**Pensieve Catalyst**

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org) at [http://archiveofourown.org/works/11627580](http://archiveofourown.org/works/11627580).

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**Pensieve Catalyst**

by **amandadubose88**

**Summary**

AU What if Snape saw Harry's reaction to the memory in the pensieve? What if Harry's reaction was stronger? What if everything they both thought was wrong?

**Notes**

Very loosely based on canon. Everything that took place up to Snape's worst memory happened before Christmas.

Disclaimer I do not have split personality disorder. Therefore I am well aware I am not J.K. Rowling. Nor am I claiming to be.
As soon as Snape left the office, Harry began to pace.
‘Stupid git, Stupid order, Stupid Dumbledore.
No one tells me what I need to know.
Not why I have to face Voldemort, Not why I have to put up with all the slander in the Daily Prophet, or the bullying.
Not why I need to learn occlumency, or even how to learn it.’
As he turned to start pacing in the other direction, something caught his eye.
The pensieve.
‘No one wants me to know anything. I did break into Snape’s mind even if it was the one time. He probably puts all the order meetings and all the stuff they don’t want me to know in that pensieve in case I manage to break into his mind again.
I don’t trust Dumbledore, I don’t trust anyone. But maybe if I have an idea what’s going on I’ll at least know who I can trust.’
Mind made up Harry strode across the room and deliberately entered the pensive.
He had no way to know what he would see would completely change his life.
Both for the worse and for the better.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Since I didn't realize chapter 1 was so short.
Here's the next chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry watched in absolute horror as his father and his godfather tormented and tortured his hated potions professor.
While his favorite teacher sat there and did nothing.
Hands covering his mouth as he tried not to cry while his world and everything he thought to be true began to crash down around him.
“No you can’t do this you can’t be like this.”
He shouted as his father, no James potter filled Snape’s mouth with soap suds, nearly choking him.
He couldn’t stop the brief flashback to the Dursleys when they would do something very similar any time he said something that came even close to magic or anything else they deemed as freaky.

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Snape entered his office, and though he tried to push it to the back of his mind he would not, could not let himself feel humor that Montague had ended up in the toilet.
Even the Dark Lord had difficulties with that boy.
Any hint of amusement fled when he saw Potter in his pensive.
Furiously he dove in after him, ready to give more detentions then could be achieved in one year.
And that was just for starters.
What he saw would change his life in a way he never could have predicted.
But it would be for the better.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, this one's short too; but oh well. LOL
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Hopefully, this chapter is a reasonable length.

Completely forgetting that this was a memory of an event that had taken place long before he was even born, Harry rushed forward trying to put himself between the two when James hung Snape by his ankle. Arms spread out in a futile attempt to prevent past events from occurring, Harry noticed nothing around himself; outside of the drama unfolding before him.

“How could you. You’re as bad of a bully as Dudley. I hate you. I wish you were never my father.” Harry’s voice broke with the betrayal he was feeling.

**********

Severus stood totally shocked at what he was seeing and hearing. His normally stoic mask nowhere to be seen as his disbelief was plainly evident. Having entered the pensieve with the full intention of giving the Potter brat what he believed he had deserved for years. He never dreamed he would see this. Had someone told him he would hear these words coming from the lips of his childhood enemy’s son, he would have sent them to the mind damage ward in St. Mungos. What was happening simply was not possible. Potter trying to stop the bullying. Potter defending him, Severus Snape. The great dungeon bat. Potter screaming at his father. Well the memory of his father. And then the boy turned on Black, heedless of the fact that the memory continued to play around him. Oblivious that they could not respond in any way. “And you, I think you’re even worse. If you had changed maybe it would be different but you’re the same now as you were then.” Severus would never have credited the boy with noticing how his beloved godfather treated him. Merlin knew no one else appeared to notice what happened right under their noses. Or if they did witness it, they did not care. As Potter, no Harry moved back from Black, Severus stepped forward. His mind in turmoil; he wasn’t certain what he would do, when Lily entered the scene.

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“Mum.” The word came from Harry as though it were ripped from his throat. Having only seen the image of his parents in the mirror of Erised, and the few photographs in the album Hagrid had given him; seeing them walking. Talking living, was something he would have treasured were it not for the circumstances. Pleading within his own mind that the beautiful woman before him, the teenage version of his mother would stop this horror playing out in front of him. Surely she would stop this. Surely she wouldn’t stand for such horrible behavior. As the memory continued to unfold Harry was sure at least one part of his world one part of what he believed, one part of what he held dear would stay safe.
But it was not to be.
He stared at the woman who became his mother as she turned her back on someone she had claimed as a friend. As she walked away and did nothing.
He saw the look on Snape’s face when he realized what he had said.
“He didn’t mean it.” Harry muttered over and over, as he collapsed on the ground his trembling legs unable to hold him.
As his mind processed all that he had just seen; Harry’s world was shook to the core.

**********

When Severus shook himself out of his stupor and got to Harry, kneeling beside the distraught child he was able to make out the words he kept repeating
“He didn’t mean it.”
His quick mind assimilating all he had just been witness to, Severus world was shook to the core.
Harry felt himself being lifted bodily out of the pensieve. He didn’t try to struggle. He was sure it would be Snape and he would deserve whatever punishment was headed his way. Even if it was on the same level as the Dursleys, Harry knew this was no one’s fault but his own. He had heard that eavesdroppers never heard good about themselves. He wondered if that held true for people who went nosing into things they shouldn’t.

No, the memory didn’t pertain to himself, but was about his parents; more specifically his father. Everyone said he was just like James. He had always taken pride in that claim. Now he hoped with all his heart that it was not true.

He didn’t want to be like James, or Sirius or Dudley. He didn’t want to be an arrogant bully with a sense of entitlement. Harry knew very well what it was like to be on the receiving end of such treatment and never wanted to be like that.

Harry sank to his knees the moment they were back in Snape’s office. Words spilled forth without him being cognizant of what he was saying. Nor of the long buried secrets he was unconsciously revealing.

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Severus expected the boy to struggle at least a little, but Harry came along meekly, as though he had no fight left in him.

No sooner had he pulled them both out of the pensive he had a kneeling child in front of him.

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. There’s no excuse. I was trying to find out why I needed to learn occlumency, so badly. I know that’s not an excuse I’m sorry. I’m sorry.”

The boy couldn’t seem to stop himself from babbling.

Severus was just about to silence him, when something, well actually a couple of things stopped him. The thought that he himself might get some information he wanted. The possibility that the boy would listen and maybe switch sides now that he had a glimpse of how everything was not as he had been led to believe. Then the final and most important reason.

The words the boy spoke next held him frozen.

“I’m sorry You can punish me any way you want. I deserve it. You can beat me and put me in the cupboard and not let me eat for two months. I’m so sorry. They were as bad as the Dursleys. You didn’t deserve that. I’m sorry. I’m sorry.”

For a moment the words Severus heard made no sense they could not mean what he thought they meant. Yet the pleas, the shaking boy on the floor before him, kneeling as though in supplication; body braced as though for a blow, all these were signs too obvious to ignore.

Harry Potter, the Golden Boy. The-Boy-Who-Lived… he could not possibly be abused.

No that just could not be the case.

Potter was a spoiled arrogant brat just like…

But there his thoughts cut off abruptly.

A voice in his head said quietly ‘Are you thinking of James Potter who made your life hell who is now dead, and has been for years.
Or are you thinking of the trembling child in front of you?’
And as surely as Harry had his eyes opened to some truths about his father and godfather, Severus now had his eyes opened to some truths about the child he had tormented for years.
The truth slammed into him with all the force of the Hogwarts Express.
Because as surely as James Potter had tormented him, had made his life hell, and taken away his only safe haven. The one place he called home. The single place had any semblance of security; Severus had done the same to Harry. He had become that which he despised. All these thoughts took but a moment.
Then he was kneeling in front of the boy on the floor.

**********

Harry tried not to flinch when he felt hands on him. He knew he deserved what was coming but it was instinctive for him to cower away from touch. Touch was rarely, if ever good. Touch nearly always meant pain and suffering. He was so tired of being hurt by those around him. So tired of being used. Just so tired.

**********

Severus could not miss the flinch, or the way Harry’s arms half raised to cover his face.
No. There was no doubt in his mind now. This child had been abused.
Severus knew Dumbledore saw Harry as little more than a weapon, a pawn in the games he liked to play with people’s lives. But he never thought he would allow such a thing to happen to his tool.
‘And why not the voice in his head spoke again He allowed it to happen to you. He allowed it to happen to Tom. He allows it to happen to many of your Slytherins. He does not care what happens to people only how it can benefit him.’
Slowly, afraid of scaring the child more, Severus reached out and gently pulled the teen into his arms, a part of his mind noting just how very light the child was.
They would stay in his quarters until Severus could figure out what should be done. The wards would keep them safe. It was abundantly clear to him now that the young Gryffindor was not safe even within the walls of the school.

**********

His thin frame shaking even harder than before Harry felt himself being lifted into strong arms.
‘Oh Merlin, this can’t be good. What is he going to do? Where is he taking me?’
Thoughts of what the Dursleys would do in this situation ran through his head. A distant part of his mind registered the fact that the arms holding him were gentle, rather than restrictive. As he attempted to keep from hyperventilating, he recognized the aroma of lavender and vanilla. Somehow the scent calmed and soothed him, at least a little.
The Professor carried him to another room. Though he lay him on the couch gently Harry instinctively curled into a ball, trying to make himself as small a target as possible.

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Severus used the hidden door in his office to his private rooms. Once inside he carefully laid the boy on the couch. He did not miss the fact that the child immediately moved into a protective position. He then quickly called up the strongest wards his quarters had.
As he was head of Slytherin house the wards in this part of the castle were stronger than they would be for those who were only teachers. This held true for all heads of house. These wards were put in place by the founders themselves and no one not even the headmaster could break through them.
Dumbledore was not the first headmaster who was unscrupulous. He was by no means the first one to view the school as his personal playground. Caring little to nothing about the children within the
walls.
The founders had put many measures in place for such eventualities. One of these was to create a safe place for a head of house to take students who were not safe elsewhere. The wards would ensure that no one could get in, or eavesdrop or know in any way what was going on in the head of house’s private rooms. There were also measures in place to keep heads of house from taking advantage of any of their students in their private quarters. Harry would not come to harm while here, and if Severus had anything to say on the matter Harry would not come to harm at all. He would do all in his power to protect the very child he once loathed.
Harry stayed where Snape had placed him, huddled against the back of the couch. His eyes tracked every move the Professor made, watching warily. He could tell that Snape was putting up wards, but what kind he did not know. Not knowing what was going on around him always led to trouble. He tried to swallow the fear that kept climbing up his throat.

Harry was well aware that Snape hated him, and with as many times as people said Harry looked so much like James, he couldn’t blame the professor. The dread of the retribution for seeing that memory could not be pushed aside. He knew he would be punished, and that he deserved it. But what hurt more than anything else was discovering that the only people he thought he could count on were as bad as his relatives.

Remus had sat back and done nothing. Which sounded so much like the neighbors in Little Whinging that it made Harry feel a little sick. They too had sat back and watched the mistreatment of another and never once stepped in. The apathy of neighbors he barely knew and never cared for did not bother him nearly as much as the indifference of one of his parents best friends.

He remembered when Ron had gotten his prefect badge during the summer. Remus had remarked how he had been made prefect, possibly to try and keep the other Marauders in line. He had also said it never did any good. And Sirius had added that Moony had never really tried.

Which meant it hadn’t been just the one incident, but rather the norm.

Sirius, he didn’t know where to begin with what he thought about Sirius. The man had offered him a home when no one else had. Yet his own godfather couldn’t seem to remember that Harry was not James. With what he had already learned and now adding what he had seen in the pensive what was to say Sirius wouldn’t be like the Dursleys? He had attacked another student for the simple fact that he existed. Not because he had attacked them first. Not because of anything he had done. Not even for the pathetic reasoning of him being a Slytherin. Only that he existed. So very much like what the Dursleys said of Harry.

James, and yes it was James Harry had never known the man in life and the only thing he knew for certain that could be proved was that the man was a bully. He didn’t want to be compared to that kind of person let alone be his son. James had clearly been the one to start the confrontation. The only purpose being that Sirius was bored. What might have happened had Harry grown up under the influence of James Potter? Would he have turned out like him, or would he have been abused by his own father if the man had nothing else to capture his interest?

Then there was Lily.

She wasn’t sure what to think of her either. He had heard once that Lily and Snape had been friends when they were younger. But she turned her back on him.

True he might not know the whole story there, but considering the hell the marauders were putting Snape through at the time it was understandable he might say something in anger that he wouldn’t say otherwise.

And Harry had seen the look on his face after he had said it. He hadn’t meant it.

What kind of friend had his mother been? To not stop and consider the situation. If not at that moment then at least when tempers had cooled.

Sirius had told him that Lily and Snape had been friends and Snape did something unforgiveable in
their 5th year and Lily had dropped the friendship. And that it had been a good thing too since Snape had become a death-eater right after. Harry couldn’t help but wonder if Lily turning away from him had been the last straw. If she had not given up on their friendship would Snape have become a death-eater? Assuming they were even what the so-called light side claimed. Would he have a reason to stay away from them if he had one truly good friend that was not part of Voldemort’s followers?

**********

Severus finished with the wards then turned to his student. He could tell the boy was deep in thought. He had yet to move from his defensive knot, however he continued to watch Severus carefully. Severus had a multitude of questions about the teenager that he thought he knew so well. He was quickly coming to the realization that he knew little or nothing about the raven haired youth. He wasn’t sure where to start but he knew he had to tread carefully. There were years of animosity to overcome. Their past would most certainly be an obstacle. Severus had to admit, if only to himself that the rift between them lay at his door. Though he had been laboring under misconceptions about the boy, Severus felt this was not an excuse. He was a spy, it was his job to catch details, to see things most missed. Yet he had never seen the suffering of this child. Purely because he shared features and blood with someone he had hated. Severus was well aware that just because you were related to someone. Just because you shared their looks, did not make you a carbon copy of that relative. He had striven his entire life to be the very antithesis of his own father. Yet he had judged Harry as James made over, before he had even met the child. Severus thoughts then went in another direction. Harry likely didn’t know that most of the people he trusted were not reliable. Dumbledore heading the top of that list and the others either being so enamored of the old man that they could not see the truth and followed blindly or else were betraying Harry for their own gain. However the child knew nothing of all this, or so Severus thought. Oh, he remembered what Harry had said in the office just after he had pulled him out of the pensive. No one told him anything. Though this was certainly true Severus did not believe Harry knew to what extent things had been kept from him. Severus would be very surprised to learn just how much Harry knew or guessed.

**********

Oh yes, Harry was aware of quite a lot in the world around him. Contrary to popular opinion, Harry was very intelligent. Though he never volunteered an answer in class, he always gave the correct one when called upon. In potions Harry’s caldron never blew up, no matter what other people threw into it. He always got the spells right the first time. The signs were all there if anyone had bothered to look. But just like the situation with the Dursleys people did not want to see. Therefore, they did not. Harry knew many of the people in his life had betrayed him in one way or another. He knew of some and suspected others. Even though he was aware of the duplicity, he wasn’t certain just how deep the treachery ran. He knew most if not all of the order could not be trusted. He knew Dumbledore not only wasn’t trustworthy, but was more evil than he claimed Voldemort to be. So, since the headmaster said Voldemort was evil and anything Dumbledore said could not be believed, Harry couldn’t help but wonder if the bad guy was really the good guy in all this. But either way Harry wanted to know from Voldemort himself what he was up to and what he stood for and what he was really fighting for. Not just the propaganda that the light side parroted from Dumbledore.
Besides the Fact that the old man could not be trusted as far as Flitwick could physically throw Hagrid, too much of what the supposed leader of the light had said did not make sense. He often would not answer important questions which made Harry think he didn’t have a lie prepared. Either that or try and change the subject. He also would overuse phrases like for The-Greater-Good, and it's for the best. Just like how he alleged that the safest place for Harry was with the Dursleys. Through all of these clichés and platitudes, he would never explain himself or his reasoning.

Harry knew that Ron was being paid to be his friend. His first meeting with the Weasleys was so obviously a setup, how they could have thought they were being subtle was beyond him. The train had barely even started when Ron came barging in, claiming all other compartments were full. So many other things throughout the years proved over and over that Ron was not the friend he pretended to be.

Harry was also fully aware that Hermione could not be trusted. Whether or not she was being paid as well was something yet to be determined. However she had gone behind his back too many times for him to consider her trustworthy. Her insincerity along with her attitude, Made her someone Harry was very leery to be around. She had more than proven she cared nothing for him as a person. Maybe an interesting research project; but certainly not as a person.

He also had the feeling that Ginny was being paid to stalk him. She seemed to want to be his girlfriend or something, but even if it were all her idea she was very much a fangirl. She was one of the many who saw the boy who lived, but never saw Harry.

He’d had many doubts concerning Remus and Sirius but had still held out hope till that memory. They had not changed. They’d always been this way.

Sirius, reckless and uncaring of those around him. Willing to hurt someone if it gave him a laugh. And no matter what he said it wasn’t harmless pranks.

The twins liked to prank but they didn’t hurt anyone.

Remus still sat back and did nothing. Not just where Sirius was concerned but Harry as well. Harry would be very surprised to know that his thoughts were similar to those of his potions professor.

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Chapter End Notes

I Promise Sev and Harry interaction next chapter.
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Yesterday I nearly broke a wall and a door; had an argument with Microsoft word and lost. So to make myself feel better, you get a chapter, and possibly two today.

Severus knew it was time to break the silence. Despite the fact that Pot-, Harry would certainly be wary of him and anything he had to say, nothing could be accomplished without communication. “Potter.”

Harry flinched back against the couch, and though he tried to hide it Severus saw the fear in the bright green eyes.

‘Towering over him is not going to help the situation.’ His inner voice told him. Another part of his mind said ‘and if I suddenly start being nice I will send him into shock.’ ‘Maybe but it is about time you be able to act yourself in front of him. It may make all the difference to him. And may very well help if you wish to win him over to the other side.’

Severus mentally rolled his eyes at the inner debate but proceeded to heed the side that said the boy needed gentleness.

Though kindness was not his strong suit, the child’s body language made it plain that his usual brusque demeanor would only push Harry deeper into his shell. The brash Gryffindor seemed to have disappeared; and in his place was a child frightened by the unknown events surrounding him. Harry had hidden his fears well, but he currently seemed unable to hide behind the mask of the Golden Boy.

He summoned a cushion from a chair and sat on the floor, where he could be closer to eye level with the teen curled on the couch.

‘Now what?’ He thought

‘Now be honest brutally so if necessary.’ Said the annoying side of his brain.

“Harry” Severus changed to the child’s first name wondering why it made such a difference when he saw Harry relax a fraction.

**********

“yes sir.”

Harry tried to keep the waver out of his voice but was pretty sure he’d failed miserably.

His mind kept replaying the professor saying his first name. That was more than a little unexpected.

He had managed to conceal himself as a brave lion for more than 4 years. Now his façade had crumbled, and Harry could not keep his natural reactions, so ingrained by the Dursleys, from showing.

“Harry, I think we both have a lot we need to talk about. I do not expect you to do all the talking but I do expect you to be truthful. If I ask something you feel you cannot answer we will discuss why and either find a way to talk about it or come back to It later. I will endeavor to do the same. Can you agree to that”

Harry stared open-mouthed at the man sitting in front of him. Perhaps he had unwittingly entered another dimension or something. This situation made no sense, and the words this man spoke were ones Harry could never imagine the Professor saying.

“I know you aren’t a polyjuiced imposter, otherwise you wouldn’t have access to the wards. So why
are you so different?"
Harry spoke without thinking he was too surprised to censor his words. When He realized what he said he turned alarmingly pale and shrank against the back of the couch.

**********

Severus wasn’t surprised either by the boy’s shock or his reaction after realizing what he said. What had astounded him was the fact that Harry had recognized the fact that he had been erecting wards and that he seemed to know only Severus would be able to control them. Though very interested, he would address that topic later.
At the moment he had a panicking boy to deal with.
“I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.” The apologies spilled from the pale lips like an aguamenti spell gone awry. The teen seemed to be trying to disappear into the couch.
The vivid emerald eyes showed a level of fear disproportionate to the situation. Potter, no Harry he seemed to respond better to his first name, had likely been in trouble for speaking his thoughts aloud. This was not going to be easy.
“You did not say anything wrong.” Severus told him. “I am acting very different to what you are familiar with, and it only makes sense that you would question the reason. I am not normally a dungeon bat, but I have had a part to play. So few ever see what I am really like.”

**********

That made sense to Harry. As it was frighteningly close to his own situation, Always having to appear to be someone other than himself. Having to mold himself to others expectations, or else suffer the consequences. he could sympathize.
“I understand. But I doubt you will believe anything I say. No one ever seems to believe me.”
Harry held his breath waiting for an explosion that never came.

**********

Severus realized there might be more to deal with than he first thought but it wasn’t like they were going anywhere anytime soon. He was convinced there would be even more to deal with than he had first assumed. Never in his wildest imaginings would he have thought the child of James potter would be such an enigma.
After collecting his thoughts he spoke, “There are ways to be certain someone is telling the truth. We can work on something so both of us know the other is being honest.”
“not to be rude, but I’d rather not have you dose me with veritaserum and have you ask whatever you want and me not be able to refuse.” Though Harry’s voice was respectful, his nervousness was evident.

**********

Harry was sure that would earn him a punishment he would never forget. But he wasn’t going to just let the man do whatever without Harry at least getting his 2 knuts in. He had enough of people using him as they saw fit, and expecting him to just lay down and take it. True he never had any options before, and maybe he didn’t now, but he would at least vocalize his objections. Even if the aftermath was as brutal as he was used to, he’d not go down without a fight. Even if it broke him in the process.
He was pulled from his thoughts by what Snape said next.
“I agree.”
Those quietly spoken words rocked Harry’s world.
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Assuming my brain is still working well enough to do this correctly. At least I didn’t break anything today…..yet

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry sat up so fast he made his head spin.
“Y-y-you agree?”
Harry couldn’t help the stutter. But he needed to know if he had heard correctly. He simply did not trust his own ears at this point. Outside of the only three people he could count on, no one ever agreed with him. Not to mention the last person Harry would ever have thought to be on his side in any way, was the one who had just uttered those words.
“Yes, I agree. There are many ways to make certain someone is telling the truth without forcing them to do so.” The potions Master affirmed.
Harry wished he had stayed lying down, his head was spinning. Not so much from what his professor had said though
He knew it was a combination of sleep deprivation, lack of food, and blood loss.
He’d had another detention with Umbridge; The-Evil-Toad;
Before coming to his occlumency lesson. The combination of all of these things made him feel worse than he usually did; which was saying something.

********

Severus watched as Harry grew even more pale and started to sway. He wanted to reach out and steady the boy, but feared that would only frighten him.
“Pot-, Harry, when did you last eat?”
Normally that would not be his first question but as he looked at Harry; really seeing him, he realized just how small he was. Thin to the point of emaciation. And other things didn’t look quite right either.
It seemed the boy was shorter than before though it was hard to tell with him sitting down.
Severus knew this was not genetics. James Potter had been slender but filled out and had stood at 6 ft. 3 Lilly also was slim but full figured, and she was 5 ft. 10
How could it be possible for their child to be so tiny?
How did he of all people never notice?
How was it no one else noticed?
What Severus didn’t remember yet was that the wards in his quarters were made so that no one wearing glamours, using Polyjuice potion, or even a metamorphmagus making themselves to look like someone else would be stripped down to their true appearance.
And more than just Harry’s height and weight were changing it seemed.

********

Harry wasn’t sure how to answer the question. His professor was being quite decent and he didn’t want to not answer,. But he was afraid of the consequences of telling him the truth. Every year something happened when the school; both students and staff, believed him to be a liar. This year it had gone so far as to be in the papers. He had given up trying to tell people anything anymore. No
He bit his lip trying to find the best way around this. If he answered honestly it would open up a Pandora’s box of other questions. Ones he wasn’t ready to answer. Might never be ready to answer. Especially when no one believed him, or cared even if they did.

