer wands is better for Herbology work. Rare materials is making strong for hexes. My master consulted with mutual friend who studies love, yes? They is agreeing that love in making and unusual core acting together is making wand be wanting to choose you. But Nevya must touch wand first, no other hands is ever touching, is wearing gloves while making. Is hoping Nevya will accept humble offering of Vitya's hands. Is missing your touch, your kiss. My Nevya, is being lost without you.

To see words on page, to see hopes of Vitya so answered, it is... heart sings to read these words, sweet Nevynenka. Is knowing there are yet fears for Nevya, but is to be calming of these, my dearest one. Is to helping us each to understand the other. In person, tomorrow, my love. Is hoping both of us are to be ready. Is hoping gifts are still finding favor. Is hoping courage of heart is not to be collapsing before is seeing vision of my Nevynenka. Is having yet one more gift for Nevya, is having one last treasure to be offering.

Is barely to be sleeping. Is aching for touch and scent of Nevynenka. House elf was finding precious Y fronts, and taking to be washing. Now is smelling of chemicals, and is missing scent of my love to comfort when is sleeping. Is missing stuffed wolf pup that was courage and strength at heart of Vitya. Is missing taste of kiss on lips.

My Nevynenka, is hoping wand is finding favor, and is making ready of final treasure. Is work of day to be doing this thing, and then is only final sleep before Nevya is receiving of final gift. Is seeming eternity, but Vitya is surviving, knowing will see Nevynenka one last time, to be looking into eyes of azure flame, tucked behind their walls of ice. Is hoping to be let past ice. Is hoping to let passion of Vitya dance with blue fire. Is hoping so many things for us. Is wanting there to be US, my love.

With all the love of my heart,
- Vitya

--

Neville woke to the soft crack of apparition, startling awake to the wide open eyes of a house elf. The elf bowed low and intoned officiously, "I come bearing the word of the house of Krum. The master gave instructions that I was to appear at dawn and give to you this letter, and this box, and that no one else was to touch them." The elf bowed low again, staying bent over, the letter and the box held up for Neville to take. Neville slid out of bed, grateful he'd worn sleep pants, and took them from the elf, thanking him for his service. The elf gave a briefer nod this time and disapparated with the usual crack, leaving only a bit of mist.

Neville read the letter quietly, his heart jumping to see Viktor wanting to be close to him, missing him. He smiled as he read the bit about his Y fronts. That Viktor was feeling close to him sleeping
Neville smiled, still dressed in just a pair of sleep pants. He let them fall and searched out the Y fronts he'd worn the previous day. He slid into his bed and wrapped a hand around his morning wood, jerking lightly on the flesh. He could give this to Vitya, and oh god, he wanted to. He let his hand move and began to moan, closing his eyes and imagining Vitya moving on top of him.

Shortly the moans got desperate, his fingers moving, his other hand going to his throat and feeling at his neck desperately for the mark he wanted. Fuck he wanted it. His breath caught as his orgasm overcame him, thick white ropes of cum landing on his stomach. He smiled and rubbed himself clean with the cotton Y fronts, sniffing them experimentally when he was done. He let his head fall back against the pillow until he got his breath back.

Then he was up and wrapping the dirty cum stained underwear in plain brown paper. The thought of Viktor opening the package and pulling out the Y fronts made him smile. He'd not wait. Viktor would bring them to his great gorgeous hooked nose and he'd inhale the scent like it was the sweetest rose on earth. And maybe to him it was. Neville closed his eyes. One more day. One more night sleeping alone. And Vitya would be there. He'd be able to touch... to kiss... oh fuck he wanted the day to go fast.

He unwrapped Viktor's parcel carefully, lifting open the box and feeling the quest of wards challenging him and then yielding. This was his, for him and no other. The wand was stunning. It hadn't been stained, just varnished in its natural finish and it was beautiful. The Karelian birch was knotted and twisted and the wood took the patterns of those knots beautifully, making it almost marbled in appearance, light and dark and beauty. It was longer than his current wand, longer and the base had been heavily knotted, and some of the ridges allowed to remain, natural resting places for fingers. For a hand exactly his size.

Hesitantly he reached in and lifted it. His heart sang as his fingers touched the smooth finish. Blue fire kissing his hand in recognition. The air swirling around him as the wand whispered its greeting. This was his. His companion and friend. And it was choosing him. He could hear the wand sing, soothing him and a tear touched the corner of his eye. It was singing away the echoes of the *Cruciatus*. It was recognizing him to his core. Because at the core of the wand was him. The Night Blooming Siberian Witch Rose, touched by the desires of Viktor Krum, which meant the essence of this wand, its core, was everything that Viktor loved about him. Reluctantly he replaced the wand in its box.

He took hold of his quill and wrote quickly.

Vityenka moi -

You astound me again. I knew of course that you were making wands, but for me? A wand made for a single person? That defies everything I know of wand lore. And yet you did it, and made it work. Using the manifestation of the witch rose petals... bloody brilliant! And it worked, my Vitya, the wand... it chose me. It kissed me with its fire and it's mine.

My magic, it's never been understood, and now, now I have a wand that truly understands. It's a precious gift. Beautiful, powerful, poignant in its message. That you would make this... that you'd defeat what are held as universal laws of wand making to give me something so beautiful and perfect and meant for just me. My Vitya. I shudder to think I mean so much to you. It gives me hope. It tells me the rose is right. That you know your heart's desire and that it's me.

I hope this gift is as meaningful for you. I'm sending you my scent. I don't want you alone, my Vitya, not even for a night, without me there, comforting you. I hope you sleep tonight. I hope being wrapped in my scent gives you that peace. I hope my cum is still wet when it gets to you.
Will you taste it? The seed I spilled this morning with no purpose other than to keep you wrapped in comfort tonight? I think you will. I know you will.

I love you. I cannot imagine a more perfect gift, and I'm forced to wonder what tomorrow will bring. I... I hope you know that no one gift will change my feelings. I hope you know... my Vitya come to me tomorrow. I'm waiting.

Lyublyu tyebya, my wolf,
- Nevya
Chapter 50

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Viktor wallowed in the scent of his love. He sniffed it and teased it with his tongue. He lapped madly at the cotton fabric to get every last taste of it, and kept it close, so very close, to ensure no accidental washing left him alone. He couldn't be alone. Not tonight. Not when his Nevya had worked so hard to ensure that he would sleep. To ensure that tomorrow he'd kneel before his love desperate with the taste of Nevya still on his tongue and the powerful scent of him strong in his memory.

Viktor was more than happy when Professor Sprout appeared, right as scheduled, late in the afternoon, coming through wards lifted just for her to appear in Viktor's study. Viktor was sitting in his usual chair, facing away from the fire.

"Madam Sprout, Is being glad you came."

"You said it was about Neville," said Pomona Sprout. "The boy... it's no secret, he was the best herbologist to come through Hogwarts in all my time there. A true prodigy."

"Is being best in his field, yes?"

"I think you know the answer," said the former professor. "You said this was about a courtship gift? Minerva wrote me... she's... she's concerned that you're a wolf."

"Is thinking Vitya would to be making claim?"

Pomona laughed. "You'd be dead before you could do that. Unless Neville wanted you to. He's formidable that one. If you have in mind to claim him, I suggest you..."

"Is not to be taking Nevya, unless, as you say, he was asking this of Vitya," said Viktor softly, standing and giving a curt bow of greeting.

"Do you love him?"

"Is thinking you will not be asking the question when you see."
"You think a gift could convince me?"

"Perhaps. Is hoping to have your expertise. Is having gift for Nevya, precious magical plant to be sending, and is needing to be sending to him. Is hoping perhaps is being willing to grant Vitya your expertise for gift to Nevya."

"Nothing dangerous?"

Neville had a known fascination with the most dangerous and deadly plants. He'd gained a reputation for being one of few willing to harvest the leaves and thorns and sap of such plants, a major factor in the success of the business he'd started with Casey. Viktork had known this of course through Lyusha, who had shared his fears for Neville in his letters. Viktor took a deep breath.

"Is to be showing you something, something known only to family of Krum. Showing and trusting that care for Nevya is keeping you silent about what it is that you have seen."

"And Neville?"

"If is saying yes, will be Krum, and this secret will be legacy for him also."

"You're not going to force me to a..."

"Is making already so you cannot be speaking of it unintentionally, or by force. But is not taking away of choice to be sharing. Is hoping you will honor trust of Krum with your silence," said Viktor.

"You were a favored student of Professor Kuznitso's. Mastery in Herbology."

Viktor nodded.

"He did not give his favor lightly. Was killed by..."

"Is true. Was killed by wolf. Pack of humble Quidditch player hunted down rogue beast that was doing this thing. Is still much missing mentor."

Professor Sprout straightened. "I see a light in Neville's eyes in the pictures with you. I know he hides his heart behind walls. But he lets it go around the plants he loves. I haven't seen that look much, but I think he..."

"Is not needing to guess," said Viktor, standing tall. "He is confessing his love for Vitya in his letters. Is much humbled to have love of beautiful Nevya." He stopped to regain his composure. "But love is not only consideration. Is to be giving up of name, shaming of family to be touching a filthy wolf. Is to be taking wolf to bed, to bearing of children with blood to be considered tainted. To be consorting with wizard who holds mastery of the dark arts. For many just to be sharing bed with another man is being mark against him. And so even with love is knowing my Nevya is feeling, is not to be sure of what response is being. Is hoping, but is not certain, even now. Even with gift is to be giving. Is not knowing."

"You think this gift will make a difference?"

"Is knowing that it will not. But is loving him enough to give to him anyway. Is to be wanting to be using powerful warming charm. Is apparating, but is site most carefully protected, and will be walking some distance in snow and ice."

Professor Sprout nodded and extended her arm. Viktor seized it and there was a crack. They
appeared deep in the woods. The sun had set and the night was alive with sound. The hoot of the owl. The baying howl of a wolf. The answering howl of others.

"Am I safe?"

"Safe enough. The wolves in this forest will not harm anyone accompanied by the line of Krum."

"They know?"

"Is blood being shared. Of course is knowing scent of distant cousin."

She looked at him rather oddly, but followed him as he led her deep into the woods. They were approaching a clearing when he spun to face her. "Is great trust is giving you. Is hoping love of Neville for his teacher is well earned." He took her hand and led her the last few steps.

The scent of vanilla, that hint of a smell more like candy than flower, hung heavy in the air. Viktor lifted his wand and cast a *Lumos* into the center of the clearing. Pomona's jaw opened, her eyes growing wide as she took in the soft translucent petals, The sharp thorns, the blooming flower in the midst of winter.

"Night Blooming Siberian?" she asked, her voice a whisper.

"The rose of the Baba Yaga," answered Viktor. "Is not being possible to find, without blood of Krum. But is giving rose bush to my Nevya. Giving to him for greenhouse at Hogwarts."

"But Viktor that's..."

"Worth several small fortunes. But of all in Hogwarts, only Nevya is knowing true value. He will be planting quietly in greenhouse and using properties of rose only at desperate need. Will be keeping secret and never selling, except to be showing of single flower to student who is having true love of craft. Will become legend... to be said that in greenhouse of Hogwarts is being this flower if is knowing how and when to look."

"It matched his eyes. The rose in the picture of the Prophet. When he was dancing. The rose, it matched his eyes."

Viktor nodded.

"It was one of these?" asked Pomona. "A flower worth... you gave him for his lapel?"

"Is allowing Professor to take a single flower in gratitude of Krum family if is helping to be giving of gift."

Professor Sprout looked around in awe. "Just knowing they... they exist!"

"Is still being secret."

"I understand. You'll need to harvest at least five feet in each direction, and clear the roots with magic..."

--

Viktor was tired and sore from his efforts when they finally reached a Krum safe house in the depths of night. He'd intended to send the rose with a house elf, or even have Professor Sprout deliver it personally, but instead she recommended spells that would protect an owl carrying it from harm and detection, saying it would be detrimental to apparate with them. That had meant
blindfolding the Professor to bring her to the small cottage that was the nearest Krum outpost. He'd summoned the materials he'd needed from a house elf, with Vasilisa, and asked the elf to take the Professor wherever she'd like to go.

The package to his side held the properly shrunk bush, with the Professor's careful notes to Neville to ensure it survived being restored. He was glad in the end to have trusted her, as her notes and additions added to his increased the likelihood that Neville might manage the impossible task of transplanting the legendary rose. He scribbled the note lovingly.

Light of my heart --

Is being day before Christmas. Is being day thirty of our courtship. Final day. Is barely able to be writing for stomach churns worse than day of Quidditch World Cup. Vitya is knowing what it is he wants. First is gift. Final day must finish properly. Is being difficult. Is wanting Nevya to know how feels and is thinking gave wrong gift on day twenty-nine. If had saved would be good final gift! Hoping nervousness gives laugh to dear Nevya.

Box is being carefully shrunk by master herbologist Pomona Sprout at request of Vitya. Is knowing you will be trusting in her skills. She is being most envious at moment. If you will be recalling day Vitya is asking Nevya for permission to be courting. Offered flower. But also was offering something else. Night Blooming Siberian Witch Rose is rarest of all roses. Unknown, almost mythical.

Nevya is knowing no witch rose ever has been grown from seed in controlled environment. Is thinking though that bush might be transplanted under right conditions. No one is ever finding bush of rose to try. Is listing on back exact consistency of soil, light, temperature. Is trying to list every variable, and Professor Sprout, she is adding many others. In box is rose bush of Baba Yaga's rose. Is gift, for you, for garden at Hogwarts. Is knowing you will never be leaving school, not even for Vitya, and would not be asking. Does not mean giving up on Nevya! Is knowing dedicated souls loving one another can be finding of way! Only meaning that is knowing importance of school and of teaching and of garden. Is knowing heart of Nevya will always be in greenhouses of Hogwarts where was finding of purpose in life. So is hoping gift to be making garden of Nevya's heart more beautiful. Making space where work is reminding him of Quidditch player that is loving him.

Is knowing you is still having fear borne of blood of wolf in Vitya's veins. Is hoping Nevya is trusting Vitya enough to speak about this before is making decision. Is making declaration now, for Nevya to be knowing. Is loving you, Neville Longbottom, from depths of heart, from depths of soul. You shatter me. Is yet waiting to see whether great love of life will put heart of Vitya back together. And is being great love of life, my Nevya. Is yet hoping. Will be seeing Nevya when sun is setting. Is only hours by time is receiving of this letter, but will seem eternity to shattered heart until hearing sweet Nevya's voice.

Is resting night with comfort of Nevya's scent close. My Nevya, is thinking you are knowing intent of Vitya. Is hoping you are knowing truth of love in words. Is hoping you are still to be willing to speak to Vitya. Is to be feeling strange, knowing there is no letter to be coming in response. To be knowing will be standing before you, with shattered heart bared, pleading with Nevya to be putting back together.

With love in my heart,
- Vitya

He sent Vasilisa into the night with his gift, protected by the spells Pomona had suggested and took
the warded Floo back to his sanctuary. He stripped and slid naked into his bed, holding the
crumpled Y fronts to his great hook of a nose. He tasted them again. His Nevya. He inhaled of his
love's scent deeply, and fell into the madness of dreams.
Chapter 51

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-----

Luciano Grimaldi stood quietly in the clearing as the others arrived one by one. They sniffed at him and bowed in deference to his place in the pack, and then slowly gathered, rings of young men and women squatting back on the balls of their feet, waiting. After a time, when no more came Luciano moved to the center and looked around him.

"We are Durmstrang," he began, "we are pack."

There were howls from the assembled, scattered and celebratory.

"I know many of you have waited for word. I know many of you have wondered why the invitation from Luciano the man came before the my pleas to the pack as a wolf, as Lyusha."

There were nods and not a few growls from the crowd.

He looked at them and stripped off his shirt. His torso was compact, muscular. A seeker's body, still kept up. Fine golden hair covered his chest, and his neck was a mass of bruised flesh from love-bites where he had surrendered just this week to his mate in a celebration of their life together, of the child his mate was bearing. Across his right side the intricate tracery of the promise, silver beneath the skin, pulsed with the beat of his heart, silver pulsing blue.

The crowd muttered.

"I am promised," he began, "to my mate."

There was a roar and many shifted to their feet.

Luciano held up a hand. "My mate respects my beast. He cherishes this part. I have asked and received permission to alter the traditional rite, and you, my pack, my family, you will see what our relationship holds."

A graceful man with long unruly hair down past his shoulders stood and growled. "You should claim him as is proper. I see the marks of the weakling on your neck. You think we'll..."
"I think you see part..."

"I can smell his seed in your body!" shouted Sasha, sliding fingers back through his long hair.

"Enough!" said Luciano, stepping up to the man, not phased in the least that he was rather taller than Luke and letting a growling rumble fill his chest. "Yes, I have taken seed from my mate. I demand this of him. Are you so weak that you would not demand satisfaction from your mate?"

"He takes you..."

"That does not mean I do not also take him," snapped Luciano. "And I meant it when I said he could tear you apart with his wand in seconds. He was Unspeakable."

They gasped and even Sasha fell back, shrinking down again on the balls of his feet. "You... you should not be able to tell us this."

"But I can," said Luke calmly. "I'll let you puzzle out what that means. My mate will stand before the pack at my wedding. He will do it publicly. He will do it proudly, Sasha. He is my promised. It is Unbreakable. Think carefully before you consider challenging him, or casting me from the pack."

"So you came to tell us we needed to wait," said Sasha, his growl barely concealed, leaving only a hint of a rumble in his voice. "I will wait. I will see this man you invite to your bed, that you surrender the flesh of your neck to. Now tell us why you're here."

"It is not for this." He turned his eyes on Luke, "It is time for the pack to celebrate. Our pack leader, our Vitya, has found a mate."

Sasha growled, openly this time. "A feeble human mate with no wolf blood!"

"He has courted, Sasha, in a tradition recognized by the pack. It is the only way for him to honorably continue the line of Krum."

"His concern should be the strength of the pack!" shouted Sasha, his outburst quietly echoed by others, who showed their support with a low rumble in their chests.

"He should be mating with you, Lyusha," said Sasha, "and both of you forgetting these feeble..."

"My promise is Unbreakable. It was made when I was one by the Dark Lord himself," said Luciano. "If there had been any means to break it, I would have. I was in love." There were murmurs at that. It had been rumored, but not well known. "In love with a feeble human wizard. So even had I not been promised, you," Luciano stepped forward and pushed Sasha back, "would have been forced to recognize a human with no wolf blood as my mate."

Sasha's eyes grew wild as he stepped forward his hand ready to swipe at Luke.

"Sasha!" called a woman, Anastasia, from the back. "He is pack defender!"

"Perhaps he shouldn't be!"

Luciano quietly turned his back on Sasha and left himself open. It was a challenge. He was pack defender. To attack him was to attack the pack. Sasha looked around the assembled, seeing many heads shake. He grumbled but sat back onto the balls of his feet.
"The pack supports you, Lyusha," he said softly. "For now."

"Good," said Luke, spinning to face the pack.

"But we will not accept this wizard that Vitya courts..."

"You will."

"He's purely human. A coward, all of them."

"He's Neville Longbottom. He holds the Order of Merlin, Sasha. For assaulting the Dark Lord when everything was lost. For never losing hope, for protecting the other students when none of their teachers could. This... this is a man we should beg and plead with to want to be mated to our pack leader."

"You loved him," said Sasha, "and gave him to your precious Vitya as scraps."

Luciano Grimaldi growled and it was not a human sound. Black eyes glared at Sasha. "Be glad Vitya is not here. He would rip your throat out and leave your body to waste. Neville... he is the best of all men."

"Then let our Vitya present his mate. Let him offer this Neville Longbottom as his mate and the pack decide."

"Vitya has decided," said Luke. "And he will state his intent and declare his love tomorrow."

"Then why are you here. Surely he will explain to his mate," Sasha sneered the word and Luke's whole body tensed, "that he's expected to present. To get approval of the pack before he marries. As you should have done."

"Promised!" snapped Luciano. "I was promised. The pack cannot protest a promise. They are always respected. That is our law, Sasha, the law I uphold."

"And Vitya? Why are you here?"

"Neville will answer Vitya with vows," said Luciano, "and Vitya does not know. He will answer with vows and he has to know that this," Luciano gestured to the pack, "has been done. That Vitya is free to speak the vows in return. Because Vitya's mate," Luke stepped close to Sasha, "is better versed in these traditions than you." Luciano struck Sasha soundly in the chest with an open handed blow, knocking him back.

Sasha turned and growled but several wolves stood. Anastasia, a young slim woman with blonde hair that hung past her waist, spoke. "He has shown respect for our traditions. But we cannot breed weakness into the pack, Lyusha."

"His human blood makes him weak? Because he is not a even a sixteenth? Because he has no diluted wolf blood in him? Weak because he is human?"

"Yes," snarled Sasha. "Wea..."