“Sir, is there something simple you can do so you’ll know I’m telling the truth?” He hoped he wouldn’t be in trouble for asking, or for calling his Professors honor into question.

**********

Severus felt he should be used to being astounded by this boy, he figured the question to be a simple one needing no prying, but obviously that was not the case. There is a spell that will allow you to answer three questions truthfully though it permits you to refuse if you so wish.”

Harry thought for a moment. Whether he was weighing the pros and cons, or deciding if Severus could be trusted, the man did not know.

“What if we decide on the questions before you do the spell? That way we’ll both know what to expect and can be sure it’s ones that I will answer.”

“that should suffice. My first question remains. When did you eat last? From the way you reacted I would say the next question should be how much did you eat and Maybe why so little?” Severus wondered how such a simple question had led to all of this.

“Since the spell will let you know I’m really telling the truth I think that will work.”

Severus eyed the youth for a moment then cast the spell.

“When did you last eat?”

This morning.” Harry responded promptly.

“How much did you eat?”

“Half a slice of toast.” Came the reply.

Harry didn’t feel like he was being forced to tell the truth, but he did feel he wanted to answer. He wasn’t sure if it was the results of the spell, or the fact that he desperately wanted someone to know and do something about the situation for once.

Severus blinked in shock then asked the final question half fearing the answer.

“Why so little?”

“Freaks don’t deserve food.”

Harry huddled against the back of the couch, shaking with fear of what he had just revealed, and feeling rather nauseas. Oh why hadn’t he just refused to answer. He didn’t even want to contemplate the trouble he would be in now.

Severus sat stunned into complete silence. How could this be possible? As much as he wanted to deal with Harry’s skewed view of himself, getting some food into him first was priority.

“I am not certain three questions were enough. But we will address that later. Right now tell me what you think you can eat without it making you sick.”

Harry caught his lip between his teeth, anxiety radiating off of him, before answering.

“I think a small bowl of soup if it’s not too heavy should be OK. But how are we going to get it without leaving this room? I know the wards won’t allow us out or anyone else in until you dismantle them.”

“I will want to know how you know that but as for how we will get what we need there is a house-elf assigned to each head of house who can bypass the wards. They can only do the bidding of the current head of house.”

“OK, Um, I have a question. Since I answered three I hope that’s OK. Um, why do you look different?” Harry really hoped the question would not get him into trouble, but he didn’t hold his breath. Asking questions was always punished in the Dursley household. At least when Harry asked them.

Severus inquired. “different how?”

Harry knew he was already in hot water for the pensieve incedint, and wished this wasn’t going to
make it worse. “Well, Your hair is different, and your skin more pale than sallow, and your nose is smaller and not crooked.” Harry spoke very fast.
Severus conjured a mirror, and saw what the boy said was true. Then a thought occurred to him. He handed the mirror to Harry
“Tell me if anything about your appearance is different as well."
Harry stared in shock, he knew, he just knew he was dead. No one was to ever know. The glamours were supposed to stay up at all times when he was at Hogwarts. “Oh Merlin, I didn’t mean to. I don’t even know the counter spells. I’m so dead.”
Severus heard the softly spoken words, “no Harry you are not in trouble. This is something you had no control over. The wards in these rooms cause disguises of all types to fail.”
Now I think I should order our dinner and we can talk some more.”

Chapter End Notes

In case you haven't realized yet. This is not going to be a fast paced story.
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Severus called his personal elf Sassy and ordered food for both of them making sure she knew that only she was to handle any food or drink that was for either himself or Harry. “I believe going to my kitchen to eat would be more suitable than here.” Harry agreed and stood up, but was stopped by Severus hand on his shoulder. “Harry are you standing up straight?” Harry knew why he was being asked this question and was not looking forward to what would be sure to be a long conversation. “Yes sir.” Severus couldn’t believe what he was seeing. The 15-year-old was not even 5 ft. tall. Before he could say anything else Harry collapsed. Severus barely caught him before he hit the floor. Though he had noticed when he carried Harry into his rooms, he hadn’t fully registered just how light the teen was. Burying his shock, he had the fleeting thought that it was good they would be here indefinitely. It would take some time to figure out just what the heck was going on. Severus carried Harry to the dining table and sat him down, making sure he was steady before releasing him. Sassy had just brought their food and Severus grasped the goblet of pumpkin juice and handed it to Harry. “do you think your stomach can handle this?” “I think so if I go slow.” Harry knew the juice was a bit rich and definitely too sweet for his system to manage, however he didn’t dare say so. He usually drank water, or occasionally tea. Hogwarts didn’t seem to have much variety, at least where drinks were concerned. He nearly spilled the juice his hands were shaking so badly. Severus eyes narrowed slightly when he saw this but said nothing for the moment. Nothing would be gained by drawing Harry’s attention to something he couldn’t even help. He assisted the boy in steadying the goblet as Harry sipped slowly. After a few moments Harry’s shaking decreased enough that Severus felt it was safe to go to his own seat. He watched carefully as Harry ate his soup. It was a fairly small bowl but Harry managed barely more than half. This would be worrying in and of itself, but the soup was little more than chicken broth. Just how long had Harry been going without food for his stomach to be so shrunken? Severus own meal was moderate. He was used to Aurora and Pomona fussing and saying he ate too little. In comparison to the small Gryffindor’s intake, Severus meal was a feast. When they had both finished Severus suggested they go back to the sitting room. Harry was rather surprised that his professor had waited ‘til he had finished eating before starting in with the questions he knew were bound to come. Though Harry no longer seemed to be on the verge of collapse Severus still supported him as they made their way back to the sitting room. Once they had both settled on opposite ends of the couch Severus began “Do you not want to answer my questions or do you believe I will not believe you?” “some of both.” Harry admitted. “But mostly that you won’t believe me. You never have before.” Severus considered that for a moment. “I can understand that and I imagine since you do not trust me that it would be difficult to trust my answers as well.” Harry eyed his professor thoughtfully then asked. “I know there’s such a thing as wizards oaths that are different from something like an unbreakable vow. Is there one that can be adapted so that we
both must tell the truth but still have the option not to answer?”

Severus was stunned to say the least. This child who seemed barely mediocre in his schoolwork was aware of something that wasn’t taught until 7th year and just glossed over then.

After he took a second to get over that little shock he answered. “I believe there is one that already exists.”

He went over to his bookshelves and found the book he was looking for easily. “Yes, here it is.” He read through it quickly then handed the book over to the teen. “read this page and see if that will meet your requirements.”

In truth Severus thought it was a brilliant solution. Rather than veritaserum that would force the person to speak the truth whether or not they wished to. Or one of the spells that would only work for a few questions and would not work for lengthy explanations, this would work well for both of them.

If both of them agreed to the terms and spoke the oath out loud it would make it impossible for them to lie to one another yet they could refuse to answer or simply say that they were not comfortable with the question.

Harry read the page through quickly then read it once more a bit more slowly to be sure he didn’t miss anything.

“I think this one would be perfect.

They spoke the oath and a pale blue light surrounded both of them then seemed to sink into their skin.

“Since I’ve already answered a few questions will you answer one of mine now?” Harry asked warily.

“You may ask I do of course reserve the right not to answer just as you do.” Harry twisted his fingers in his robes nervously. It wasn’t just the deep-seated habit of not being allowed to ask questions. But the question itself could be considered volatile. Especially after what had happened today.

“Why weren’t you teaching me occlumency properly?”

If that first question was anything to go by, Severus knew this boy was going to be a constant surprise.

“I will answer your question, but will you tell me how you knew I wasn’t?”

“Clear Your mind is the first step to meditation. Which you also did not explain. After you have mastered meditation then you proceed to build shields then traps or false memories or better both. You don’t yell at someone who has little to no knowledge of occlumency or what it’s intended purpose is or even why they need to learn it to clear their mind then immediately proceed to rape said mind.”

Harry was out of breath and knew he’d likely said too much but those lessons had been hell, even after he knew what to expect.

Severus Hadn’t really stopped and considered that what he had been doing could be thought of as mental rape; but of course that’s exactly what he had done. Had been expected to do.

“I do not know how to apologize for that, but I will at least try and explain. I was told to teach you in the most invasive manner possible, and that you would learn more quickly that way. It did not make sense then nor does it now, but I was not sure how to do otherwise without the wrong people finding out. I also was told you knew the basics and thought you were just being lazy and not trying to occlude.”

Harry frowned but nodded.

“Before we continue with other topics, will you tell me about your occlumency shields? Whenever I’ve used legilimens on you I didn’t find anything to make me believe you were using any kind of occlumency.”

Harry shifted on the couch, pushing his pain to the back of his mind as usual. Then began his explanation. “I have a couple of different kinds of defenses but I figured that the first line of defense should be that whoever is attacking my mind thinks there is no defense at all.”

Severus raised one dark eyebrow, “Please explain.”
“There’s a set of memories that are triggered to your magical signature, so that anytime you enter my mind those memories play at random. There’s a few different kinds of memories so if you’re looking for something specific, you’ll think you found it because you found memories that pertain to that subject.” Harry repositioned himself again, not even noticing what he was doing. He was so used to pain and discomfort that it was second nature to push it aside and continue with whatever he was expected to do.

Severus observed the near constant movement of the small Gryffindor. It appeared he was unable to get comfortable. The man decided to wait a few minutes and see if that changed or if Harry said anything. Turning his thoughts back to their conversation, he asked, “I want to know how you matched my magical signature to activate anything in your mind. But first I want to know how it is that what I have seen in your memories does not seem to match with the person in front of me.”

Harry smiled slightly. “All I did was show you what you expected to see. You believed I was a spoiled, pampered, arrogant brat, So I took all of my memories of my cousin Dudley, and put myself in his place. What you saw really happened only it happened to Dudley, not me.”

Severus gaped in a most unprofessional manner “How are you able to manipulate memories like that? And I do still want to know about the magical signatures.”

“Do you want a complete answer on that first part?” Harry was becoming a bit more comfortable with the conversation, if not his position. It was getting harder to ignore his aching back and hips. “Yes.” Severus was becoming concerned about Harry’s obvious discomfort. He would have to say something soon. Harry clearly was not going to.

“I had a lot of time to spend in my own head while I was locked in my cupboard.” Harry winced and raised his hand when he saw Snape about to interrupt.

“Please let me finish then ask.”

Severus nodded curtly and Harry continued.

“I learned how to make things play back in my mind the way I wish they’d happened. I also learned how to lock away memories that I didn’t want to or could not deal with. After Dumbledore told me about having to learn occlumency from you I got some books and realized I’d been doing a form of it for years and using the books built up my defenses better than they were. As for the magical signatures, You’ve been using very light legilimens on me for as long as I’ve been here so I knew what your magical signature felt like in my mind and created memories to respond to you and the situation.”

“I do not know if you are a natural occlumens or if you gained that ability from whatever your life has been like. What I want to know now is, what do you mean locked in your cupboard?” Thoughts of Harry’s discomfort flew out the window, as Severus was completely sidetracked with this topic. Harry winced at the anger he saw in his professors face, not sure if it was because he didn’t believe Harry despite the oath or because of the issue being discussed. Taking a deep breath he plunged in.

“My room is the cupboard under the stairs.”

“Are there not enough rooms in the house that you could have one? If not then why not at least let you sleep on the couch? Exactly who do you live with?” The questions came rapid fire, and Harry just sat there for a moment processing before answering. Severus thought he wasn’t going to answer and was opening his mouth to start in again when Harry began.

“There are four bedrooms one is my aunt and uncle’s one is my cousin’s one for guests and one is for all my cousin’s stuff that won’t fit in his bedroom. They thought about moving me to Dudley’s second bedroom after the letter came because it was addressed to the cupboard under the stairs and they thought wizards must be watching the cupboard under the stairs.”

“Barely had Harry said Petunia’s name when Severus jumped to his feet and exploded.

“Petunia, you do not mean, you cannot mean Petunia Evans.” Severus had completely lost his composure and was nearly shouting.
Harry could usually control his reactions in these kind of situations, but he’d been through too much lately and the memory in Snape’s pensive had been the final straw. Harry was unable to stop himself from cringing back in fear his arms raised protectively to cover his face.

Severus saw the reaction his anger had caused and forcibly calmed himself somewhat.

“Pot-, Harry I am not angry with you. But could you please tell me if the Petunia you live with was your mother’s sister?:

“Yes.” Came the frightened response from the couch cushions where Harry had nearly buried himself. Quaking in terror at the anger he was sure was directed at him.

Severus sat back down but this time on the floor very near Harry. Deliberately he gentled his voice and tried to explain his response to what Harry had revealed.

“How, I knew Petunia when we were growing up and she was a very hateful, vindictive, cruel person even then. I am only worried that she has not changed.”

“She hasn’t,” Harry whispered. “And Uncle Vernon is worse.”

Severus stomach clenched at what that might mean. Petunia liked to beat people down verbally when she was a kid but she didn’t always stop at verbal. And if her husband was worse…… Suddenly he wasn’t sure he wanted answers to his myriad of questions.

Chapter End Notes

I would love to hear if people like my work. Flames will be given to the poor for their winter fires.
Severus decided not to pursue the matter of Harry’s relatives yet. Instead saying, “I think we need to address the subject of secrecy, so that neither of us will hold back for fear of others finding out things we’d rather they not know.”

Harry observed him for a moment. The change in topic had thrown him off a little, and he had to adjust.

“I think that will make both of us feel better. Do you have an idea how we should do it? And will it interfere with the oath we already took?”

Severus admitted, if only to himself that he was impressed by his student’s line of reasoning. “Yes we can add a sort of addendum to the oath we already took. That way it won’t hinder the first, and will make both components stronger.” Severus replied.

“Can we agree on the wording before we do it like we did with the other?” Harry requested.

“Yes” The older man replied.

It took a few minutes longer to find one they both agreed on that would bind with the truth oath. Finally both were satisfied.

“I Severus Tobias Snape, will keep all of Harry James Potter’s secrets, unless given express permission By him, and only him, Whom I can tell and how much I may reveal.”

Harry responded in kind. The light was a deeper shade of blue as it swirled around them and then sank into their skin.

Severus settled back on the couch, and as Harry did the same, he remembered the difficulty the youth was having before in getting comfortable. Determining to watch him closely to see if he was still having problems, Severus started the conversation.

“Rather than just diving into the difficult subjects, where would you like to begin?” Severus asked, feeling he should give Harry the option of where to start. Harry had already revealed a great deal, and Severus had not as of yet.

“I think the first thing is that I really need to know how you feel about Dumbledore. I’m not sure how much I can say until I know that.”

Severus wasn’t sure he wanted his true alliances to come out this soon, but then he reminded himself he need only tell his true feelings about Dumbledore he need not tell all until the time seemed right.

“I do not feel he can be trusted.”

Harry’s green eyes narrowed slightly as he studied his Professor, before he said, “that seems a rather careful answer. I know you’re speaking the truth, but you’re also not fully answering the question. Would you explain at least a little why you do not feel he can be trusted?”

Harry’s Slytherin side was showing itself as he was getting Snape to reveal his thoughts about Dumbledore without letting on how he felt either way.

“Without going into all the reasons or specifics at this time, I will say Dumbledore likes to play with people’s lives. I do not think he sees people, but pawns. If he does realize they are people with feelings and rights, he does not appear to care.”

Harry quietly let out the breath he’d been holding. Maybe things would go better than he had expected.

“Thank you. I believe knowing that it will make what I have to say quite a bit easier. I think we should do a question for a question or a n incident for an incident. That way neither of us will feel like we’re giving more than the other.”

Severus agreed, realizing the maturity of the proposal.

“That seems fair, since I have told you how I feel about the headmaster, I’d like to know the same.”

“I feel that most of what you have said is true except that he believes he is better than anyone else and because of it he has the right to play with people’s lives, and their rights do not matter because his agenda is more important than anything or anyone else. And his agenda is not for the greater good as he would have most believe but for his own benefit.”
Severus leaned back thoughtfully taking in all he heard. “Do you believe that he is evil?”
“Since I am only aware of certain things I cannot make a truly informed decision about that. I do not believe he is in any way good. Whether or not that makes him evil, I’m not sure.”
“That sounds like a well thought out and mature response. I doubt many adults would think that way let alone ones of your tender years.”
“Age is only a number. Experiences and how you respond to them is what defines you and causes you to grow up.”
“That’s certainly true. Now I believe you have a question for me?”
“My questions aren’t really on the same track.” Harry smile was small. “However I do need to know a couple of things. 1 Are you sure no one can get to us here? 2 If we are to be here for any real length of time there are a few things I need and a message I need to send. And third If we’re to be here long what about your snakes?”
Severus stared at the teen wondering if he would ever stop being amazed by him. Harry’s questions were sensible, but more than that he’d asked about his Slytherins and seemed to actually care if they would be alright.

“I Yes I’m sure no one but Sassy can get in here, and she only answers to me. 2 I can send her to get some things for you, and we will need to discuss the contents of the message and for whom it is intended. And third there are a couple of options where Slytherin house is concerned. One way or another they will be cared for.”

“OK, I may ask more about those options but first the message would go only to three people if I can make sure one of them gets it they will all know and they know not to tell anyone anything without my permission. I need Fred, George and Nevil to know I am safe and that the message is from me. I won’t need to tell them where I am just that I’m ok or they might raise suspicion looking for me.”
Severus looked at Harry for a moment, wondering what that was about; then nodded. “Sassy.”

When the little elf popped in Severus told her she was to take a message from Harry to whom he said and to get the items Harry would tell her he needed.

Harry knelt to be on eye level with the elf. “Sassy, if you would please, tell either Fred Weasley, George Weasley or Nevil Longbottom that Harry said ‘I solemnly swear I am up to no good, I am safe and will let them know more when I can. As always they know nothing. Mischief managed.”
Sassy, two things are very important I make sure whichever of the three you tell has no one else around them. And 2 you need to say the exact words I told you so they know the message is from me. And all I need is a few changes of clothes from my trunk, if you wouldn’t mind.”

Harry then turned to Snape. “If you don’t mind sir I’d also like her to tell Dobby I’m safe and that the wards won’t let him in so he doesn’t have a meltdown.”

Severus asked, “Why specifically that elf?”
“I freed him from the Malfoys’ and bonded him to me end of my second year. If he is unable to get to me he may do something drastic unless he knows I’m fine.”

Severus nodded, and Harry gave the message to Sassy to pass on.

After Sassy returned with Harry’s things and said the messages had been delivered, Severus said “I believe we should go to bed. We both have a number of shocks to deal with before we go into the rest of the things we need to discuss.

Harry agreed And Severus showed him to the guest room. He pondered whether the Gryffindor was still in pain, He’d have to keep a close eye on him the next day to see if Harry had just been overly tired or if there was more to it. He had a feeling it was quite a bit more than simple exhaustion.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

You get this chapter courtesy of the fact: I’m currently not battling nausea. Not that you wanted to know that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Harry looked around the room in interest. If he had thought about how a guest room belonging to Professor Severus Snape, possibly the most Slytherin of Slytherins would look, this would not be it. The walls were a soft cream with green trim. The large four poster bed was of beautifully carved cherry wood, as was the night stand. The wardrobe and chest of drawers were Scottish pine, with cherry wood inlays. The desk was a grand roll-top affair that was also a lovely blend of Scottish pine and Cherry. The coverlet on the bed was a mix of cream and shades of green, as were the rugs. Now that he thought about it none of what he had seen of the man’s quarters were expected. Though the furniture in the sitting room was of dark woods: ebony and mahogany, the darkness of it wasn’t gloomy, being lightened by accents of cream, silver and even blues. After dressing in the oversized pajamas that had once been Dudley’s, Harry sat on the side of the bed for quite some time thinking.

There were several things he would need to come to terms with before he and Snape could get into the subjects that were even more difficult than what they’d already dealt with. He wanted to push all thoughts about what he had seen in the pensieve to the back of his mind to deal with much later, if ever, but he knew he couldn’t do that. So one piece at a time.

Yes Snape had taken out his problems with the marauders out on Harry. But harry had always believed Snape had no real reason for his animosity towards his father and his father’s friends. Now he knew there was good reason for Snape’s resentment. So even if it wasn’t fair to take it out on Harry, there could be more to that as well.

Harry had learned things were often different to what they first appeared. He’d have to slowly work through his feelings about James, Sirius, Remus, and Lilly. All his perceptions about them had completely shifted. And it was not something he could deal with quickly or easily. He had more than enough on his plate as it was. All of it was too much to deal with, particularly all at once.

Harry realized when he had gotten up to walk to the guest room that the wards didn’t only unravel all disguises but other spells as well. He had no idea exactly what the results would be and even though Snape was being decent so far how quickly might that change if Harry became the burden he knew he truly was? He’d find out soon enough as he had felt the other enchantments Dumbledore had placed on him begin to come undone.

As he climbed into the amazingly soft bed, snuggling under the warm covers, he hoped it wouldn’t be as bad as he feared.

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Severus thoughtfully walked into his own room after making sure Harry was safely ensconced in the guest room. His mind on the events of that evening, he didn’t take in his surroundings. His rooms were all done in colors and styles that he felt were both esthetically pleasing as well as soothing. The
master bedroom was blues and silver. The bed and matching nightstand were of walnut, the chest of
drawers and chifforobe of maple, and the desk of rosewood. He hadn’t intended to purchase the
desk, as he felt it did not go with the rest of his bedrooms’ furnishings, but had immediately been
drawn to the piece with its intricate carvings and hidden compartments.
His thoughts focused on the teenager in his guest room, Severus readied himself for bed slowly,
considering what he had learned and what he was beginning to suspect.
Dumbledore had always said just how much like James Harry looked and acted. Had always pushed
the idea that Harry was just like James in every way. The only thing of Lilly being the vibrant green
eyes.
Since it had been widely known of Harry having eyes so like his mother, it would have been obvious
if he had shown up with James hazel eyes otherwise Severus didn’t doubt Dumbledore would have
put them under glamour as well. Just to push the image he wanted to portray even farther.
Harry, once the glamours had fallen, was a mix of Lilly and James though there really was more of
Lily
Instead of James mop of unmanageable hair he had Lilly’s curls though the color was black like
James.
Harry’s eyebrows arched like James and he had the same high cheekbones. But he had Lilly’s button
nose Lilly’s lips and Lilly’s stubborn chin.
It didn’t take a full health scan to know that Harry was not only undernourished but had been
starved. There was no way he could be that small and that light without severe malnourishment over
a lengthy period of time. The insignificant amount of food the child had consumed at dinner, after
having nothing but a bit of toast that morning; only further cemented this certainty.
Severus knew there were likely other health problems that would show themselves. The way Harry
had seemed unable to get comfortable, constantly shifting position, it seemed likely there was a great
deal more. There was a good chance that more than glamours had been placed on Harry. More than
likely spells that hid his true physical condition and not just his appearance was being unraveled by
the wards. He hoped that it would not be as bad as he feared.
Severus climbed into bed little realizing that his thoughts were running on a similar track to Harry’s.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, I know There's no interaction in this chapter; but I wanted to get their individual
thoughts and perspectives.
You get a fairly long chapter. Mostly because I had no idea where to end it. Hope you like.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Next morning Harry had his answer. Having slept very little; as was the norm for him. He had felt the other spells dissolving throughout the night ‘till he knew they were no longer in place. Exactly how bad the results would be remained to be seen. With the indications he had so far, he was not encouraged. Harry cast a tempus charm and seeing that it was still quite early idly wondered if he would even be able to get up to go to the loo. It seemed it would be unlikely at least without his difficulties being noticed. He wondered what this day would bring. He hoped Snape would continue to be agreeable Too much had been expected of him for too long. That was not even mentioning the fact that the very ones he was expected to give everything for were also the ones who had helped to make his life hell, especially this year. Add to that the Dursleys were worse each summer; with the Headmasters full knowledge and approval. Harry knew he couldn’t handle much more. He had well and truly reached his breaking point. Pushing the unproductive thoughts aside, he sighed quietly and began the painful process of starting his day.

Severus woke at 5:30a.m. and thought about how he should handle today and what would likely turn out to be more shocking discoveries. He heard Harry getting up and was just about to do so himself when he heard what sounded like Harry falling. Not wanting to embarrass the boy he silently slipped out of his room and went to the door of Harry’s room. The door was partially open and he saw he had been right The slight teen appeared to have collapsed just a few steps from the bed. Severus frowned. Granted the small Gryffindor had eaten very little yesterday, but something told him this was not due only to lack of food. Remembering his thoughts of only the night before he came to the conclusion that the likelihood of Harry being under the effects of more than just glamours was being proven out. Making up his mind Severus knocked on the doorframe. “Might I be of assistance?” Harry groaned almost inaudibly. “Yes sir, I’m sorry to be a bother, but I’m having a little trouble. If you wouldn’t mind helping me up and to the loo I’d appreciate it.” Pleading green eyes lifted to meet Severus’ onyx ones, Silently begging the older man not to deride him. Severus realized it had to be bad if a 15-year-old was asking for help to the loo. Answering the unspoken entreaty, Severus acted as though this was a normal occurrence he strode over to the boy and gently lifted him up and carried him to the loo waiting ‘till Harry had steadied himself with the edge of the sink he then stood outside the door until Harry had seen to his needs. He would have to keep a closer eye on his diminutive student. It was quickly becoming apparent that harry would not voluntarily ask for assistance. Severus couldn’t allow the past and his previous misconceptions to blind him to the child’s needs. That had happened far too often already.
Harry was mortified but knew he had little choice for the moment. He fervently hoped his physical
issues would either just go away, or that at least he would be able to deal with them better on his own
soon.
Snape hadn’t made him feel like an idiot for needing help to the loo, and Harry was immeasurably
thankful, but if this continued, Harry knew the Professor would view him as the burden the Dursleys
always said he was.
He called for Snape as soon as he was done. Again feeling grateful that the man was not rubbing it in
his face that he couldn’t see to the simplest things without someone to help.
Harry knew even without fully understanding why, that things had drastically changed. Only the day
before Snape would have taken every opportunity to belittle and demean Harry.
Little did he realize the changes had only begun.

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Once Severus had Harry settled on the couch he asked. “What would you like for breakfast?”
Harry bit his lip not sure if he should dare ask. “I’d like some fresh fruit please.”
Severus nodded then called Sassy to tell her what to bring them both. As soon as she had popped out
he turned back to Harry.
“why were you nervous about asking me for fruit?”
“I’m really not allowed to have fresh produce.” Harry answered apprehensively.
Severus eyes narrowed dangerously. “And why is that exactly?”
Harry pressed back into the couch at that look sure he was about to be in trouble.
“Because no one wastes good food on a freak.”
The response was automatic, otherwise Harry would have stated it less bluntly. But he’d had those
words drilled into his head for nearly all his life, so out they came.
“who stops you from eating what you want while at school?”
Severus let the freak comment go for the moment realizing the teen hadn’t meant to say it. It seemed
to him that it had been a programmed response.
Harry twisted his fingers not sure how much he could reveal. Sure they had added the secrecy oath
but who knew what kind of backlash would result from him spilling his guts to the professor? True it
seemed that Snape didn’t fully trust Dumbledore but that didn’t mean he was completely against him
either.
Finally he spoke deciding he’d have to go on instinct.
“Dumbledore and Pomfrey.”
Severus sat back not sure what he was feeling at having his suspicions confirmed.
Harry studied him for a moment. “You don’t seem surprised.”
“Considering how Dumbledore has treated you in public before this year, I’m a bit surprised at him,
but not as much as I should be. As for Pomfrey; Have you ever seen a Slytherin in the infirmary?”
Harry thought about it “No, can’t say that I have.”
“I have yet to figure out if she is incompetent or just lazy.”
“Neither.” Harry answered. “Among other things she is a fake.”
Sassy popped in with their breakfast setting everything out on the table, while Severus sat staring at
Harry in shock.
Harry started to move off the couch when Severus realized what he was doing. Quickly he rose and
without a word to the embarrassed boy he carried him to the table.
Once both had been seated and started eating, he asked the question burning his tongue. “How do
you know that? And if she is fake what is she really?”
Harry was eating slowly, partially because he almost never got fresh fruit and was savoring it, and
partially because he knew he wouldn’t be able to manage much.
“She is supposedly a fully trained and licensed healer, correct?”
“Yes.” As interested as Severus was to hear what Harry had to say, he took note of what the child ate and how much.

“any healer who is licensed by the healers guild is obliged to take an oath. This oath states That they will not harm their patients. That they will put their patients above all else. Including that the health and safety of their patients comes before co-workers, employers, etc. Since she has broken all of these strictures, she cannot be a healer.”

Severus thought about all Harry had just told him. He was fully trained as a healer but due to Dumbledore’s interference, he could not apply for his license. So he was unaware of the oath.

“She could still be a healer and have broken her oath, couldn’t she?”

“No. All healers are carefully questioned and tested. They are made aware of the oath and its consequences before they take it. Always depending on the infraction and the severity of it: the first time you break the oath you are brought before the guild and given a warning. The second time you are on immediate and automatic suspension. The third time you are stripped of all healers rights and cannot be hired as a healer or medi-wizard or even work in a hospital. If you have caused deliberate harm or injury to one of your patients you are immediately stripped of your magic.”

Harry sighed quietly as he pushed his plate away. He had only managed to eat two strawberries, two small apple slices, and a few grapes. Even so he felt overly full.

Severus saw this and intended to address it soon, but continued with the discussion at hand.

“I’m assuming she has done deliberate injury by the way you have stated it. And as she still has her magic she therefore cannot be a healer.”

“Exactly.” Harry tried to get comfortable on the hard chair. It wasn’t working.

Severus sipped his coffee, watching the small Gryffindor shifting in discomfort on the firm kitchen seat. If his theories were correct Harry was likely in a great deal of pain and the chair would certainly make it worse.

He rose from his seat banishing the empty mug to the sink as he did so. When he stood over Harry he did not miss the flinch.

“Shall we go to the sitting room?”

“Yes sir.” Harry couldn’t hide the brief flash of relief that crossed his features. He started to move as though he would get up. Ignoring the small teen’s blush of embarrassment, Severus stopped him by lifting him And carrying him to the other room.

Chapter End Notes

Review please. Thank you. See I have manners and everything.
Once both were seated in the sitting room, Severus spoke.
We’ve been tiptoeing around the major issues. Perhaps we should set some
Ground rules before we begin. I believe there are a few other things needing attention as well.”
Harry hoped this would be a mutual agreement kind of conversation and setting of boundaries, but
he wouldn’t hold his breath. In his experience adults said how they wanted something and you
obeyed or suffered the consequences.
Severus began, “We’ve both taken the truth and secrecy oaths, so that’s covered. May I ask if
you’re avoiding certain topics for fear of some kind of retribution?” He eyed his student shrewdly as
he asked and saw the flicker of fear cross his face.
“Just because you can’t tell anyone doesn’t mean you won’t find a way to use the information
against me or stop you from getting angry at me. I’m not trying to be disrespectful but you have done
this many times in the past and I can’t be sure you won’t again.” Fearful of retribution, Harry was
unable to keep a slight quaver out of his voice.
“consider the fact that you will also have information about myself that could be used in various
ways.” The older man tried to set the teens’ mind at ease.
“I’m not sure if that makes me feel better or worse.” Harry shifted again wondering why it was his
hips and back that hurt the most.
“Let’s start with something fairly simple. If you lay your legs on the couch would you be more
comfortable or would you like a different seat?” Severus asked, not willing to skirt around the issue if
something could be done to alleviate some of the boys’ obvious pain.
Oh merlin this was going to be torture if Snape noticed every little thing like this.
Deciding to be completely honest Harry answered. “If I could prop my legs up and still have my
back fully supported, I think I’ll be fine.”
Severus immediately moved to lift Harry’s legs onto the couch gently turning him so he was braced
by the high arm. As he slid a pillow behind Harry’s back he realized the boy was shivering and his
skin was chilled to the touch.
Without saying a word Severus flicked his wand at the fireplace, building up the flames. Then took
the fleece blanket from the other end of the couch and spread it over Harry’s small frame.
Harry was trying not to gape like a landed fish, but was having a difficult time of it. Snape, one of
the people Harry would put on the Top Ten List of’ Those Who Hate Harry Potter’ was showing
more care and concern than those who were supposed to be his friends and family.
Severus couldn’t help but smile at the look on the teens face. He had a fair idea what was going
through his students mind.
He was only partially correct.
After getting Harry settled, Severus summoned a chair and positioned it beside the couch. Sitting
down he said.
“now as for some ground rules.”
Severus didn’t miss the stiffening of Harry’s body, but continued. “I believe you will need to eat
small portions several times a day. So I would like you to tell me some things I should have Sassy
stock in the kitchen. I will still call her for meals and other things we may need, but this way we won’t need to constantly bother her.”
Severus didn’t realize it yet, but that last sentence was a major trigger for Harry. Having been told for as long as he could remember that he was a burden and a bother; Harry always tried to do everything on his own and rarely asked for help in anything. Being rebuffed the few times he had dared ask for any kind of assistance had further driven home the point that he was the drain the Dursleys claimed him to be. Had it been only his relatives to give this impression, Harry might have been more willing to go to the adults around him, but muggle school, the neighbors in Little Whinging, and the people of the wizarding world, made it clear that he had no one he could turn to.
Harry closed his eyes for a moment, hating himself for the tears he felt prickling. It hurt too much to let himself think he had someone who cared, when he knew that support could and would be yanked out from under him at any moment.

“Thank you sir, but I don’t need anything I don’t want to be a bother.”
Immediately Severus recalled Harry’s words when he needed help to the loo.

“Harry you’re not a bother, I just think it will be easier if the food is right here, so you can eat as often as you need.”
Choosing his words carefully Harry replied. “If I continue to have difficulties, then you will have to prepare any food I have. So I will be a burden.”
Severus breath caught at the look of pain on Harry’s face.

“I have a feeling we could argue this all month and not come to a conclusion. I assure you, you will not be a burden or a bother. Now please tell me some things Sassy should bring, or I will have to guess.”
Harry sighed softly “I’m afraid you may have to guess. I honestly don’t know what will be easy to stock and fix.”

“Afraid to tell what he wants or even needs.” Severus mind supplied.

“Then I will begin a list. If you think of anything, please tell me.”
Harry only nodded.

“Now on to other things. We both reserve the right to not answer a question or to go back to it later. But I would also like to add that no topic will be considered off limits. That goes for myself as well as you.”
Harry bit his lip then asked, “and what happens when you don’t like my answers?”

“As long as you are respectful, there will be no repercussions either now or later. Due to the oath I will know you are speaking the truth and you are entitled to your own opinion whether or not it is one I agree with. I’m quite certain you won’t care for all I have to say either.”
Severus readjusted his position and continued. “Since you have answered many things already I think you should have the opportunity to ask some questions before we start on your story.”
Harry looked thoughtful for a moment. “I’m not sure what to ask, since most if not all my questions are hard ones.”

“As I have the right not to answer you may go ahead and ask.”

“Were you really friends with my mum?”
Severus winced. Well the boy did warn him his questions would be hard.

“Yes. We met before Hogwarts. That is also how I know of Petunia.”
Harry didn’t miss the look of pain that crossed the man’s face.

“Um, ok I guess my next question would be was my fa- James always like that?”
Severus caught the way Harry changed from saying my father to calling him by name.

“He never liked me even before the sorting. I made it clear I intended to go into Slytherin and James fully expected to go to Gryffindor. The house rivalries were in some ways worse then, than they are now. He and his friends regularly targeted me, either because I was usually alone or because I was friends with Lily. Though there was always animosity between myself and the Marauders it was not always as bad as the memory you witnessed.”
Severus didn’t care to lay bare his soul for anyone. But he felt he owed it to the boy when he expected him to do the same.
Harry decided he didn’t want to deal with more truths concerning his mother or the Marauders right now. “Since potions is likely your favorite what was your second favorite subject in school?” Severus understood the topic change and went with it. “Ancient runes. As it is the basis for creating spells.” “So you’re an artist.” Harry said the words half to himself, but the potions master heard. “Why would you say I’m an artist?” “Artists create. It doesn’t really matter what the medium is. You enjoy potions. Oh, I don’t mean teaching it, as you clearly dislike that. But you enjoy the different way the ingredients interact. The many possibilities and variations. It’s not something repetitive or mindless. Anything can happen whether or not the results are good they are rarely exactly the same every time. Same idea with runes. No real limits or boundaries. No one saying it can’t be done because no one ever did before.” Harry flushed with embarrassment when he realized he’d been rambling. “Sorry sir, I didn’t mean to go on like that.”

Severus had been staring at the teen with fascination. No one had ever put it quite that way before. Not to mention the fact that the boy had shown a great understanding for both subjects. An understanding that only the day before Severus would have said was beyond the teens’ capabilities. “Harry you have nothing to apologize for. I enjoyed hearing your thoughts on the subject. They are different to what I’m used to. I believe I owe you a thank you for the compliment of calling me an artist. Also Since we will be here for an indeterminate amount of time I think you should call me by my first name. Outside of these rooms you are my student. However while we are in here and in this situation I think we should be on equal footing.”

Harry looked frightened yet hopeful at the same time. “Are you sure?” “Yes I think that may make things easier for both of us.” “Um, ok, S-s-severus, what’s going to happen while we’re in here?” “What do you mean exactly?” Severus hoped Harry didn’t think he was going to harm him in some way. But given what he knew of Harry’s past he couldn’t blame him if that was the case. “I mean, with classes. With Dumbledore and Umbridge. And with your Slytherins. It’s still a few days ’til the winter break.” “As far as Dumbledore or Umbridge or even the ministry are concerned there is nothing they can do until we come out of our own accord. Since there are only a few of my classes left before the end of term, they will either find someone to take over those classes or assign essays or theoretical lessons. As for my Slytherins, Since all of them will be going home during break, there’s only a few days and they know if for any reason they cannot come to me they can go to Professor Sinistra.”

Everything the Professor said made sense, and there was no telling what would change or how long before Harry would have to deal with those who made his life miserable within Hogwarts. Even so he had to keep telling himself not to panic, but it didn’t seem to be working. Eventually he would have to face Dumbledore, Pomfrey, and Umbridge, and he had no idea what they would do to him once he was no longer out of their reach. If Umbridge was forcing him to use a blood quill nearly every night just because she thought he was on Dumbledore’s side what would she do when he had missed more of her detentions? Whether or not the fault was his she would most definitely blame him. Harry didn’t even realize he was clutching his hand and had curled up into a ball shaking with dread of what was to come. Severus didn’t know what he had said to set the boy off, but something clearly had, as the slight teen was shaking and curled in on himself with obvious fear. “Harry, please tell me what has you so upset.”

Harry didn’t respond so deep in his thoughts, that he hadn’t even heard the man. Severus gently lay a hand on Harry’s shoulder. It was impossible to miss the violent flinch. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.” Harry’s voice was breathless. “Harry you have not done anything wrong. You are not in trouble. Please try and calm down and tell me what’s wrong.”
“I’m sorry, it’s nothing important. I’m just being stupid. I’m sorry.” Harry fought the tears he felt threatening to fall.
“If it has you this upset, then it is important. And I highly doubt you are being stupid. Whatever it is you won’t be in trouble.” The potions master tried to soothe the distraught boy.
“yes I will. Whenever we leave here, my punishments will be worse than usual. I’m not sure whose will be worse.” Harry was barely aware of speaking at first. When he realized what he had said, he began to shake harder.
“I’m sorry. I told you it wasn’t important. It doesn’t matter. I’m sorry for being a bother.”

Severus closed his eyes for a moment. Just how much hell had this child been through that he believed undeserved punishments were not important? What all had been done to him that he felt he was a bother to anyone who concerned themselves with him and his situation?”
‘Just how many people have taken the time to see what was beneath the surface? How many people have actually cared about his circumstances?’

Severus recognized that Harry was on the verge of a breakdown. Too much had been put on his shoulders. Too much had been expected of him. Even without the obvious abuse at the hands of his relatives. What Dumbledore expected of this small shaking person on his couch was more than could reasonably be expected of a fully trained: of age wizard. One with a good strong support system.
Severus realized they had all let Harry down. Some more than others but there seemed to be no one who cared for this child outside of what he could do for them in one way or another. Even the dark lord had plans for Harry. Not malevolent as with Dumbledore but still he saw Harry as possible leverage against the old man.

Severus wasn’t sure what would happen in the days and weeks to come but he determined no one would use Harry again. No one would get to this broken child without having to go through Severus Snape first.

Chapter End Notes

Comments, questions, constructive criticism. Feedback welcome, as long as it's not the kind to make me feed you to my kudzu.
Severus waved his wand and transfigured his armchair into a large comfortably padded rocker. Then
scooping up the trembling Harry, he sat and began to rock gently. He summoned another blanket and
tucked it around him.
Harry wasn’t sure what to think when Severus picked him up. The thought flashed through his mind
that he was about to be bodily thrown out. He couldn’t wrap his mind around the fact that his potions
professor was comforting him. Severus had wrapped him up and was rocking him, soothingly
rubbing his back. The words Harry heard next were what finally broke the dam on the tears he’d
been holding for far too long.
“You have nothing to be sorry for. All of us who have let you down time and again are the ones who
should be sorry. You are not a burden. You are not a bother. You are important. Anything that
worries or concerns you is important. You are not stupid. I’m sorry for how I’ve treated you I’m
sorry for adding to the load that should have never been put on your shoulders. You may not believe
me, but I’m going to do all in my power to protect you and be there for you like so many should
have been doing already. I’m going to tell you this until you believe it. Even if that takes years.”
Harry was still shaking but during this speech he had started to lean into Severus chest clutching his
robes with tiny fingers. It wasn’t long before the frail shoulders shook with silent sobs.
It broke Severus heart that Harry’s cries were soundless.
He had a feeling that this was something
else that could be attributed to Petunia. She, who called all magicals freaks, surely would not allow
one to annoy her with their tears.
“Yes Harry, you go ahead and let it out. I’m aware I don’t know all of it yet, but you’ve been
through too much for too long. You have every right to let it out. You have every right to have
someone you can lean on.”
Severus was barely aware of what he was saying. He just kept up a steady stream of comforting
words, as he rocked the violently shaking boy.
Harry cried all the harder, hearing those words. He had never been allowed to show weakness,
whether because of his relatives, or because he was supposed to be strong as the Gryffindor Golden
Boy, The Boy-Who-Lived, or whatever title they were currently using that week. Never was he
allowed to be himself, to break down or even just be human. Any time that he did he suffered brutal
repercussions. The only times he was able to let down his guard, even a little was when he could be
alone with the twins or Nevil. Even then he was afraid to fully lower the walls he had built around
his emotions.
After some time Harry’s tears slowed. He now had a massive headache to go along with his other
problems. But he felt a bit better for having cried all over his professor.
Severus knew when Harry had stopped crying, but continued to rock and gently rub his back.
“Do you need a headache potion?”
“I’m not allowed, but thank you.” Harry’s voice was a bit stuffy.
“Why aren’t you allowed?” Severus had a suspicion he knew why.
Once again Harry’s response was automatic.” Freaks don’t deserve medicine. It’s too expensive to
waste on them.”
Severus closed his eyes. Was there a single area of this child’s life that had not been touched by
cruelty?
"I know you won’t believe me but I’m saying it and will continue to say it until you do. You are not a freak. You deserve medicine and treatment when you are hurt or ill. And it is not a waste for you to have medicine. You are just as important as anyone else, and more important than some.”

Harry was shaking his head, but didn’t say anything.

Severus knew 14 years of abuse would not be erased with a few words, but he had to start somewhere.

“Harry, does your head hurt?”

Harry nodded hesitantly.

Quietly Severus summoned a vial of headache relief potion. Uncapping it he held it for Harry whose trembling had not abated. Harry flicked a glance at Severus trying to be sure he meant it. That this wasn’t a trap. That he was truly allowed the potion.

Severus saw the look and correctly interpreted it. Fury rose up in him as he thought of the ways he could torture the Dursleys if what he believed was true.

“Harry.” Severus voice was quiet, not wanting to scare him further. “Did the Dursleys ever offer you something, then take it away from you?”

“Y-y-yes.” The stutter in and of itself was telling, and something in the way Harry had said that, made Severus ask. “Have others done that as well?”

Harry shifted restlessly, but finally answered. “yes.” His voice barely above a whisper.

“well, this is not a trick or a trap. You are allowed to have this potion, and I’m not going to take it away from you.” Severus wanted desperately to strangle some people. Whether he wanted to start with the Dursleys or Albus-for-the-Greater-Good-Dumbledore, he didn’t know.

With Severus holding the vial steady, Harry swallowed the lavender colored liquid. Almost immediately he could feel his headache easing.

“Oh, that’s brilliant.” He breathed.

“Have you never had any kind of pain potions before?” Considering what he had already learned Severus shouldn’t be surprised, but he would have thought Pomfrey would give him something from time to time to keep up the pretense.

“Nevil brings headache potion to school every year. But he needs them too and they have to last the year or his Gran would ask questions. So I only take a swallow when I have really bad headaches.”

Severus couldn’t help but wonder just how bad it would have to be for Harry to admit it and take something for it.

“Do you want to continue with our discussions, or wait a while?” Severus asked.

“depending on what we’re discussing we can continue.” Harry was twisting his fingers in Severus robes without realizing what he was doing, and not looking at his professor.

“Harry, you’re allowed to say no. We will be talking about many things, but there isn’t a timeline for it. If you need to wait a bit before we start today or even need to wait until tomorrow, it is perfectly understandable.”

“No, it really is ok. There are some things I’d rather not talk about yet, but it should be fine.”

“Alright, first off, are you comfortable? Do you need to move back to the couch?”

Harry’s hands clenched reflexively in Severus robes, before he let go and spoke softly.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t think about how uncomfortable it would be with me sitting on you for so long. I can go back to the couch.”

Everything in Harry’s body language said he wanted to stay where he was.

“You are fine where you are. It’s not at all uncomfortable for me. So unless you really would prefer the couch, you’re staying right here.”

Severus punctuated his words by tightening his hold on the little body in his arms.

Harry’s green eyes peered up at him for a moment as though to gage Severus’ sincerity.

“Oh, then I’d like to stay here.”

“What would you like to talk about first?”

Harry chewed on his lip in thought.

“Um, I guess how I found out about the wizarding world might be a good place to start.”
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

If my sink isn't fixed soon, I may lose what's left of my mind. Hopefully it won't interfere with my writing and posting. Hope you enjoy this chapter. I did. LOL

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“What are your impressions of Hagrid?” Harry began unexpectedly with the groundskeeper turned Care of Magical Creatures Teacher.

“I think Hagrid is a decent person, but has no concept of what is safe and what is dangerous. He is also loyal to Dumbledore to a fault.”

Harry nodded. “What may be safe for him isn’t safe for others. Even fully trained wizards couldn’t handle some of Hagrid’s creatures, let alone students. Like you said he is loyal to Dumbledore. He won’t hear anything said against him. Even if he were given proof that the Headmaster wasn’t all he seems Hagrid feels he owes Dumbledore and will stick by him no matter what.”

“So we agree.” Severus said. “What does this have to do with our conversation?”

“What does this have to do with our conversation?” Harry’s shivering had lessened, and he unconsciously nestled against Severus.

The older man thought about what Harry had just said. Nodding slightly he replied, “That makes sense.”

Harry was surprised and a little hurt. “It does?”