"We are pack, Lyusha," interrupted Anastasia, ignoring Sasha's outburst. "Children of wolves. It sings in our blood and howls with the moon, and with our passions. Will he understand? He is taking away the strength of our pack, our Vitya. How can he keep our Vitya strong?"

Luke glared over the pack, his eyes still solid black. "He will submit to the claim of our pack
leader. He will submit to the claim and wear his mark."

Sasha's eyes narrowed. "How can you know this?"

"Neville was my lover for three years, Sasha. He is offering to me and to my mate this truth. That he wishes to give this to his mate as a gift, to offer of himself completely after they take their vows. He knows what this gift means. He knows what it involves."

Sasha grumbled. "I will accept Vitya's mate," he sneered the word again, "but he will need to present his claim to the pack."

The other wolves nodded in agreement.

Anastasia looked coolly at Luke. "The marks will have to be deep."

"There is no other way to claim, Anya," said Luciano. "Vitya, he is a quarter. The marks will be deeper than you or I could bear them."

"But you think that this Neville will..."

"I think the love of a mate gives a feeble human wizard strength that the beast in our blood would envy," said Luciano. He turned to the pack. "I offer Neville Longbottom as mate to our Vitya. The pack will answer."

And the pack howled, until they spoke with one voice.

--

Viktor Krum sat quietly in his sanctuary. The gift was sent. Thirty days of gifts. A declaration of love, a declaration of intent. He looked at the ring he'd been fingering all morning, over and over in his hand, the heavy gold weight comfortable in his hand. A token of love to serve as a promise of marriage. A promise to put the ring on his lover's finger and declare Neville Longbottom his mate.

He stood and went out onto the balcony. It was cold and crisp, and the air burned with chill against his skin. His eyes focused on the barest bit of light that was only just beginning to cast a glow into the dark of the sky. He let the old elation fill him, the appreciation for the beauty of the sunrise that had been his cherished friend since he was a boy. He'd never thought in life he'd find anything more beautiful.

"Nevyenka," he whispered. "I love you. Please, my love." He closed his eyes. He'd never felt so vulnerable in his life, standing starkers on a balcony in the cold and wondering in the burgeoning light of the sunrise if his Nevyenka would move past his fear enough... if his love was that strong, to accept the wolf that sang in Vitya's veins. "I'm more than just a beast. I..."

Viktor swallowed and closed his eyes, stretching his neck up his eyes glaring at lids pointed up toward the sky. He let himself feel the burn of the cold. He let the frigid air fill his lungs. He sniffed the air, smelled the winter. He could still smell his Nevyenka, the scent he'd bathed his nose in, buried in dirty Y fronts. He could smell the hint of the witch rose, drifting over the estate, powerful and comforting. He could smell the fir and pine of the forest. It was home.

Would Neville come here with him? Make it their sanctuary instead of solely his? He smiled. Where once the idea of anyone coming here had felt foreign, awkward, now he... he wanted to share this with Neville, to be together, to be mated. Properly mated.

He returned inside, dimly conscious that his wolf had subsumed his body, covering him in fur to
ward him from the cold. The smell of Nevya was so strong. He slid into the bed, finding the
crumpled pair of underwear. He shook as he summoned the house elf and bade the creature to wash
them. He shook keeping himself from calling the elf back. He needed to trust... Nevya... his Nevya
would say yes. He had to say yes. He had to know that, he had to trust it. He couldn't allow himself
doubts.

He went into the shower and he let the hot water cover him as he shed his fur and washed and
washed and soaped himself until his skin was clean and shampooed the hair on his head and his
chest. He soaped and lathered and washed until he was immaculately clean, and then let himself
soak in the hot water for a time.

He pulled on a tight cotton form fitting undershirt that clung to his trim waist and hugged his chest.
Familiar red silk slid over his arse and privates. Black trousers, formal, and shoes shined to a
reflective sheen. A slick shirt of black silk, fitted tight to his body and fastened with tiny ebony
buttons. He pulled the heavy red coat over the other clothes and fastened it. He heaved a breath,
feeling the pull of the perfectly fitted clothing. He slung the heavy fur pelt of his shoulder. Let
himself adjust to the weight. He was ready.

He stepped through the Floo to the ancestral home. His father stood waiting.
"Is going through with it then?"

Viktor nodded.

"Is winter. Sunset will be coming sooner than is thinking. Come. Is being time for us to eat. Zhensi
will be getting us something."

Viktor's face paled.

"My son... is good to be eating something. Is having joyous day, yes?" Gregori set a hand on his
son's shoulder. "Is liking this boy, Vitya. He is caring deeply for you."

"Is not knowing that will be saying..."

"Is natural to be feeling this way, my Vitya. Come," he seized Viktor by the arm and guided him
through the house to where the house elves had set a table for both of them. "Sit, my son."

And they sat. Viktor found it strangely surreal that after years of sitting at far ends of a lengthy
formal dining table that only now were they sitting close and familiar at a smaller table. He
glanced up at his father. "Is knowing house elves are delivering gifts for your Neville Longbottom
if he is to be accepting. Is asking that is adding this." He set a box on the table.

"Is giving gift?"

"Is key to wards. Is fine young man, your Nevya. Is hoping one day soon to be calling you both my
sons."

"Papa?"

"Is to be mate of my Vitya. Is making him Krum. But more, is making him family."

"And you," Viktor stumbled. "You're..."

"If is loving you, and is making happy, then is asking only that is continuing family line. Is
knowing that family is needing heirs. Is knowing you have been discussing of this," said Grigori.
"Is not thinking that he is protesting. Is thinking he is wanting a little Vitya to call his own. To be being father is never having."

Viktor looked at his father. "What if he..."

Gregori shook his head, taking a bite of his rather overly rare steak. "Is loving him, my Vitya. Is not question of what is to be saying. But is necessity, my son, to be asking."

"Is being afraid. Heart is open to be wounded, Papa. Is shattered by waiting. Is not knowing if... Nevya is afraid of my beast, Papa."

Gregori grunted. "Is not being afraid of beast. Is knowing beast is part of Vitya. Is being afraid of self that is loving beast, and not knowing how can be embracing."

"He is not saying this..."

"No, but is feeling. Is telling you he loves you?"

"Da. Is saying is in love with Vitya." Viktor closed his eyes and took a long breath. "Is making Vitya's heart to be singing, but is still being very afraid. Afraid that is loving only part of Vitya that is not beast."

"Vitya, my son, has been giving everything to courtship of your Nevya. Is thinking is knowing that Nevya is loving you. All of what is Vitya. Is including beast. Is knowing what it is to be waiting through day when is sending final courtship gift. Is knowing fear of wondering whether beast is being too much for one is loving. My Vitya. Is being very proud, my son. Proud that is standing up to father. Proud that is taking courtship and choosing of right gifts for Nevya, and not what is expected by society. Proud, my son." He tapped the table. "Now, be eating."

Viktor slowly began to eat. He was still nervous, and he did not finish what was on his plate, but he did more than simply pick at the dishes, eating as much as he left behind. He glanced at his father, watching the careful intense eyes that were a mirror of his own. When he was done he looked up at his father. "Is nervous, Papa."

"Is right to be nervous, my son."

"Is not seeming nervous. Is seeming oddly calm."

"Is being easy for your papa," said Gregori. "Is needing only to sit back and is gaining son. For Vitya... Vitya would be nervous even if was knowing answer of Nevya, until is hearing with own ears. Until is feeling lips bringing greeting to mate. Until is touching face of one is loving and seeing in eyes truth... that is now more than Vitya. That love and flirtation of Nevya is meaning also willingness to be not just husband for Vitya, but mate."

Viktor gulped.

Gregori pushed his plate aside and stood. "Come here, my Vitya."

Viktor stood and walked to his father, finding himself wrapped in firm embrace. "My son," said Gregori, speaking softly into Viktor's hair. "He is loving you. There is nothing to be greater than this truth. Show him, my son." He pulled away and set a hand on each shoulder, holding Viktor firmly. "Telling this truth to him, it is not being enough. You must be showing with this offering that is wanting more than anything to be with him."

Viktor took a deep breath. "I..."
"You are to be going to Hogsmeade and walking up of trail to Hogwarts."

"Papa..."

"Go, my son."
Chapter 52

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Note that this is a side story based on the events of Promised, a fic written for the Nuke Bigbang 2012 that combined a Nuke and a Drarry fic.

IMPORTANT: This story is a side story and is based on the events of my previous story, Promised. This story begins before the events of The Redemption of Seamus Finnigan and shortly after chapter 90 of Promised.

A/N: Posting the entirety of the wedding/mating scene, since it is expanded, but still repeated information from Promised. So chapters 52-54 today.

------

Just before sunset, Viktor Krum arrived in the swirling snow at the gates of Hogwarts. He'd requested access formally from the headmistress, and received only a notice that someone would meet him at the gates. The someone, it appeared, was Noah Mayer, Lyusha's mate.

"Viktor," said Noah calmly, his body wrapped in deep black robes, his wand extending a warming charm to cover them both.

"Noah," said Viktor quietly. "Headmistress was only to be saying that someone would be meeting here."

"She doesn't approve," said Noah. "I'm sure you know."

"Is knowing. She was trying to be convincing of Nevya not to be finishing courtship with Vitya."

"She doesn't understand," said Noah. His hand reached up to his own neck. "She fears this for him. That he'll..."

"Is both knowing that Nevya will never be permitting," said Viktor.

Noah smiled. "It's hard to be sure what's going on in his head right now. Come," he said gesturing as the gates swung open, "Let's at least get out of the snow."

"Lyusha is being well?" asked Viktor as they walked up the long path toward the castle.

"He's tired. His grandmother sent him a portkey and he took it to visit family. He took Teddy with him. He wanted to stay here with me, but we're taking the twins tomorrow, so we couldn't be together, not really. It's early, but we can't wait any longer."

"Is being dangerous?"

"Very. Twins... it's been decades since a wizard brought twins to a live birth."

"Draco is being..."

"Beside himself with worry," said Noah, "yes. He becomes quite the arrogant prat when he's nervous too. I should thank you. You're getting me away from him. It's hard, you know, to watch
him worry. I loved him for a long time."

They were getting close to the castle now. Viktor's eyes looked toward Gryffindor tower. "Is Nevya..."

"He has not been seen all day. His house elf delivered a lunch to the greenhouse, but his duties today," Noah shrugged. "We all knew what today was. He's not a head of house, so he didn't have any duties as staff."

"Can you..."

"You have to ask him, Viktor," said Noah, turning to pierce him with a stare of crystal blue. "You have to trust him. He's been anxious and waiting."

Viktor nodded. "The house elves can deliver the gifts?"

"For Christmas?" asked Noah with a smile. "Of course. Have your elves deliver them to Hogwarts. As long as they are appropriately addressed, they'll get to their destinations." Noah set a hand on Viktor's shoulder. "I'm sorry, Viktor, that Luciano couldn't be here. I hope you know, he wanted..."

"Is being hard for him to witness. As is hard for you to be seeing Draco in such worry," said Viktor softly.

"I can trust you to get to the greenhouses?"

Viktor smiled. "Was here for year during tournament. Is knowing layout of castle."

Noah nodded. "Viktor... be good to him. He was hurt horribly when the promise took Luke from him. I'll be in the hospital wing, if you need me."

Viktor walked slowly but purposefully to the greenhouse. The sun was setting quietly behind gray skies, slowly letting a blanket of darkness fall over the castle. He waited just shy of the door until the sun had set completely. Silently he wished that the rules of courtship had permitted him one last letter from his Nevya to fortify him. He steeled himself, and stepped quietly into the doorway.

His Nevya. So beautiful. He'd clearly been working in the heat of the greenhouse all day. His chest was heaving and it showed all the glorious muscles of his upper body. Sweat poured from his face and down his body. It was sweaty and slick and mixed with a film of dirt that clung to him. His exertions had left his jeans clinging unnaturally tight to his body. They were old and faded Muggle denims, ripped in several places and at least a size too tight. Viktor couldn't help but smile. This was his Nevya. This place, this sweaty, dirty Neville. That was him, at home and in his element.

"Nevya moi," said Viktor, just loudly enough to get and hold Neville's attention.

Neville turned, his eyes growing bright at the sight of Viktor in the doorway. His eyes raked appreciatively over Viktor's body, his face showing his joy openly even as the obscene outline of his excitement formed beneath the tight fabric.

"Vitya... I'm... fuck. I'm so sorry, I got... your gift was..." Neville sputtered.

Viktor smiled, shaking his head. Neville had wanted to be ready for him, he realized. Ready as Viktor himself was, dressed in formals. "Is apologizing for wrong thing if you is thinking Vitya is for one moment sorry to be seeing you like this. Is... was not thinking Nevya could be more beautiful than when in fancy robes for dancing. Is startled and pleased to be so completely wrong."
"I..." Neville looked away disappointed. "I wanted to kiss you. To touch you. I'm all sweaty and you're... you look gorgeous, Vitya, in those formals. I can't kiss you, not when I'm like this!"

"Is speaking nonsense," said Vitya, closing the distance between them and pressing himself against Neville. He inhaled deeply through his nose to catch the other man's scent as his arms wrapped around Neville, pulling them together. "Vitya is not being afraid of a little dirt," he said leaning in to kiss Neville, a soft press of lips together. "Is rather liking it," he raked one hand through Neville's hair, thick with the oils of his body. "Is like earth, is like Neville. Strong."

Neville returned the embrace, his exuberance pressed against Viktor's stomach. Neville rubbed their faces together, pressing kisses against Viktor's cheek, against his ear. He whispered the words softly, "You... you shatter me too, my Vitya."

The declaration shook Viktor, and he pulled himself away. He couldn't lose his nerve, not after an admission like that. "Is making proper declarations, Nevyenka moi," said Viktor firmly, his eyes burning with intensity. "I is being Viktor Krum. Is heir of Krum family, is Triwizard Champion. Is Quidditch World Champion. Is thinking these not very important. Is also being Vitya. Quiet simple man. Man who is happiest when he is with his Nevya. Is loving you, Nevya," his voice choked and he had to take a few breaths before he could continue, "loving you so much is not having words to describe pain of heart without you. Is hoping these feelings are being returned in equal measure. Is knowing..."

"They are, Vitya," breathed Neville. "I... I am so in love with you... I..."

Viktor beamed at the admission and taking strength from it, he stepped forward, hands cradling Neville's face. He felt his Adam's apple bobbing up and down as he found the fortitude somehow to continue. "Is understanding what is having to ask now?"

Neville nodded, his icy blue eyes never leaving the intensity of Viktor's gaze.

"Is knowing you are worried about wolf... is being ready to talk..." said Viktor. "I wanted to be here, to be able to...

Neville shook his head. "It won't change my answer. I've made my decision."

Fear covered Viktor's face then, palpable and dark as his heart constricted and his mind cruelly forced all his fears to the forefront of his mind.

"Ask," said Neville quietly, his hand gently covering the one already cradling his face. "I'm ready."

Viktor fell to his knees, leaning quietly back onto his ankles and bowing his head. "Is thinking was stupid position to call for in this ritual," he grumbled, "as is not seeing eyes. But is traditional."

He paused for a moment, taking a number of long deep breaths. Finally he spoke, his voice finding its strength. "Is asking of Neville Longbottom, pure blood child of Longbottom family, for binding of hands and houses. Is asking out of love. Is asking for bonding of soul."

He heard more than saw as Neville dropped to his knees across from him and clasped his hands. Right to left, left to right, crossed in front of them.

"Viktor Krum, Vitya moi," said Neville softly, his voice cracking with emotion. "Your letters have shared your heart, your words have shared your soul. I bind myself and my hand to you, Vitya," he held tightly as he felt Viktor's hands jump in surprise. "I bind my house to you, Vitya. Your soul lives within me, and I bind it there."
Viktor's eyes widened as he looked up and into Neville's heart. There was only blue fire, the ice, it was gone. "Is binding now?" he croaked.

Neville nodded. "I am ready, my Vityenka. This is what I want."

Viktor hesitated. "What of families and friends? Is supposed to be sharing..."

"Our friends will understand, Vitya. It's a courtship, my wolf. It's for us, to celebrate our love. And our friends, they knew what I intended."

"Is thinking pack was not knowing," said Viktor with worry as the depths of what they were doing hit.

"Luciano knew," said Neville. "He knew what I meant to do. He knew and promised he'd take care of the pack."

Viktor's eyes brightened and he turned serious, dark intense eyes staring directly into Neville's. His heart felt heavy with a mix or terror and elation. "Neville Longbottom, Nevyenka moi," He let his hands relax and squeezed Neville's hands gently. "Is being humbled by soft words well spoken, with gentle soul within eyes of ice and blue. Is binding my hand to yours, my heart to yours, my house to yours. Is welcoming soul of Nevya and binding piece of it within, that we never is being parted."

A soft undercurrent of magic swirled around them, power and mystery and warmth, it surrounded them and settled tangibly at their feet as they released each other's arms.

Viktor looked at the openly adoring face of his Neville, nervous but happy as he gazed into the intensity of Viktor's eyes. "As suitor is place of Vitya to provide token," he pulled out a heavy ring of gold bearing the device of a wolf's head before a shield. "Is hoping Nevya will be accepting token of love. Is mark of house to be wearing proudly as husband of simple Vitya."

Neville offered his left hand, felt the ring slide home. He wasn't looking, his eyes were still caught up trying to read the emotion that filled Viktor's eyes. The magic pooled at their feet, and as the ring pushed past Neville's knuckle, it rushed into them both. Neville pulled Viktor close as the energy surrounded and merged with them.

Then their lips were together, gentle open mouthed kisses, sharing the taste of the other. They stayed like that for a little while, relishing the taste, the feel of their lips together.

Finally Neville pulled away long enough to speak. "You wanted to talk?"

"Is not wanting you to be worrying," began Viktor, "about blood of..."

Neville pulled a small vial from a pocket of the very tight jeans and pulled the stopper.
Chapter 53

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IMPORTANT: This story is a side story and is based on the events of my previous story, Promised. This story begins before the events of The Redemption of Seamus Finnigan and shortly after chapter 90 of Promised.

A/N: Starting the next installment of my ATWT/Drarry crossover. I promised Neville a happy ending, and in Promised I gave it to him. But those characters: Viktor, Neville, together, and their courtship demanded an attention I could not give them in a fic based around Luke/Noah and Harry/Draco. So here it is. The whole story of Viktor and Noah's courtship. I hope you enjoy it.

------

"What is you taking, Nevya?" asked Viktor as Neville swallowed down the contents of the vial. The herbologist had drunk it gleefully despite a grimace from the taste.

"Waiting long time, Vitya," said Neville, tossing the bottle aside. He leaned back on his ankles. "To touch your skin, my Vitya. To..."

"Is knowing you were having worries," said Viktor. "Is wolf, my love, but can be controlling. Can be setting aside of beast. Is not reason to be fearing..."

"Not fearing," said Neville quietly as his face slowly flushed and he smiled. A warmth spread through him and he could see the red of the flush as it spread over his body. He reached out a hand to grasp Viktor's arm and squeeze. A tingle started in his spine at the base of his neck moving down. "Vitya. My Vityenka. Please..."

Neville began to tremble uncontrollably. He could smell Viktor... his scent was so powerful. Strong. It called to him. So seductive. He was overwhelmed with a need to touch and taste.

"Nevya," said Viktor, setting a hand on Neville's where the other man had grabbed and squeezed his arm. "Lyusha was telling me of your concern, that you were to be fearing..." Viktor looked intently at Neville, concerned over the suddenly huge pupils, at the beginnings of a fresh sheen of sweat overlaying the existing film on his skin. "Is knowing you had fear for Vitya making of claim..."

Neville shook his head rather more vigorously than he could handle, his body swaying as he lost his balance and moved automatically to press himself against Viktor. "Made choice," breathed out Neville. "Knew you were wolf. Knew what it meant. Knew it. Wan-wanted."

Neville could feel his limbs tingling as he shook, no longer mild tremors, the potion making powerful changes throughout his body. He managed to sniff along Viktor's throat to his ear and kissed him gently there, where he could whisper to him. "Want you to know. This... it is what I wanted. You. to." The warmth of his body changed suddenly and powerfully into an intense heat that sizzled beneath the skin. He began to pant, desperate for the cool of the air.
"Nevya," Viktor pulled away, trying to catch his eyes. "What is being wrong, my Nevya?"

"Everything right," said Neville, too loudly, but he could barely hear himself over the pounding in his chest. It echoed through the room and in his head. "You wanted to share my body tonight..." said Neville, trying to make it sound sexy, though he knew the words came out to loud and desperate.

Viktor smiled. "Of course is wanting, my..."

Neville clutched at his legs, pushing at the fabric, trying and failing to get them loose. They were so tight. He pushed desperately at the waistband, trying to remember how buttons worked as he pulled down and tried to shimmy enough to get them over his hips. "Offering as gift to husband. My body. Forever. Body and soul to be. to be."

Viktor's breath caught. They'd needed that talk, Neville, his Nevya... it sounded like an offer. An offer of... "Nevya, please. What is it that you..."

Neville growled fiercely, the sound rumbling through his chest, sniffing at Viktor again, sniffing at his neck. "Is mate. Your mate. Good mate," said Neville, rubbing his face against Viktor's shoulder.

"Nevya?" asked Viktor plaintively. His Nevya, he was begging at him like... it wasn't possible.

Nevya kissed him then, rather forcefully, his hands moving in desperation to the button fly of his denims and pulling with sudden strength to pop the buttons.

Viktor heard the sound of scattered buttons, of ripping fabric. He felt it as Neville's manhood suddenly came free from the bindings of the jeans. He could smell... his eyes rolled backward, and he growled. Pheromones, the smell of Nevya, hot and... Viktor's voice wasn't quite human as he growled the words, "Is smelling..."

Neville turned desperately away and pressed his face to the ground, pushing his face into the dirt of the greenhouse floor, presenting his arse arced up to his mate in proper form. Positioned to be held, positioned to be taken and bred. The heat hit him fully and powerfully, the slick of pheromones spreading across his back and arse, soaking a line down his jeans as he pushed desperately against the waist of the denims to try to get them off of him. To show his arse, to show his heat, to present for his mate. He was so empty. His mate needed to take him, his mate needed. Neville groaned against the dirt of the greenhouse.

Viktor could smell it, so strong, so powerful... he felt his beast emerging. His eyes growing a uniform black, his nails growing sharp and long. Such heady temptation, the scent was consuming his consciousness, driving him to only one thing.

"Is not being possible," choked Viktor, presented with what he most wanted... his Nevya, presenting his arse to be taken... to be claimed? It wasn't possible. "Is... Nevya... is heat."

"Yes..." breathed Neville, wiggling his arse. "N-need to be... oh Merlin, VITYA! N-need you. Need mate. Need husband."

"Nevya," said Viktor as calmly as he could with his blood pounding in his veins, in his head. With that scent calling to him, begging him to let go, to take what he needed. "I... I cannot be taking you in heat. Would be claiming..."

"YES!" screamed Neville, his face crashing back into the ground as he presented his arse, pushing backwards toward Viktor. "Need you to. Want you to. Please... please fuck Vitya, I feel so empty.
Fill me... fill your mate. So empty. Please. Need...

Viktor gulped. "You is knowing. Before is drinking bottle?" Had Neville... had he done this on purpose?

"Fuck yes, Vitya," moaned Neville. "Knowing. Offering. All of me. Yours, Vitya. Take it, please. Yours to..."

"Would mean claiming forever," said Viktor. He tried to back up, but he was frozen. His eyes fixed on that glorious hot wet arse. On the gift he was being offered. It was being offered! "What if..."

"No. Wanting forever," said Neville, his voice was desperate and certain and pleading. "Wanting to belong to my Vitya. Wanting to..."

"Is not being..." Viktor's voice was cracking. He'd. He was going to swear to never... "Is needing to run for safety of Nevya. Is needing to keep from claiming."

"NO!" screamed Neville, Turning his face to look at Viktor. His eyes burned, Viktor had never seen the blue fire so clearly, so bright. "Need you. Inside, now, please. Fuck Vitya. Offering you..."

"You'll have a mark Nevya," said Viktor, desperately trying to back away though his steps brought him closer, the siren's call of his mate's slick begging him to touch, to smell. His hand reached out to touch Neville though he tried his best to pull away. Bare hand touched bare skin. The jolt was electric and desperate.

Shivers of pure need went through Vitya, the image of his love, his husband presenting himself to be taken, the strength of pheromones in the open air, the electric feeling of the touch of Neville's bare skin.

His eyes rolled backward as he lost the fight with his body, as his beast took over. Viktor scarcely noticed as his nails sharpened and tore away his clothing, casually sloughing it off and leaving him naked. He sniffed at Neville's arse, growling. He wanted to taste. He sliced at the thick denim material keeping him from his mate, tearing the jeans away from Neville's body.

But he noticed when he was over Neville, his proud thick cock dripping pre-cum as it rubbed in Neville's slick, pressed against Neville's entrance. He noticed the slick feel of Neville's skin. He noticed Neville's whimper as Neville presented his neck. As Neville... it was an offer. He noticed as Neville breathed the words, "Vityenka. My wolf, my love, I am yours. Please, need to be yours."

Viktor blinked furiously, trying to pull his beast back. "Is sorry Nevya... is not being able..."

Teeth pressed against Neville's neck. The blunt pressure against Neville's entrance rubbed back and forth, pressing, just, several times into his hole. Then the pressure was hard and solid and it released in a sudden single flare of white behind Neville's eyes as Viktor slid himself home. Neville screamed as sharp canines bit deep. Viktor tried to say something, mumbling through the clench of his jaw as Neville screamed. But Neville's screams slowly found words to share space with obscenities and the words "Oh fuck, yours." Words that sounded suspiciously like "Love you," and "Vitya yes!"

With teeth clamped tightly to Neville's neck, Viktor began to thrust, really thrust. Neville had presented as his bitch in heat, and the wolf in Viktor could read nothing else. He thrust madly into Neville from behind, ruthlessly, brutally. Neville kept screaming, and Viktor, the words set him on fire. He knew Neville's flesh was tearing, but he couldn't stop. He needed to mark, he needed to take and possess and own. This body was his, and he wanted it, he needed it. His hips snapped over
and over pushing his cock deeper. Neville's hole was slick and tight and hot. The words "more" and "fuck harder yes" began to feature as Viktor pounded himself into Neville, his hands roaming over Neville's chest and arms.

"Is wolf," hissed out Viktor. "Is Neville understanding what means for..."

"Oh fuck, you going to... ahh... yes... fuck deeper oh..." he panted desperately. "Fucking breed me love. Want it. Want you. So empty without you. Aiiigggh. Fuck yes, like that, right there."

"Nevya. Is w-w-wolf. B-b-being...

"Mated. In heat. F-f-fuck," Viktor's mouth had closed on his neck again and Neville screamed. "Gonna be knotted. Gonna be... AIGH, oh... Vitya mark me please... please. Need to feel your teeth, need to know I'm... oh god, oh Merlin, make me. Yours, Vitya. Need to be yours. Only..."

A growl sounded as Viktor pounded deeper and the swell began at the base of his cock. His hands wrapped around Neville, roaming about his chest. Viktor let loose his shoulder and bit again, hard and very deep into the flesh of Neville's neck and shoulder, pushing with total abandon as deep as he could and then thrusting and grinding hard into Neville's arse as the knot swelled inside Neville, sealing them together. It was ecstasy, a feeling of completion, to be sealed inside his Nevya.

Neville's desperate release came moments after Viktor began spasming into Neville's gut, hot liquid spraying into him as Neville lost his own battle and his orgasm had him spraying his cum against the dirt floor of the greenhouse. Viktor was still grinding inside him, still coming desperate and deep as Viktor released his neck and howled triumphantly into the night. Neville trembled and whimpered and scratched at Viktor's arms until Viktor sealed his neck under his mouth and marked him again.

Finally they collapsed, tied together by Viktor's knot, in a heap of post-orgasmic bliss, clutching each other weakly.

Viktor was breathing deep breaths that caught every third or forth one. "Was going to be promising not to claim..."

"Didn't. Didn't you want to claim me, Vitya?" asked Neville, sounding desperate.

"Didn't want you to be feeling pressured," said Viktor soothingly, pressing a kiss to the mark and filling Neville with the sensation of being taken, lovingly, completely. "Wanted you to be knowing could be living without."

"Vitya," said Neville, clenching his arse tight around the knotted cock sunk deep within him, "I wasn't able to live without it. I needed it. I need you." He rubbed his face against Viktor's arm. "I'm yours now. Claimed. Owned. My body is yours. So happy. Wanted it."

"Nevya, you is not being wolf," said Viktor, pulling them both sideways, so that they fell against the dirt floor and layed, Neville spooned in Viktor's embrace. "Not possible what we was just doing."

"There's a potion."

"Is not being stupid, saw bottle."

"Wanted it so bad. To be yours completely," said Neville. "I didn't think I did, and then someone tried to talk me out of it when I was already thinking I didn't want it. It made me realize that was what I wanted all along."
"Is hoping Nevya was being sure..."

"I know. I know it was a final decision. I don't regret it. I don't regret you. It's... it's the best decision I think I've ever made."

"Was wanting to be making love to you."

"Heat will come in waves. Second one coming right after knot releases. Third will take longer, then fourth and maybe fifth. Tomorrow heat will be strongest. Will spend Christmas with my Vityenka, being buggered over and over again while you claim me. Oh fuck yes, want you to claim me." He whimpered folding his knees back to push Viktor's arse tighter to his own with his ankles. "Want to feel your teeth on my chest. You'll make me scream Vitya. It'll hurt, but I want it. I want it. To give you my soul. I'll be truly owned then. Yours. And the third day... heat will slow. Long slow endless making love. Could keep you inside me forever..."

A kiss pressed against his neck. "Is fine thing to be inside of lover. Vitya... Vitya just is not wanting Nevya to be having..."

"It's what I want. It's what I need. Please..."

"Is to be claiming you then, Nevya. You is understanding?"

"Did you not want to..."

"No, Nevya. Do not be mistaking me. Is what wanted most. But never was dreaming of having."

"Then you're happy?" asked Neville a little hopelessly.

"Is going to be fucking man of dreams for three days. And then will be having claimed him. Is thinking there is much to be being happy about."

"Will you fuck me hard again, Vitya? Wanting to feel it deep when you cum."

"Is losing wolf, if you is truly wishing it."

"Fuuuuckkkk yessss..."
Chapter 54

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Viktor kissed the mark at Neville's neck lightly. He was on top of Neville now, face to face, Neville's hands playing in the thick hair on his chest. "Is wanting to..."

"I know," said Neville. "Will you... will you make love to me while you do it?"

"Is entering next cycle. Is smelling it on you. Oils starting on skin of Nevya. So hot. Smell so sweet. Is wanting... needing to be inside you."

Neville squirmed beneath Viktor, adjusting so Vitya's pelvis fell directly between Neville's legs. He spread them. "It's going to come soon. I'll be slick again, ready for you."

Viktor smiled. "Yes, my sweet," he said, his hands caressing Neville's face. "You'll be... oh Merlin, Neville, so beautiful. Is breeding pup inside you. Is needing to do this. Is needing to be taking you hard until seed is filling Nevya and making our pup inside you."

"Want it. Want your pup."

"Is needing..." he caressed the flesh over Neville's heart. "Is needing to claim of heart and soul, my Nevya. Is taking body, is mine, but is..."

Neville leaned his cheek against the top of Viktor's head. "I'm ready."

"Is hurting you."

"Your proof, that I want it. That I endure the pain, that I let you mark me. That I let your teeth seek past skin and between ribs to pierce my heart. That I trust you." Neville's lips pressed against Viktor's hair, his hands moving to slide along Viktor's cheek. "My Vitya, I'm ready. I want to be yours."

"Is starting," said Viktor softly.

Neville let out a long slow gasp as his body produced a fresh wave of hot slick pheromone-filled oils, his arse becoming slick, his body flushed. He slid a hand and slicked his fingers with it. Then
reached back. "Taste, my Vitya."

"Will be savaging you if is..."

Neville nodded. "Yes. Taking my heart. Filling my body with the seed to create our pup. I want that."

"Is not wanting to be..."

"You're a beast, my Vitya. It's okay. You don't have to hide..."

"Is precious, Nevyenka moi, is not to be hurting..."

"Loving me," said Neville, wiping the slick across Viktor's cheek and ending with a still slick finger against his lips. He felt the skip in Viktor's breath, and then his hot mouth as he took the finger in his mouth and licked it clean. His eyes grew uniform black, the hair on his chest thicker.

A hot wet tongue licked across Neville's shoulder, licking and caressing the mark and setting Neville moaning.

"Oooooh god. Yes, my Vitya. Oh god. Feels so..."

Viktor breathed against it and then whispered to him, "Mine."

"Yes!"

"Mine..." hands caressed him, hard and rough, grasping his chest.

"Oh god, Oh Merlin, my Vit... AAAAAIIGGHH!" Neville's head was thrown back, his mouth open as he let out a desperate hoarse cry of pain. He could feel Viktor's teeth at his chest, the fiery searing pain as he began to make the mark, his chest, his heart on fire with it. Oh fuck. "VITYA!"

Viktor hesitated and began to draw away and Neville's hands wrapped around Viktor's head pulling him back into his chest. "Yours... oh god... oh fuck... Oh... hurts so much."

Viktor whimpered.

"Deeper, my Vitya. Need... AIGH... yes... AAAAAIIGGHH!" he was panting the breaths. Oh fuck. Vitya... he was taking... "ah... oh god. Yes, YES. It's yours Vitya. AAIGH! FUCK! DEEPER!" his breath was all panting. And then he screamed as Vitya marked him deeper and his legs were rolled up and Viktor entered him in a single brutal stroke to the root.

Neville gulped and clutched Viktor's head closer. He was trembling as he adjusted to the intrusion inside him. It was good. Distracting him from the pain. He was taking deep panting breaths, but finally he kissed Viktor on top of his head, and then the pain in his chest grew stronger as Viktor's jaw clamped deeper into him. He felt the stutter of his heart. He kissed Viktor again. "Yours, my love," he managed to breathe.

Viktor's arms hooked around knees and he began to thrust. Long deep thrusts, all the way out before plunging back in deep. Neville couldn't even form words as the onslaught pressed into him managing little more than a plaintive wail as Viktor's hips snapped over and over into him. Then there was something, the bite at his chest suddenly deeper and he felt something missing. He closed his eyes against a tear. The teeth parted and there were lips against his, hands roaming his body. Viktor slid his hand against the wound at Neville's chest.
Neville screamed. But it wasn't pain. There was no way to describe it. Even being held as Vitya climaxed within him, it didn't match the belonging. He belonged. He fucking belonged. This is what Teddy had smelled, the feeling of oneness and fuck, of being possessed and owned. He was... Viktor owned him. The missing piece, it was his soul and Viktor, he was telling Neville with a touch that it was safe. That he was holding it. That Neville could trust him.

And oh Merlin, he did. He trusted him and he tried to communicate that love and submission in his kiss, letting Viktor ravage his mouth, letting Viktor love him. Viktor let Neville's legs go and Neville wrapped them tightly around Viktor's waist, pulling him deeper. Their lips parted.

"MINE!" growled Viktor, thrusting deep.

"Yes... yes, I'm... I'm yours, my Vitya. Oh... oh god please. Deeper, love. Want your seed deep. Want it to make a pup. My little Vitya, growing inside me. Oh fuck. I'm yours, love... give me that. I want it. Want you!"

Viktor's response was a touch at Neville's neck, sending him screaming ecstasy as Viktor pushed deep. The thrusts were deeper, but shorter, and Neville could feel the expansion. He was going to be knotted again. He wrapped his legs tight around Viktor's waist as he screamed in pleasure as Viktor caressed the marks as he pressed deep, over and over again. Then just as he howled his own release, his hand swiped against the marks on Neville's chest. Neville's eyes rolled back into his head as he came explosively. For his mate. His cum was a gift. It was for Vitya, in gratitude for being owned. For being held and protected and so loved. He'd never come so much. It gushed in ropes over their chests, matting in Viktor's chest hair and dripping onto Neville's stomach. And he kept coming, spray after spray, matched by Viktor's seemingly endless release inside him.

"VITYA!" he screamed, as Viktor howled again and collapsed against Neville's chest. Viktor was swollen tight inside him, his hands grasping at Neville's skin reflexively.

Neville gulped. "Yours, my Vityenka."


When the wave of heat was over, Viktor ran with Neville naked through the halls of Hogwarts to Neville's rooms in Gryffindor tower where they fell, together, into the bed. They had time now to kiss, to touch, to caress each other. They had moments where there was no need to take or to be filled, but only a desperate want each for the other as they stared from dark intensity to wild blue fire, each drowning in the eyes and soul of the other.

Their kisses were deep open mouthed passionate affairs, desperately sending messages of love from mouth to lips to tongue, pleading with the other to keep going. Their touches were furtive, exploratory. Neville's hands luxuriating in the deep mat of hair on Viktor's chest. Viktor's thrilling at the silky smooth skin and trembling in ecstasy as the touch of pheromone laden oils drove him mad with desire for more... more of his Nevya. More of what was his.

By the time the heat hit again they were already desperate. Neville needing Viktor inside him. Viktor desperate to possess him. Both afraid to do so until his heat slicked his arse and drove them wild with need. Both aware they needed to last. That the heat would strain their endurance. They would savor it. Savor every wave of madness, every fierce and all-consuming desire to be entered and filled. Every scent driven need to take and breed.
As Viktor plunged into his mate he growled, a deep rumble and nipped at Neville's neck. Neville moaned, feeling the tongue lapping at his neck, the warmth of his Vitya smothering him, the soft fur upon his face nuzzling into Neville's chest, biting and licking at the marks, both of them. Then his tongue was tickling Neville's ear and the thrusts were deeper. Neville wrapped his hands around Viktor's body, fingers sinking into fur, thick and luxurious. Viktor was humping him, desperate brisk thrusts, as Neville matched each thrust by rubbing vigorously against the fur of his stomach.

Teeth closed over his neck and shoulder, biting deep and Neville felt his body given permission to come. He exploded into Viktor's fur, his hands desperately seeking hold in Viktor's hair. He wrapped his arms around Viktor's head, holding him into the marks as Viktor thrusted. He screamed his love's name. He wept as his body was bade come over and over into Viktor's fur, and finally he entwined their legs and bodies together as Viktor thrust frantically into him, filling his body and locking them together. He stroked Viktor's head until the beast calmed from Viktor's body. Rubbed his hands into Viktor's skin. Kissed him deeply. And then he lay back against the sheets as Viktor proceeded to lick and suck and mark every inch of Neville's flesh.
Chapter 55

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Neville awoke to the weight of a body draped over his. A head full of black disheveled hair lay on his chest, and an arm was slung across his body, the hand grasping Neville's chest just below the armpit. His left side was pinned to the bed by the heavy weight of muscle and bone, his leg pinned under a naked thigh.

He was sore, so very sore. His arse burned from the ruthless abuse of days of being taken, so many times taken. His body had been bent and folded and contorted so much that his muscles ached. His back and front both were covered with the marks of claws, a fierce and fiery sting, his chest and shoulder torn by teeth, the flesh over his heart black and bruised from the deep marks of canines piercing flesh. Marked. He let his free hand move to the marks at his neck. He could feel the bruising there, a dull throb that radiated out. How bruised must he be to feel that so clearly? It was the bites that burned. The real marks, the ones that answered his offer to his mate. Claiming marks where neck met shoulder to claim the body. Marks over the heart to claim the soul. He was... he was owned.

Neville closed his eyes and took a deep slow breath. He belonged. The air in the room was tinged with the taste of blood and sweat and sex. It hung in the air, palpable. It clung to him, to the core of him. Viktor had rubbed his fluids into Neville's body, massaged him with them, and then licked his body from head to foot, leaving no part of him that had not been touched and licked and loved and claimed by Viktor Krum. He had a mate.

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His left arm was wrapped around Viktor's body, resting on his back. He slid it down along the smooth flesh to the soft curve of Viktor's arse, feeling comforted as he cupped the man's muscled rear gently. He luxuriated at the freedom to do that. To touch Viktor's arse that way. To feel him. Neville lifted his head and placed a gentle kiss on the disheveled hair that was normally so carefully oiled back. He let himself squeeze, so gently, the muscled arse of his mate. He whispered words into the mussed hair, affectionate words, cloying and sweet and full of the tenderness that days of brutal and frantic sex had forgotten.

Viktor stirred, and growled and then murmured answering soft words into his chest and Neville could feel the soft press of lips against his skin. Lips awakening marks. Reminding him he was owned. Another kiss. Neville felt the waves of love and reassurance flowing through him.
Belonging. Neville combed his hand through Viktor's hair and playfully squeezed Viktor's arse a bit harder.

"It is being over?" asked Viktor softly, fingers teasing Neville's nipple.

"I think so."

"Is being best Christmas present Vitya is ever getting," said Viktor, sliding up Neville's body to kiss him rather gently on the cheek. His hand brushed Neville's hair away from his face.

"Not a Christmas present," said Neville firmly. "Wedding present."

"Ah. Is still being Christmas?" asked Viktor, half sitting and rearranging pillows, but half of him still managing to be slung over Neville's body.

Neville shook his head and laughed. "No. We fucked all the way through Christmas. Bloody brilliant way to spend it, I think!"

He turned and looked at Viktor's intense eyes.

"But there is still a tree with gifts for us both under it. This one," he said, reaching under his pillow for his wand and summoning a box from the desk by the window, "I wish I could have given you before. You... you gave me your token, Vitya."

He opened the box revealing a ring, white gold and yellow gold and rose gold, thorny vines wrapped and twisted and entangled together. The design was beautiful and unexpected and Vitya lost himself in the study of it. Neville held it up so that he could get a good look.