Severus didn’t miss the note of hurt in the small voice. “Yes. We’ve already spoke of how deep Hagrid’s loyalty for Dumbledore runs, how he isn’t really aware of how dangerous a person or situation might be. So who else would Dumbledore send to someone he wants under his control?”

Harry’s breath left him in a rush. The tension in his body relaxing somewhat.

“Harry why were you upset when I said it made sense to have sent Hagrid?”

“I-I thought you meant I didn’t deserve a head of house like the other muggle raised.” Came the tortured whisper.

Severus clasped the child even closer. He could almost feel the pain rolling off of him in waves. “Not in the least you not only should have had one of the heads of house but should have had one on one meetings with them considering how well known you are in our world. You should have been given help before you came, so you would know how to deal with it and have someone to go to when the situation was as it’s been this year.”

Harry couldn’t help basking in Severus warmth. “Thank you.” He said softly. “Well, um, back to the story.” Harry explained about the Leaky Caldron and how he had practically been mobbed. Told about the bank and Hagrid’s retrieval of the philosophers stone. And hesitantly told of his encounter with Draco Malfoy.

Severus could feel the tension in Harry when he described his feelings concerning the Malfoy heir. Having heard a different version of events Severus could understand Why Harry had refused Draco’s admittedly arrogant offer of friendship later, knowing that the blond would have been just as insufferable at their next meeting.

“Harry I completely understand your feelings. But I also want you to know Draco isn’t really like that now. Yes he is rather spoiled. And he was an arrogant brat when younger. But since then he has learned a lot. Like us he has had to wear masks and pretend to be something he is not.”

“I think I’ve seen that at times but the situation was never where we could talk and try to work out our differences.”
Severus couldn't understand how a child who had been through so much and betrayed by so many could possibly be so forgiving.
Harry continued with his story telling of how he had met the Weasley's on the Muggle side of the station.
“Wait, why would they be there? They could have flooed directly to the platform or apparated or?” He cut himself off abruptly, as realization dawned. “It was a setup.”
Harry’s little fingers were twisting themselves in the man’s robes again. “Yeah, too bad I didn’t realize that from the first. But I knew next to nothing about the wizarding world and how things worked. I was stupidly grateful for people who didn’t treat me like something they had found on the bottom of their shoe.” Severus held on the tiny Gryffindor tightened slightly. “So I latched on to them. I should have known better.”
Severus sighed gently. “Harry there was no way you could possibly have known any of this back then. Dumbledore had it all arranged so you would follow the path he wanted you to.”
They were interrupted then by Sassy popping in.
“Master Severus, Master Harry’s Dobby wants to know if he should be spying on Dumbledore for Master Harry. Or should he continue spying on the toad?”
Severus snorted in amusement. “I presume the toad refers to our lovely Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher?”
“That’s what she calls herself anyway.” Harry unconsciously snuggled deeper against his teacher’s chest. “What should I tell Dobby?”
“That’s up to you. I’m not sure why you have him spying on Umbridge though.” The man tucked the fleece blanket more securely around the boy.
“Um, I’ll explain that later. Sassy could you please tell Dobby that he should continue to spy on the toad and Winky should keep an eye on Dumbledore?”
“Yes Master Harry Sassy can do that.” The little elf said cheerfully.
“Before you go Sassy.” Severus said. “Would you please stock the kitchen with an assortment of snack food and drinks?”
“Yes Master Severus. Sassy will see to it.”
“Thank you Sassy.” Harry said.
“You’re welcome Master Harry.” With that the small elf disappeared.
“Your house-elf has better speech than others I’ve come across.” Harry observed.
“I make sure all my house-elves are well spoken. Now would you mind telling me why you have your house-elf spying on Umbridge? Or would you prefer the toad? Also I thought Winky worked for the school.”
“Winky bonded to me when I found her here last year. She and Dobby pretend to work for the school so Dumbledore won’t get suspicious but they’re really my elves. The other elves cover for them because they don’t care for how Dumbledore is using the school for his own purposes.”
“I thought the elves were bound to the headmaster.” Severus tried not to show his confusion. He was also astounded that Harry had two house-elf spies right under Dumbledore’s crooked nose.
“No. For one thing every time the headmaster is out of the castle for any reason the elves would not have anyone to go to for orders. For another the headmaster position can change many times throughout an elves life span. They are actually bound to the castle herself.”
Severus looked intrigued. “I’ve always wondered if the castle is sentient.”
“Not as much as she should be.” Harry huffed in annoyance. “Dumbledore has messed with the wards and other things. But Hogwarts can still have an effect over some of the things within her walls.”
“As much as I would love to discuss this further you have put off the topic of Umbridge long enough.”
Harry bit his lip and winced at being caught.
“I um, I’m sorry. I just, well she.”
“Harry whatever you have to say, you don’t have to worry that you’ll be in trouble. Not with me. Not with Umbridge or Dumbledore or anyone else.”
“Once we leave your quarters, I’ll be in more trouble than I’ve ever been in before.” Harry said this very quickly, not sure what Severus reaction would be.
“We won’t be leaving these rooms until we know what course of action we’re going to take. I will do whatever is necessary to ensure your safety.”
Harry’s breath caught and he fought not to cry again.
“Thank you. I don’t think anyone has ever cared to try before.”
“Well that is about to change. Now please tell me about the toad. I promise you won’t be in trouble.”
“Well, I know she hates me in particular. I have Dobby spying on her to find out if she uses the same methods of punishment on other students. Especially if she tries it on children of ministry workers I may can get rid of her. I can’t do anything about how she treats me but I won’t let her do the same to others if I can help it.”
“And what exactly does she do to you?”
“Sh-sh-she makes m-me write l-l-lines with a b-b-blood qu-quill.”
Harry couldn’t stop himself from stuttering. Despite what Severus had said Harry was sure he was about to hear how he deserved it. How he had brought it on himself. How he shouldn’t whine about a few detentions.
“She did what?”

Chapter End Notes

Reviews? Pretty please.
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

Yes, now you get Severus' reaction to the blood quill. Hope you enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Severus was having difficulty keeping his voice even. He could feel Harry starting to shake again and knew the teen was afraid of getting into trouble. Though how he could in any way believe this was his fault was beyond Severus’ comprehension.

“She did what?”

Severus knew he had failed keeping the anger from his voice when the trembling increased in the tiny 15-year-old cradled in his arms.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have said anything. I shouldn’t complain about detentions. I’m sorry I’m sor-“

“Harry.” Severus cut off the apologies “In no way is that a fit punishment. That is not a detention, that is torture. I don’t care what you did. You do not deserve such treatment.”

“B-but M-mcGonagall said….” Harry’s voice trailed off.

Severus felt bile rise in his throat. Had absolutely everyone let this child down?

“Do you mean McGonagall knew about this?”

“Sh-she said I should keep my head down and n-n-not make waves. She said I deserved to have detentions for not keeping my mouth shut. I-i-I thought m-maybe she didn’t know what kind of detentions they were. Th-then sh-she had that argument with Umbridge in the entrance hall about archaic means of punishment and she knew I was st-st-still serving detentions with her. S-s-so I knew she thought I deserved it.”

Harry could barely get the words out through his hitching breaths.

Severus desperately wanted to make excuses for Minerva, but couldn’t think of a single one.

“Harry, no matter what Minerva did, no matter what she said. You did not deserve that. I don’t understand why she didn’t intervene, but in no way was it your fault. How many detentions did you have with the pink monstrosity?”

“I-I honestly d-don’t know.”

The child’s teeth were chattering now, from fear or cold, Severus didn’t know.

He repositioned Harry on his lap. “Let me see your hand.”

A small hand with slightly twisted fingers was placed hesitantly into Severus larger one.

He said nothing of the condition of the tiny digits for now. Instead examining the back of Harry’s hand.

The reddened words of ‘I must not tell lies’ stood out starkly against Harry’s pale skin. He’d have to run a diagnostic spell, but it appeared the cuts were inflamed, possibly infected. And deep. Very Deep.

“The only way there could be this much damage is if you had been using that damnable quill many times for several hours.”

“I h-have detention with her at least 3 nights a week and each detention lasts at least f-f-four hours.”

Harry’s breathing hitched.

Severus felt sick. A blood quill was meant to be willingly used for contracts. A couple hundred years ago they had been used as a form of torture and punishment for certain criminals. But to have one used in such a manner….

Harry would have suffered considerable blood loss, not to mention the pain from such usage. The magic in the quill would cause him to believe the words he wrote. And with Harry’s already
extremely low self-esteem; it was no wonder Harry thought no one would ever believe him.
“Know your weren’t able to go to Pomfrey, but were you able to treat your hand in any way?”
The pink toad had just joined the list of people Severus wanted to feed to Hagrid’s acromanchulas.
Harry stammered, “Ess-essential of m-m-mertlap.”
Severus frowned slightly. That would help with some of the pain but certainly not all. And it would
do nothing about the injury itself, nor any possible infection. There were ways to reverse the effects,
but not all were at his disposal right now. Not to mention he wanted irrefutable proof of what that
vicious woman had done.
He explained all of this to Harry, who looked surprised that he would want proof. No adult had ever
been willing to help in any way before.
“Why? I mean it’s n-not like anything c-can or will be d-done.”
“There are several options. All of which we will discuss and you will get the choice of what we do
next. Not only about Umbridge and the blood quills, but everything.”
“I’ve n-never had a choice about anything before. I’m n-not sure I would make a good one.” Harry
frowned thoughtfully.
“I will give any advice and guidance you wish. But it is your life and should be your decision. And
didn’t you choose to become the youngest seeker in a century?” Severus was gently teasing with his
last comment.
Harry snorted “Hardly. I d-didn’t even know what a seeker was. M-mcGonagall just hauled me off
to see Oliver without telling me anything and informed him I was the n-new seeker.” The shudders
in the small frame were reducing into slight shivers.
“It would appear that even what I thought I knew about you was not as it seemed. We will have
much to discuss in the days to come.”

Chapter End Notes

Questions, comments, thoughts? I accept all. I'd also accept a large bottle of Echinasea
at this point. LOL
“I guess I c-can understand why we need to discuss things, b-but will it really make a difference?”
“Yes, it will make a difference. How much of one will depend on your choices.” Severus adjusted the blankets when he felt Harry still shivering.
“How? D-dumbledore will just interfere and do whatever he wants like always.” Harry sounded frustrated.
“Again that depends on you. There are options that will enable us to work around Dumbledore and his schemes.”
“Us?” The small voice was tremulous.
Severus noted the tone of surprise in Harry’s voice and was fairly certain he knew why but asked to verify.
“Yes, us. Why do you seem surprised by this?”
“N-no adult has ever stood up for or with m-me. I’m n-not sure why you’d want to bother.”
“Harry, I’m going to tell you something, and I ask that you hear all I have to say before you react.”
“OK.” The murmur held a hint of fear.
“I’ve been caught between two very powerful people. They have both sought to use me for their own agendas. Though one does so only by my consent. It was my intention to discover if you would be amenable to changing positions in this war.”
Harry began to shift, but Severus hold on him tightened though his hold was still gentle.
“Please let me finish.”
He waited for Harry’s cautious nod.
“After I began to really see you for who you are, not who others portray you to be, I made a decision. I will follow your lead alone. Whatever path you choose I will be there. I’m beginning to understand you have had no one on your side, and it’s well past time you did. I will tell you all I know of both sides and you can make your decision without me or anyone else forcing your hand.”
The small form began relaxing once more against Severus chest.
“So you’ve been working for both Voldemort and Dumbledore. I really can’t see either of them letting you leave their control.”
Harry sounded thoughtful, but Severus heard no censor in the words or tone.
“Dumbledore wouldn’t if he had a say over the matter. Voldemort is not like how you’ve been told he is.” Severus wondered if Harry would be as willing to listen as it was sounding to him.
“I’d like to hear a side other than Dumbledore’s. If I’m completely honest, I’ve wondered about Voldemort for some time now. Too many things don’t add up.”
The potions Professor wondered if he would ever stop being surprised by this child’s insight and knowledge. “As we have much to discuss, we can take all the time we need. Having said that, would you like something to drink or eat?”
“Um, would it be a problem to get apple juice? It’s a little easier on my stomach than pumpkin juice.”
“Certainly. Sassy.”
The small elf popped in “Yes, master Snape?”
“Could you please stock apple juice in the kitchen here?”
“There’s some here now. Would you like Sassy to get more?”
“Yes please. Enough for a few weeks so we don’t have to keep asking. And would you please bring a goblet of juice now?”
“Yes master Snape.” Sassy snapped her fingers and a goblet of apple juice was floating near Severus hand.
“no Harry, let me hold it for you.” Severus said when Harry tried to reach for the drink. “Do you realize how much you’re still shaking?”
“I’m sorry. I know I shouldn’t be cold. I’m just making things harder for you. I’m sorry.”
“You can’t help being cold and shivering. You have nothing to be sorry for. And you’re not making anything harder for me.”
Severus carefully held the goblet so the slight teen could take the slow sips of juice.
After drinking about a third of the proffered drink Harry leaned back against Severus chest.
“Have you had your fill for now?”
Harry nodded tiredly. “I’d like more, but I don’t want to get sick.”
That quiet statement brought home to Severus just how badly malnourished the child was. Starved would be a more accurate term. If just a goblet of juice was more than his system could handle then there was almost certainly more damage than Severus had originally thought.

**********

Severus and Harry spent the rest of the day discussing Harry’s first two years at Hogwarts. The staff had been told a much different version of the events. Having full knowledge, as well as a different perspective, Severus could now clearly see the manipulations of the Headmaster. A few things from time to time could be written off as coincidence; but the obvious control of the situations could not be anything other than deliberate. With this new understanding, Severus discovered the motivation behind many of Harry’s actions that he had formally perceived to be Harry’s flouting of the rules. As Severus explained some of what he had believed about Harry and why; Harry in turn, began to comprehend Severus reasons for some of his past treatment.
Though the situation they found themselves in had started with a tenuous understanding of the other, they began to form a bond of trust and mutual regard.
“No, please no.”
The cry had Severus shooting upright in bed. Harry had fallen asleep in Severus lap just over an hour ago. Severus had tucked him into the guest bed before seeking out his own. And now it seemed apparent that Harry was having a nightmare.
“I’m sorry, I’m sorry. Please, no please.”
Severus quickly made his way to the teens bedside. Fearing Harry’s reaction if he touched him right then, Severus gently called.
“Harry, wake up, you’re dreaming. Wake up now. You’re safe.”
Severus heart clenched at the pitiful whimpers that Harry made as he fought his demons.
“Harry, please wake up. You’re safe, I promise.”
Severus knelt by the bed, hoping to wake Harry with his voice alone. The slight frame jerked as though he were being dealt blows. Which was likely what was happening in his nightmare.
Seeing no other option, Severus gently lay a hand on Harry’s arm.
The raven haired teen flung himself out of the bed and into a corner of the room. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I’ll be good.”
Harry’s breath hitched as he tried to calm down.
Cradling the too light figure against his chest, Severus stood and carried Harry to the sitting room.
Settling into the rocking chair he summoned the fleece blanket from before, gently tucking it around the trembling form.
“You have nothing to be sorry for. None of this is your fault.”
“B-but I s-set a snake on D-dudley.” Harry’s voice was trembling nearly as much as his body.
“Do you mean in your dream?” Severus began rubbing comforting circles on Harry’s back.
“Th-that’s what I w-was d-dreaming about, b-but it really h-happened.”
Severus asked about the incident and Harry explained.
Fearing the answer, Severus asked, “How did they punish you?”
Harry hesitated, his small frame quaking in remembered terror. “I w-was l-locked in m-my c-
cupboard until just after the h-holidays s-started.”
Severus realized there was more, but chose to start with what he had been told.
“How long was that? And exactly what does being locked in the cupboard entail?”
“Almost f-f-five w-weeks. And when they w-would l-l-lock m-me in my c-cupboard I w-would get
one s-slice of b-bread every other d-day. One b-bottle of water every d-day, and l-let out to g-go to
the l-loo once a d-day.”
“Was that your full punishment?” Severus was worried at just how hard Harry was trembling.
“N-n-n-no.” The fear he heard in the soft voice told him a great deal.
“Will you tell me?” Severus tone was gentle, not demanding.
“It d-d-doesn’t matter.”
“You don’t have to tell me if you’re not ready. But it most certainly does matter.” “
“I h-h-h-had to be taught m-m-my P-Pppplace, uncle Vernon used the bbbbelt on mmmme.”
Severus continued to rub soothing circles on Harry’s back. “Can you tell me how often?”
“ttttwenty lashes every ddday.” Tears silently streamed down the pale cheeks.
Severus felt sick. He knew Harry had been mistreated at the hands of the muggles. He strongly
suspected abuse. But to have it so blatantly confirmed and to know it had been to such a degree,
turned his stomach.
“Harry, I want you to listen carefully to what I’m going to say. I will repeat it as often as necessary
until you believe it.”
He waited for Harry’s shaky nod.
“We are not going to leave these rooms until we have decided what to do and how to do it. We are
going to make certain you never go back to those despicable relatives of yours again.”
“I-I wwwwant to bbbelieve you.”
“But you do not. At least not yet. I think I understand. People have lied to you before, haven’t they?”
“y-y-y-yes.” Harry whispered. “I’m s-s-sorry.”
“For what?”
“I sh-should b-believe you. As f-far as I know you h-have n-n-never lied to m-me.”
“Trust needs to be earned. It is not something given automatically.”
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

If I remain nocturnal, I'm going to start posting on Sunday night/Monday morning.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Trust. That was a word rarely used in Harry’s vocabulary. The Dursleys had taught him that trust got you more punishments. Dumbledore and Pomphrey had further cemented this certainty.

Harry had Neville, Fred and George’ but as for adults, there had never been anyone. The boy who was considered more of an Icon, rather than the child who had never been allowed to be a child, desperately wanted to trust. Wanted someone he could lean on. Someone who could help lift the burden that had been thrust upon him.

Before these last couple of days, Snape, no Severus; and wasn’t that just bizarre, had always treated him with contempt at best; but even at his worst his dealings with him had never been on the level with the Dursleys. Even when Severus believed he was just like James, he didn’t lie and try to use him for his own gain. Though many of the things the Professor had said over the years had hurt Harry, he had never physically harmed him in any way.

If Harry were to make a list of pros and cons concerning whether or not to trust Severus Snape, the benefits heavily outweighed the risks.

After their talk following Harry’s nightmare Harry insisted Severus help him back to bed. Harry was not willing to be even more of a burden than he already was. He would certainly be one if he were the reason the Professor became sleep deprived.

Harry sat up against the headboard, his back braced by soft pillows. He had no intentions of going back to sleep. It wouldn’t matter to anyone if he himself got little sleep. Severus was another matter altogether. The man was turning his entire life inside out for Harry the least he could do was let the man get uninterrupted sleep.

Harry figured if he was going to be awake anyway, he could use the time to consider some things. Too many things didn’t add up, where Voldemort was concerned. Now that he thought about it, Harry realized that the source of the contradictions could be traced back to Dumbledore.

Everything, including the belief that Voldemort had killed his parents, was information spread by Dumbledore. If things went the way the headmaster said then no one else had been there that night. The only ones to survive in any form had been Harry himself, and supposedly a wraith-like version of Voldemort.

Harry certainly didn’t remember the details of that night’ and Voldemort had never said publicly what had happened that ill-fated Halloween. He may have told his followers, but the facts were not widely known.

Which meant either Dumbledore had been there and done nothing.

Dumbledore had been there and contributed to his parents deaths.

Or, Dumbledore knew nothing, was lying through his teeth, and had set Harry up from the very beginning to play hero, to serve the old man’s twisted agenda; when there was no evidence to suggest that things had happened the way he said.

Everyone believed anything and everything the Headmaster said just because he was Albus Dumbledore.

Any way he looked at it, Harry felt that Dumbledore made things to fit his own agenda caring for only himself and what he could gain by using others.
Harry knew for a fact that the Headmaster was lying about the blood wards. It wasn’t impossible that there had been blood based wards at one time’ extremely unlikely, but not impossible. However the aspects needed for those type of wards to continue to exist and remain strong enough to serve their intended purpose were elements very much absent in the residence of #4 Privet Drive. That wasn’t even taking into account the fact that it would be inconceivable to create the precise wards that Dumbledore claimed were at the Dursleys. 
There were so many other lies, So it really wasn’t that difficult to entertain the possibility of the Headmaster lying about Voldemort as well. 
Harry wished with all his heart that he had what so many others took for granted. Nevil was the closest to understanding Harry’s situation. Though his friend didn’t have the same pressures Harry did, nor was he under constant scrutiny by the entire wizarding world, Nevil really had no adult he could turn to. And like Harry he had very few true friends. No one saw the strength or potential in Nevil. Just like with Harry they saw what they wanted, albeit in very different ways. 
Needing sleep, but knowing that he’d almost certainly have another nightmare, Harry wished he could get his hands on a pepper-up potion for when Severus got up. He thought about how much he wanted someone to be there for him. Someone to support him and not expect him to always be strong on his own. 
Harry had no idea how soon his wish would be fulfilled.

**********

Severus lay awake for some time after helping Harry back into bed. He was well aware that the fragile teen was teetering on the edge, it wouldn’t take much to cause him to fall. Harry was an exceptionally strong individual, but even a punching bag could only take so many hits before falling apart.*
Severus made a promise to himself that this time Harry would have someone to pick him back up. To put him back together. To be the support he so desperately needed, rather than expecting him to stand alone.
Severus would be that someone, whatever it took. He had no idea just how soon he would be called upon to fulfill that promise.

Chapter End Notes

A/N Credit where it's due. * from The British Reformation by: KB0 on fanfiction.net
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

A/N A peek into what is going on with some of the other inhabitants of the castle.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

When Sassy left to bring the message from Harry, the first one she found was Nevil.
“Mr. Nevil, Sassy has brought a message from Mr. Harry potter.”
Nevil’s eyes widened in surprise and some concern. It was more than a little unusual for Harry to send a message through a house-elf other than Dobby or Winky.
“Yes, what is the message?” Sassy related Harry’s words verbatim. With the correct code phrases, Nevil relaxed somewhat. He was still worried about his friend. Harry had been put under even more stress and abuse this year than most. However he knew if Harry was in any trouble he would have made it known through his message. After checking with Sassy, to make sure there was nothing else she could tell him, he quickly moved to find the twins. They needed to talk and in private.

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The three boys who were Harry’s true friends gathered in the ROR. Nevil had spent more time in the room than the others, and therefore understood a great deal of how the magic worked. They were able not only to have a place to talk unheard and undisturbed, but also to remain hidden. No one else would be able to find them while they were in the room; with the exceptions of Harry, Dobby and Winky.
“Alright Nev, tell us”
“What you know.”
“And why it was”
“some elf we don’t know”
“That came to you, instead”
“of Dobby or Winky.”
Used to Fred and George’s twin speak, Nevil followed the back and forth with ease. He gave them Harrys message word-for-word, then added, “The elf said her name was Sassy. I don’t remember that name, and I don’t think I’ve seen her before. Oh, one more thing. She was very well spoken for an elf.”
Fred and George looked at each other thoughtfully.
“OK, let’s start:
“with what we know.”
Harry had detention,”
“with the evil toad, and”
“occlumency from hell,”
“with Snape.”
Nevil supplemented, “Don’t forget whatever is going on, he didn’t send Dobby or Winky. He would have told us if he bonded another elf.”
“Do we know if”
“the elf came as soon as”
“Harry gave her the message?”
“Don’t have a clue. She just popped in and said she had a message from Harry, then told me what I
“told you.”
“What f we checked”
‘the Marauders map?’
Slowly Nevil shook his head. “Harry keeps a few things on him at all times. The map is one of the things he never lets out of his sight; since he doesn’t want certain people to get their hands on the few things he has of his parents’.”
“Nev, you don’t have to”
“Tiptoe around the fact,”
“that ickle Ronniekins is”
“A backstabbing”
“Jealous”
“Loud-mouthed”
“thieving git, who”
“only Pretends to be”
“Harry’s best friend.”
Though Nevil had no difficulty following the twins speech patterns, he was rarely able to tell them apart. He often wondered how Harry was always able to tell the difference. Never once had Harry gotten them mixed up. He wondered if it had to do with the fact that Harry saw people, really saw them for who they truly were. Unlike how others saw, or perceived them to be. Nevil thought Harry likely looked at people the way he wished they would look at him. Judging them according to how they acted, rather than what was said about them.
Nevil looked at both of the twins and asked bluntly, “how much do you know about the deceptions around Harry?”
Fred and George exchanged a glance; silently communicating. After a moment they both nodded and turned back to Nevil.
“We know that”
“Mum, Ron, and Ginny are”
“being paid to spy on Harry”
“for the Headmaster. We know”
“that most of the order cannot be trusted. We also know”
“Hermione isn’t being paid, but is too focused”
“on her belief that all authority figures are”
“Perfect; unless they do or say something she doesn’t like. She reports”
“to Dumbledore as well. She will not”
Listen to anything that goes against him. She also does not”
“really see Harry as a friend. She just likes”
“to have him and Ron around so she can“
“lord it over someone how smart she”
“thinks she is.”
“We also know that”
“Dumbledore is using Harry; but we”
“don’t know exactly what his plans are for him.”
Nevil was silent for a moment, then said, “people really do underestimate you two. I think you know all that harry and I know.
What has me worried right now is that we don’t have a clue where Harry is, and he sent an elf that we don’t know to give us a message. The only thing that makes me think he’s ok is he wouldn’t have used the code if he was in any real trouble.”
The twins nodded in agreement and said,
“Let’s wait a couple”
“of days, and if we don’t”
“hear from him we can”
“call Dobby and see”
“what he knows or can find out.”
With their thoughts on their green-eyed friend, the three boys made their way back to Gryffindor tower to get some much needed sleep.

Chapter End Notes

A/N Since Nevil can’t tell the difference between the twins, I didn’t put who said what. Hope it’s not too confusing; writing the twin-speak thing is HARD!
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

I could give reasons why this update is late, but none of them are very good, so I won’t bother. Hope the chapter is worth the wait.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Just before 6:00a.m. A storm rolled in. Thunder resounded throughout the valley echoing off the surrounding mountains. Harry hated thunder. Really hated thunder. It terrified him beyond reason. There were deeply buried memories associated with thunderstorms. Memories Harry wanted to remain buried. Another sharp crack of thunder sounded, and without even consciously realizing what he was doing, Harry crawled off the bed and to the only semi safe place he could think of. His soft whimpers could not be heard over the thunder.

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At 7:00 Severus determined he was not going to be able to go back to sleep due to the raging storm. Deciding to check on his charge and see how he was faring, the potions master got dressed and went to the guest room. Finding the bed empty he proceeded to search the bathroom, then the sitting room. Finding no sign of the teen, he pulled out his wand and said “point me Harry Potter.” The wand spun in his hand, leading him first to the guest room, and then over to the huge Scottish pine wardrobe. Closing his eyes and pinching the bridge of his nose for just a moment to gather his composure, he realized that looming in the doorway when he opened the chifforobe would not go well, he knelt down before opening the door. Curled into a ball in the very back was Harry. Between bouts of thunder Severus could just barely make out the soft sobs interspersed with the words, “Please make it stop.” Chanted over and over. “Harry.” Though softly spoken the sound of another being so near caused the small boy to flinch back violently. “Please, I’ll be good. I promise, I’ll be good.” Severus felt his heart break with those nearly inaudible entreaties. “Harry, you’re not in trouble. You’re safe. I can’t make the storm go away, but I can be here to protect you.” “No one wants to protect a freak. They aren’t worth it. Freaks should shut up and be glad when they’re not thrown out into the weather. They don’t deserve a nice place. Always taking for granted what normal decent people give…..” The whispered criticisms against himself spilled out in a way that made Severus believe that Harry had been forced to repeat those same words until they had been drilled into his mind. Severus couldn’t take any more of watching the slight teen nearly choking on his sobs in an effort to keep quiet. Taking the chance that it might frighten Harry even more; Severus reached into the chifforobe and gently clasped the child to himself. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.” Not in the least surprised by the frantic apologies pouring from his student, Severus carried Harry to the sitting room.
He arranged himself and Harry in what was quickly becoming their rocking chair, tucking the soft blanket around the distraught Gryffindor. Another loud clap of thunder, and Harry startled so badly he nearly fell out of Severus’ lap. The older man heard the soft hiccupping gasps the teen couldn’t stifle.

“You’re safe. I’ve got you. It’s just a bad storm.” Severus had repeated the words over and over as he brought Harry from the guest room and settled them both in the chair. He knew he would need to address the issue of how Harry saw himself but also understood that he would need to wait until Harry was able to take in what he said. Locked in his own mind, Harry didn’t even register Severus’ words.

“I’m sorry, I can’t make it go away. Please, I didn’t do it. Please don’t. Please don’t. Severus feared what memory Harry was reliving. Rocking gently he began to rub Harry’s back lightly.

“You’re safe. None of it is your fault. It’s just a storm No one is going to hurt you. I won’t let them. You’re safe. I promise.”

Severus continued to repeat himself until he felt Harry begin to relax.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m being a burden. I’m sorry.”

“No Harry, you’re not a burden. You have nothing to be sorry for.”

Harry was silent for a time, his body shuddering from residual sobs. Then a very small voice said jerkily, “I don’t want to anymore.”

Severus breath caught at the absolute hopelessness in the few words spoken.

“What is it you don’t want to do anymore?” He gently asked.

“I don’t want to be what everyone else thinks I should be. I don’t want to be the one to fix everything. I don’t want to fight. I don’t want to have no one caring about me. I don’t want to pretend to be strong anymore.”

Harry’s voice had grown quieter and quieter as he spoke, until Severus had to strain to hear him.

“You do not have to be what others think you should be. It is not your job to fix everything; no matter what anyone else says; and that includes fighting and your place in this war that others have created. You likely will not believe me yet, but I am coming to care about you. You do not have to be strong if you do not feel strong, and you do not have to pretend. I will tell you until you believe it. I am going to be here for you. You do not have to be alone again.”

“I want. I want…..” The little voice trailed off.

“What is it you want Harry? You are allowed to say.”

The dark head of curls shook almost violently, as the small form curled into an even tighter ball; the quaking of his thin frame growing considerably. Severus sighed quietly, and began running his long fingers through those silken curls. The child’s shaking started to decrease a little.

“Will you tell me what you want? I can’t promise to get it, but I’ll do all in my power to see that you have whatever it is, as long as it’s not something that will harm you in any way.”

“I want to be just Harry. No expectations, no being someone’s pawn. Just harry. I’ll be good, I promise, but I want to be worth loving, without having to earn it.” The anguish in the small voice was evident.

Severus felt his heart squeeze painfully at that pronouncement

The words spoken earnestly, were said in such a childlike tone, that he was sharply reminded of earlier that night when Harry had been in the throes of a nightmare, and again when Severus had found him in the wardrobe.

‘I’ll be good.’ Words used by a much younger child. Harry who had never been permitted a childhood. Harry who had to be self-reliant. Harry who had no one’ at least no adult, who cared about him as a child should be cared for.

Another crash of thunder. Harry tried to bury himself in the soft fleece, as his shivering worsened again. The soft mantra of “please make it stop. Please make it stop.” Began anew.

Severus hold tightened cautiously around the boy not wishing to frighten him further. Harry responded by pressing himself as closely as possible against Severus’ chest.
“W-w-what’s safe?” the tremulous question confused the potions master.
“What do you mean?”
“What D-does it m-mean to be safe?”
Severus frowned slightly in thought. “Free from risk of danger, damage, or injury. Being unharmed. Having protection.” He was quiet for a moment then continued. “Safe is when no one hurts you. When you can be yourself without fear. When you have all you need.” He felt his explanation was lacking, but it was the best he could manage.
“I want to b-be safe. I never have b-been b-before.” Harry stuck a finger in his mouth and peered up at his professor with brilliant emerald eyes.
“I will do all in my power to see that you are safe even when we leave these rooms. You deserve to have someone you can go to with your problems. I would be honored if you would consider me for that role.”
Harry’s free hand grasped the front of Severus robes tightly. “OK, I want that.” He said around the finger still in his mouth.
Severus considered what he had thought about earlier that evening, along with the behavior the child was currently displaying. It would seem Harry had been pushed beyond the point of what he could endure.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to all who have left comments and kudos. Knowing other’s enjoy my work motivates me to write more.
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

Thanks to veltaio for alerting me to how I have been misspelling Neville’s name, as well as the problem with the paragraph indentation.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Severus decided that if they had any discussions that day that it would be his own story. Harry had shared a great deal and Severus had only divulged the bare minimum. If the teen brought up something he wished to talk about then that would be fine. However it seemed to Severus that Harry was withdrawing from the situation. Time would tell if this was only a defense mechanism, or something more worrying.

Flicking his wand at the fireplace, he built the fire up more. The storm had made the normally chilly dungeons even more so as the damp crept in.

Harry was currently cuddling close to him, and clinging to his robes as though afraid Severus might disappear.

“Would you like some breakfast?” the older man asked.

Harry shook his head but didn’t answer verbally.

“aren’t you hungry?” Severus cajoled.

“I Didn’t earn any food yet.”

Severus heart sank. It would appear that Harry was experiencing rather extreme regression.

Somewhat dis-associative, if his present state of mind was anything to go by. He wondered if the thunderstorm had been the trigger, or if it had been something else. For now he decided the best course of action would be to see how harry continued to act and how he responded once the storm had passed.

“Harry, you do not need to earn your food. You are allowed to eat anytime you need or want to. I’m ready for breakfast. What would you like?”

Harry sighed and moved to get off Severus lap.

Tightening his hold the man asked. “Where are you going?”

Harry responded promptly. “You said you wanted breakfast, so I have to go cook.” He stated this as though it were an obvious fact.

Flabbergasted Severus stared at the small teen. Just how bad of a shock had the boy experienced; either in the wardrobe or before he had crawled into it, to precipitate such a drastic change?

“What? It is not your job to make meals. It is not your job to wait on others. You should have someone to take care of you, You do not have to take care of other people. I am going to take care of you. I will see that you have everything you need and try to give you all you want as long as it is not bad for you. I am going to call Sassy now. Do you remember Sassy?”

“Of course, but I’m supposed to…” Harry’s voice trailed off in confusion.

Severus lifted his hand to pinch the bridge of his nose. Flying off his lap, Harry cowered away in terror, arms raised to protect his face.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.” He babbled, almost incoherently.

As quickly as he could without alarming the boy further, Severus knelt down in front of the cringing child. “Harry, you did nothing wrong. You are not in any trouble. I am sorry I frightened you. Please Harry, please forgive me.”

Still shaking severely Harry’s arms lowered slightly as his intense emerald eyes studied Severus
“You’re an adult. Adults don’t apologize. They’re never wrong. Adults can do whatever they want.”
“No Harry, though some would like to think they do not have to pay for their actions, everyone at some point is held accountable for what they have done. I know you find this difficult to believe but even your despicable relatives will have to answer for what they have done. I promise. One way or another I will make certain they pay. And I truly do apologize for frightening you.”
“But I did something wrong. That’s why you were mad at me. So it’s my fault.”
Severus couldn’t help but wonder if the reprehensible Dursleys had managed to turn everything that happened around so that they could blame their nephew for every little thing even insignificant events.
“No, you did nothing wrong. I was not and am not angry at you. I was attempting to figure out how to help you, since I knew you were confused.”
A loud crack of thunder reverberated throughout the room. Harry jumped and started whimpering quietly.
Moving Slowly so as not to startle the teen, Severus pulled him into his arms, gently cradling the overwrought boy.
“Whatever is going on, we’ll figure it out. You are not alone. I am right here and I am not going anywhere. I have a few theories, but no matter what I will help you through this. I promise you do not have to be alone again. I will take care of you if you will allow it.”
Fisting small hands in the man’s teaching robes, frail body shuddering convulsively, Harry said, “Yes, please. You’re the only one who has ever even tried to help. You’re the only one who has offered. Please, please, help me.”

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After both of them had calmed down somewhat, Severus called for Sassy.
“Would you please bring us a breakfast consisting of a variety of dishes? Not too much of anything, please.”
Sassy agreed and popped out.
Shifting the still shaking Gryffindor Severus began to rise from the floor. Harry’s hold on him tightened, with a strength born of desperation.
“Please don’t go, I’ll be good. I’m sorry I cried and am being a burden.”
“I am not going anywhere. We are going to the kitchen for breakfast. You are most certainly not a burden, and you are allowed to cry as much as you need or want to.” Severus lifted his charge and carried him to the kitchen. When he began to set Harry down in a chair the boy clung with a tenacity that surprised the older man.
“Harry I promise, I am not going anywhere I will be right here at the table with you.”
Harry only shook his head and would not release his hold.
Sighing gently Severus Sat in the chair himself and set the little limpet sideways on his lap.
“Now what would you like to eat?” He showed the boy the choices the house-elf had set out on the table.
Bright green eyes met onyx as Harry chewed on his lip. Severus guessing what the problem was told the teen, “You are allowed to eat anything that is on the table. If you want something that is not here we will send Sassy to get it for you. I want you to eat, Harry. Will you do that for me?”
Harry felt like he was two people in one body. He was well aware that he was 15-years-old, was at Hogwarts with Professor Snape: Severus, and that they were in the Professor’s quarters. Yet at the same time he felt much younger; with all the fears that came with being at the Dursleys and vulnerable to their nonexistent mercy. Letting out a frustrated breath, he replied, “I’m sorry I’m being stupid, I’m not sure how to stop acting like this. Could I-, may I have a pancake please?”
“Of course you may. What would you like on it?”
“I’m not sure, maybe syrup? Would syrup taste good?”
Severus ruthlessly pushed down the murderous feelings he felt towards those contemptable muggles,
and answered Harry. “we have some very good maple syrup. Have you never had pancakes?”
Though he feared he knew the response.
“No sir, Though I made them all the time for Dudley.” Harry replied absently as he began to prepare
his single pancake with one hand, his other still tightly grasping the potions masters’ robes.
“Are you telling me those appalling relatives of yours made you cook for their son and you didn’t get
any?” Severus could feel his blood pressure rising.
“I cooked for all of them. A freak has to earn it’s keep.” Harry, suddenly realizing what he had said,
froze; emerald eyes staring at Severus, wide with fear.
Severus looked into the terrified face of the child who had already wormed his way into the potions
masters heart.
“Harry you are not in trouble. You are not a freak. Your relatives were wrong; both in what they said
and how they treated you. It is not the place of a child to earn their keep. It is the responsibility of the
adults to care for the children. A small list of tasks; such as cleaning your own room or picking up
after yourself is acceptable, if it is required of any and all children in the house. However this does
not seem to be the case. Did you have other chores?” Severus didn’t want to have to discuss this
now, but it was something that needed to be dealt with. If he remained unaware of the atrocities
visited on the teen he could unwittingly cause more trauma.
“I did all the cleaning and cooking. I painted the shed, and the fence, and inside when Aunt Petunia
wanted to redecorate. I did all the yard work, and washed their cars.” Harry stopped. Unable to
continue, he pressed close to his Professors chest, tremors racking his slender frame.
“We can discuss it more later. I did not want to upset you, but I needed to know. Please eat your
pancake; and let me know if you want anything else.” Gently Severus rubbed the thin back.
Still refusing to surrender his hold on Severus’ robes; Harry tried to cut his small pancake
singlehanded. Seeing the problem Severus reached around his lapful of Gryffindor and quickly cut
the food into bite-size pieces.
Flicking a glance upward, harry softly said, “Thank you. I’m sorry, I should get down. You can’t eat
with me being in the way like this.”
“you are fine where you are. I will partake of my own meal after I am certain you have eaten
properly.” Severus leaned back in the chair and began sipping his usual morning cup of strong
coffee.
Tentatively Harry forked up a bite of syrup covered pancake. He made a soft sound of surprise when
he got his first bite of something he had made for years, but never tasted himself.
Severus was unable to stop the slight smile that caused his normally stern lips to tilt up. “Does it meet
with your approval?”
Harry swallowed, “Oh yes. No wonder Dudley always made a pig of himself and demanded a
dozen.”
When Harry had finished his infinitesimal breakfast; (Severus description, not Harry’s) The older
man wrapped an arm around the slight teen and used his free hand to eat his own decent sized
portions of pancakes, fruit, and bacon.
As the slight teen made no move to leave the comfort and safety of his teachers’ lap, Severus carried
him back to the sitting room.
Positioning himself and Harry in their chair, he said. “If you have no objection, I think I should tell
you some of my story today. You have had to do all the work, and that was not our bargain.”
Harry burrowed into Severus’ warmth before replying. “Only if you want to. I know some things are
hard to relive.”
Marveling at the consideration of the teen, Severus answered. “Like you, there may be things I do
not wish to speak of yet. However I believe you should know about my life, just as I am beginning
to learn of yours.”
A/N I intend to go over all previous chapters and fix certain things, such as: Neville’s name as well as paragraph indentation. I hadn’t noticed before that when I copy from my documents, this doesn’t transfer. Please know I am now aware of the problem and will work to rectify it when possible. Currently though I have to make a kudzu basket, a safety pin angel and cocoa butter lotion bars. So it may take a while. I also have to figure out how to do it. LOL
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

You almost didn't get this chapter today. For anyone who doesn't know this; migraines come straight from the pits of hell.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The storm was dying down, the rolls of thunder fewer and farther away. Harry still clung fiercely to Severus robes, but the older man could feel the tension starting to drain out of the little body. Knowing he had put it off long enough, the potions master knew the time had come to share his story. He was silent for a few moments, gathering his thoughts. Finally he began.

“My mother was a pureblood witch, who married a muggle. Her family ended up cutting all ties with her. Not because they were pureblood bigots, or even because they looked down on those without magic; rather for the reason that my father was an abusive drunk.” Harry’s small frame leaned into Severus; whether to seek comfort or give it, was not apparent.

“When my mother met him, he was an amiable person and abusive only when inebriated; which was not a regular occurrence. It was only later when he had difficulty finding employment and my accidental magic became apparent that things became particularly difficult.”

The older man felt a shudder run through the little Gryffindor. Gently he rubbed Harry’s back and continued.

“My mother tried to protect me for a time. I believed she loved me in her own way, but it was a selfish love; for she refused to leave him no matter how abusive he was towards us. She also declined to allow me to go somewhere where I would be safe wanting to keep me near no matter the cost to both of us. My mother’s family tried to help in various ways for a time. They provided financial assistance on several occasions, until they discovered that my father would take the money and buy alcohol. They offered shelter for my mother and myself once I came along. They also offered repeatedly to take me in.

My mother being an adult could and did make her own decisions even though they were very bad ones; most of which affected me. Were it one world or the other I would have been taken away and raised by my mother’s family. With the marriage straddling both; the legal recourses were ineffectual as they are not set up to work in both the magical and muggle; only one or the other. Had it been two muggles it could have been battled out in their courts; had it been a case of a magical couple, then other measures could have been taken to ensure my safety.

Once I began to show signs of accidental magic, my father became abusive to me as well as my mother.”

Thin trembling arms wrapped around the potions master. Harry didn’t say anything; knowing better than most that words were often meaningless. Severus cradled the teen against himself and continued.

The reason I joined the dark lord’s ranks is because one of the things he is fighting for is segregation between the muggle and magical worlds. Having lived through how some treat those with magic, and having seen how your mother’s sister treated her I felt and still feel that this is a worthy goal.

“But doesn’t he hate muggle-borns?” Harry’s slight frame did not move from where he had burrowed close against his Professor.

“No, despite what is being said; he is not against muggle-borns, half-bloods, or even muggles as long as they leave us alone. He is not a hypocrite, as he is a half-blood himself. His mother was a pureblood and his father a muggle.”
“I wonder how many other lies I’ve been told.” The diminutive Gryffindor muttered.
“Hopefully we will be able to ascertain most if not all the lies that we both have been subjected to.”
“Why would Dumbledore say that Voldemort is basically trying to kill everyone, when it isn’t true?”
“I believe it all comes down to power. Dumbledore wants to keep the power he has, as well as increase it. If people believe those on the other side are out to get them, they will more likely turn to Dumbledore to take care of the problem. The more favor he has and the more people who support him, the more power he gains.”

Harry looked thoughtful. “I imagine after defeating Grindlewald, most thought he could do no wrong and believed anything he said. So if he opposed Voldemort and told everyone he was going to destroy the wizarding world; they would automatically believe him. The majority of the magical world is so used to listening to him, it seems they don’t know how to think for themselves.”
Severus noted with relief that Harry was fully following the conversation and had made good points. He would have to watch closely, but it would appear Harry’s regression was situational. He only wished he understood what had caused it this time, other than the thunderstorm.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to all who have left comments, kudos, or bookmarked my work. It’s greatly appreciated as well as a good motivator when my head feels like it has been used as a bludger.
I'm squeaking in under the wire' but at least it's still Monday. LOL

Severus and Harry spent the rest of the day speaking mostly of inconsequential things. Once the storm had completely passed Harry had relaxed, but he still seemed to want to stay close to Severus. The potions master had noticed several things he wanted to address; but he wanted to wait until he felt certain that the subjects would not unduly upset his small Gryffindor.

Severus had realized that while he himself was dressed in casual clothing, Harry was still in his school robes. He had also noticed that the trainers the boy wore were both too large and in a dreadful condition; held together with tape, string, and who knew what else. The older man had observed that even with his spectacles, Harry often squinted as if to focus. Severus wondered if the teen's poor vision might be due to more than genetics. James Potter had needed spectacles; however he had near perfect eyesight when wearing them. It seemed a distinct possibility that more was wrong with Harry's eyes. There was the fact of the abuse; head trauma could cause optical damage or exacerbate a pre-existing condition. It was also more than likely that the boy's prescription was incorrect. It seemed very unlikely that his abominable relatives would take him to the optometrist, when they would not see to even the most basic of needs. That was not even mentioning the starvation. Poor nutrition could also cause a great many health issues; including bad eyesight.

Severus very badly wanted to run a full diagnostic scan on the little 15-year-old but didn't want to frighten Harry either with the suggestion or his own reaction. He was quite certain the scan would hold some unpleasant surprises.

He also needed to know to what degree Dumbledore was involved in Harry's abuse, as well as Madam Pomfrey. There were many questions that needed answers and many decisions that needed to be made before Severus and Harry could leave the safety of his rooms.

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Harry was grateful for the conversation not being focused on him today. He knew there were many things they would need to discuss still; but he couldn't deal with those issues today.

He had a flood of questions, yet still feared to ask for anything, including information.

He couldn't help but be surprised at how Sna-, Severus was treating him. Harry was well aware that he was being even more of a burden than usual, but Severus attitude never showed it.

Maybe because his Professor was the only one outside of Neville, Fred, and George to care about him for his own sake rather than who the wizarding world portrayed him to be or what they could get out of him; but Severus was the only adult Harry thought he might be able to trust. He wasn't sure how to balance that with the knowledge that the older man would surely not want to put up with him much longer. He was for now, perhaps only because there was no one else to take care of him, but what would happen when they left these rooms?

His mind was a great deal more clear since the thunderstorm had moved on; but what if it happened again? How many times could he break before the pieces couldn't be put back together? How many episodes could he have before the only person who seemed to care right now threw up his hands and left? Harry had no illusions that Severus wouldn't get tired of him and his problems eventually and walk away. Everyone walked away, sooner or later. Harry had a feeling it would hurt so much more when Severus did.
Chapter End Notes

Thanks to all who have left comments and kudos. They are greatly appreciated.
That night Severus talked Harry into taking a long hot bath, telling him it might help with his back and hips; as it seemed the pain had only worsened. The diminutive teen agreed, he was never able to enjoy a bath. Never being allowed the time for it at school and only permitted short showers at the Dursleys.