"Is knowing my Nevya is having thorns," said Viktor, his eyes gleaming as he studied the ring, "but is still thinking he is very beautiful. Is very like my Nevyeikna, this ring. Very beautiful."

Neville smiled and leaned forward to kiss him briefly. He gently teased the fingers of one hand against Viktor's cheek as he spoke. "Will you accept my token, Vitya?"

Viktor nodded and offered Neville his left hand, allowing him to slip the ring onto his finger. "Is never wanting you to doubt. Is being proud being with Nevya. Both with gentle caring soul that lurks behind ice of eyes, and with hard thorny dangerous Neville that lets no one close."

"You're close now," said Neville coyly, fluttering his eyelashes.

"Forever, Nevyenka moi," said Viktor. "Is thinking we did very rash thing. Several very rash things," he let a finger slide across the mark on Neville's chest, causing Neville's blue eyes to roll back and eliciting a desperate moan.

"Oh, Vitya... Oh god. Yes, do that," he breathed deeply for a moment. "So, you weren't planning on getting married? It was a courtship, a proposal," said Neville with a smile, kissing him rather seriously as he rolled Viktor off of his body and shifted on top of him to straddle his waist.

"Is not regretting for instant binding with Nevya," said Viktor, his voice full of conviction that mellowed into something very tender as he continued, reaching up to stroke Neville's face. "Not for instant. Is not making less rash of thing to be doing."

Neville sniffed a path up Viktor's sternum to the dip at the base of his neck and placed a kiss there and then another on Viktor's lips. Viktor smiled and returned the kiss rather passionately before breaking away.

"Is still being rash," said Viktor, savoring the taste and flavor of Neville's lips.

"You mean the claiming," asked Neville.
"Binding, claiming. Both is being rash. Is not regretting, but is being rash. Was planning on quiet Christmas spent together. On careful announcements to newspapers. On invitations to friends and family who would be wanting to witness." He sighed and ran his hands up Neville's chest. "Was not expecting open Nevya to be kneeling and speaking rite of bonding to Vitya. Was planning to be promising Vitya freedom from claim."

His fingers strayed to the bruised marks where he had claimed Neville. "Was afraid Nevya was fearing that Vitya would be making mark. Was afraid to be losing you. Was not knowing Nevya was being triggering heat for wolf mate and offering of neck. Offering of self to Vitya for claim. Is not having words. Is in awe of trust of mate." He slid his fingers onto the mark. "Is feeling this? What is meaning?"

"I am yours."

"My Nevya... is meaning so much. Never was dreaming..."

"Shower with me?" asked Neville. "Walk the halls with me as my husband... as my mate. Please?" He caught Viktor's hand over the mark on his chest and held it there.

Vitya leaned up to kiss Neville gently on the lips, lingering and hot. "Is not denying my Nevya," he said as their lips parted. "Is hoping Nevya has clothes that is fitting Vitya!" There was a hint of real concern in his voice. "Was tearing off formals in greenhouse. Is thinking scandalized many portraits before reaching rooms of newly claimed husband."

Neville closed his eyes. Had any students seen? He hoped not. He had been too overwhelmed in his heat to notice. And yet he was also happy. Just the thought, Viktor Krum, naked, carrying him through the halls to Gryffindor tower to lay his claim on Neville's flesh.

Neville waggled his eyebrows at Viktor playfully. "I may have gotten you some clothes as gifts for the holiday. I think I'll rather enjoy watching you open all your gifts starkers though."

Vitya laughed. "Is hardly to be embarrassed by Nevya to be seeing Vitya naked. Is thinking has been seeing most every part of Vitya. Shower, my Nevyenka, then gifts. Is hoping elves were to be placing under proper tree. And then is thinking there is being newly born children of dear friends to be welcoming to world."

Neville climbed off of Viktor and led him shyly into the shower, letting the hot steaming water cover him, washing away filth and sweat and cum. Viktor pressed against him in the shower, finding flannels and soaking them with soap before spreading soapy suds all over both of their bodies. When they had washed rather thoroughly, Viktor faced the steaming spray and leaned his head back, falling backwards against Neville's chest. "Is washing hair for Vitya?" he asked plaintively, and Neville did, feeling overwhelmingly happy as he did, washing the heavy oil-slicked strands until the thick black hair on Viktor's head was clean.

When they climbed out of the shower, they dried each other with towels. It was their first time, and they took the time to do it deliberately, lovingly. Then they wrapped clean, dry towels around their waists and Neville led him back into the sitting room and from there into a small parlor just off the entrance to the suite. The tree was decorated in blues and whites and icicles dripped from the branches as glittering lights danced within the tree itself. Viktor couldn't help but notice that subtle images of wolves in black lurked in the shadows of the branches, seemingly hundreds of them.

"I was thinking that I loved being stalked by my dark romantic wolf," said Neville, whispering into Viktor's ear as he walked next to the tree and sat, adjusting the towel quickly to keep his bits private. He reached under the tree for a small package wrapped in blue and silver and handed it to
Viktor took it and smiled. He looked at Neville and unwrapped it to find a pair of silk pajama bottoms in crimson and black.

"I got them so you would have something to wear when you stay here," said Neville. "I'd... I'd hoped you'd want to stay here. Sleep with me here."

Viktor felt the sheer soft cloth and grinned. He stood up and let his towel fall, pulling on the soft pajamas and kissing Neville on the cheek as he sat back down, sliding close to Neville and wrapping an arm around Neville's waist.

"Mmmm. You look even better in those than I thought you would," said Neville, a goofy grin on his face as he admired the snug sleep pants on Viktor's muscular body. "Very hot."

Viktor leaned forward closer to the tree and searched beneath it for the gifts in black paper with gold ribbons. Finding them he gathered them closer and handed one to Neville who shook it very gently, and then tore open the paper. Inside there was a saint's medal. The surface was old and worn to the point where even the name of the saint could no longer be read. "Is key to wards," said Viktor softly, setting a hand on Neville's. "For all estates of Krum family."

Neville looked up at Viktor. He was the heir to his family, but not head of house. Ward keys were a show of trust by heads of families, which meant that Neville was being offered...

"Is having approval of father for courting of beautiful Nevya," said Viktor, caressing the side of Neville's face. "He is sending Vitya with this gift for Nevyenka. He is much wanting to meet again man who has swept feet from under Quidditch playing son."

Neville wrapped the medal around his neck, fastening the elegant silver wrought necklace upon which it hung. "Thank you," said Neville. "I don't know what..."

"Is okay, Nevya moi. Is hoping more clothes than just pajama bottoms is being under tree," Viktor said with a grin. "They are being rather tight. Is happy to be showing this to Nevyenka, but should be wearing something perhaps more modest if is to be going out."

Neville pulled out several more boxes and passed them to Viktor, who found himself gifted with several pairs of tight Muggle style jeans, a tshirt that would be very tight on him with his name on it, several rather elegant shirts all in black and crimson, a Gryffindor tie, a full set of stylish dress robes that matched the ones he'd gotten Neville, some rather fancy and skimpy sets of smalls, silk Gryffindor boxer shorts as well as several pairs in black and crimson that matched the pajama bottoms he'd opened already, a modern Muggle hair gel that Luciano had recommended, and a framed copy in color of the original print of the wizarding photo of the two of them dancing at the winter ball that had graced the front page of the Daily Prophet.

Victor dropped his pajama bottoms folding them carefully. "Will be wearing to bed, my sweet," he said, kissing Neville softly. Then he stepped into one of the pairs of Muggle jeans, pulling it up and fastening them closed. He pulled on one of the shirts, an elegant fitted long sleeve black shirt with a dragon design in crimson on the right side. Neville could only look at him with an even goofier grin. Viktor was simply stunning in the casual clothes, and without pants, the jeans showed every inch of Viktor beautifully. Viktor smiled back at him and nudged the gifts wrapped in crimson beneath the tree towards him. "Your turn, Nevya moi."

Neville found himself gifted with several new sets of teaching robes a far cry from his customary browns, two beautiful sets of full dress robes, one black tie, one white tie, a further formal outfit in the style of Durmstrang formals, but white accented with Gryffindor red and gold, the pelt for the shoulder brilliant white, thick and luxurious. A rather large box revealed a heavy fur coat and hat
that matched the one Viktor had draped over him at the Quidditch match only a month before. There were also tickets to several upcoming events from theater shows to Quidditch matches, as well as invitations to two more formal balls with scribbled notes saying "Is wanting Nevya to dance with Vitya again." The last box was a set of formal documents and a key. Neville looked at Viktor questioningly.

"Is knowing you will never be leaving Hogwarts, Nevyenka moi," said Viktor. "Is house in Hogsmeade. Not being large or fancy, but being ours, if Nevya is wanting it to be. A home, for many weekends off. An escape from student questions. A greenhouse of very own, where can be growing plants without danger of students damaging. Breakfasts in quiet nook together. Evenings by fire. Nights, Vitya hopes, spent with passion in bed with Vitya. My Nevyenka, is place to be raising of family with Vitya."

Neville dropped the papers and launched himself at Viktor, and they spent the next hour in a haze of languid snogging that had Neville almost ready to sacrifice his immensely sore and abused arse to the sweet pressure of the aroused man that was pressed close against him. They parted, finally, and Viktor waited while Neville in a show of modesty went into the bedroom to dress. He came back out in open teaching robes over slacks and a proper shirt with a Hogwarts tie done in a rather modern style, one of the many Viktor had gifted to him.

They held hands as they walked to the hospital wing to visit their friends, both of them trying to ignore the snickers and quiet gossip of the portraits as they went. The visit to the hospital wing itself was rather quiet. Harry was out cold still, recovering from the procedure to take the children from his body, and Draco had collapsed sleeping only hours before. It had been difficult, Harry had nearly died. A rather tired looking Ginny Weasley introduced them to the babies, but she too was still so tired from the procedure that she simply admonished them to visit again the next day when everyone was better rested.

Neville tried to apologize, looking a little ashamed as he glanced furtively at Viktor. But Ginny would have none of it. She reassured him that Harry had been surrounded by family, as he had always wished, and that Draco had never left Harry's side. Assured him that Madam Pomfrey had allowed Noah there only because he was potions master and that Neville himself would have been admonished to come see them today instead, which he had.

Neville and Viktor didn't go directly back to Neville's rooms, instead taking some time to wander the castle while ignoring cat calls and whistles from the portraits, finally making it late in the evening to the greenhouse. It still stunk of their sex, and of Neville's heat, but a few quick waves of Neville's wand cleaned up the external evidence of their indiscreet coupling.

Neville took Viktor's hand and led him to a corner, deep in the greenhouse. A corner that exuded a cold and chill of winter. A corner where a small rose bush sat laden with blossoms. They sat then in that quiet secluded corner of the greenhouse as the evening began, and watched the Night Blooming Siberian Witch Rose as the beautiful translucent flowers opened in the night air.

"It's beautiful," said Neville softly, his hand squeezing Viktor's.

Viktor leaned against him, pulling him close. "Is always thinking beautiful, since was little boy."

Neville's heart skipped. "There are more, aren't there?"

Viktor turned and kissed him gently on the cheek. "Be watching. Is sight few others is ever seeing, to be blooming all at once on bush, this rose."

"Vitya. I..."
"Shh. Will show you true beauty of rose soon. Is Krum, is needing to be seeing, to be knowing," said Viktor. "For now, is watching roses opening in night with mate." He leaned his forehead against the side of Neville's head. "Is never dreaming. To be watching this sight with you, to be. My Nevya, is loving you so much."

"I know."

Viktor squeezed Neville's hand. "Is knowing what is having to do?"

Neville nodded. "I am ready."

"They. My Nevya. Is submitting to Vitya and this is making claim to pack strong, but..."

"Someone could try to take me."

Viktor whimpered.

"I will always be yours, Vityenka moi. No one else's."

"Is Durmstrang pack, my Nevyenka."

"And I was in Dumbledore's Army," said Neville with an unshakable confidence. "If they try to take me from you, my love, they will lose."
The arena at Durmstrang was silent. Viktor stood there quietly, looking around the stone arena that served as the Quidditch pitch. He glanced at Neville. He was proud, draped in a warm cloak. Viktor shuddered. His Nevya was naked under that cloak. Ready to be presented to the pack. Viktor had only the cloak and his wand. Tonight he'd kneel with Viktor and embrace Viktor's claim before the pack.

Viktor took a few deep breaths, willing himself calm. Unlike Neville, Viktor was dressed in the usual drab black and earth tones of the Durmstrang students. He looked at Neville. Azure flame danced behind ice. Neville's eyes were pure determination. Viktor gulped and moved in to kiss him softly.

"Is being fine, Nevya moi," he said softly.

"You're nervous."

"Of course is being nervous. Durmstrang pack... they could to be rejecting you, my Nevya."

Neville shook his head. "Luciano, he..."

"Is knowing. Lyusha was getting approval for marriage. Does not mean they will be accepting of presentation. My... Nevyenka. One could try to take my claim."

Neville shook his head. "I submitted to you, my wolf."

"Is fearing they will try to take you. Is not. My Nevyenka. Is being allowed to try."

"I'm allowed to fight back?"

Viktor nodded.

"With magic?"

"Of course. Is wizards, all of us."
Neville set a hand on Viktor's shoulder. "My Vityenka. I am yours. Only yours."

"Is fearing..."

Neville pressed his lips against Viktor's in a searing kiss, pressing their bodies close. Viktor felt his knees go weak. His eyes fluttered from the ecstasy that was his mate. Neville finally pulled away. "It is yours. No one else's. If they fight me for it... my wolf. You are my heart. They will not soon forget the fight."

Viktor stroked Neville's face. "If is fighting, my love, will be fighting to win."

Neville nodded. "I understand."

Viktor led him into the center and briefly wrapped his arms around Neville from behind. "We could just..."

Neville shook his head. "I am proud to be yours."

"You were embarrassed."

"I'm naked, Vitya, it has nothing to do with this, and everything to do with not being comfortable with anyone but you seeing me."

Viktor chuckled. "Then pretend, my Nevya, that you are on display only for me." A kiss settled against his ear. "Because I will be worshiping every line of your body, and remembering what I intend to do with you tonight."

"Still sore."

Viktor shuddered again. "Is meaning will beg more."

"You like that."

"I do."

Neville smiled and lifted one of Viktor's hands to his lips, kissing the knuckles softly. "Call them. The sooner we are done, the sooner you can take me."

Viktor kissed him again softly, his hand seeking beneath the fabric of the cloak for the mark over Neville's heart. He stroked it gently and felt Neville tense and then go slack beneath his fingers. "Oh god... my Vitya... oh fuck... yours. I'm..."


Neville gulped. "Yours, oh god... oh... AIGH! Fuck Vitya..."

Another kiss pressed against his ear. "Is needing, in case is fighting. Is needing to remember feel of Vitya."

"I won't... I couldn't ever forget, my Vityenka."

"Good."

And Viktor howled, loudly, and for a long time, and soon there were pops of apparition and flares of green from the Floo. More and more as young men and women began to assemble. So slowly,
they assembled, in twos and threes and gathered, circling around. Fire circled the pitch in great waves as pyromancers began to call upon their art, and the stone benches began to fill, softly glowing with the heat cast through them. Viktor and Neville stood alone on the ground. Rows of benches filled. Viktor cast his glance around the pitch. He howled again, loudly and this time answered by more howls from the assembled crowd and more arrived, some bowing in deference, others growling defiance. But all went peaceably to their seats.

Finally Viktor surveyed the surrounding figures and pressed his wand against his throat.

"Is being Durmstrang!" he shouted, his voice echoing into the night. "Is being pack!"

The answering sound of howls was deafening and celebratory.

"Is to be thanking of pack. For listening to our Lyushenka. For acknowledging that courted of Vitya was to be answering with vows. Is filled with gratitude for family of Vitya, for pack that is being also family."

The stands were silent.

"Is now to be finishing responsibility. Is pack leader. Is taking of mate. Is taking of husband. Now is to be presenting before pack."

The pack stood and came down from the stands, surrounding him so only a small circle was open. Viktor walked behind Neville and reached around his neck to undo the cloak clasp, pulling the cloak off of him. There was a hiss as the assembled took in the smooth body, but their attention was taken by the marks. The marks of a claim. The marks that meant that Neville was owned. Deep marks. The marks of a wolf that laid his claim as a wolf. They were deep and vivid and they were not his only marks. There were marks of claws and teeth. There were marks made in heat, and no wolf could mistake them for anything else.

"It is being time," said Viktor quietly.

Neville nodded and fell to his knees.

"Is presenting before pack, husband and mate of Vitya. Is presenting of Neville Longbottom."

There was a rumbling from the crowd.

"Then let him complete the rite," said Anastasia. "We will hear him speak the words, if he is to be claimed."

Viktor nodded. "Is being good and right," he acknowledged. "My Nevya. Is consenting before pack to be binding of yourself and your children to me, to Vitya, forever?"

"Yes, my Vitya."

Viktor smiled. "My Nev yenka, is to be submitting to claim of Vitya on your body, and on your soul, and on heart that beats in chest?"

"Yes, my Vitya."

"Is submitting to be owned in soul and in body, owned by Vitya, claimed by marks made out of love for mate?" asked Viktor.

"Yes, my Vitya."
"And is being bound, to be husband and mate, to be submitting to claim of Vitya and to be bearing of heirs for strength of family and for pack?"

"Yes, my Vitya."

Viktor stroked the marks on his chest and Neville moaned. "Is being mine?"

"Yes, yours, my Vityenka... only yours... OH GOD FUCK, YOURS!" screamed Neville as Viktor's hands slid against the marks on his neck, filling him with pleasure.

"And will you be enduring of marks in presence of pack, to be showing strength of..."

"Stop!" cried out a voice, as a slender man with waist length wavy black hair stepped into the circle.

"Sasha, be stepping from circle," said Viktor, his voice cold.

"No. It is my right. I will take this one as my own, Vitya. Your precious little human wizard. I am stealing your claim on him. I will take him and breed him here in front of you and keep him as my play thing. How dare you! Bring such weakness into..."

Neville stood. "I belong to Vitya. No one else."

Sasha stepped forward and grabbed him roughly. But his hand touched the mark.

"MINE," screamed Viktor's presence, the force of it crumpling those nearest to their knees. Sasha was thrown back, though he kept his footing with a preternatural grace.

"I see. His claim is strong," said Sasha. "But it is not unbreakable. I have claimed my right," he glared at Viktor in defiance. "You will withdraw."

And the pack moved back. Viktor gazed lovingly, fear in his eyes, at Neville, but he also stepped back.

Sasha laughed. "Now it's just you and me, pretty thing. You won't like being mine. I like my boys to scream."

"I love to scream," said Neville softly, "for my Vitya." He set piercing blue eyes on Sasha. "I give to you one chance. Step back and abandon this madness. I love Vitya, and I will fight to remain his."

"How sweet. I'll make you..."

Sasha stumbled backwards under the force of barely blocked *Stupefy*.

"I see. I have mastery in..."

"Fought Voldemort," said Neville calmly, a gesture sending Sasha stumbling back further. "Alone and with no one behind me. You do not scare me."

Sasha's face wrinkled and grew feral. "I should." And then the dark curses began to fly.

Neville blocked calmly. His opponent moved gracefully and dodged, casting curses barely blocked by quick moves of the Karelian birch. Neville stood calm, his bare feet digging into the earth as he beat back curses and spoke soothing words to the earth, seeking.
"Don't have the guts to throw a curse?" asked Sasha laughing.

Neville said nothing, just smiled as one hand stroked the marks on his chest. Thorny vines began to shoot out near his feet, wrapping Neville's flesh and piercing it with thorns as they grew, wrapping around his legs, around his torso, piercing him everywhere with thorns. Neville's eyelids fluttered.

Sasha took advantage of the distraction to begin casting more vicious curses. Cutting curses that sliced deep into Neville's flesh. Viktor was calling Neville's name. But Neville took long and deep ragged breaths and then began to move his wand in earnest.

Sasha gazed in disbelief as the wounds of the cutting curses closed, one after another. Every wound. Every mark except the claim where his shoulder and neck met and the deep marks over his heart. They closed and were gone as though they'd never been. And Neville's wand was moving.

Sasha began to throw up desperate shield charms. There were no incoming curses, what was Longbottom...

Thunderous cracks filled the arena, echoing into the night as immense lengths of living plant cracked through rock to erupt through the ground and out. Suddenly Sasha was dodging writhing vines bigger than his arm at the wrist. Bigger than his thigh, bigger than his waist. They slammed and writhed and danced around him.

In desperation Sasha fixed a glare on Neville. "*Crucio*," he screamed and Neville's whole body shook.

Viktor screamed as he watched agony fill Neville's body. But Neville did not relent. He fixed Sasha with a gaze of blue fire and spoke a word, and the vines seized hold of Sasha, seized him tight at his waist and his arms and his legs, then lifted him and pulled.