Harry sank up to his chin in the soothingly warm water. Severus had suggested adding lavender to help him relax. Harry was tired even though he had done absolutely nothing in the last couple of days. He wasn’t sure why he was so exhausted; yet his body was still tense. The lavender bath eased his muscles and calmed his swirling thoughts. He didn’t even realize he was drifting off to sleep.

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Severus had observed Harry’s fatigue and had thought to put up a monitoring charm on the bathtub, just to be on the safe side. He was thankful for that foresight when nearly an hour later the alarm chimed.

He hurried into the guest bathroom just as Harry was about to slip under the water. Quickly Severus moved to lift the boy out of the bath. Summoning a towel he wrapped it around the all too slender figure. Harry seemed even more tiny without the heavy winter school robes.

He carried him to the large bed. Keeping the towel around Harry’s waist to preserve his modesty, he summoned another to begin to dry the small teen. When he repositioned him to dry his back, Severus; movements stopped cold. He could feel the blood draining from his face as he saw irrefutable proof of the treatment at the hands of Harry’s relatives. There wasn’t an inch of the child’s back that wasn’t marred with scars. Most seemed to have been made by a belt but others weren’t so easily explained.

He had known Harry was telling the truth. He had guessed it was even worse than the child had admitted so far; but he would never have imagined it was this bad.

Severus was brought back to the present by the soft whimpers as Harry shivered and curled into a ball seeking warmth. Quickly the older man finished drying his little Gryffindor and gently dressed him in a set of his own shrunken pajamas; having discovered Harry’s were in deplorable condition. After tucking the boy under the covers, he ran his fingers through the raven curls.

“Never again. I promise you Harry, never again will they hurt you.” With those quiet words Severus left to seek his own rest.

He now had the means to ensure Harry’s safety with the dark lord. Severus also knew the man would be firmly on Harry’s side. If there was one thing Tom Riddle AKA Voldemort hated it was hurting a child; particularly when it was muggles hurting a magical child. Severus felt quite certain the entire war was about to shift drastically.
I know this was a short one; but it seemed the right place to stop. Thanks to all who read and enjoy my story. Special thanks to those who leave comments and kudos.
Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

Oh look, on the right day, and at a decent time. The world must be coming to an end.
LOL
A/N WARNING: Descriptions of child abuse.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Harry woke the next morning, he was disoriented. He didn’t remember getting ready for and going to bed; not to mention he had never seen these pajamas before. He lay still for a few moments until he realized he must have fallen asleep in the bath. The only way he could have been dressed and in bed meant Severus had—oh no, no, no, no, no. Severus had to have seen the scars. With all of the glamours having been dismantled, it was impossible the man wouldn’t have noticed. Now Severus would know just how much of a freak Harry really was.

Harry’s insecurities were working overtime sending him into full panic mode. He was nearly hyperventilating, when Severus hurried into the room. Gently gathering his little Gryffindor into his arms, he carried him to their chair in the sitting room, trying to soothe him all the while.

Before Severus had gone to bed the night before, he set an alert on the guest room; so he would know if Harry was in any distress, be it physical or emotional. He had a feeling the small teen would panic when he understood that Severus had seen the physical proof of his abuse. With Harry’s emotions already being so fragile, the potions master knew the child’s reaction would likely be fear. Fear of the unknown. Fear of reprisal. Fear of rejection. Harry already had too much dumped on him; he didn’t need the added stress of dealing with these new fears alone.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m sorry. Please don’t get rid of me. I’ll be good.” Harry’s frantic words began spilling out as soon as he was aware that he was in Severus’ arms.

“You have nothing to be sorry for, Harry. You have done nothing wrong. I would never get rid of you. You have not done anything bad. You are not bad. Please calm down, Harry. I do not want you to make yourself sick. You are safe. No one is going to hurt you. You are safe. I promise.” Severus kept up the comforting stream of words until he felt the slight frame begin to relax slightly in his hold.

“I’m sorry.” Harry whispered between hiccups.

“You have nothing to be sorry for.” Severus continued to rub soothing circles on the thin back.

Harry didn’t want to say it. He really didn’t want to say it; but if he didn’t then he would always be waiting for the other shoe to drop. Always be expecting Severus to throw him out once he realized the truth. Harry’s slight frame began to tremble once more.

“I’m sorry I’m such a freak. You saw, you know. It’s all my fault. It’s always my fault. I’m a useless burden. Always in the way, always a bother. A worthless freak, who should have died with his parents. I understand you won’t want anything to do with me now. Th-thank you for putting up with me for so long.”

As he spoke the last few words, Harry moved to get off of Severus’ lap.
When Harry began to repeat the invectives that had obviously been drilled into his head all his life, Severus had opened his mouth to stop him. Then he realized two things.
One. Harry needed to be able to say what he had been told for so long, and now believed about himself.
No form of healing for the mental and emotional scars could begin until he had faced it and had someone he could verbalize it to.

Two. Severus needed to hear all of the lies Harry thought were true. Much as it pained him to hear the little voice breaking as he spoke the insults his abominable relatives had used to hurt him further, he needed to know. He would be unable to help if he remained unaware of Harry’s emotional state, just as he would be unable to help his little Gryffindor physically, if he did not perform a health scan. When Harry tried to move off Severus’ lap, the potions master gently tightened his hold.

“No, Harry. You’re not going anywhere. I’m not getting rid of you, or kicking you out. You are not a freak. What those miserable excuses for relatives did was indefensible, that they would do that to a child, any child let alone one of their own blood, makes them the freaks, not you. It is not your fault. None of it is your fault. You are not a burden or a bother nor are you useless. You are certainly not worthless. You are an intelligent, generous, young man with a sweet forgiving nature, that is frankly astounding for anyone, let alone someone with your past. I am not putting up with you, I want to help you, in any way I can.”

Severus had continued gently rubbing Harry’s back as he spoke. He was well aware that even if the child had understood all he had said, he would not believe it. The vicious barbs that had been thrown at him by the horrid muggles and others had been repeated for 14 years until they had sunk into the teen’s subconscious. Harry truly believed all the lies they had spoken. Fighting back more sobs, Harry just kept shaking his head. He wished he could believe Severus; but he knew the truth. Even the wizarding world believed him to be worthless, useless, in the way, a freak because he could speak parcel tongue, if for no other reason.

Severus had an idea. It was certainly not something he wanted to do; but if it got through to Harry, even a little, it would be worth it,

“Harry, am I a freak?”

The small shaking teen just looked at him as though he had lost his mind. Then shook his head. “no, of course not.”

Severus stood and then turned and gently deposited Harry in the chair. His little Gryffindor clutched at the front of his robes, and whimpered softly.

“Harry I’m not going anywhere. I’m not angry with you, you have done nothing wrong. I need to show you something. I’m staying right here I promise. Can you let go for a minute?”

Harry released his hold, but still looked terrified that Severus would disappear.

The potions master removed his robes and shirt, and turning around, he knelt so his back was facing the tiny 15-year-old in the chair.

He heard the soft gasp, as Harry took in what was before him. Tiny fingers touched his shoulder before pulling back quickly.

Severus’ scars were not as bad as Harry’s, but they were bad enough. He never let anyone see them, much as no one saw Harry’s: but the teen had no choice about Severus seeing his back. The potions master felt that the least he could do was let Harry see visible proof that he was not alone. Taking a deep breath; this was more difficult than he had anticipated, Severus spoke. “Harry, you are allowed to touch.”

Gently, hesitantly, the small questing fingers brushed over Severus’ shoulders and back.

“I’m sorry.” The little voice was full of suppressed tears.

Keeping his movements slow, so as not to startle the small teen, Severus turned to face him. “You have nothing to be sorry for, Harry. This happened long before you were even born.” He Said as he redressed.

“I’m sorry it happened. I’m sorry you were hurt. You didn’t deserve that” Harry lost the battle with his tears, and pressed his fingers to his lips in an effort to remain silent.

Quickly Severus scooped the child into his arms, and settled them back into their chair. “Harry, you are allowed to cry. I want you to listen to me. Will you do that?”

Harry nodded shakily.

“You are correct. It was not my fault. Though it took me a long time to believe that, and sometimes I still struggle to remember that. Harry, it was not your fault either. You did not deserve what they did.
to you. I know you don’t believe me yet, and it will take a long time before you do; but please try to believe me. It is not your fault. It was never your fault.”

“I’m sorry. I’ll try.” Harry’s voice was muffled as he had buried his head in Severus chest.

“I’ll keep telling you, as often as you need to hear it; until you truly believe it.” Severus knew at this point Harry only said he’d try in order to appease his Professor. It would take time; and more than just words, for Harry to begin to understand that the muggles, Dumbledore, Pomfrey, and all the others who had hurt him were wrong.

Chapter End Notes

Many thanks to all who leave comments and kudos, as well as those who bookmark my work.
Severus waited for Harry to calm down and then suggested they have breakfast. Like the morning before, Harry didn’t want to let go of Severus’ robes. The older man settled the small teen in his lap; and they ate much as they had the previous morning. It was after they had eaten and were seated in their chair that Severus brought up the topic that needed to be addressed.

“Harry I need to know how badly you have been hurt, so I can work on healing what can be healed.”

Severus wished he could say that he could heal all of Harry’s injuries, past and present; but he knew some things even magic couldn’t fix. Had the abuse and starvation been caught sooner, more could be done. However this was 14 years of accumulative unhealed injuries, as well as the neglect. With time and proper nutrients, Harry’s frail body would become stronger; but he would never be as strong physically as he would have been otherwise. He would never be as tall as he should. He would always bear some of the scars of his past. The potions master didn’t know what else may not heal correctly, and wouldn’t know until he had performed a full health scan, including a full history. Harry’s slender frame shuddered convulsively. He didn’t want Severus to have more proof that he was a freak.

“P-please d-don’t.” he whispered.

Severus closed his eyes for a moment. He knew this wouldn’t be easy, and he didn’t want to upset his little Gryffindor more than he already was; but he needed those diagnostic scans, before even more problems showed themselves.

“Harry, no matter what I find out; I can promise you, you are not a freak, nor will I think of you as such. None of what happened to you is your fault. I promised to help you in any way I could. I can’t help you like I need to; if I do not know all of the problems with your health.”

“I-it d-doesn’t m-matter. I’m f-f-fine.” Severus could hear just how terrified the teen was.

“Harry, it most certainly does matter. I know full well you are in pain. Please let me help.”

Severus could perform the necessary scans without Harry’s permission, of course; but he also knew if he did, he would lose the trust the child had begun to place in him.

Harry was silent for several minutes, Severus let him have the time he needed to think. Finally a small quavering voice said, “ok.”

The potions master retrieved his wand and incanted the necessary spells to obtain Harry’s full medical history. He then sat back gently rocking, as he cradled the still shaking teen against his chest. A complete, in depth health scan would show quite literally everything. Including: damage to bones, muscle, tendons, internal organs, and even skin. Even the things that would never show up on muggle tests would come to light. Though the body may have completely healed from an injury, or illness; and no longer remembered it; a witch or wizard’s magic remembered and recorded it. Severus expected the list of injuries and any other health issues to take some time to record. He expected there would be some unpleasant surprises. What he did not expect was for the spell to take more than an hour, and for the list to run over 15ft. long!

Severus began to read the results. The potters had taken very good care of their baby. Harry had a
spring cold when he was about 4 and ½ months, but other than that there was absolutely nothing to report for his first 15 months of life.
The same could not be said after that point. The first signs of neglect and abuse began to show on the same day Harry had been left with those despicable muggles.
Pinches, some from small fingers; likely the cousin, and some from long fingernails; Petunia’s doing, Severus had no doubt. Then, diaper rash, malnutrition, dehydration; and it only got worse from there. Severus began to skim, looking for anything that needed his immediate attention. He would read the scan in its entirety later; when he could process it, and not frighten Harry with his reaction.
Unfortunately he had been quiet for too long. Harry shifted, and began to whimper softly.
Harry had not wanted Severus to do the scan; certain, despite the older man’s reassurances, that he would be disgusted with Harry. When it took so long for the spell to finish recording the results, the small teen realized it must be writing absolutely everything. He would have very few, if any secrets left after this. At least as far as what the Dursleys had done.
When Severus began to read the parchment, Harry practically held his breath. His professor didn’t say anything, just kept reading. Harry knew, he just knew he was about to be kicked out. He really was a freak. Even Severus would have to admit that now.
His mind in a whirlwind of painful thoughts and feelings; Harry gasped softly and fought to keep his sobs silent. He was sure if Severus didn’t want to kick him out because of the health scan he certainly would due to Harry’s inability to stop crying.
Severus hadn’t heard the first inaudible whimpers, so occupied in reading the scan. He absently noticed Harry shifting; but didn’t react. He was sharply brought out of his reverie however, when he heard the first stifled sob.
Quickly he set aside the parchment, and moved the now violently shaking teen into a more comfortable position. Before he could speak, Harry’s words came spilling forth.
“I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I really am a f-freak. Y-you have all the proof r-right there. I’m sorry, I can’t stop crying. They’re right. They’re all right. No one could want a freak. I’m not worth love. I’m sorry I’m sorry.”
Severus could barely make out the words between the hiccupping sobs. His little Gryffindor was shaking and crying so hard, he was sure the teen was about to make himself sick.
“Harry, calm down. Please calm down. You are not a freak. This scan only proves what I said before; those deplorable muggles are the freaks. What they did is wrong. There is no justification for their actions. They are not right. None of them are right. You are not a freak. You are most definitely deserving of love. You did not deserve any of this. Please Harry, please calm down.”
Though the small teen had broken down several times already, the stress of thinking Severus would see him as so many others did caused the final restraints on Harry’s emotions to snap. He simply could not stop crying.
Quickly Severus summoned a calming draught, and gently tipping Harry’s head back; he poured the pink potion in, carefully massaging the slender throat to make sure he swallowed without choking. It took a few moments, but finally Harry’s sobs slowed to sniffles and hiccups. Severus waited patiently, rocking and running his fingers through Harry’s silken curls.
“I’m sorry I’m so much trouble. I’m sorry I keep crying.” Harry’s voice was hoarse.
“You are no trouble. You need to be able to cry. Holding it in all the time is unhealthy. The reason I wanted you to calm down was not because you were crying; but because you were crying so hard I was worried you would make yourself sick.”
Harry didn’t answer, just nestled against Severus, clinging to his robes. In a matter of moments, the exhausted emerald-eyed wizard was asleep.

Chapter End Notes
Many thanks to those who leave comments and kudos, or bookmark my work. It’s more help than you can know.
Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

OK, today we have a note and a warning.
NOTE: Seeing as next Monday is Christmas I will not be posting. You will have to wait 2 weeks for the next update.
WARNING: Descriptions of abuse.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Severus carried Harry to the guest bedroom. When he attempted to lay him down, the tiny 15-year-old whimpered and desperately clutched Severus’ robes. The potions master sat against the headboard and arranged the boy so his head lay in Severus’ lap. Then he placed a one way silencing charm on the teen, so he could hear if Harry needed him, but Harry wouldn’t hear if Severus reacted audibly to the scans as he read them.

Having discovered that carding his fingers through his little Gryffindor’s raven curls seemed to relax the child; Severus continued the practice while reading the diagnostic results in depth. He was relieved that by constantly running his fingers through Harry’s silken hair, it relaxed himself enough that he did not outwardly react to what he was reading.

His suppositions about Harry’s poor eyesight bore truth as it was revealed that Harry had been subjected to numerous head injuries; some resulting in concussions; nearly all helping to contribute to the deterioration of the child’s vision.

Just as he suspected, Harry’s state of near constant starvation had taken its toll as well. Contributing to his poor eyesight, yes, but also causing his bones to be considerably more brittle than they otherwise would be.

Most of Harry’s fingers had been broken, and never set properly; which explained why they looked twisted now. Severus skipped ahead and discovered that he had been correct. There was infection from the blood quill. The Potions Master would need to counteract that, as well as the pain caused by the injury.

Several of Harry’s bones had been broken over the years. Most had set correctly; but the scan noted that it had been done by Harry’s magic alone. Not by a magical healer, or even a muggle doctor.

Just as Severus had suspected, his little Gryffindor was suffering from vitamin deficiencies. This caused several health issues, though most if not all could be negated. However with the damage having been done for nearly all of Harry’s life, it would take quite a while for him to be as healthy as possible. As Severus had speculated earlier, Harry would never be as healthy or strong as he would have been with proper care.

Severus had been right about the scars on Harry’s back. While most were made from a belt there were several that were caused by something more slender. From what Severus had seen and what he was reading; it appeared to be either from a willow switch or possibly even something like a riding crop.

Severus felt literally ill as he read the likely cause of the pain Harry was still experiencing in his lower back and hips.

Both hips had been broken multiple times. From the type of breaks, it would appear Harry had been slammed against something with a ledge, possibly a counter or table. Similar damage had occurred with his back. Considering the injury had been repeated several times over a period of years, and had never been properly treated; it was astounding the small teen hadn’t suffered permanent paralysis.

No, his little Gryffindor would never fully heal from all that had been inflicted on him; but seeing
these scans, and having a chance to get to know the teen, Severus could safely say Harry was one of, if not the, strongest person he knew.
To have come through all of that and still have any amount of humanity, let alone compassion, was astounding. The obvious fact that his magic had kept him alive through what would have killed or at least permanently incapacitated anyone else attested to his considerable magical strength.
They would need to discuss matters, but Severus was certain they had all they needed to keep Harry out of the hands of all those who had hurt him, including Dumbledore. No matter how powerful the man thought himself to be.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to all who have left comments and kudos.
Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good read.
Delores Umbridge, Senior Undersecretary to the Minister of Magic, Hogwarts High Inquisitor, and Professor of Defense Against the Dark Arts, sat in her office, thinking furiously. She had been using her ministry sanctioned stash of blood quills on several students; but her main target had been the Potter brat. The problem was, it didn’t seem to be working. The little brat still dared to defy her authority. No one defied Delores Umbridge without regretting it. Not only had the Potter boy continually defied her at every turn in class, she had reason to believe that he had set up a defense club, in direct opposition of one of her ministerial decrees. On top of all that, he now had the audacity to miss two of her detentions. One way or another the boy would pay. If blood quills and quidditch bans didn’t work, she would just have to step up her game. Harry Potter would soon be under her control.

**********

Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, former supreme mugwump of the ICW, former Chief Warlock of the Wizen Gamut, Headmaster of Hogwarts, and self-proclaimed leader of the light, paced in his office. He had plans, many plans; and most of those plans involved one Harry Potter. The problem was, that Albus feared that his control of the boy was slipping. He couldn’t understand how that could be the case. He had the boy monitored constantly. Harry couldn’t go to the loo without Albus being aware of it. Perhaps he had pushed the boy too far this year. What with dementors, the court hearing, occlumency with Severus, and of course his numerous detentions with Umbridge and her blood quills. Albus wasn’t sure what to make of the fact that the boy had been missing since his occlumency lesson Monday night. On the one hand, he didn’t like not having full access to his pawn. On the other hand, knowing that Harry was with Severus made him feel certain that whatever was going on, the boy would be miserable. Albus had gone out of his way to make certain that Severus saw Harry as a mini James Potter, and would treat him accordingly. Still his potions professor cum spy, was doing something without Albus’ express permission. Albus Dumbledore did not like his pawns moving without his say so. He would have to think some more about how to get the boy back in line. Albus couldn’t afford to let his weapon slip out of his control.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to all who have taken the time to read my story. Many thanks to all who leave kudos, comments, or bookmark my work. As I've reached the end of my pre-written
chapters, the encouragement is needed. LOL
Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

Yes, I'm aware this is a week and a day late. However I can be reasonably certain you wouldn't want to read anything I might try to write while sick. I think antibiotics make my brain even more crazy than usual. "Cause I wasn't weird enough already. I think this chapter may be a bit shorter than my usual but at least you get something. Sincerely hope you like it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Severus had been unable to read the diagnostic scan in its entirety. The abuse which bordered on torture was enough to make him literally ill. The fact that he had irrefutable proof of Pomfrey’s complicity caused rage to boil within him. Not wishing to disturb his little Gryffindor, he had put the parchment aside to read more later.

After a couple of hours, Harry began to stir. He whimpered softly as he shifted his small frame. Then as if realizing he wasn’t alone, he abruptly fell silent.

“How are you feeling, Harry?” Severus questioned quietly.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to fall asleep. I’m sorry you had to carry me. I didn’t mean to be more of a bother.” Harry, still half asleep, sat up quickly, making himself a bit lightheaded.

The flash of fear that swam in the small wizard’s emerald eyes made Severus’ heart break a little more for all this child had suffered. Would there ever come a time when Harry could wake with a feeling of safety and love. Without first feeling that burst of panic, that he was in trouble for some minor infraction?

“You are not in any trouble. You needed the sleep. It was no bother to carry you.” The potions master kept his voice soft, so as to not startle the boy who didn’t seem fully awake yet.

Harry reached up and began rubbing the sleep from his eyes. His brain felt fuzzy, and he couldn’t shake the sense he was in trouble for something. He couldn’t remember having done anything else wrong; but that usually didn’t matter. He was so often in trouble for something someone else did, or for no reason at all.

“Are you hungry?” Severus’ voice brought Harry out of his painful thoughts.

“Yes,” He answered before he thought about it. Then quickly added. “I don’t want to be any trouble. I won’t make a mess. I won’t make a mess. I’ll clean up whatever mess I do make.”

Severus winced mentally. It seemed the stress of the diagnostic scans had caused Harry to regress again.

“You need not fix anything. Either I or Sassy will prepare anything that requires it. Is there something you want in particular?”

“Um, just whatever is easiest, please. Maybe it’s too much bother. I don’t really need anything.”

Harry’s slender frame was trembling, whether from fear or cold Severus wasn’t sure. The dungeons were cool at any time, let alone during the frigid Scottish winters. Harry was so thin, he had absolutely no body fat to help keep his body temperature up.

“Harry, are you cold?”

The brilliant green eyes widened in alarm. “No sir, I’m fine. I’m sorry if I complained. I’m not ungrateful, I promise.”

The words tumbled from his lips, almost incoherent in the rush to be heard; as his shaking increased exponentially.
Severus didn’t want to frighten the teen more than he already was, but took the chance of moving quickly to gather the tiny 15-year-old in his arms.

“Sssshhh, Harry, sssshhhhh. You’re not in any trouble. You haven’t done anything wrong. You didn’t complain and even if you had you certainly have a right to do so. Please don’t worry that you will be in trouble for expressing your needs or wants. You’re safe here, I promise. I won’t let anyone hurt you again.”

Without conscious thought, Harry’s small hands tightly clutched the front of Severus’ robes. He had that odd feeling again, of being two people in one body. He couldn’t shake the ever-present fear of punishment, that always loomed over his head at the Dursleys. He knew where he truly was and what was going on. Yet the certainty of reprisal for wrongs he had or hadn’t committed was something he could no more ignore, than the constant pain of his body.

Severus gently felt of the little hands clinging to his robes and discovered that Harry was indeed cold. His little Gryffindor’s fingers were like ice, and it didn’t take a genius to realize that the rest of his small frame would be chilled as well.

Shifting the teen in his arms, he stood and carried him to the sitting room where the fire crackled merrily. Using his wand, he built the fire up and settled them both in their chair trying to soothe the distraught boy all the while.

It took several minutes to calm Harry enough that they could call Sassy to prepare a snack for them. After finishing the light luncheon; of which Harry ate little, Severus brought up a topic he hoped would not cause his charge to panic again.