Sasha began to scream. There was an audible pop when his bones were pulled from their sockets. Sasha bellowed and screamed as flesh tore, and then his body was cast onto the ground and beaten bloody by the vines as they withdrew.

Neville spoke a word and the twisting thorny vines around his body withdrew, the many piercing marks already healing as the vines sank back into the earth. Neville walked calmly up to his broken body and stepped on Sasha's head. The graceful man was broken and torn and screaming in desperate pain.

"I belong to Vitya," said Neville, his voice carrying over the screams to an astonished pack. "I am his, his owned. I submit only to him." He kicked the fallen wolf hard in the side and walked back to Vitya, falling to his knees. "My Vitya. I submit to you and beg leave to be marked before the pack, lest they think me weak."

The eyes of the pack were wide as Viktor sank before Neville and instead of taking him at the neck, he bade him lean backwards. And then he took Neville's soul while they watched, sinking his teeth into Neville's heart as Neville submitted and begged him to bite deeper.

When Viktor was done, Neville still moaning and begging to be taken and marked again, he threw his head upward and howled, and the pack howled with him.
Chapter 57

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Neville hesitated at the door. "Vitya?" he said it plaintively and his pain leaked from his voice.

Viktor stepped up to him and pulled him close, kissing him on the forehead. "Is not needing to be doing this now, my Nevya."

Neville gulped. "I... I need to. Please. Help me?"

Strong arms wrapped around him. "Is mate of beautiful Nevya, always to be here when is needing." Vitya kissed him gently again and then led him to the door and opened it, stepping through and leading Neville into the room. It was quiet. Severe. Neville's parents each on a bed, a chair on either side, and one in the center. The beds had been moved close over the years so that a single person in the chair in the center could hold both hands. It was Neville's seat.

Viktor held him, leaning their foreheads together. "Is loving you, my Nevyenka."

Neville stroked his face gently. "I... I should have asked gran, but..."

"Shh. She is to be coming, Nevya moi. Is having half of time to be just you."

"No, Vitya... just us."

Viktor swallowed. "As is wish of mate. Is here for you, my Nevyenka."

Neville hesitantly walked over and sat between them, pulling out the glass vial. He looked at his father and his mother and then at Viktor, tears in his eyes.

"What if they..."

"They is loving you. Is last memory, to be trying to protect you from *Cruciatus*. Now is to be free of pain for hour, and to be knowing little boy is grown into handsome hero. But is more. Is being... my Nevyenka, is grown into good man. Into happy man, who has life filled with friends and purpose, and love, my Nevyenka. Is thinking this will be making parents of Nevya happy, yes?"
Neville nodded and then quickly, before he could change his mind, dripped four drops on the tongue of each.

They sputtered and then sat bolt upright, both of them. They were shaking, looking desperately about.

Alice Longbottom eyes found her husband and they grew wide. His hair was streaked with gray. "Frank?" she asked, her voice panicked.

Frank pushed himself backward against the headboard of the bed, his eyes found his wife, but his Auror training forced him quickly to look around for threats. They were... it was a hospital wing. He glanced at his wife. She looked, she was older. An ageing curse?

"Neville!" he said quickly to her. "Where is..."

"I'm here," said a tall muscular man next to the bed. He was standing next to another man, shorter, east European, marked by the shape of his features, by his thick oiled back black hair, as nobility.

"Where is my son!" said Frank Longbottom, trying to stand and finding his limbs strangely weak.

"Neville?" asked Alice cautiously. The man had Frank's eyes, piercing blue, fiery, but reined in somehow, cautious.

"Please, Dad," said Neville softly, "calm down and let me..."

"Where's my son?" snarled Frank, searching desperately for his wand.

"Is being here," said the shorter man indicating Neville. "Is being Viktor Krum, son of the Boyar. And this," he gestured to the room, "is being St. Mungo's."

"St. Mungo's?" asked Alice. "We were..."

"You suffered from a coma, both of you, brought on by *Cruciatus*," said Viktor. "Is being lifelong incurable condition."

The young man next to him choked back tears.

"Is needing to be telling you, because is being important. Nevyenka moi, your Neville, he is bringing you this chance to be together. But potion is containing dangerous toxins that build up quickly in body. Is taking almost year to metabolize even small dose. Is meaning," said Viktor, squatting next to the bedside, "is meaning can be giving only an hour each year to be spending with Nevya."

"An hour?" squeaked Alice. "That's..."

"Where... where is my son?" asked Frank.

"I. I'm here, D-dad," said Neville quietly.

"But... but you're..."

"Is being twenty years in coma," said Viktor. "Potion to give you this hour is not being considered cost effective. Was needing to be privately funded."

"Who?"
"He funded it, for me," said Neville, moving to sit between them. They shrank back nervously. "I know this is strange for you. But I... I'm Neville Longbottom. I'm your son."

"How do we..."

"Gran will be here. She'll. I wanted some time with just you. But she'll..."

"Mum?" asked Frank.

Neville nodded. "She... she raised me."

Frank shook. "They were. You were being. Bellatrix, she was using *Cruciatus* on you..."

Neville nodded. "I have echoes. All my life. From the curse. From being under it for so long."

"Shh, love," said Viktor, "I... I can help with those now."

Neville reached up and took his hand. "I know."

"Neville? Who is..."

"I. We won. You should know first. Harry Potter, he fought and killed Voldemort."

Both Frank and Alice backed up at the name. Alice put her hand over her mouth. "He... Harry lived?"

"He was at Hogwarts with me. My year. All of us in Gryffindor together. Harry and me and Ronald Weasley, and a Muggle, Hermione Granger. We... we defeated Voldemort."

Their eyes grew big. "You?"

"Is being hero, my Nevyenka. Order of Merlin, first class. Those four, all of them. For to be destroying of soul of Voldemort that is never to be returning. And for my Nevyenka, to stand when everyone else gave up, to be standing defiant against him as voice of hope."

Neville gulped. "I should have..."

"Nyet, Nevyenka. Is being hero for reason."

"And you..." asked Frank. "I mean, obviously he's here and if you... if you funded this potion, I understand you would want to know it..."

"He's my husband, Dad."

Frank looked at Neville and then at Viktor.

"Husband?" asked Alice.

"I know. You intended me for Luciano Grimaldi. But he was promised to Noah Mayer."

"Death Eater!" cried Frank.

"Yes. Also a dear friend," said Neville. "He turned against the Death Eaters and Voldemort, and half of Hufflepuff house lives because of him."

"But Luciano..."
"We shared a glorious three years together," said Neville, gently patting his mother's hand, "and I don't regret it."

"Did you claim my son," asked Frank Longbottom quietly, his Auror training making him take note of the signs of the mark, through glamours that were not strong enough.

"I am owned, Dad," said Neville, his voice shaking. "It was a choice I made. To submit to my wolf."

"My... Neville?" asked Alice, "Owned?"

"Is being accepted by pack as mate of Vitya."

"But... Neville. You. What about..."

"I ended the line. I ended it honorably, as a hero, surrendering to being loved completely by my husband. Our children... he's the son of the Boyar. Our children will be Krum."

"And you let him?" Frank's face was red with rage.

"Is not possible to be forcing your son to anything," said Viktor. "Is to be having more faith in Nevyenka moi than this. Is not hearing Vitya to tell you that this is man who stood defiant before Dark Lord himself. Who as is being cursed and set aflame still was defiant against him? Who summoned forth sword of Godric Gryffindor to fight against the darkness?"

"I wanted to be owned," said Neville softly. "I. Maybe someday I'll explain why. Today," he swallowed, "we don't have a lot of time. I. You'll remember, from year to year. You don't understand. He spent several small fortunes to make this time possible. Just an hour. Can't we..."

"Son. You. He claimed you son."

"I asked him to, Dad. I answered his courtship with vows, and gave myself to him that night as his. It's the best thing I've ever done."

"You love him?" asked Alice.

"Very much."

"And you?" asked Frank Longbottom, looking pointedly at Viktor.

"Is not having words for love in heart. Is being my own. Is loving so desperately."

"He cares for me, Dad," said Neville.

"And what does he do? Aristocratic..." Frank almost spat the words.

"Is Quidditch World Champion," said Viktor quietly. "But passion in heart is in making of wands."

Neville smiled as he pulled his wand out. "He made this one for me. Karelian birch."

"There's no... I should be able to feel..."

"Is using witch rose petals for core," said Viktor.

"You used plant matter for a core?" Frank was incredulous. "That's..."
"Is being herbologist, my Nevyenka. Best in world. Is being perfect for him."

"Best?" asked Alice.

Viktor nodded.

"I. I don't know about best," said Neville. "But..."

"Is being Professor of Herbology at Hogwarts."

"You're at Hogwarts?" asked Frank.


"Malfoy!" said Alice. "But he's..."

"His family turned," said Neville. "We. I have friends, Mum. Dad. I have friends and a life I love and this man." He looked up at Viktor. "I'm proud to be his. And I hope you'll come to know him. To love him. Because I'm his."

Viktor held his hand. "Your gran will to be coming soon."

"He's a wolf," said Alice quietly. "You. You let yourself be claimed by a wolf."

"I did. But Luciano, he was a wolf too."

"If you hurt him..." said Frank.

"Is thinking is being distraction. Nevyenka? Perhaps is better for Vitya to be leaving and..."

Neville shook his head. "This is my family, Vitya."

"Is wishing for Vitya to stay?"

Neville held out his hand and Viktor took it, squatting down next to him. "Is loving you, my Nevyenka."

Neville smiled and kissed him gently. "We're spending time with my parents. Time I have because of you. Stay, please?"

Vitya pulled his wand and summoned a chair, sitting by the end of the bed. "As Nevya is wishing."

And they began to really talk then. Talk about life at Hogwarts and about Viktor and about the war, though Neville would say little. They talked about the Weasleys and about Remus Lupin and about Sirius Black. They talked about Quidditch and then they had a bit of a massive row as Augusta Longbottom arrived, not knowing that Frank and Alice would be awake. It was Alice who shut Augusta up with a sharp word about wasting what time they had, and then Augusta was in tears and hugging Frank and letting her own shields drop.

As the end of the hour approached, Viktor held Neville tight. And as they fell back into their slumber, again beginning to writhe in the pain brought by echoes of *Cruciatus*, Viktor cast the spells that would ease their pain, held Neville close and with a crack brought them to Three Broomsticks, and from there they took the Floo to Neville's chambers. And Viktor held him, all night, as Neville's tears flowed freely.
Chapter 58

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Luciano stood draped in sheer white silk, elaborately patterned and buttoned with the tiniest buttons. The sheer did not cover much, though it was layered in such a carefully elaborate way that it achieved the acknowledgement of Luciano's nakedness without wholly sacrificing his privacy.

"Will you hold still, Mister Grimaldi!" said Madam Malkin, her voice firm and punctuated by a jab of needle. "I have to have this ready for you in two days, and you are not making it easy."

"I bet I'm doing better than Noah was..."

"Actually he was a model of patience, though he blushed scarlet most of the time. He does know he's taking it off during the ceremony, doesn't he?" asked Madam Malkin.

"Familiar with claiming rites?" asked Luciano.

She chuckled. "I've made gowns and outfits for more different traditions than you can imagine," she said simply and went back to deftly tucking and sticking in needles.

"Ow."

"I did say to hold still," said Malkin, curtly.

"I offered to drop mine too," said Luciano honestly. "But Noah's stubborn."

"He doesn't want them to see you," said Neville quietly from the door even as Luke tensed suddenly, the scent of Viktor on Neville following him like a cloud announcing their union to any with a nose finely tuned enough to acknowledge it. "He wants them to know the promise of beauty underneath those robes is something you give only to him."

Luciano turned, his eyes flashing black as he fought against his wolf.

"I am his, Luciano."

Luke closed his eyes. "I know. He..."
"It was what I wanted."

"I know, baby," said Luke, taking a few calming breaths and looking at him with deep brown eyes. "I know." He looked down sullenly and then Neville was there, close and Luke was fighting wolf again.

Neville's hand touched the small of his back, fingers ran against his cheek. "Noah loves you."

"I know."

"He submitted, Luke. I never understood how much that must have..."

"He took me from you," said Luke softly. "And you..."

"You don't need to be forgiven for that. It wasn't you. I know it wasn't you. And it was right, Luke. Look at you. You're beautiful and in two days you'll claim your mate in front of everyone," said Neville. He brushed Luke's hair away from his face. "It'll be beautiful, and right, Luke. He's your mate. The one you were meant to have."

"But you..."

"I have Vitya. You know that. You can smell him on me, still smell him inside me. And it's good, Luciano."

"I still love you."

"I know," said Neville. "The feeling is mutual. Vitya and I have an understanding about our love for you. You'll always be in here," Neville pounded a fist against his heart, "for both of us."

Luke tried to lift his arms only to find his efforts thwarted by Madam Malkin as she swatted his hand quickly. "Hold still, Mister Grimaldi."

"I... I know it was what you needed," said Luke slowly. "To be owned. Like Noah."

Neville smiled. "Also what I wanted. A bit embarrassing to try to explain to my parents, what with only an hour."

"You brought him then?"

"He's my life," said Neville. "Vitya and I, we're coming to the wedding together. Is that going to be..."

"It's good," said Luciano softly. "To know you're there, that you're happy. It will make this easier."

"Hey," Neville stroked his face again. "You love him. He loves you." Neville tapped the elaborate silver lines along Luke's throat that pulsed with blue light in time with his heart. "The marks of a promise do not lie."

Luke leaned his forehead against Neville's. "He's bearing my pup, Nev."

Neville chuckled. "Maybe Vitya and I can give her some playmates."

"You're not?" Luke's eyes were wide.

"No," said Neville, an air of pained desperation and longing in his voice mixing with an almost audible sigh of relief. "But I plan on entering heat for him again. And charms don't work during a
"The *Cruciatus* will make it..."

"Noah managed, and he suffered *Cruciatus* as punishment when he was a Death Eater."

Luke nodded slowly. "I know. I'm a little afraid this will be our only chance. I just... I know it's dangerous..."

"Pomfrey knows what she's doing, and so does Noah. She'll be beautiful."


"You'll. You'll be godfather? I talked to Noah and he agreed. It has to be someone who will love her wolf. She's mine, she'll be..."

Neville kissed Luke on the forehead. "Of course I will. I'm honored."

Luke pulled his hand loose from Madam Malkin. "It should be you, Nev. Standing up beside me and witnessing."

Neville shook his head. "No. Casey has been your best friend your entire life. He looked after you too. He set us up, didn't he?"

"After a fashion."

"He did," said Neville. "I needed a push. To look at you instead of Harry. And he gave it."

"I want you there, Nev, but if it's too hard... I. I would understand."

"I will be there," said Neville, running a hand through Luke's hair and kissing him again on the forehead. "I wouldn't miss it."

Luke took hold of Neville's left hand. "I missed yours."

"Everyone missed mine. It was for Vitya. To give myself to him completely." Neville's hand went to the collar of his shirt. "It was a glorious thing, Luke. To give that to him." Neville swallowed hard. "Just. Noah needs it. Like I do. Give him that. Claim him as yours in front of everyone. Present him to the pack as your owned."

"Sasha will..."

"Sasha is in no shape to do anything. He tried to steal my claim from Vitya."

Luke's eyes went black.

"It's okay. I'm fine. Vitya is fine."

"He..."

"... managed some *Cruciatus*, but..."

"I'll kill him!"

"Luke, calm down," said Neville. "I'm rather more formidable, even naked with only a wand, than most people would think."
"But he..."

Neville sighed. "He tried to take me from Vitya. I couldn't allow that."

"You." Luke studied Neville. "He died?"

"No. But as a wolf he may wish he had. I tore both arms from their sockets and ripped his left leg clean off his body. They... because it was ripped, not cut, they're not sure they can reattach it."

"He'd challenged you," said Luke evenly. "Under our law, whatever your response, even if he died, you would. He tried to take you. You are owned, Neville, the pack protects your right to do almost anything to protect that."

"I know. But I destroyed a young man's life, for nothing more than being arrogant. I'm a hero. That's not what a hero does, Luke."

"Did he try to take you from Vitya?"

Neville nodded.

"And he would have if you hadn't fought him and won?"

"Yeah, but..."

"And he was casting dark curses, including Unforgivables at you?"

"Yeah."

"Then you did what you needed to. To protect yourself and your mate," said Luke. "It's funny. I worry about Noah, and he's..."

Neville shook his head. "He's an elite dueler. They'd have to be crazy, especially after seeing what I did to Sasha."


"You're going to look beautiful," said Neville.

"Noah's the one who will look beautiful. My marks. I. I hate that I do that to him. But they're beautiful on him, those marks."

Neville nodded. "I know. I look at mine and I wonder how I could possibly allow Vitya to do that to me. And then he touches them. And I remember." Neville kissed Luciano lightly on the cheek. "He wants the marks. To know this. That he is yours. That you will settle for nothing less than him belonging to you utterly."

"But I gave him that months ago."

Neville smiled. "The promise marks are beautiful. But it's the marks you give him that make him feel loved, Luciano."

"My. My parents will be here."

"Damian will understand. He'll be delighted, I expect."

"He's horrified that I revealed our wolf blood to everyone," said Luke, grumbling softly as Madam
Malkin shifted and began tugging artfully on fabric and sticking more needles. "But he's glad I'm fulfilling the promise."

"You're worried about..."

"Holden. And my mom. And, heaven help me, the great Lucinda Walsh."

"They..."

"... hate my wolf blood. Hate it. They want me to hide it. And for me to be marrying a Death Eater."

"Noah isn't that anymore."

"I know," said Luke, "but it's still all they see. He tore the mark off his skin, Neville, I mean, that's impossible, right? But he did it, for me, so the only marks on him were mine."

"It must be in the nature of a mate to try the impossible."


"Maybe. And a wand that was made to choose me. That's not supposed to be possible, but Vitya did it."

"And?"

"He dances beautifully."

Luke smiled. "He always did. Tell Vitya I expect him to loan you to me for at least one dance, okay?"

"He's very possessive."

"Oh, how I know that. But he's worth it, Nev, isn't he?"

Neville's grin was very broad. "He is. He definitely is."
Chapter 59

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"Thank you."

"I didn't do anything," said Noah, his voice soft as he looked at the layers of translucent fabric on the bed.

"Is something," said Viktor, his voice deep, resonant, "to be even knowing my Nevya is to be doing something. Was needing to see, Noah, what it was to be owned. If was not seeing, if was not able to be speaking to you... Vitya was to be promising never to claim him."

"You would have had a full and happy life," said Noah, his eyes still on the robes.

"Is true. But now is more full, and more happy. Was never imagining. And now, is all I can imagine, to be having Nevya as true mate. Is to be giving this to Lyushenka, Noah, and this will be making him happy also. Happy like Vitya is happy. To be standing before pack and presenting of mate." Viktor stepped into the room and looked at the long formal robes. "Is nervous?"

"It's one thing not to be self conscious when you're stripped and beaten as punishment. You learn not to be embarrassed," said Noah. "I learned early. But this. Luciano's family will be there. And I represent to them that Luke is embracing his wolf. They hate me already, and that I'm giving him that," Noah shook his head. "It was bad enough I was a Death Eater. Now I'm taking what they believed about their son and twisting it."

"Is being what heart of Lyusha is wanting. And is thinking heart of Noah also."

"I'm just. I'm rather more shy than people think. And I'm going to be..."

"Is not to be seeing."

"But I'll..."

Viktor shook his head. "Will be having moment of shock, when they are looking, because are being human, and is nature to look and see manhood of healthy man. Then they will see this," Viktor gestured to the softly pulsing silver tracery twisting intricately up Noah's neck, "and on this
day, tracery of promise, it will be very beautiful, yes? Your heart and your mate's and your pup's, all beating in light upon beauty of promise to each other. And will be seeing this, and be distracted." Viktor paused and then nodded at Noah's heart. "Then gaze of your guests, so shocked at nakedness and beauty of Luciano's mate, they will be seeing of this mark here. This mark that your mate makes upon your soul to claim you. And saving only the pack, they will see it and be too horrified to notice the bits of you that give your mate such pleasure. Will be seeing of teeth, and marks, and scars that mate of Lyusha is bearing with such pride, to be owned and loved."

"They'll hate me."

"And yet you are knowing, as any wolf would know, that these, they are a gift from your mate. To be showing that you are belonging to pack, belonging to Lyusha, and that will always be protected and loved by the wolf that lives within heart. By wolf that gives to you this pup, to be bearing for the pack."

"She'll only be a sixteenth."

Viktor shook his head. "Was entering into heat, like to my Nevya, yes?"

Noah gulped softly and nodded.

"Then was wolf when was mating with Lyusha. Child of this union will to be reflecting of this. Will have strength of blood of Lyusha, at least. Maybe stronger."

"I didn't think..."

"Is not to feel guilty," said Viktor. "Is bearing for pack, is making wolf pup with Lyusha. Is no shame for her in blood. To be child of wolf with mate that is claimed properly. She will grow knowing what is meaning to be wolf. Knowing sacrifice made by mate who was bearing. She will say it proudly, that father is being claimed by wolf." Viktor set a hand on Noah's shoulder. "Will be proud to hear this from daughter. To hear her know that you are owned, and that this for mate of wolf is to be celebrated."

"His family still hates me, and this will make it worse."

"Is not just to be family there, but also Durmstrang pack. Pack of Lyusha, that already has taken pup of your body as its own to be protected always for Lyusha and Noah. Now is to be presented. Is not just wedding, Noah. Is knowing this. Pack is also family for wolf. And pack will be accepting Noah," said Viktor calmly and with certainty. "Pack is not yet knowing of claim. Lyusha has only told pack of promise, now is revealing that promised that pack is grudgingly accepting for sake of tradition is also bearing for pack, is also being claimed as mate, is also strong, as my Nevya is strong. Is seeing very recently the strength of human wizards and being reminded that when wolf is choosing to claim such a mate, to claim in flesh, and in soul, and in heart, as Vitya is doing with Nevya, as Lyusha is doing with Noah, that is choosing mate able to bear burdens of mark."

"Luke was worried about a Sasha."

Viktor's face turned dark. "Sasha is full of ambition, and is leading him to foolishness. He was challenging my Nevya."

"But Neville..."

"Is knowing. I think, what my Nevyenka will do when is being in corner and seeing only way out. Was sealing fate when Sasha was to be using of *Cruciatus* on Nevya. Will not be recovering ever in way that would allow leadership of pack. And is this that Sasha was always to be seeking."
"He was your rival?"

"Not of Vitya, but of Lyushenka. Was always wanting of Lyusha to submit to him, and Lyusha, was being eager for sex, but not for claim. Is thinking you were knowing that Lyusha was being... active, while was being in school."

"It was his revenge, on you. For refusing his courtship gift."

"Is knowing. Was taking long time for Lyusha to speak to Vitya again after."

"He'll be glad you're here," said Noah.

Viktor smiled. "Will be seeing you both often. Nevya, he is not to be giving up of position at Hogwarts."

"You'll live at the castle?"

"Not to be right away. Has yet championship games. And if all is smiling upon Vitya, also Quidditch World Cup this summer. Then... then is to be leaving Quidditch. Is great trust to be telling you this. Is only Nevya who is knowing."

"But... you're the best seeker..."

"Da. Is being best seeker ever to be living. Is good title for Vitya. But is not career to be growing old with Nevya. And is also being son of boyar, and will have duties that involve never being in such danger as is in every day on Quidditch pitch," Viktor sighed. "Has been planning for long time. Was knowing time in Quidditch was growing short. Would not be having game be keeping Vitya away from Nevyenka moi."

"I... I don't know if Neville told you, but Luke and I. We wanted to..."

"Is being honored," said Viktor. "Never to be doubting this."

"I just. There's..."

"Is not so true. Is being others. Is being still parents of Lyusha. Brothers. Friends of both of you. This was choice of Lyusha, is knowing. I... Is wanting only to know that is sure. Pack will to be protecting always, no matter what choice is making."

Noah shook his head. "It was my choice. I saw Neville, during that last year here at Hogwarts. I saw his eyes and I know in my heart that he will do whatever necessary to protect those he loves. More even than a parent, because in Neville there is a drive never to leave a child alone and helpless, as he was left. He would make sure she is safe forever, and that she is never alone. And you, Viktor, you can help him keep that promise."

"Would be keeping it anyway."

"Thank you."

"Is to be pack, Noah. Do not be afraid to let Lyusha's family become yours also. Would be welcoming to you like as to brother is never having."

"They will accept me?"

"You will have to accept his mark, Noah. Is to be giving you warning of this now," said Viktor, setting a hand on Noah's marked shoulder. "He will have need to make the marks deep."
"They are already as deep as they can go," said Noah softly, "They pierce my soul, and make me his."

"And this is why will be having acceptance of pack."
Chapter 60

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IMPORTANT: This story is a side story and is based on the events of my previous story, Promised. This story begins before the events of The Redemption of Seamus Finnigan and shortly after chapter 90 of Promised.

A/N: So this story is winding down. Only a handful of chapters left. There is one more story left in this series, and I'm hesitant to post it. It deals with Teddy as he comes of age. Still mulling it over. For now, Chapter 60.

------

Neville spun, the white of Luciano’s wedding robes contrasting starkly with Neville’s formal tuxedo-style dress robes. The other guests watched as the two danced together, until Viktor swept in to take Luke, and Noah waited a few moments before moving in to take Neville.

Noah adjusted quickly to Neville’s lead, Neville’s eyes intent upon him. "You treat him right, Mayer," said Neville seriously.

"How could I do less, I belong to him."

Neville nodded, this was something he understood. They danced about the floor for a few minutes more and then there was a pause in the music. The couples drifted away, and Luke pulled Noah aside and quickly away from the still threatening glower of Lily Snyder and Lucinda Walsh. Neville found an arm locking elbows with his and leaned against the shorter man grasping him.

"Is smelling divine, my Nevyenka."

"Mmm. It's the cologne you made for me, Vitya moi," said Neville as he was escorted off the floor.

"Was knowing would smell beautiful on Nevya."

Neville smiled and leaned down to kiss Viktor on the cheek as they found their table once again.

"Is being sure is not wishing to dance?"

"I love to dance, my Vitya. But you were wanting to..." Neville glanced at Ronald Weasley, out on the dance floor with Hermione.

"Is just needing to be..."

"She told you to leave it alone, didn't she?"

Viktor nodded. "Da, is telling Vitya this."

"He's... he's still seeing Seamus, isn't he?"
Viktor nodded. "Is smelling too strongly for it to be..." Viktor set a hand on Neville's arm. "Is just wanting to be clear to Ronald..."

"Alright. Go."

Viktor lifted Neville's hand to his lips and kissed it, then was on the dance floor, sweeping Ron into his arms even as Harry managed to interrupt to dance with Hermione.

Ronald gulped as he was swept into Viktor's organic expression of dance, desperately trying to keep from stumbling over his own feet.

"Is not needing to be saying anything," said Vitya softly. "Is to be listening."

Ron glared at him, tripping over his feet though Vitya held him smoothly from falling.

"Just to be listening now, my friend."

Ron nodded, his eyes returning to his feet.

"Is not being fair, what is doing to Hermione."

"I'm... I'm not cheating," Ron hissed.

"Is not taking seed of man inside of body. Is not same thing. Is bathing in sweat and flesh of this man. Is aching for him, such that stink of your want is seeping out of you."

Ron gulped.

"Hermione, she is not being so blind as Ronal..."

"I know," hissed Ron. "I know, alright."

"Is hurting my Nevyenka, this man. Hurting of Olya, who is friend also to us both."

"D-don't... just. Please don't."

"Is not witch to be betraying," said Vitya.

Ron glanced to where Hermione was keeping Harry from falling down on the dance floor. "I know. I love her."

"Is need then to be asking of why," said Viktor. "Is not to be treating of Hermione in this way."

"Because... I love him too."

Viktor narrowed his eyes. "Will be hurting fine witch."

Ronald gulped. "I'm already doing that."

Viktor growled, but spun him around and into Hermione's waiting arms. Harry and Viktor looked at each other for a moment and nodded to each other, each walking off the floor rather than continuing to dance.

Viktor sat down with a growl back next to Neville.

"He won't stop?"
Viktor shook his head. "Is not understanding. This is not just man who hurt Olya, but also hurting of you, my Nevya. And is still..."

Neville glared at his hands. "They lost a baby, Vitya," said Neville very softly. "Ron, he was never quite right after."

Viktor shuddered.

"I... I know, Vityenka moi," said Neville quietly, squeezing Vitya's hand. "I... I will give you that, Vitya. What you lost. It's part of me being yours, to give you that."

"Is to be telling me how you were kno--"

"Because Luke knew. And we... we didn't have secrets. He didn't name you, my Vitya," said Neville, "I promise you, he didn't. But it wasn't hard to piece together, once I knew."

"Vitya... Vitya should have..."

"Shh, my Vitya," said Nevilled, pulling Viktor against him. "I'm hoping we can try..."

"Headmistress will be being vexed with Quidditch star."


Viktor looked around, his eyes darting down and then to Neville as his wand was at work casting *Muffliato*. "Is really wanting? During heat is drive to..."

Neville nodded. "I didn't say it in heat because of... I want it Vitya. With you."

"C-could be asking of Noah. For potion to give heat to my Nevyenka. For... for using during break at Easter."

Neville smiled and cupped a hand around Vitya's face. "I already asked."

Viktor gulped and kissed Neville hard, his tongue seeking deep. He pulled away, breathless. "Can we... is wanting..."

Neville stood. "Dance with me, my Vitya."

"Is cruel to be teasing..."

"Dance with me, my Vitya," said Neville, "for Luciano. This is..."

Viktor stood and wrapped Neville in his arms. "Is good for Luciano, to be having of mate."

Neville nodded and set a hand on Viktor's chest. "Yes. Very good. I need to know, my Vitya, that he has this. That there is someone to be his, as I am yours."

Viktor's canines flashed. "Is..."

Neville allowed the glamour to fall, revealing the deep marks twisting up his neck to his ear. "Yours."

Viktor's growl was a low rumble as he led Neville to the dance floor. They nested themselves seamlessly into the center of the floor and then Viktor let the music take him, sweeping them both into an ecstatic joyous exultation on the floor, spinning and sweeping and twirling and dipping and
kissing. As the music slowed, they melded together, their bodies flush and touching, and swayed softly.


Neville's Adam's apple bounced. "I know. It hurts, Vitya."

"Is feeling too. But is..."

"I know," said Neville. "They're... Noah's carrying his daughter."

"She will be strong wolf, full of passion and fiery spirit."

Neville chuckled. "She could be quietly powerful, like her father."

"Mmm," Viktor acknowledged the truth of the statement with a quiet nod.

"Will you... when I'm... I mean. Look at how Luke holds him..."

"Is cherishing mate, my Nevya."

"Will you... when I'm. I'll be fat and..."

"Mine," said Viktor. "You will always be mine." Viktor leaned into him and kissed Neville as they swayed together. "And is thinking my Nevya, carrying pup, that he will be being very beautiful."

And they swayed together as the music played, until it was done, and then slowly they made their way back to their seats.

Peace, unfortunately, did not await them there.

"You let this happen," came the accusation. Lily Snyder, with a disgruntled Holden trying to pull her away. "You could--"

Neville glared at her. "He is happy, Mrs. Snyder."

"But that... Noah is--"

"Fine man," said Viktor. "Good and fine man."

"He was supposed to be with you!" spat Lily, facing down Neville, "And you--"

Neville stood suddenly taller and let loose the fire in his eyes. Cold and burning both, he stared at her. "My Luciano, he embraced this," said Neville, his voice firm. "Noah, he belongs to Luke, belongs with Luke, in a way so intense... you will never break it, Mrs. Snyder," he reached blindly and unerringly for Viktor's hand, wrapping it around him to settle over his heart. "This was right. Luke is... it was meant to be, what they have. And I," he leaned against Viktor, "am where I am also meant to be."

"But..."

"Lily," said Holden, his hand wrapped around her arm just over the elbow, "you need to let this go. They are... Luke claimed this boy. He's our family now. We're going to be grandparents, and he needs us to accept this."
Her neck snapped sideways to glare at him. "You can accept it?"

Holden nodded, hesitantly. "We don't have a choice. This claim, it's--"

"Is forever, claim of wolf. Stronger than marriage rite. Stronger than binding of promise. Lyusha, he is," Viktor looked intently at Lily, "he is not able to be yielding of claim, ever. He is to be protecting of it with last breath in body, always. For strength of mate, and of pack, and of pups."

"And as pack, we will help him protect it," said Neville.

Viktor shuddered and pulled Neville close. "Is being part of pack, my Nevynka?"

"Mmm, with my mate," said Neville, his attention moving to the arms wrapped around him, "where I belong."

Lily sputtered, but was pulled away by Holden before she could say more.

"Is making you mine again tonight, my beauty," said Viktor softly.

Neville closed his eyes and smiled. "I love you."

"Is knowing," said Vitya, pressing his hand to Neville's heart, "is always keeping safe, trust that is giving to Vitya."

"I know," said Neville turning to face Viktor. "I... I want to see the house. And make love in front of the fire. And have breakfast in the nook."

"Tonight?"

Neville nodded.

"Is needing to bring Trevor," said Viktor.

Neville smiled. "It's remembering things like that--"

Viktor swallowed the words that followed in a kiss.
Chapter 61

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A/N: Sorry about the delay. My novel releases today and I've been doing final proofing for that. Anyway, here it is, chapter 61.

-----

Neville woke well sated, as he had every weekend since the wedding. He was sticky, of course, dribbles of chocolate and marshmallow and cum streaked down his chest, but the man sprawled half on top of him, snoring softly into his armpit had made him something he'd never really truly thought possible. Being with Viktor made him immensely happy. And having Viktor here, in their home in Hogsmeade, to enjoy nights on furs licking hot chocolate and marshmallow off of each other in front of the fire before continuing on to other activities... that was simply bliss.

Neville ran his fingers through the heavy oiled strands of Viktor's hair. His mate groaned and shifted, a leg hooking around Neville's to pull them even closer. Neville smiled. To think that Viktor Krum wanted him closer. Neville shifted his hips against Viktor and kissed his head gently. They'd fought last night. They seldom fought. It had stung. It still stung. For Viktor to be supporting Seamus after what Seamus had done to him... to Oliver. Nevermind what he'd done, indirectly, to Hermione.

But Viktor, he... he'd forgiven it. And Neville just couldn't. Not yet. Maybe not ever. Even if he'd married Ron. Even if he'd helped Oliver. Seamus... Neville sighed. Maybe Viktor was right. Maybe the important thing was that Oliver had forgiven it. If Oliver could forgive, maybe, just maybe Neville should too.

A hand crawled up Neville's chest to swipe gently against the edge of the marks over his heart. Freshly renewed and still bloody, a little, they sang at the touch. Viktor sniffed deeply and shifted up Neville's body to kiss him on the cheek. "Is sorry to be fighting with Nevyenka," he said softly.

"Our first fight..."

"Is not being first. First was being scary time in courtship, when Vitya was taking girl to party."

"First since we got married."

"Hmmm. Is still thinking Vitya is... how did you say... too stubborn to understand the pain that Seamus was to be causing?"

"That's not what I said," grumbled Neville, turning and kissing Viktor properly. "I just. I want Oliver to be happy."
"And Seamus is working at this. Harder and with more sacrifice than any other friend that Olya is having," said Viktor, his hands brushing Neville's hair back behind his ears. "Is wanting that you are understanding. Vitya is not simply accepting of past wrongs, my Nevyenka. Is knowing this. Seamus, he is trying so hard. And now, to be carrying of child for Ronald, and yet still to be helping Olya in this way? Is finding hard to be faulting him for this."

"I want to be the one helping him," said Neville, very softly.

Viktor shook his head and stood up. A whispered word had the fire roaring again, the flame soothing the chill from their limbs. Viktor reached down and pulled Neville gently to his feet. "Is knowing you want this, my Nevy. Is not being what Olya is needing now. Be trusting me, my Nevy, the things is seeing when visiting Olya... he is needing something that Seamus is able to be giving to him. Let Seamus do this thing. It is something he is wanting to be doing, as a redemption for things done when Seamus, he was not truly in control of what was doing."

Neville leaned against Viktor. I'm sorry I haven't been able to...

"Is not being ripe. Is not fault of Nevy. Pups will come in time. Is having great faith that this will be true for us, my beauty."

"Your father is anxious."

"Is nature of fathers to be wanting of heirs. Be seeing how Lucius is doting on children of Draco and Harry. Even on Harry's medvyedchik."

"Doesn't change that he..."

"He is Boyar," said Viktor. "Is wanting to be sure this is passed on to line of Krum. To child of Vitya, but also child of Nevy. Surely you must know by now that Papa, he is accepting you as mate of Vitya."

Neville set a hand on Viktor's chest. "He's still anxious."

"Is telling Nevy secret. Is also anxious. But is cherishing every moment is having with Nevy that is just us, together. When is carrying pups, will be having fewer such moments. And now," Viktor pulled Neville to him, "is having them, and living them, and is having such happiness it can scarcely be contained by flesh."

"You go back to training tomorrow," said Neville sadly.

"And you, my Nevyenka, return to your greenhouses at the castle. To students asking annoying questions. Is life you are loving dearly."

"I feel like I should be doing something. I mean. We're... you're father is arranging..."

Viktor laughed. "Be trusting Vitya. Papa is arranging for other people to be seeing to details in entirety, and then is to be reviewing them. And then, my Nevyenka, is making Vitya sit with him to review each piece, so that all is acceptable to Vitya. And will be doing same to you. Do not be so sad that is not yet coming to you with such details. Papa, he will be having more details to review with Nevy than Nevy will ever want to think about. Be happy for brief reprieve that gives chance for Vitya to be taking Nevy," Viktor pulled Neville close, "and kissing him," and their lips pressed together, "and begging of him to be doing again that thing with tongue that is driving Vitya to be howling."

"You want me to make you howl?" asked Neville, waggling his eyebrows.
"My Nevyenka... is loving it when is..." Neville had dropped to his knees and his tongue was at work on Viktor's lengthy cock, "ooooooh oh... OOOOoooooh Neeeeevyaaaaa."

Neville dragged his tongue back along the base of Viktor's cock, teasing the underside with the softest hint of tapping and then flicking across the tip. "You liked that?"

"My... oh my... my Nevya..."

Neville swallowed the head of Viktor's cock and got it very purposefully sopping wet, just the head and then fell back. "My wolf..."

"Oh Nevya... I..."

Neville grinned up at him and rolled onto his stomach his ass waving in the air. "Yours."

There was a growl, and then pain, and then teeth biting against his neck. Neville's eyes rolled back as he moaned, and then a hand pressed against the marks on his chest and he was complete. He wasn't sure how long it was before he felt his mate fill him with cum. Before Viktor howled. Viktor panted against his neck, licking and kissing it. Bidding Neville to come... again. Neville's body complied willingly, letting him touch ecstasy as his mate ground their bodies together. One body, knotted.

Viktor twisted Neville around, and lifted them both, together, still knotted, Neville's legs wrapped now around Viktor's waist. And Viktor carried them to the shower, and they sat under the spray, braced against the wall.

"Is sweet distraction, my Nevyenka," said Viktor, still grinding softly into him.

Neville smiled at him and brought their lips together. "My Vitya," he said softly, his voice husky and sultry. "Don't stop," his arms clutched the walls of the shower.

"Is..."

A hand seized Vitya's and dragged it down the line of Neville's hip over a tell-tale swell. Vitya's eyes widened. "When?"

"While we were..."

"Nevya?"

"Don't... don't stop..."

Viktor growled as he ground in. His hands clutched and found leverage. "Is not... with Nevya... not to be able to..."

Neville wrapped his arms and legs tight around Viktor's body, pulling close enough to whisper. "Ripe. Need to be bred."

Viktor growled and there were teeth in Neville's neck and there was a rumble against his flesh. Viktor began to fuck him then, again, and hard, and Neville, he screamed. It was an exultation of pure joy, of want and need and desperation and of the oneness that made him complete. And only when Viktor had knotted them tightly again did Viktor slow enough to pull them from the shower and move awkwardly, only half dry, to the bed, where Viktor claimed Neville's body, and filled him, over and over, until they fell asleep, knotted together.
Chapter 62

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A/N: As this story winds down to its final chapters, I am still mulling whether to chance posting the final sequel. It's focused on Teddy in his seventh year at Hogwarts, so long after this story is over. Still not sure.

-----

Neville shifted nervously, glancing about the manor. "Vitya?"

Maroon and black shifted and Viktor was there, taking Neville into his arms. "My Nevya!" It had been three weeks, but it felt like so much longer.

Neville gulped. "I've missed you."

Hands stroked around Neville's face. "Nevyenka moi," Viktor's head leaned into Neville's chest, "is so beautiful. Is sorry to be. Is forgiving Vitya?"

"It's... it wasn't your fault, Vitya."

Viktor gulped. "Was wanting to be protecting you from all hurt, my Nevya."

Neville wiped the tear away. "I was... Poppy and Noah, they did their best. It just..." Neville pushed a small vial into Viktor's hands. "We can try again."

Viktor pulled away. "Is still wanting to be trying after..."

Neville nodded, slowly.

"Is not having to do this for mate, my Nevya... be knowing this."

Neville hugged Viktor fiercely. "I know. Not doing it for you, my Vityenka. I... I need to know that life goes on. And that... that means us. Being a family. T-trying for..."

Viktor held Neville tight and kept holding him for a long time. "Is wishing had been there for Nevya."

"It was so fast, my Vitya. There... there was nothing anyone could have done."

"What is needing of Vitya. Anything, just to be..."