“Harry we need to start discussing what will happen when we leave these rooms.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to all who read my story.
Many thanks to those who leave kudos, bookmark, or subscribe to my work.
A thousand thanks to those who leave comments.
Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

OK, I think I’m back on track; but don’t hold your breath on that. Hoping you like the chapter as I’m not sure if it makes sense. I know this chapter will raise some questions that will be answered in later chapters. I’m just hoping this one isn’t confusing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Just as Severus had feared, Harry looked absolutely terrified. He had become perfectly still, and appeared to have stopped breathing. Quickly Severus lifted his small charge and carried him back to the sitting room and their chair. Cradling Harry against his chest he summoned the fleece blanket and wrapped the still cold boy in it. He had been quietly speaking to his little Gryffindor the whole time, in an attempt to calm him. Yet nothing seemed to be working.

Severus didn’t want to use another entire calming draught. He feared overdosing, with Harry being so undernourished. However he had to do something. So he summoned a vial of the pink colored draught and carefully measured out a third of the potion. Gently he coaxed the liquid into Harry’s unresisting mouth, lightly stroking his throat as before to make sure it went down properly.

After the potion had taken affect, Severus made certain he had Harry’s attention before speaking. “Harry, I’m sorry, I did not mean to upset you. Nothing will be done that you’re not comfortable with. I only meant we cannot stay in these rooms forever, and we; not I, must decide the best course of action. My promise stands. You are safe and will continue to be. I will be here and will help you in any way I can. You are not alone. I will not let them hurt you again.”

“I-if we leave your rooms, then Dumbledore will make me do whatever he wants, and h-he’ll send me back to the Dursleys. Nothing will change. Nothing ever changes. He’ll probably be angry that you’ve tried to help me. It will just cause more trouble.”

The helpless despair in the small voice nearly brought Severus to tears. He hadn’t truly cried in many years. “Harry, I don’t want to talk you into anything you’re not willing to do.. but I am certain you do have options. Ones that will circumvent the Headmaster’s authority. It is possible to change things. Are you willing to discuss the ideas I have? You don’t have to make an immediate decision, but you should at least be aware of all the choices available to you.”

Harry cuddled closer to Severus’ chest while he thought about what the Professor had said. He didn’t see how it was possible to work around Dumbledore, without the old man stopping anything he didn’t like and think of himself. However Harry would be the first to admit, he didn’t know everything. There could be several possibilities of which he was unaware. As much as Harry had worked to learn how the wizarding world ran, he had not grown up in this world. He had not had the opportunity to ask trusted adults about things he didn’t understand; and with Ron and Hermione working against him at every turn it was difficult to get any information on his own. It certainly couldn’t hurt to hear Severus’ ideas, and Harry would do just about anything to get out of the hell his life was.

“Yes, please, I want to hear what you have to say. I really want things to change. I just don’t understand how that’s possible with all the power that Dumbledore holds.”

Severus gently ran his fingers through Harry’s silken curls, helping to calm the small teen further. “Currently Dumbledore doesn’t hold as much power as he did. It would still be possible to
outmaneuver him, but with a great deal of the public turned against him, it will make things less complicated.”

Severus seemingly changed the subject randomly. “What do you know about Tom Riddle?”

Harry drew in a sharp breath. Was he about to find out some of what Dumbledore had been keeping from him? Was he about to discover that the headmaster had indeed been lying to him for years?

“Dumbledore said he changed his name to Voldemort.”

“In a sense that is correct. He only uses the persona of Voldemort for the public. Tom Riddle wanted to make changes in the wizarding world. He saw and experienced a great deal of the prejudice toward all but a select few of the purebloods. He also saw how not understanding what the muggles are capable of leads to things like what you have suffered. As he endured a somewhat similar situation to yours, he was working towards segregation. Not purebloods from muggle-born or half-bloods, but rather complete separation of all magicals from non-magicals. He also wanted the wizarding world to have full knowledge of the muggle world. What they are capable of, both individually and as a society. He wanted the magical community to understand how the majority of muggles view us, how they fear what they do not understand how that fear turns to hatred and that hatred turns to violence. They do not understand magic, and even if they did; it is something they cannot use and that can be used against them.

The potions master shifted slightly, and tucked the blanket more firmly around the lightly trembling teen, before continuing.

“Tom was also trying to get the muggle studies class here updated; as well as make it a mandatory class for all who are not muggle-raised. He wanted it to become a core class, along with wizarding studies for all who were not wizarding-raised. He wanted as few conflicts as possible to arise from misunderstandings and preconceived notions. He also desired that the wizarding community be able to move through the muggle world without notice. We have obliviators, however it should be that they are called only in a true emergency. Rather than because witches and wizards are too lazy or arrogant to attempt to blend in. Tom argued that obliviators could not possibly perform memory charms on everyone in a given situation. If something happened in a crowd, the chances were high that some of them would have already left before the obliviators arrived. As things stand it is a major security risk to the statute of secrecy and the wizarding world as a whole.”

“And what does he believe now?” Harry asked softly.

“He still believes the same things, but Dumbledore was blocking him at every turn, as well as discrediting him, so few were willing to listen. Of those few they were not politically or financially powerful enough to go up against Dumbledore. This was also very soon after Dumbledore’s much lauded defeat of Grindlewald, so he was very much in the public’s favor.”

Harry contemplated All that Severus had told him so far, along with his own suppositions. Severus stayed silent allowing the teen to digest what he had heard.

After several moments, Harry spoke. “So after it was obvious the public was blindly following Dumbledore, and Tom’s name and credibility was in shreds; Tom Riddle ceased to exist in the public eye, and Voldemort came into being. Likely He only took on the persona of Voldemort after gaining a following. Probably working behind the scenes and gathering those with political power, as well as the gold to back them in their efforts.”

Harry seemed to be talking to himself as much, if not more than to Severus. Still the older man responded.

“That is a very good summation of what took place.”

Inwardly Severus was relieved that Harry seemed to have passed safely through another regression episode.

Chapter End Notes
I decided to break their conversation into two parts, as it was getting longer than I wanted.
Thanks to all who read my work, Leave kudos, or comments, as well as those who bookmark my story.
Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

I'm really hoping this is a good chapter.
As I think I've been ran over by a herd of hippogriffs, or quite possibly a rampaging
screw, I'm not a good judge of my own writing at the moment.
Oh, well, at least it's on the right day... I think.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry turned and looked at Severus with piercing green eyes. “I agree with all the things you say
Tom, er, Voldemort stands for; but there’s still a few things I need to know, before I can say that I
could support him in any way, or go to him for sanctuary. That is one of the options you were
referring to isn’t it?”
Severus nodded, thankful that Harry’s quick mind was once again working clearly, and making it
unnecessary to explain every little detail.
“Yes, Harry, that is one of the options, and I think possibly the best one. I will not pressure you to
make the decision I think best. It will affect you far more than it will me; so I will help in any way
you want, but the choice will have to be yours. I will tell you anything you wish, as long as I know
the answers.”
There were four things in particular Harry needed the answers to. He would have to work his way
up to the worst one, though. He didn’t feel like he could handle that subject quite yet; no matter what
the response was.
“F-first year. The whole deal with the philosophers stone and Quirrell. I need to know if that
happened the way I thought it did or if Dumbledore was manipulating things again, or if it was
something else altogether.”
The teen wasn’t exactly babbling, but it seemed apparent to Severus that he was somewhat fearful of
the replies to his concerns.
“I do not have all of the details, so I am unable to give you a full explanation of what took place. I do
know that Tom; and by the way you can call him that in private settings; was not possessing Quirrell.
He was not even in the country at that time. I believe he was in Sweden working on an alliance with
several magical species there. I can only guess as to what truly happened when you faced who you
thought to be Voldemort.”
Harry shuddered remembering the face on the back of Quirrell’s head. He tried to think if there were
any signs of what was really going on. Finally he said. “Is it even possible for someone to possess
another person like that? I mean usually when you hear about possession, at least in the muggle
world, the one being possessed is taken over by the one doing the possessing. If Voldemort had
really possessed Quirrell, then wouldn’t it be more like Voldemort in Quirrell’s body pretending it
was still Quirrell? Rather than being stuck on the back of his head?”
Severus thought about it for a few moments. “I think you’re right. Even if the one being possessed
didn’t willingly let the spirit in, the results would not have manifested in such a manner as what you
saw. It seems far more likely that Dumbledore used trickery, to cause you to believe that Quirrell was
controlled by Voldemort. Either to make you fall in line with his plans or possibly even in an effort to
harm you.”
Severus was thinking out loud, before suddenly realizing his words could further upset his little
Gryffindor.
Looking down he saw Harry appeared contemplative, but not fearful.
“I think those are good guesses. I also think it’s unlikely we’ll ever know exactly what happened and why. Unless we can tie down Dumbledore and pour a vial of verutusyrum down his throat.”
“you’re most probably correct. What is your next concern?” Severus began running his fingers through the raven curls again in an effort to soothe them both.  
“2nd year. Though I think I have an idea about that.”
“I’m afraid I know even less about that incident than what took place in your 1st year. The staff had been told very little, but blame was placed on Voldemort; through the use of a cursed diary. I inquired about the matter when I next saw him, and he didn’t know anything about it. He had not kept diaries as such while in school. Anything personal he had in written form, he had in parcel tongue and was clearly visible. Not like what you described to me; and certainly not something the Weasley girl could have read, had she managed to get her hands on something.”
“Is it possible parcel tongue is something that could have come through her family?”
“Besides the fact that no one else in the family have shown signs of the ability, the only ones in Britain who had the gift and passed it on was Salazar Slytherin, and the Peveril Family. I have studied family lines and am quite certain that the Weasleys and Prewets did not have any connection to either family.
Harry sighed softly. “Then it sounds like another of Dumbledore’s tricks. I wish I understood why he’s so interested in either conning or killing me. What does he have to gain by doing either?”
Severus snuggled the small figure close against his chest. “I believe he either wants to con you as you put it; in order to use you and your influence to garner himself more power, or to ki-kill you for much the same reasons using the sympathy route. I imagine should you have died in one of his schemes, he would use your memory as a rallying point.”
Harry’s tiny fingers played absently with the buttons on Severus’ robes.
“You’re probably right.” He couldn’t stop the shiver that ran through him as he asked the next question. OK, what about 4th year. The tri-wizard tournament; and especially the 3rd task?”
As they had yet to discuss Harry’s 4th year, Severus asked for clarification. Once Harry had explained everything that happened in the graveyard, and that Moody was really Crouch Jr. under Polyjuice, the potions master asked, “Harry, I need you to tell me what Crouch Jr. said once the verutusyrum had been administered.”
The teen wasn’t sure he could remember in full. Biting his lip he asked hesitantly, “Could I give you the memory, and you look at it. I can’t be sure I won’t forget something that may turn out to be important.”
Severus realized by Harry’s increased shaking that his little Gryffindor was still afraid he would be in trouble for the pensieve incident.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to all who read my work and put up with my weirdnesses.; which is apparently not a word, but I really don't care right now.
I tried a shrinking charm on my couch. It didn't work. Does anyone know the ingredients for a shrinking solution? Despite my furniture issues, I hope you enjoy the chapter.

“That’s an excellent idea. I will retrieve the pensieve and then teach you how to remove a memory.” Not sure if he dared believe his ears, Harry looked up. Emerald eyes met onyx, as Severus let Harry see that he was not angry. He wanted the teen to know beyond any doubt that he would not be unfairly punished again. Gently the potions master set his little Gryffindor in the chair before leaving to get the pensieve from his office, thankful the wards included that room.

When he returned, he found the small teen shivering again.

“Before we view the memory; how about we have something warm to drink?” Harry nodded, not looking at the Professor.

“Harry, will you please tell me what has you upset?” Severus had a fair idea of what was troubling the boy, but he wanted Harry to be able to say it. Not to mention, it was possible he was wrong in his assumption.

“Are you going to get mad?” The small voice was trembling.

“Do you mean about what happened the other day?” Severus queried.

Harry dipped his head in assent; his nervousness obvious.

“No Harry, I am not angry about that. I admit I was when I first found you in the pensieve. However once I understood why you went into it, I was no longer irritated. I am not going to change my mind and become upset with you about it at a later date.” Severus was quiet for a moment, studying the little 15-year-old, who still would not meet his eyes.

“Harry, has someone ever pretended not to be angry with you about something, and then later punished you for it?”

Harry’s slight figure began quaking again. “Y-y-yes, but it’s my fault for doing freaky thins.” Harry gasped and covered his mouth with small fingers. “I’m s-sorry, I d-didn’t mean to s-say that.” Severus desperately wanted to strangle some muggles. He wouldn’t mind adding Albus Bloody Dumbledore to that list.

Tenderly the potions master gathered his shaking little Gryffindor into his arms.

“I want you to be able to tell me things that upset you, or anything you want. I can’t help if I do not know what has happened to you, or what has been said. I want you to be able to believe that such things are not your fault. The way others have treated you is indefensible. Even if you had done something wrong; the punishments you have received were abuse rather than the discipline you should have received. If you ever do something that annoys me, I will let you know. I will not pretend everything is fine to lull you into a false sense of security and berate you for it later. You deserve so much better than you have been given all these years.”

The tiny form cradled against him continued to shudder with what Severus thought might be suppressed sobs.

How long would it be, if ever, before Harry could believe that he was allowed to show emotion? How long before he did not think he would be punished for every minor transgression? Would he ever be able to trust someone completely? Was there a single person who had ever truly been in his
corner? Severus suspected there may be a few teens; but strongly felt that it was a precious few, that had stood by Harry through everything. Contrary to popular belief, he highly doubted that Ron Weasley nor Hermione Granger could be counted among them. It was more than apparent that no adult had stood up for Harry. He wished he could go back and do so many things differently, but all they had was forward.

He gently rocked the diminutive wizard as he tried to soothe him. “Harry, you are not in trouble, I promise. You are allowed to cry. Please do not hold it in. That could make you just as sick as crying too hard. I promise I will not judge you for needing a good cry.” Eventually his little Gryffindor began to calm down. Severus called on Sassy and she brought them hot tea. Severus had to assist Harry again, as his trembling had yet to abate to the point where he could hold his cup without spilling.

Once he felt Harry was sufficiently relaxed, Severus began explaining the process for removing memories for viewing in the pensieve. Then carefully tightening his hold on the small teen, in an attempt to assure Harry that he was not and would not be in trouble, they entered the pensive together.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to all who read my story.
Many thanks to those who leave kudos.
A thousand thanks to the ones who leave comments.
Harry quietly explained that he had began the memory where the fake Moody took him back to the castle after the fiasco of the final task. He told Severus that Crouch Jr. had revealed more than just what was said during the interrogation under veritae. Severus paid close attention to not only what Crouch Jr. said, but also to his body language before the truth potion had been administered. He shifted the small figure in his lap and began rubbing light circles on his back, as the teen was shivering again. Severus thought it was likely as much from remembered fear, as from being chilled.

Harry had been through quite an ordeal. The difficulties he faced in the 3rd task of the tri-wizard tournament, watching a schoolmate murdered right in front of him. Witnessing and unwillingly participating in what he believed to be the rebirth of a man who wanted his death. Then after all that, to be kidnapped by this nutter, and have his life endangered for the umpteenth time in a space of a few hours. It was no wonder his little Gryffindor was having so much trouble right now.

Severus’ eyes narrowed as a few things started falling into place. He did not like the picture that was coming forth.

**********

Once they had watched the memory in its entirety, Severus settled himself and Harry in their chair. Wrapping the blanket more securely around the still quivering teen, he began rocking as he thought. Harry studied his Professor silently. He felt reasonably certain that the older man was not angry, but Harry was so used to being reprimanded for everything; whether or not he had anything to do with it or not, that he always felt apprehensive when an adult became too quiet.

Eventually Severus broke out of his reverie. Sighing he looked at his lapful of Gryffindor. Running his fingers through Harry’s silken locks, he said, “I noticed a few things in the memory. Thank you for thinking of it. I may not have noticed some of them even if you had told me. Seeing it for myself helped a great deal.”

Harry burrowed closer, surprised at the praise.

“What did you find out?”

“Dumbledore knew far more than he let on. I also have circumstantial evidence that he was behind what took place in the graveyard.”

The tiny 15-year-old exhaled in annoyance. “With all we’ve talked about and uncovered already, I can’t say I’m surprised. If it’s true besides the fact that he put me through all of that—“ Harry’s small frame jerked in recollection of all ‘that’ entailed. “Anyway, in addition, he’s also responsible for Cedric’s death. Whether directly or indirectly, he’s still to blame.”

“I’m afraid so. One thing in particular that Crouch Jr. said. Struck me as impossible. At least how he related it to you.”

Harry tipped his head back to look at Severus. “What was that?”

“He said he had adjusted the portkey. That would be impossible, without the direct intervention of Dumbledore. Only the Headmaster can adjust the wards. That also means only the Headmaster can
create a portkey that goes through the wards. Even a pre-made one will not work unless the current headmaster adjusted it to work. The only exception to this is the Deputy head can control the wards if the Headmaster is incapacitated, or he hands over control of the wards when he is off of the premises.”

“So, there’s a slight chance it was McGonagall?” The little button nose wrinkled in concentration.

“No, I know for a fact that Dumbledore has never handed over the wards in the entire time he has been headmaster. Even when he has been out of the country for ICW conventions, he has retained control.

“I’m not sure I understand how he managed to make me think I had seen so much that didn’t really happen.” Worried that Severus might think Harry was accusing him of lying, he bit his lip anxiously.

“I can’t be positive, but I believe it’s possible Dumbledore is an illusionist.”

Harry’s brow furrowed in confusion. “What’s an illusionist?”

“An Illusionist is a witch or wizard who can manipulate things around them to make them appear any way they choose. If they are especially gifted at it, they can make it look, sound even smell authentic. Everything you’ve described from your 1st, 2nd and 4th years convinces me that Dumbledore is one.”

Harry snorted softly. “Manipulates. Yeah, that sounds about right.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks, thanks, and ever thanks for taking the time to read my story, for leaving kudos, and comments, as well as for bookmarking my work.
Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

I'm on time! I'm on time!
barely, but it's still Monday.
Seeing as my brain has been wrapped in wet cotton, it's a good thing this chapter was mostly complete.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Having covered so many stressful topics in the last few hours, Severus decided they should have lunch. He also said he thought they should not discuss anything difficult while they ate.
“T think we both could use a break from such heavy topics. I know I said we cannot stay in here forever; and while that is true, we also do not have a time limit. If we both feel up to continuing this particular conversation after we have had a leisurely lunch, then that is fine. If one or both of us is not up to it yet, that is also fine.”
Then catching Harry’s eye, he reiterated, “Both of us. Harry, I do not just mean myself. If you are not ready to continue this discussion after we have rested, please do not hesitate to tell me.”
Harry nodded. For the most part he felt comfortable with Severus. He had difficulty in fully believing that he would not get in trouble for something or other. Not because Severus had done anything to cause him to fear punishment; but because Harry had been conditioned over the last 14 plus years, to expect reprisal for anything that didn’t please the people in authority over him. It never mattered if Harry had done what he was accused of. It never mattered if it were even possible for Harry to have done it. They wanted someone to blame and Harry was the one they chose.
It happened most often with the Dursleys; but they definitely weren’t the only ones.
Harry shook his head trying to rid himself of the depressing thoughts.
Severus noticed the action, and questioned. “Is there a problem Harry?”
“No sir, I was just thinking. I’m sorry I didn’t mean to let my mind wander.”
The apology spilled out without forethought. Harry was often reminded … painfully that he must pay attention to those around him. Especially those who could make his life even more miserable.
“You have nothing to apologize for. Everyone’s mind wanders from time to time; and considering all we have talked about, I would be more surprised if it did not.” Severus was watching the small teen closely.
Harry nodded and shifted uncomfortably in his seat. Since the glamours and other spells Dumbledore had placed on him had dissolved, his pain had been ever-increasing. He was better at hiding it than he had at first, but it was more and more difficult.
Severus wanted Harry to trust him, but he fully understood why the boy found it so problematic.
Having been betrayed time and again, would not be conducive to easily trusting another. The older man felt certain that the difficult past they shared only added to the issue.
It was becoming apparent to the potions master that not only was Harry’s physical discomfort constant, but was worsening.
“Shall we return to the sitting room?” Severus asked the question, while carefully watching the teen from the corner of his eye. It was impossible to miss the look of relief that crossed Harry’s features.
“Yes, please.” The tiny 15-year-old stood gingerly and began to make his way toward their chair.
Severus stayed only a step behind. Harry’s façade was beginning to crack, and the extent of the pain he was in was starting to show. Severus had a feeling that his little Gryffindor would find it difficult, if not impossible to continue to hide his hurt. He intended to keep close, should the green-eyed...
wizard need assistance. 
His fears were proven out, when only a couple of steps later, Harry’s legs seemed to give out. 
Moving swiftly Severus lifted the all too light figure before the boy hit the floor. 
Harry’s small frame began to shake once again. Severus wasn’t certain if it was from pain, fear of punishment, the perpetual chill that the teen experienced, or possibly something else altogether. As he began to adjust himself and Harry, Severus asked, “Is this uncomfortable for you, or would you rather sit on the couch, where you can stretch out?”
Harry’s breath hitched. “I’m sorry. I should have realized I would be a bother always sitting on you like this. I’m sorry. I’ll sit on the couch. I’m sorry I’m a burden.”
The teen’s breathing had started coming in short quick gasps, as he began shaking all the harder. Severus feared his little Gryffindor was about to hyperventilate. Tenderly lifting the small teen’s face, so their eyes met, Severus spoke quietly but firmly. “Harry, you are not a bother. It is not a problem for you to sit on me. You are not a burden. The only reason why I asked and gave you the option of sitting on the couch was because I was worried it may be uncomfortable for you sitting like this all the time. You are welcome to sit right where you are. I only want to alleviate as much of your pain as possible.”
Harry realized he was panicking and began holding his breath. He felt tears stinging the backs of his eyes. Merlin, would he ever stop crying. Did he have to keep proving to Severus, what a freak he was?
The older man noticed the teen had stopped breathing. Whether in an attempt to stop hyperventilating, or to keep tears at bay, he didn’t know; and it didn’t matter. Harry needed to know, that whatever his reactions, Severus would not punish him. “Harry, I need you to breathe. I’ll do all I can to help you when you are panicking, but you must breathe. You are allowed to cry. You are allowed to be upset. I promise, you will not be in trouble for showing your emotions. However, you cannot stop breathing because you think you will be reprimanded. Please I know you are still trying to learn to trust me, but you must not make yourself ill. If there is any way I can prove to you I mean what I say, tell me and I will do it. I promise you are not a bother nor a burden. It is no difficulty for me to help you. I want to help all I can. Please let me help.”
Halfway through Severus’ plea, Harry had begun to take in air; albeit, shaky gasping sobs. The potions master rubbed soothing circles on his back, hoping to ease some of the teen’s fears. Harry collapsed against his Professor’s chest, clutching the front of the older man’s robes. His thin frame shuddering uncontrollably, he was no longer able to stifle the sobs. Harry didn’t want to admit it; even to himself, but he was terrified that the continual pain he was experiencing; particularly in his back and hips was something that wasn’t going to go away. What if it just kept getting worse? What if it was something that couldn’t be fixed? Severus was being more than patient now, but what would happen if Harry proved to be a complete waste of space? More than that; a burden even beyond what the Dursleys accused him of being. Severus was growing worried, his little Gryffindor’s tiny body jerked with the force of his sobs. Harry had been through too much in his short life, and dredging up painful memories would only have piled the stress on him even more. On top of all of that the teen still feared reprisal for having human emotions.
Severus was fairly certain that even when Harry was sleeping, it was not restful sleep. With that in mind, and considering the current state of the child in his arms, he summoned a vial of sleeping draught. Having no desire to cause an overdose with the severely undernourished boy, Severus carefully measured out a third of the lavender colored liquid. He had tried for several minutes to calm his overwrought Gryffindor, to no avail. Gently he coaxed the potion into the trembling, crying teen. It took only a few moments for the potion to take effect.
Instead of carrying Harry to the guest room bed, Severus continued to hold the now sleeping youth. Rocking, and softly running his fingers through the silken curls, the older man began to plan a course of action. He did not, and would not make decisions for or about Harry without the boy’s consent, but he would consider all avenues and work to help Harry decide the best course of action.
Something needed to be done and soon. Though Severus was relatively certain that Harry felt as safe in his quarters as he did anywhere, he also was aware that the teen also felt that the security would be yanked out from under him at any moment. Having the future so unresolved, put the already stressed boy under further strain. Even if they had yet to cover everything concerning Dumbledore, Harry’s years at school, and where the teen might stand regarding Riddle, some decisions would need to be made about their next step.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed the chapter. As always your kudos, comments and bookmarks are greatly appreciated.
Chapter 35

Chapter Notes

I had intended for this to be posted either last night or early this morning. However I had an argument with Microsoft word and lost. So you get the chapter now.
At least it's still on time. LOL
A/N WARNING: disturbing themes. That's the best way I know to put it.
Sorry, no Severus and Harry interaction in this one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Severus continued to hold the small teen throughout the night. He was dismayed, though not surprised to discover that his assumptions about Harry’s restless sleep were correct. Despite the sleeping draught, Harry woke several times during the night, and even when sleeping, he stirred restlessly, soft whimpers escaping his lips.
Whether the difficulty in sleeping came from pain or nightmares, didn’t really matter; Harry desperately needed restful sleep. Severus worried that this had been going on for years. That being the case, it was nothing short of astounding that the child had not completely shattered.
Considering all his little Gryffindor had been through, (and Severus was fairly certain he didn’t know all of it as of yet.) it seemed impossible that Harry had turned out so well. Harry could have easily turned out evil, seeking retribution against those who had harmed him, or had turned a blind eye to his suffering. It could have just as easily happened that the severe abuse he was subjected to could have turned him into an obscures.
Though Dumbledore and his ilk tried to deny and hide the evidence, Severus, Tom and those working with them were well aware that many children, mostly muggle-born whose names were written down as having magic and therefore eligible for Hogwarts, never attended. Not because they were uninterested. Not because they chose another school. But rather because their parents or guardians feared their accidental magic and beat them for it. For many of these children their magic turned inward. Sometimes in an attempt to shield the child, sometimes due to the child’s desperate wish to obey and become what their guardians termed as normal. Whenever a child’s magic turned inward in such a manner, it was only a matter of time before it built up. Until the pressure caused the magic to burst out of them so forcefully that it killed them.
Severus. No longer blinded to who Harry truly was, was quite cognizant of the small teen’s power. Such power coupled with so much brutality against him, would have killed nearly anyone else. That his magic hadn’t turned inward and killed him, was a testament to Harry’s inner strength.
Severus knew he was guilty of not seeing what had been right in front of him for more than 4 years. However he was not alone in that guilt. He was not Harry’s only teacher. Not to mention all those in the Order.
Now that he could look back over Harry’s time at Hogwarts clearly, he could see the signs of abuse he should have recognized before. So why had no one who was not carrying a grudge against the child see it?
What of Molly Weasley? Severus knew that Harry had been to the Burrow more than once, for extended visits. Granted the boy was under glamour, but the Weasleys or at least some of them had retrieved him from his relatives. Surely there were signs, and anything the children would have noticed would have been passed on to Molly. Added to that, was Harry even under glamour during the summers?
Come to think of it, Weren’t many in the Order tasked with guarding Harry over the summer? Dung
wouldn’t notice if something occurred right under his nose, but what of the other’s? It would seem that the betrayals went deeper than Severus first thought.