Neville kissed him gently on the forehead. "You're my husband, Vitya. I need you to... I need to..."
Viktor's hand rested on Neville's chest and Neville was filled with a sense of belonging as fingers moved over his heart against the scars that marked him.

"Is not needing to try."

"But I need to," said Neville, his voice very soft.

Viktor wiped away the tears and kissed him. "Come," he said quietly, and led Neville through the rooms until they reached Viktor's bedroom. Viktor stripped Neville quickly and let his own clothes fall and then pulled Neville close to him, bodies touching, and pulled Neville's head to his chest. "Sleep now, my Nevya."

"But it's still..."

"Is having errand tonight, together."

Neville's eyes strayed to the vial that sat on the nightstand.

"Is not being that."

"What errand?"

"Something," Viktor's voice cracked. "Is showing... my Nevya, must to be trusting mate to be doing anything to be helping through loss."

Neville's hand shifted to rest on Viktor's chest. "I should never have sent you away."

"Shh. Was letting you. Vitya should have been stronger for Nevyenka. Now is here and together. To be making together reminders of what is being love and beauty and hope. Is making this time to be special always for both of us."

"I... I wanted to..."

"Nyet. Is knowing always that *Cruciatus* was to be making difficult to be bearing pups." Viktor wiped away a tear and then ran his fingers through Neville's hair. "Is... should not have been allowing of mate to be sending Vitya away."

"I'm here now," said Neville. "I. You're my... I shouldn't have done that."

"Is being now together. Sleep my beautiful mate. Tonight Vitya will be showing you truth of wonder in world. Is to be promise."

Viktor's arms tightened around him, lips against his hair and slowly Neville found himself lulled to sleep by the soft whispers of his mate.

Viktor smiled through his tears as his mate's breathing slowed and settled into sleep against his chest. Viktor did not sleep. He held his mate close against him, and he kept whispering the soothing words.

Dusk had settled over the manor by the time Neville woke. Vitya kissed him gently, and they showered and dressed, and Vitya held tightly to Neville. "Is being ready, sweet Nevyenka?"

Neville nodded and there was a crack. They appeared in the woods, still covered in a deep layer of snow. "Vitya?"

Wolves howled in the distance.
"Am I..."

"You are Krum, my Nevya. No wolf in this forest will harm you. They are our kin. Come."

"Kin... Vitya, what are you..."

Viktor held his hand tight and led him through the wood. They paused at the entrance to a small clearing. Viktor looked up at the darkening sky, and then again to Neville. Fingers caressed Neville's face. "My Nevyenka," said Viktor, his voice cracking. "I. This is sight few is ever seeing. Is wanting to share with you," Viktor walked backward pulling Neville with him into the clearing, then Viktor fell to his knees. "Sit with me," said Viktor, wrapping them both in warmth. "Sit with me and watch."

Neville shook his head. "I can't... I can barely..."

"*Lumos*," said Viktor softly, filling the clearing with illumination just as the first blossoms began to open.

Neville started to shake. "Vi..."

"Shh, my mate," said Viktor, resting a hand on Neville's chest.

Neville's eyes were open wide as he watched the roses bloom. Thousands of impossible blossoms blooming, glittering translucent beauty in the night. From the edge of the clearing the wolves began to howl.

"All... Night Blooming..."

Viktor nodded.

"You... you said you knew a place."

Viktor kissed him gently on the lips. "Is secret of Krum family."

Neville looked around. "But it's... I mean, the Baba Yaga..."

Viktor held his trembling mate close. "Is time to be meeting someone, my Nevya."

The world spun and Neville felt the twisting of apparition, and they appeared together in the great hall of the Krum manor. A house elf met them there and bowed. "Young masters," said the elf. "What can Zhensi be doing for you?"

Viktor took Neville's hand and kissed it. "Is needing Papa."

"Your father is very busy, young master."

"Nonsense, Zhensi," said a deep quiet rumbling voice from the top of the stair. He looked with deep intent eyes at Neville. One bushy eyebrow raised. "He took you to see?"

Neville nodded.

"Is good and proper. Is duty of all Krum to be protecting."

"But... why?"

Gregori looked at Viktor and nodded.
Viktor turned to Neville and gently laid a finger on his lips. "Follow me, my love."

And then Neville's hand was in Viktor's and they were descending deep into the manor. Deep beneath the earth they came to a door, and they stopped. Viktor stepped aside. "Only a true Krum can open this door, my Nevya. I... I'm not permitted to go with you."

"Why?"

"The words of the great lady, they are for your ears alone tonight, my Nevya," said Viktor softly. "Go."

Neville set his hand on the knob and felt a presence, ancient and earthy seeking though him and then there was a click and the door swung open. Neville glanced furtively at Viktor, who mouthed 'I love you' at him, and then hesitantly he stepped inside.

The door swung shut behind him, and the room was terrifyingly black. Neville pulled his wand, and whispered a quiet *Lumos* filling the room with the dim dull white light of magic. The room was bare, save for a single portrait of a woman on the wall. She gazed intently at him.

Neville gulped and clutched his wand tight. "I... I'm sorry about the light," he whispered.

"*Da budyet svyet*," said the woman quietly and there was light. Bright and brilliant and filling the room as though the sun shone above.

"Wow."

"You wear his mark," she said, glancing at Neville's neck.

"I am his."

She looked at him with eyes that pierced him to his soul. It was rather like being watched by Albus Dumbledore. "Then you know he would do anything to spare you the pain you're going through."

Neville felt the tears well up. "It's not his..."

"It is. He is your mate. To make you happy and content, it means the world to Vitya. And he feels he failed."

"Was there anything that could have..."

The woman shook her head. "I have great power, but that is hard to know for certain. Your body suffers from what was done to you as a child. That you've fought past it... my grandson, he is lucky to have such a mate."

"You're his..."

"It's a simplification, of course. I chose this," she said, gesturing to the frame, "to remain as a guardian over the children of my love."

"You're the daughter," said Neville softly, his voice quavering. "From the story. The daughter of the great witch who pricked her intended's finger to know the truth of his heart."

The woman nodded slightly. "He was a wolf, and I was horribly afraid."

"I know that fear."
"You got past it," said the woman, shrugging, "as I did. It is never easy, loving a wolf."

"I lost..."

"You still wish to bear the next line of Krum?"

"I wish to give my mate a pup, to raise as our own," said Neville, "to have a family with him. What I never had."

She smiled. "If this is truly what you wish," she said, "then the heat you offer him is the way."

"But I lost..."

"Come here."

Neville stepped hesitantly forward.

"There will come a time in your heat," she said softly, "when Vitya will get nervous and pull away. In a heat, you are wolf. Show him you embrace it. Seize the azure fire in your heart and let your own beast out."

"I..."

"You are his. Do this thing for your mate."

"I'm afraid."

"He is there to catch you and cherish this gift. And in the cherishing, you may find the thing you seek."
Chapter 63

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Note that this is a side story based on the events of Promised, a fic written for the Nuke Bigbang 2012 that combined a Nuke and a Drarry fic.

IMPORTANT: This story is a side story and is based on the events of my previous story, Promised. This story begins before the events of The Redemption of Seamus Finnigan and shortly after chapter 90 of Promised.

A/N: For the record, I love Vitya's accent.

------

"Is not needing to do this thing," said Vitya. They were lying on the furs in front of the fire, dribbles of chocolate and marshmallow marking Neville's stomach and chest.

"It's my last break," said Neville.

"Is not good reason to be rushing."


"Is not feeling..."

Neville smiled as the tingle started at the base of his spine. He felt the flush of the pheromone slick. He trembled. This was good. He was empty. He needed...

"Nevya?"

Neville slid over to Viktor and sniffed at his neck. "I n-need you."

"Want you to be..."

"Shhh," Neville pressed a finger against Viktor's lips even as his other hand slid past the waistband of his jeans against the wet slick.

"Nevya. You... you already..."

Neville rested his forehead against Viktor's, pulling his hand free of his jeans. Viktor's eyes exploded with black.

"Nevyenka..."

A slick finger slid against Viktor's lips and he growled. "Is..."

Neville let himself fall against the furs and with shaking hands popped the button of his jeans.

The growl was a deep rumble. Desperate.
"Empty..." moaned Neville, spreading his legs.

Then all he felt was teeth buried in his heart and that ecstatic sense of oneness. Sharp pain dull against his legs as the jeans were ripped off of him. Blunt pressure that pushed into him even as his body was folded. A muffled cry of joy between clenched jaws. Neville pulled Viktor's head into his chest. "M-make me f-full."

A growl sounded between the clenched jaw of his mate as the teeth bit deeper and then he felt his mate moving inside him. Neville's arms fell to his sides, grasping at the floor as he wrapped his legs against Viktor's waist.

And Viktor took him and howled as he came and knotted inside of Neville, rutting into him as Neville moaned. Slowly the knot dissipated and Neville was turned and Viktor whimpered as he slid into Neville from behind, wrapping his arms against Neville's chest and pushing hard into him. And Neville squealed as the strokes began to hit that perfect spot and he began to scream for completion from his mate.

Fingers sought Viktor's cheeks as Neville begged. "Please, Vitya. I... I want... oh God. Vitya yes, YES. Right there. Give it to me! Oh GOOOD. Fuck, Vitya... my... oh GOD."

Viktor was quiet, his teeth buried in Neville's shoulder as he rutted. And then there was a moment. And Neville breathed and reached back to hold Viktor tight to him. "Don't stop."

"Nevya, you is not... I'm. Oh Nevya, I couldn't, not..."


"Nevya?" Hands clutched his chest. "Is shaking Nevya..."

"Y-yours," said Neville as the coat of fur began to cover him. "Yours!" he screamed as it grew thick. "T-take... Oh God Viiiiiiiiiiityaaaaaaaaaa!"

A howl rang out. And then it was joined. And then there was only pleasure and togetherness and a sense that they were both connected always.

Neville knew it was over when he couldn't feel the fur of Viktor's back. When sated lips kissed his neck and bade him cum again. And they lay together like that, knotted, for a long time.

"Nevya... what is. You..."

Neville wrapped Viktor's arms around him. "My mate."

Viktor's voice shook as he tried to seek and find words and yet none came.

"Still... still knotted."

Viktor gulped. "Yes."

"I. We were..." Neville kissed his hand. "You got excited."

It was an understatement. Even now, Viktor was thrusting inside him, and Neville could feel that he was still coming, over and over, his hard cock pulsing inside Neville's arse.

"Are you... you're not angry?"
Viktor shook his head. "So... so beautiful..."

"M-make love to me?"

Viktor's hand moved to the mark on Neville's chest and lips moved against his ear. "S-still coming."

"Is... did I do..." Neville was hesitant. He'd embraced it. They'd...

"Shh, my Nevyenka," said Viktor, moaning as he thrust deeper. "Is... my Nevya, is making litter inside you. Is why knot is..."

Neville gulped. "Litter?"

"Many pups, all... oh Ooooh GOD!"

Neville felt the rush of cum filling him again.

"Oooh my... my NEVYA!"

More cum filled him. Neville swallowed softly. "It..."

"Is having pups, my Nevya." Viktor's tears were wet against Neville's face.

"How many?"

"Is not... oh... oh God... oh my Nevya... oh GOD... AIIIGHHH!" Viktor's arms wrapped around him and pulled them tight together as Viktor suddenly pushed deeper. 
"NEEEVYEEEEENKAAAA!" He was pushing deep and Neville could feel it, Viktor wasn't just coming, it was gushing out inside of Neville, over and over as Viktor was reduced to strangled moans and desperate frenetic thrusting and then there were teeth in Neville's shoulder and the bite was deep.

Neville wasn't sure how long it lasted, only that it ended when Viktor finally collapsed exhausted, still knotted inside him. Neville feebly summoned a blanket, and they slept.

He woke aware of eyes staring at him. The grin was broad and wide and he was aware of voices.

"Shh, my sweet Nevyenka," said Viktor. "Just to be staying in comfort."

Neville let his shoulders relax and his head fall backwards into a pillow that hadn't been there when they fell asleep. Hands were touching him, Viktor's hands. As though desperate to touch and feel every part of his skin. "My Nevya..."

Neville gulped. "You..."

Viktor nodded. "Is carrying pups, my Nevyenka. Full litter!"

Neville shook. "M-more than..."

Viktor slid up against him and pulled him close, his hands over the marks. "Is not to be afraid. Madam Pomfrey, she is making rare house call to be checking on Nevya. And is having already potions. And is arranging for careful transportation back to Scotland for my beauty. Is coming with you. Every moment, my Nevya. Is..." tears streamed down Viktor's face, "my mate," Viktor sniffed at the marks, "is giving to Vitya such joy. Is... was not knowing possible to be making Nevya full with pups this way."
"A litter?" Neville's voice was small. "How... twins almost killed Harry."

Viktor nodded. "Is not same as bearing child. Is giving birth to pups. As wolves, they will be born as small wolf pups. Is not so long as time for pup born as human child. And is... my Nevya, pups. Is having litter!" Viktor kissed his face over and over.

"You're. I mean, I..."

Viktor's kissed him again, sensuously this time. "Six, my Nevya. Six pups."

"Six?" squeaked Neville.

Viktor nodded and then he rolled over. "Nevyenka moi?"
Neville gulped. "Yeah?"

"Be... be making love to Vitya?"

"You want me to?"

"Is wanting to feel Nevya inside me. Is wanting to be one with my Nevya. Is wanting Nevya to be screaming in ecstasy with Vitya." Viktor spread his legs wide. "Please my Nevya?"

"It won't hurt..."

A finger pressed against his lips. Of course it wouldn't. Viktor was a wolf, the pups were always protected first. Neville climbed awkwardly onto him, still wincing at his own sore arse. "You're... it won't hurt the..."

"If is greater claim than growing of six pups inside of Nevya, then is not knowing what is being. Nevya... is wanting you. Please?" Viktor pulled his legs up by his knees, exposing himself.

Neville smiled, and slicked his cock with oil, and then he pressed into his love, and they rocked together, moaning into the night, until Neville filled Viktor, and Viktor howled an ecstasy that Neville had never heard. And they slept, covered in cum and tired from days of being knotted together.

Neville woke to the soft snores of his husband, reflexively stroking the marks over Neville's heart. It was comforting, to be filled with the knowledge that he belonged. He'd woken shaking though. It hadn't quite set in, that certain knowledge. He was pregnant again. And it wasn't one pup he had to fear for, but six. Neville struggled to keep the trembling from waking Viktor and tried to just breathe.

A leg wrapped over him. "Is being well, my Nevya?" mumbled Viktor.

"Scared," said Neville softly.

Viktor laughed softly against Neville's skin. "Is scared too. Is prepared to be parent, but this is... is such gift is not knowing how to say."

"Six?"

"Mmmm, my beautiful Nevya. Is giving line of Krum something not having in generations. My mate. My beautiful..."

Neville kissed his forehead. "Still scared. I... I lost..."
"Is not letting this happen to mate again," said Viktor. "Is being family. Vitya and Nevya together, with pups of our flesh. Nevya, my mate. Is not knowing how much is loving you in this moment. So much. Cannot to be finding of words."

Neville leaned against Viktor, his voice still small and frightened. "Yours, my wolf."
Chapter 64

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IMPORTANT: This story is a side story and is based on the events of my previous story, Promised. This story begins before the events of The Redemption of Seamus Finnigan and shortly after chapter 90 of Promised.

A/N: Starting the next installment of my ATWT/Drarry crossover. I promised Neville a happy ending, and in Promised I gave it to him. But those characters: Viktor, Neville, together, and their courtship demanded an attention I could not give them in a fic based around Luke/Noah and Harry/Draco. So here it is. The whole story of Viktor and Noah's courtship. I hope you enjoy it.

-----

Neville watched the students below being herded slowly towards the Hogwarts Express that would take them back to London, and from there to their homes. Noah and Draco and Harry were all helping guide the students, along with Flitwick looking lost in a sea of people taller. Only Neville's vantage point from the high clock tower let Neville see him at all. Gryffindor's head of house was no where to be found. Neville snorted. Minerva would never have left her Gryffindor's so unsupervised.

Neville set a hand on his stomach. Barely over two months and he was already showing. Only the voluminous cover of his teaching robes, the older less stylish ones, kept it from being immediately obvious that he was carrying. He smiled, his other hand going to his collar to feel under his neck for the marks.

A cough startled him from his reverie. He took a deep breath and turned. "Minerva," acknowledged Neville quietly.

She walked quietly in that severe graceful stride to the window to stand next to him, looking down. "You have a student waiting for you, Mister Longbottom."

"I know," he said softly, his attention still taken by the scene below. "Harry and Draco haven't figured out she's missing yet."

"Are they staying, Neville?" asked Minerva softly. "Noah committed, but Draco and Harry haven't said a word."

The corner of Neville's mouth twisted into a smile. "Extended the Writer in Residence clause, did you?"

"It is what it took to get him to stay," said Minerva. "There's no one else suitable. Severus and Albus both agreed. They come as a set, and I need Mayer here."

"And the complaints against him as a Death Eater?"

"A small army of Hufflepuffs swears that he is as trustworthy and loyal as they come. And he no
"Quietly powerful where no one expects," said Neville softly. "He showed me, you know. That he'd removed the mark. He felt guilty, taking Luke from me, he would have... as powerful as he is. As Harry is. As Hermione is, they all tried."

"It was an Unbreakable binding," said Minerva. "Ghastly. Albus and Severus and I tried too, you know. There really was nothing to be done."

Neville shook his head. It was a tiny motion, unrecognizable to any who did not know him well. "I am content, Minerva. If... I found my mate. It is what I needed. If I'd stayed with Luke, I might not have found," he hesitated, "I needed this."

"I'd hoped your thing with Oliver might--" Neville laughed. "He married Dennis Creevey."

"He... why?"

"Because Dennis gives him what he needs."

"Love?" asked Minerva.

"In part. All Gryffindor, that boy, chasing after Oliver that way."

"There's a story there..."

"There is," said Neville, "but it's not my story to tell. Did you ask him? Harry, I mean?"

"No... I. I don't know what I'll do if he says no."

"You're asking me," Neville chuckled. "You should be asking Luke."

"But Noah is..."

"About Harry," said Neville. "Teddy is pack. He spends a lot of time with his Uncle Luke. You can bet Teddy has told him if they're staying. He's too young to keep secrets."

Minerva looked back over the throng of students. "I... I am trying, Neville. I know I've been..."

"He's my mate."

Minerva struggled a moment. "I doubt him, not you. You have to know my confidence in you--"

"It should extend to my choice. To be mated. To be owned," Neville said, turning to her. "I entered it willingly, Minerva. He was planning to promise me freedom from his claim forever, because he was terrified he was going to lose me. It was what I wanted from him. I made the demand when I submitted. I begged him to do it."

"He hurts you. Those shameful--"

"Is needing to be seeing past this headmistress," said a voice from the door, rich and resonant.

"You hurt him!"

Viktor crossed the room with it's mass of weights and chains and gears to the window. He wrapped
Neville in his arms from behind and kissed his cheek, then nipped lightly at his ear. "Is hurting, Nevyenka?"

Neville shook his head. "Vitya..."

"What is pain of bite?" asked Viktor.

"Promise to keep my soul safe," panted Neville as Viktor's hand rested over the mark. "Promise that it is forever. That we are... I'm yours!"

"Mmmm. Always, my Nevya." His fingers danced lightly over Neville's shoulder and neck. "And these, that headmistress sees, that she is being much worried over?" Viktor's fingers slipped beneath Neville's collar. "Is bringing pain to beautiful Nevyenka?"

Neville trembled and his eyes danced backward into his head and his knees buckled, though a strong arm at his hip kept him upright. "Vitya... oh God, Vit..."

"Shh, my mate," said Viktor softly. "Is promising will fulfill all promises to Nevya when is alone."

Neville smiled as Viktor's fingers withdrew. "L-love you."

"Is knowing," said Viktor, his glance returning to the headmistress, "is needing to focus, Nevya moi, headmistress, she is waiting."

Neville got his feet firmly back under him and moved Viktor's hand back over his stomach. "It's not shameful," said Neville softly, his hand covering Viktor's over his stomach. "And there will be children, Minerva. Our charges, who will need you not to see their love as shameful. Not to see their marks as shameful. Wolves like Teddy. Like my children--"

"Is litter, headmistress, that mate is carrying for Vitya, to be born as wolves. Full blooded. True children of line of Krum."

Minerva looked at Neville's stomach and gulped, her eyes wide. "A litter?"

"Six," said Neville, answering her unasked question.

"I've..."

"Is no wizard, living or dead, ever who has been bearing litter. Is rare even in wolf packs for she wolves to be bearing such gift... not being unknown. Grandfather of Lyusha was being child of such gift. But..."

"It's dangerous," said Neville. "And yet I offer this to my mate. To bear his pups. And they will be educated here, Minerva. Wolves in these halls. Not a sixteenth or an eighth that cause all the fuss, but full blooded wolves."

"You won't send them to Durmstrang?"

Viktor shook his head. "Only if this is where is wishing to go. Is proud of Durmstrang. Is good education. But Hogwarts is being best. Is what every parent is wishing for child, to be in best school."

"I..."

"There will be more, Minerva. It is not just... Greyback and his were-wolves, they tainted a lot of families. Families that will have children like Teddy," said Neville. "You want Harry to stay, but
will you give his child, his pride and joy who he loves as much as the twins, will you give that boy a fair education? He's a wolf, Minerva, and he will come here."

"We are not ready. I listened, Neville, when you spoke so eloquently as you left my office that day. I did. I. I'm an old woman, and I'm struggling. I have years of prejudice to get past. I won't deny it. But that's... Neville, we need you here."

Neville turned back to look over the students. "I still have a student," said Neville, "who is waiting."

"She won't take Herbology as a specialty," said Minerva. "You knew that."

Neville smiled. "Vityenka, come with me," he said pulling Viktor's hand to his lips and kissing it softly. "Help me change her mind?"

Viktor smiled and nodded. "Headmistress should come and be witnessing."

Minerva looked at Viktor oddly but nodded. They all descended the staircases together until finally they stood in the greenhouse where Neville taught his fifth years. There, leaning against a work table was a young woman.

"Miss Appleton," said Neville softly.

"I. I just had to. I. I decided to..."

"You haven't decided," said Neville, his voice still quiet. "If you had, there would have been a note. You're Slytherin, not Gryffindor or Hufflepuff. You would have left a note."

Minerva and Viktor made their way into the room behind him. "Mister Krum!" said Miss Appleton in shock. "Headmistress." Her voice was very soft.

"You want to. Something is..." Neville slid onto the worktable comfortably. "What is it?"

"Who," said Miss Appleton quietly. "It's a who."

"Parents?"

She shook her head. "Please don't..."

Neville's eyebrow raised.

"Is worthy specialty, Miss Appleton."

She looked at Viktor, her eyes very wide.

"He has a NEWT equivalent in Herbology," said Neville, answering her unspoken question.

"And your parents..."

"Father is charms expert. As Boyar, knowledge of Herbology, is knowledge of earth. Is something that is needed when crops are not growing, when is struggling. And if is understanding of the earth, of the growing of things from promise of seed, is understanding also of life, and of growth, and of promise within," said Viktor. "Father understood this truth. Greatest legacy of Krum is not seeker, or title. Is this truth." His eyes danced to Neville who nodded.

"My Nevyenka, he says you can be trusted. That is wanting to be learning. Was asking that I carry
Neville spoke a word and the greenhouse was plunged into a sort of odd twilight darkness. Viktor pulled something from his inside his robes and stepped up to Neville, reaching out to touch his face in front of Miss Appleton. Light flared within the heart of the translucent petals of the rose.

"It's a myth," breathed Minerva softly.

Neville pricked his finger on it and the petals flared into the colors of fire. "This man," said Neville softly, "is the fire of my heart. My mate. He wooed me with this flower. A gift, rare and beautiful, that he offered with a hand over his heart."

Viktor pricked his finger and the heart of the rose burned with blue flame, the edges touched with the translucent white of ice. "Is eyes of mate that is seeing in flower. Azure fire that burns inside behind walls of ice."

"You said you'd... if I made it to NEWT levels."

"I've seen your OWLs," said Neville. "Your aptitude is in Herbology, more than any other subject."

"But... I, I can't..."

"If is being calling of heart, to study of plants, then must be studying plants. Career to be growing from this, be worrying about this later," said Viktor softly. "For now look at wonder in own eyes. In greenhouse here is wonders not seen anywhere else. Wonders Nevyenka moi is showing only to those few students who is choosing to look beyond expectations of others, and being willing to dig deep within own souls to find heart."

"They won't..."

"I will talk to them," said Neville quietly, "but it has to be what you want."

Miss Appleton looked at him. "I'd be proud to be your student, sir."

Neville smiled. "Then you shall be. Now go catch your train." Neville turned to Viktor, "Could you make sure she gets to the train on time, Vitya?"

Viktor nodded. "Will fly her to station, but must to be hurrying." Viktor ushered her quickly to the door.

After a moment Minerva looked at him. "You plan to stay?"

"Did you doubt it?"

She shook her head and was quiet for a moment. "We're losing Flitwick. He gave us this year, but his wife's illness gets worse, and he... the Board of Governors asked me to make Harry Deputy."

"Of course they did," said Neville with a sigh. "He won't do it."

"I was going to ask you, instead," said Minerva quietly. "Head of House for Gryffindor, as we discussed and Deputy Headmaster."

"I've only been a professor for a year."

"But you had the good of all students at the school in your heart when you were in seventh year. And in many ways, dear boy, you protected them better than we could. Keep protecting them."
"I. I may need family leave," said Neville, glancing at his stomach. "From time to time."

"Then you'll have family leave," said Minerva.

"I won't. I am owned, Minerva," said Neville. "I won't be ashamed of my marks. And I won't... my children will be wolves," his eyes glinted icy in the light of his wand, "and I will protect my family."

"I'll get letters."

"And what will you say?" asked Neville. "When the board demands you remove the claimed of a wolf from the staff?"

"I'll remind them that you're a hero. And that my decisions on hiring matters are final."

Neville looked away. "And?"

"And I'll remind them of Luciano, and of Viktor, both students who might have attended Hogwarts, had we pushed our prejudices away."

Slowly Neville nodded.
Chapter 65

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A/N: Final chapter. After this it's the epilogue.

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Neville screamed. A damp cloth was set quickly against his forehead, intent eyes looking deeply at him, offering him a bit of hard leather to bite into. Neville unclenched his jaw for long enough for it to be set into his mouth and bit hard into the leather.

The eyes turned toward Madam Pomfrey and Noah, who stood next to the bed, Noah looking through potions desperately, Madam Pomfrey whispering incantations and staring with worried eyes at the diagnostic circles floating over Neville's body.

They'd been at it for hours. The spells and potions that had helped Harry through his delivery of the twins were failing.

"Noah?"

Noah looked at Madam Pomfrey. They both closed their eyes and gulped. "Viktor, I..." started Noah.

"No!" shouted Luke. "Noah!"

Viktor's eyes were shut tight. "Is nothing else?"

"We could try to take the babies the Muggle way, Viktor," said Madam Pomfrey, "but it's certain to kill Neville and there--"


"Enough," said Viktor quietly. His hand caressed Neville's face. "My Nevyenka. Hold on for Vitya. Is... is not giving up."

"There's. Viktor," said Noah very seriously, "he won't last much longer. And the pups... we're. I fear we may already have lost one."

Neville whimpered and struggled against the restraints.

Viktor screwed his eyes shut. "Papa?"

Gregori nodded solemnly. "If ever was being time, my son..."
Viktor stood. "Lyushenka moi," he said firmly, "be keeping watch over Nevyenka."

"What are you..."

"Just watch him." Viktor turned and his face stung from the slap.

"I told him... told him that..."

"No..." croaked Neville from the bed. "Gran, not his..."

Viktor shook his head as he caught the hand that tried to slap him a second time. "Mrs. Longbottom. Nevyenka needs you right now. Stay with him."

"And where are you going."

"Go, my son," said Gregori. "Now is not being time for explanations."

Viktor nodded and fled the room.

Deep in the bowels of the manor a portrait looked at a kneeling Viktor Krum with sad eyes. "I'm sorry, my Vitya. I. You have tried..."

"Is being capable potions master, mate of Lyusha. And Pomfrey, she is helping many wizards bear their children."

"This is my fault," said the woman in the portrait. "I encouraged him, knowing he would surrender completely to your wolf. Knowing that this would result. I did not..." she sighed. "Who is there with him?"

"Pomfrey, the mediwitch. Papa. Lyushenka moi and his mate, who is being potions master. Gran of my Nevyenka."

"No one else?"

Vitya shook his head, tears falling from his face. "Great lady, my mate... he is dying."

The portrait looked up to the sky and then the earth shook as she stepped from the frame. "Take me to him," she said.

Viktor looked at her once more with fear written in his face.

"My grandson, there is little time."

Vitya nodded and stood, opening the door. She followed, thunder echoing footsteps that bled paint onto the floor. He ran, the lady following him in fast footsteps that shook the earth with their fury. They reached the bedroom and all eyes were on her. A woman of paint and magic, her step and touch leaving the barest touch of oils behind, but full of power as the force of her step echoed through the manor. She surveyed them and stepped up to the bed.

Luke looked at her, trying to remain calm as he gulped and stepped away to make room with a muttered, "Great Lady," and a nod.

The lady ignored Noah's sharp look at his mate, ignored Neville's Gran as she backed against the wall, eyes open wide, ignored Pomfrey's protestations as paint caressed Neville's face. "He has little time. The pups are suffering. They are... they are all of them alive yet, but barely so."
"Great lady..."

"It is beyond my power," said the woman softly. "You must take him to the grove and plead your case."

Viktor gulped. "The apparition would..."

"I will make this possible. You must take him to the grove. I will send you to the edge of the wood. You will need to bear him from there to... you know how it is done. I... I do not know if she will help you."

"He certainly can't go out in this--"

"He must," said the woman. "You must plead of my mother to show you the secrets that will see him safe."

"She will not listen to us," said Gregori quietly.

"No," said the woman softly. "It is not in her nature to listen to man." She turned to face Neville's Gran. "This boy is your grandson?"

Augusta Longbottom nodded and the woman pulled from inside her robes a rose so black it gleamed with an almost bluish sheen... the same black as her hair. The rose was not made of paint or oil.

"I offer you this truth. That I was loved by a wolf. And by his love I brought forth two litters for my mate. And one roams still the forest in numbers too great to be counted, choosing to live fully as wolves, and the other, its last descendants die inside your grandson's body. I was loved by a wolf and for that love I have stood guard over that line for centuries. But I cannot leave this manor, nor stray far from my portrait."

She held out the rose. "Take it. My mother will hear you. Plead the case of our grandsons' love. She may listen to you."

"Your mother..."

"Hurry," said the woman, and tossed the rose into Augusta Longbottom's hands as the world spun. There was a crack and they were, all of them, at the edge of a wood. Neville lay on a pallet with space for four to lift and carry. Pomfrey frantically checked him. "He's... he's getting worse."

"We have to hurry," said Gregori nodding to Viktor to take the post opposite him.

"How was that possible?" asked Noah.

"The same way we got Vitya through his heat," said Luke.

"She was the source?" asked Noah.

Luke nodded as he seized the post. Noah took the opposite one and they all looked at each other, nodded once and lifted together.

"Is not being far," said Gregori.

"How do you know?" asked Augusta, staring at the rose in her hand.
"Was seeking wisdom of the Vyedma once before, when mate was dying. She... she does not listen to the pleas of men," he glanced at Augusta. "We can only hope..."

"Is to be hurrying," said Viktor, hefting the post in his arm, and then they were moving through the woods. Augusta and Pomfrey followed behind, their eyes on the wolves that stalked them from afar.

They were sweaty and tired by the time they reached the clearing and the posts of human bone. Viktor hovered over the lowered pallet as his father performed the rituals to open the gates and spoke the words that the hut that danced on chicken legs might stop spinning and lower itself to the ground. Viktor lifted Neville into his arms and carried him to the hut as the door opened and a grotesque woman stepped forth, a long and warty bulbous nose twitching under a mass of tangled white hair.

"I am smelling the scent of men who have walked the Russian steppe," she said, her voice like a shriek that cut to the soul.

Gregori stood and was about to speak when Viktor shook his head. He set Neville down before the witch and turned to Augusta. His eyes pleaded with her.

Augusta stepped forward awkwardly in her prim clothes and usual outrageous feathered hat. "I am here to speak for Natasha," she said, her voice cracked.

"My daughter is long dead," spat the witch, her voice carried on a gale that swept the clearing save only for that space within the fence.

"And yet she offers forth this truth," said Augusta holding up the rose, "that you might listen to me in her stead."

The witch narrowed her eyes and stepped forward on legs that were too long and bent like a frogs. "Is smelling still blood of Ivan upon the thorn. Of wolf that..." She looked at Gregori. "I remember you."

Gregori closed his eyes and remained silent.

"Grandmother of the Russian Steppe," said Augusta quietly, "Please, I plead not just for your daughter, but for the blood and flesh that descends from us. That passes from her to the line of Krum, and from me into this boy, my grandson."

"You plead for men's lives!"

"I plead for my grandson and the litter he carries inside him. The end of the line of Krum dies inside his belly, the fruit of his love and devotion to your grandson."

"And why should I care..."

"He slew the soul of the modern incarnate of Koschei the Deathless, Grandmother of the Wood, he who we named Voldemort. He hid his soul as of old, and this boy slew the piece that dwelt within the serpent."

The Baba Yaga screamed in a strange sort of fury as she knelt over Neville, ripping open his clothes with long fingernails that were sharp like talons. Her fingers traced over the distended belly.

"Pups yet live inside him," she said, sniffing the air, "Pups that bear the blood of my daughter." She looked at Augusta. "You are a foolish old woman, to let your blood mingle with mine."
"I gave that choice to my grandson. He chose a love so complete that it subsumes him, and he is owned in his soul."

"And you, little prince, do you carry it safely for him?" asked the Baba Yaga, her face suddenly inches from Vitya.

"Is being heart and soul of Vitya, and is carrying closer even than my own," said Vitya, tears falling. "My mate, he is dying."

The Baba Yaga growled and knelt by the prone form of Neville Longbottom. "Speak. Is it true you slew the snake that my old enemy might be defeated in this life?"

"Sword," whispered Neville, "cut the head of the snake from its body with a sword."

"It's a lie," shrieked the witch. "No sword would..."

"Goblin made, imbued with basilisk venom," murmured Neville. He whimpered as he spoke. "Hurts."

"To be bearing of wolves is foolish and dangerous. Was telling this to daughter. She did not listen. Came to me with belly full of pups. Begged me for help as you are begging now. Tell me, why should old witch be helping?"

"You loved your daughter," said Augusta, holding out the rose, "as he did. These are their children. As Neville is mine. As Viktor is your Natasha's."

"And how is knowing love of boys is same?"

Augusta looked the witch in the eye knelt beside her grandson. "Neville is my grandson. I know his heart. Do you not know the heart of young Viktor?"

She glared. "Doesn't matter. Would need healer and master brewer. Is not having all the hands I would need."

Pomfrey stepped forward. "He is not my boy, but if you are a healer that would deny healing, well, then you do not deserve the title."

"Your heart beats to heal those in need," said the witch. "You'll do."

Noah stepped forward. "He is my pack, and loved by my mate. I will give my skill to aid him."

She looked pointedly at his left arm. "There was a mark there."

"The one there now lives in my bones," said Noah, kissing his ring and setting a tracery aflame along his right side. On his left forearm, deep, came the glow of the completed promise, bound into the bone.

The Baba Yaga grunted once and stepped into the hut. "Bring him," she said harshly.
Epilogue

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Note that this is a side story based on the events of Promised, a fic written for the Nuke Bigbang 2012 that combined a Nuke and a Drarry fic.

IMPORTANT: This story is a side story and is based on the events of my previous story, Promised. This story begins before the events of The Redemption of Seamus Finnigan and shortly after chapter 90 of Promised.

A/N: Poor Neville. For the end we fast forward to a moment we've seen before. A party at the Burrow seen originally in the Epilogue to the Redemption of Seamus Finnigan. I've been convinced to post Teddy's story, so I will start posting it in a few days with a slightly less rigorous schedule than I've been posting this story. So for those who have been enjoying the series, next up is The Surrender of Teddy Lupin. I'll post a brief one-shot in between.

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Neville sighed. "Nikolai, you need to get ready."

"What for Papa?"

"We're going to the Weasley's, remember?" said Neville.

"I can play with Aedan, Papa?"

"If you want."

"What about Colin?"

"Him too," said Neville, "And Rose, and your Uncle Luke's daughter Charlene. And Erakis and Fred. Everyone's going to be there."

"But... what about."

"And all our family. They've all gone ahead, Nikolai. It's only you and me left."

"Papa... when new litter comes, will you still..."

Neville kissed the boy gently on the forehead and managed, with a little difficulty, to sit down.

"Does it frighten you? To have more pups coming?"

"A little."

"You know your papa Vitya and I, we both love you."

"I know."

"And we'll still love you," said Neville, "when the new pups come."

"But what if you don't, Papa?"
Neville leaned his forehead against his littlest boy's forehead. "I promise."

"But how do you know?"

Neville smiled. "Do you believe I love your Papa?"

Nikolai laughed. "Of course you do!"

"Well, what if I told you that a litter happens when your Papa and I are so full of love for each other that it overflows, and fills me up inside. And all that extra love, that's what makes you and your brothers and sisters."

"And Papa loves you a LOT!" screamed Nikolai in delight.

"He sure does," said Neville. "And because of that we have lots of pups. But you know what?"

"What Papa?"

"I love every single one of you just as much as I love your Papa," said Neville sincerely, looking right into Nikolai's eyes. "Because you are what we made together with our love."

"You promise?"

Neville nodded. "Now come on. It's just right over the hill to the Burrow. Everyone is waiting for us."

"Papa?"

"I know, little one. It's okay to be shy."

"But Papa says..."

"I know. He wants you to be happy, and our happiness has grown from having close friends. He regrets that, son, from his youth. Not having friends. And he doesn't want you to make what he thought of as a mistake."

"But I'm scared," said Nikolai, as Neville wriggled a pair of trousers onto the little boy.

"I know," said Neville, whispering a word to summon a shirt and pulling it over the little boy's head. "There. Ready?"

"Papa?"

"You know you want to play with Colin."

"Colin is brilliant papa."

"I know, my little wolf," said Neville. "Come on."

He lifted Nikolai to his hip and carried him out the door, walking slowly and carefully over the hill. In the distance the Burrow rose, ramshackle and lopsided and beautiful. "See there?" said Neville, "They're all waiting for us."

"Papa... why do you love Papa Vitya?"

Neville smiled. "It's not enough to just love him?"
"But there has to be a reason..."

Neville kissed the little boy on the forehead. "You really want to know?"

"Yeah!"

"Alright," said Neville. He shifted the boy against his waist and started toward the Burrow. "A long time ago, I was very alone. And your papa, he came to visit me, and he brought me a rose."

"Was it a pretty rose, Papa? Like the one on the mantle?"

Neville chuckled. "It was the rose that's on the mantle, Niki."

"Oh. Wow. That's an old rose!"

Neville flipped a lock of hair out of Nikolai's face. "Yeah, it really is. So your papa, he gave me that rose. And he asked me if I'd consider loving him."

"He said it like that?"

"No, there was a lot of boring adult stuff involved. But that's what he meant."

"Oh."

"And he said if I agreed to think about it, that he'd send me gifts every day to show me how much he loved me."

"Every day, Papa?"

"Every day. And he did. Every day he sent me a gift and a letter. And they started a little silly. But as we wrote each other, your papa, he put so much thought into each gift, that I started to look forward to every letter, more even than the gifts."

"More than the gifts?"

"Yes," said Neville. "And I realized in the midst of all the letters and gifts that I wanted him near me. That I needed him near me all the time. So much that it hurt sometimes."

"Weally?"

"Yep. And then your papa, he took me dancing. And we kissed on the dance floor."

"You were wearing a suit! I sawed it on the wall!"

Neville smiled. "I was. And your papa kissed me, and a few days later, he sent me a letter, terrified, admitting that he loved me."

"But why do you love him, Papa?"

"Because he makes me laugh. Because he makes sure I know I'm cherished and loved every moment. Because when he gives a gift or a letter, he fills it with love and thoughtfulness. Because he knows what is important to me. Because he helps me realize my dreams."

"He does all that?"

Neville tousled Nikolai's hair. "Every day, like a gift."
"And that's why you overflowed with love and made pups inside you with it?"

Neville looked across the field where the children were playing at the base of the lopsided structure. "Yeah," he said. "That's exactly why." He tapped Nikolai on the temple and pointed. "Look over there, little guy. There's Colin"

Nikolai screamed in delight as Neville set him down and he took off toward the red headed boy. Viktor spotted him across the sea of playing children and made his way over. He kissed Neville lightly. "Is being better?"

"He's still afraid about the litter."

"Is normal for children to be worrying when more pups are coming. When is litter, is worse. Means many tiny babies demanding of attention. Is less for them. That is what they see."

"I know," said Neville, leaning in to kiss Viktor rather more seriously. "I love you."

"And I you, my sweet Nevyenka," said Viktor. "Come, they is all waiting to tell us news was already knowing of Seamus and Ronald both carrying of children."

"I guess our news should wait then."

Viktor smiled. "Is happy to be sharing this secret with only beautiful mate and pups for still a time yet. Come, family of friends is waiting. Be acting surprised."

Neville laughed. "They know you know."

"Of course, but still is appreciating the pretending."

Together they walked hand in hand, and joined the throng of celebration.

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