He knew that the Order would blindly follow Dumbledore, but he never would have believed that would include deliberately turning a blind eye to the obvious abuse of a child. With the extent of the abuse Harry had suffered, it would be impossible for the watchers not to have noticed something was off.

Severus recognized that more information would need to be both given and received between himself and his little Gryffindor; but the time to move forward and take action, both for Harry’s health as well as in moving against Dumbledore was quickly approaching. He only hoped Harry could trust him enough to consider his suggestions.

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When Harry woke, he stayed perfectly still, assessing his surroundings. He knew he wasn’t in Gryffindor tower, or his small pallet in his cupboard. His mind cleared a bit and he remembered he was in Severus’ rooms, but he certainly wasn’t in the guest bed. In fact his pillow seemed to be moving.

It took several moments for Harry’s sleep addled brain to comprehend that he had been sleeping on his Professor. He hated the fact that even when he slept, he often felt like he had not. This made it all the more difficult to concentrate on what was going on around him. This also was a major factor as to why he got into trouble so often. In some ways he got less sleep at Hogwarts than at the Dursleys. While he was worked into an exhaustion at his relatives’ house; being woken early and not allowed to go to bed until fairly late, he at least knew he could sleep undisturbed for the few hours allotted to him. Always providing that he didn’t have a nightmare, and wake his uncle and aunt.

At school things were different. They didn’t start out quite so bad as they were now, but he never felt safe enough to relax into a deep slumber. At first, it had just been that things were too new, and therefore unpredictable; but unfortunately, it didn’t take long for Harry to realize that, contrary to what everyone said, Hogwarts was not safe. At least it wasn’t for him.

Now with his new insights into the Headmaster’s interference, he knew that most of, if not all of the threats he faced could be traced back to the old man. Both last year, and this, he didn’t even feel safe in his dorm; last year with Ron’s open hostility, and this year Seamus’.

Before, he had legitimate concerns about his possessions; few as they were. Either from Ron, out of jealousy, or people wanting something that belonged to The-Boy-Who-Lived. None of them cared that he had so little, and they were taking that. None of them realized what his unwanted fame cost him. None of them realized that nearly all of them had what he would give anything for. People who loved and protected them. Family who was there to tease, and harass, and support, and defend. They never saw Harry, only the legend that was so built up it was impossible to live up to, even if he had desired to do so.

Right now, for this moment, he had someone who seemed to want to help, to protect and defend him. Harry wished with all of his heart that he could hold on to this most precious gift. Yet he knew from the few times he nearly had something; someone to be there for him, it wouldn’t last. It never did.

Without even realizing it, tears began spilling down his cheeks again.

**********

Severus woke, instantly alert to his surroundings. He noticed the slight weight of the small teen who lay across his chest. Harry had been so restless throughout the night, that his sudden stillness had been what awakened the potions master.

Unobserved, he studied his little Gryffindor’s face, and the emotions that crossed it.
Confusion, introspection, longing, followed by a look of sadness, pain and loss, rolled into one. The small raven-haired wizard seemed to be going through the whole gamut. Harry had yet to notice that Severus was awake. The older man was debating whether or not to tell him, when he saw the tears.

As was often the case, Harry made no sound as he cried. Severus honestly couldn’t think of a more heartbreaking sight.

To never be allowed to show your pain, or fear, or sadness; to have to always bottle it up, and when you finally let it out, that must be hidden as well.

Severus was truly beginning to understand that for all intents and purposes, Harry himself had been hidden all of his life.

When he was still a baby, James and Lily had gone into hiding; by Dumbledore’s orders. Harry had not been able to go out and play and be with other children; as he surely would have, under other circumstances. After their deaths, he had apparently been left without thought or care, with his abominable relatives. Where, all evidence would suggest, he was never allowed to be himself. To be a child, or even given the right to have and show basic human emotions. From everything Severus was coming to understand, Harry’s coming to Hogwarts changed nothing. The child was expected to fill a role the wizarding world created. Merlin forbid he be allowed to be anything other than what their preconceived notions dictated.

Slowly, so as not to startle the small teen, Severus’ arms wrapped around his little Gryffindor. Somehow, someway, he would show this child that he was allowed to be himself. To be whatever he wanted. To have, and show his feelings, be they good or bad.

Harry urgently needed help. Help that could not be gotten, hiding away in the dungeons. As difficult as it may be. As terrified as Harry might find it to say what he really felt. The time had come to make decisions concerning their next step.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to those who read my work.
Many thanks to the ones that leave kudos.
A thousand thanks to all who leave comments.
I'm not the type of writer who says I have to have so many reviews before I'll post again; but the encouraging comments are a very big motivator and help when I'm struggling.
So, again, thank you to all who take the time to respond.
Chapter Notes

Talk about waiting until the 11th hour.
At least it's still Monday ... Barely.
The good news is Microsoft word is now behaving itself.
keep your fingers crossed it continues to do so.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Completely lost in his thoughts, Harry barely even noticed Severus wrapping his arms around him. It wasn’t until the older man spoke, that the teen was even aware that his Professor had woken.
“Harry, please tell me what has you so upset. I promise, no matter what you say, you will not be in trouble.”
In pain, fearful of what the future held, and still tired; despite having just woke up, Harry spoke more candidly than he ever would, had his mind not continued to move sluggishly.
“I want what everyone else has, and takes for granted. I’m tired and I hurt. I’m afraid whatever is wrong with my back and hips will only get worse. No one wants to be burdened with a useless freak, and I’m scared of what will happen when you realize how worthless I am and chuck me out.”
The tears were streaming copiously down his pale face, before the outpouring of his thoughts had finished. Then he seemed to realize that he had actually said all that out loud … to his Professor.
Harry’s slight frame stiffened in fear, and his emerald gaze flew to Severus’; certain he would see anger and loathing in the obsidian eyes.
Instead what he saw was understanding, empathy, and maybe, just a bit of affection.
Severus’ heart clenched with the pain he saw reflected in those green depths. He had not missed Harry’s use of the word ‘when’, not ‘if’
‘WHEN you chuck me out.’
Severus knew Harry wasn’t trying to manipulate him, or garner sympathy. He honestly believed that Severus would get fed up and toss him out like rubbish.
The older man realized with painful clarity that is just how everyone else in this child’s life had treated him. Even those who claimed to care about him, never truly showed it in their actions.
Gently he rubbed his little Gryffindor’s back, trying to get the tense little body to relax. With the pain Harry was already in, tensed muscles were the last thing the teen needed to be dealing with.
The older man wished that Harry could believe that Severus had no intentions of deserting him, but knew it was one of those things that would take time.
Time, and his actions backing up his words. Harry had no reason to believe anything Severus said. Especially when the child had the very antithesis driven into his consciousness for as long as he could recall.
Though he knew the words would mean little to nothing at this time; he also knew Harry would need those words to slowly replace the lies he had been fed all of his life.
“Harry, I am not going to chuck you out. I do not find you a burden.
You are not useless. You are not a freak. You are not worthless. Even if your physical problems persist, or Merlin forbid be permanent, I am not going to get tired of you. I will not give up on helping you. I told you I will help you in any way I am able. That hasn’t changed, nor will it. I made a Promise; not only do I intend on keeping it, I do not in any way regret doing so.”
Harry only nodded before laying his head back on his professor’s chest.
Tenderly running his fingers through the raven curls, Severus remained silent for several moments.
He wanted the teen to have a bit of time to calm, and perhaps let the words sink into his subconscious.

“Harry, I need to ask you something. No matter what the answer is, you will not be in trouble. I promise. Is the pain getting worse?”

Harry started to curl in on himself. Even if they hadn’t used the truth spell, he would have felt compelled to answer honestly. After all that Severus had done for him, he deserved the truth. Though the teen felt certain this would be the last straw.

Despite what his Professor had said; no one wants to be burdened with a freak. Before the spells had dissolved, Harry could at least try and do something to earn his keep. He could cook and clean as well as any house-elf, but now he couldn’t even do that. He was completely useless. Just like everyone always told him.

Though his fear of the consequences of his answer was nearly choking him, Harry finally replied in little more than a whisper. “Yes.”

The dread rolling off the small teen was almost palpable. Harry’s slight frame was coiling into an ever tighter ball.

Though Severus was well aware that it was instinctive, and that Harry likely didn’t even consciously realize he was doing it, the constriction of his already strained muscles would only intensify the pain. He summoned a vial of a mild muscle relaxant. Harry’s abused system couldn’t handle anything stronger. Gently he coaxed the terrified teen into swallowing the potions, after explaining what it was. He also had to reassure his little Gryffindor that he was not in trouble, That Severus was in no way upset with him, and that he was not about to be tossed out.

Quietly he called Sassy and requested she bring a cup of hot tea. When the small elf returned with the drink, the potions master had to work to persuade Harry to drink it, as he was still quite upset. Besides the fact that Harry’s health currently would allow only minimal amounts of potions and none of them too potent, Severus didn’t want the teen to become dependent on potions. He also felt it would be counterproductive, if every time Harry became overwrought, a vial was shoved under his nose. The older man wanted Harry to understand that he was able and allowed to express himself, to have and show the same emotions as anyone else. His concern was that the boy would make himself ill in the meantime.

Harry had gone so long without being allowed to cry, or show fear; that now he was in a setting where he could, the feelings were overwhelming him with their intensity.

It took some time before Severus felt Harry had relaxed enough to discuss what needed to be done next.

After Severus laid out what he considered was the best course of action, and reiterating that he wanted the teen to say what he truly thought, rather than what he believed Severus wanted to hear; harry spoke.

“I’m afraid of what will happen. I don’t have answers to some rather important questions, though I suppose Vol-er, Tom might be the best one to ask. I don’t think he’ll want to help me, but I don’t know of anyone else we can go to that isn’t on Dumbledore’s side, or like Fudge and Umbridge.”

The teen bit his lip anxiously before continuing. “What will happen if he just wants to get rid of me? I mean, you’re his spy, and I’m not worth you going against him, and-“

Severus cut him off. “I told you, I would support you no matter your decision, or what side you chose. I have not changed my mind. You are worth supporting. You are worth protection. You are worth far more than all those incompetent idiots could ever hope to comprehend. I can’t say exactly what his reaction will be, but I can say with certainty that the worst that will happen is you can’t agree to work together and will go your separate ways. There won’t be repercussions. Not from that quarter, and I will be with you the whole time. I believe even if you don’t work with Tom, as long as you are not working against him, he will help you. At the very least, as far as finding you a safehouse, until Dumbledore and his ilk have been dealt with.”

His little Gryffindor clung to his robes, tremors once again racking his tiny frame.

“Promise you won’t leave me alone. I know I’m a useless waste of space, and eventually you’ll leave; but please stay with me when we go to see him.”
Severus really, really wanted to dismember Dumbledore and the Dursleys. Harry had it so ingrained into his psyche that he had no worth and no one could ever want him, that even with Severus’ continual reassurances that he would stay with him, the teen was still filled with doubts.

“I promise, Harry. I will stay with you. I will not leave you. I will not get tired of you. Not just for this visit. You are neither useless, nor a waste of space. Would it help if I gave you a magical oath, or an unbreakable vow?”

Harry recoiled in horror.

“No, no, I’m sorry. You said you would stay with me, I’m just being a bother. I’m sorry. I’m not worth you risking your magic, and certainly not your life, when you change your mind later. I’m sorry. I’m being stupid. I’m sorry.”

“You’re not being stupid. You have had no one you can count on, and have been lied to enough that you can’t trust someone simply on their say so. I understand you can’t trust my words, but that is why I offered the oath or vow. If you wish to take me up on it later, you may. I will tell you as many times as it takes for you to be able to believe. I will not leave you. I will do all in my power to protect you. There isn’t a time limit on my promise.”

Harry bit his lip, nodded hesitantly, then burrowed into Severus’ warmth. The older man sighed silently, as he tucked the blanket snugly around his little Gryffindor. He knew Harry was trying. The problem was the teen had absolutely no frame of reference for this situation.

The tiny 15-year-old huddled in the potions master’s lap. He had never in his life felt safe, not once. Until Professor Snape became Severus. Harry was terrified of losing this feeling of protection. He feared leaving these rooms would see this new-found security disappearing. Yet he also knew Severus was right. They couldn’t stay here forever.

Time seemed to have stopped in the Professor’s quarters. At least that’s how it felt to Harry. But he knew that certainly wasn’t the case outside this bubble of safety.

After thinking about it for some time; Harry finally spoke.

“I think you’re right. We should go see Vol-er, Tom.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to all who read this story, leave kudos, comments, and bookmark my work.

Your continued interest in the story is what keeps me pushing through against writer’s block, headaches, and ticked off computers.

Since I’m practically broke, the only way I can pay you is with chapters. LOL
Harry and Severus decided they would have their meeting with Tom the next day. Although Severus didn’t want Harry to have too much time to become even more nervous about the upcoming visit, he felt the teen needed the rest of the day to unwind. They had entered his rooms on Monday evening and it was now Friday morning. A great many issues had been addressed during that time, not to mention his little Gryffindor had been put through more stress than he had already been dealing with. A day without discussing Dumbledore, the Dursleys, or any of the other topics that caused Harry to become anxious, might help the consultation with Tom to go a bit more smoothly.

Saturday morning saw a very nervous Harry toss a pinch of floo powder into the fire in Severus’ sitting room. Taking a deep breath both to try and calm himself, as well as to make sure he ended up in the right place; he stepped in and called, Slytherin sanctuary.” Severus had to manipulate the wards so he and Harry could use the fireplace undetected, and to buy them enough time to get to Tom’s manor before the wards fell. The potions master and his little Gryffindor knew they would not be coming back to Hogwarts anytime soon, if ever. Things would have to change drastically for that to be a safe possibility for either of them. Waiting just long enough to give Harry time to arrive and step out of the way, Severus followed. Come what may, their fate was sealed. Harry would be openly going against Dumbledore, even if he didn’t choose to ally himself with Tom; and Severus would stay by the side of the tiny 15-year-old, whatever he chose.

Never graceful when it pertained to magical transport, then add in his continuing difficulties with his back and hips; it was no surprise when Harry landed on his bum once he reached the manor. The surprise was in the form of who was there at his arrival. Lucius Malfoy was well aware of Tom’s goal of getting the Potter boy on their side. He personally believed the endeavor to be a waste of time, fully convinced the teen was irrevocably on Dumbledore’s side. Having come unexpected and unannounced to the manor, with some proposals for Tom to look over, Lucius had no idea that Severus, Let alone Harry Potter would be coming. With no knowledge of the unfolding events, and being certain of Potter’s loyalty to Dumbledore; it was not really surprising that Lucius first reaction was to reach for his wand. Harry’s green eyes widened in absolute panic, when his gaze fell upon Malfoy Senior. Not so much due to seeing him there, though that struck a chord of fear in the teen; but his actions caused terror to race through his small frame. Wishing he had never left the safety and protection of Severus’ quarters’ harry scrambled into a corner of the room. Curling into a tight ball, he tried to make himself as small a target as possible. He
didn’t even realize he was softly whimpering, whispered entreaties spilling from his lips.

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Severus stepped out of the floo, fully expecting to see an empty room, save Harry. What he saw instead was his little Gryffindor, cringing in a corner, and Lucius Malfoy, standing as though rooted to the spot with his cane raised.

Ignoring Lucius for the moment, Severus quickly made his way to the plainly terrified teen. As soon as he had knelt beside the boy, he could hear Harry’s whispered appeals, chanted over and over.

“Please don’t please don’t. I’ll be good. I promise. Please don’t.”

It didn’t take a prodigy in arithmancy to figure out what was going on. Harry clearly thought Lucius was about to use that cane on him. An understandable assumption; given the teens past, and what he had seen of Malfoys’ public attitude.

Most people didn’t realize that Lucius kept his wand sheathed in his cane. Severus presumed that the blond had not been expecting Harry to come through the floo, and had begun to draw his wand. The potions master was well aware that Lucius thought trying to persuade Harry to Tom’s cause was futile. Though how he thought Harry had managed to come through a private well-warded floo, without permission, was anyone’s guess.

Viciously tamping down his temper at both himself, for not foreseeing the possibility of someone else being at the manor, as well as Lucius for not bothering to employ his brain, before reaching for his wand; Severus spoke to the violently shaking boy.

“Harry, it’s Severus. You’re safe I promise. No one is going to hurt you. You have done nothing wrong. I’m right here. I’m not leaving you. You’re safe.

Harry’s small frame twisted into an even tighter ball,. A quiet sob was quickly stifled when he clamped his hand over his mouth.

Severus feared any progress he had made would be lost with his next move; but he could not let Harry cause himself further injury. With the damage already done to his bones and muscles, the position the child’s body was in would only exacerbate his condition.

Carefully he lifted Harry into his arms. Cradling the teen close, he gently pressed the boy’s face against his chest, so he could no longer see Lucius.

Then leveling his most ferocious glare at the blond, he said, “Malfoy, you may want to lower your cane. Besides the fact you look a right fool; it would do you well to consider you raised a weapon against a guest in someone else’s home.”

With that, he left the other man staring after him in stunned silence.

Knowing it would only take a moment before Lucius pulled himself together and told Tom what had happened, Severus carried his little Gryffindor to a small parlor that was close to the entrance where they had flooed in.

Finding a rocking chair, not dissimilar to the one he had transfigured in his quarters, Severus settled himself in it, tenderly arranging Harry in his lap. Having come prepared he withdrew a vial of muscle relaxant from his robes. Encouraging the teen to take it took some minutes, as Harry was too upset to even realize what was going on around him. Finally managing to get the potion into his small charge, Severus then summoned a cashmere blanket that was draped over the arm of a nearby couch.

Harry’s slight frame had seized up to such a point that his muscles had begun to spasm, before Severus had gotten the potion into him.

He was running his fingers through Harry’s silken curls, hoping the potion, mild as it was, would work and take effect soon; when Tom, followed by Lucius entered the room.

Severus placed a finger to his lips, requesting the two to remain silent. They both took seats out of Harry’s line of sight.

After several moments, Harry’s slight frame began to relax somewhat. His muscles were still much too tense, but he was no longer so tightly folded in on himself.
Severus had talked to him quietly the whole time, but waited for Harry to be comfortable enough to speak, without prompting.

“I’m s-sorry. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to. I’m sorry. I’ll be good, I Promise. Please don’t leave. I’ll be good. I’m sorry I was bad. I’m sorry.”

By the time he had stopped talking he was barely understandable. Between shaking so hard, his teeth chattered, and trying to keep the tears at bay.

Tenderly Severus snuggled the teen closer, quietly he began to soothe his frightened little Gryffindor.

“Ssssh, Harry, sssshh, you’re safe, I promise. No one is going to hurt you.”

He sent a glare over to Lucius, that was unseen by the youth on his lap.

“I Promised I wouldn’t leave you, and I haven’t changed my mind; nor will I change it. You’ve done nothing wrong. You have nothing to be sorry for. I’m right here, Harry. I promise, I won’t leave.”

Harry burrowed against Severus’ chest, little hands fisting in the older man’s robes. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to. No more. I promise I’ll be good. Please no more.’ The child’s soft whimpers nearly broke Severus’ heart.

“No more Harry. I will stay with you and make sure it does not happen again. Yu did nothing wrong. It was not your fault.”

The diminutive wizard shook his head and pressed even closer against Severus.

The potions master sighed inaudibly. Lucius’ seeming act of hostility toward the tiny teen had caused the child to regress yet again.

Though the blond man had no idea what effect his actions would have, it did not negate the consequences of said actions.

Harry, already traumatized; abused all of his life, and having the further stress of this meeting today; understandably thought he was about to be hurt once again.

The Aftermath of today’s events could very well have a negative affect on the discussions they would need to have with Tom.

Severus only hoped that the damage was not irreparable.

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Chapter End Notes

Thanks to all who stick with this story, despite my insanity.
To all who take the time to leave kudos and comments, my utmost thanks.
Knowing my work is appreciated is often the only thing that makes me work on chapters when I feel like I’ve gone head-to-head with a brick wall.
Chapter 38

Chapter Notes

Sorry! Sorry! I know I'm so way beyond late that it's pathetic.
I'm having a few issues; including the fact that my creative fairy flew away, and
someone ran off with my brain.
Having said all that; Please note that I have no intention of abandoning this story.
My posting schedule may have been flushed down the toilet, and I'm having difficulty
getting back on track; but the story will go on.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Severus felt out of his depth. As head of Slytherin house; he had dealt with his fair share of abused
children; but never one whose abusive history could rival Harry’s.
The potions master wasn’t certain how to handle things, now that others were part of the equation.
He would not reveal any of his little Gryffindor’s secrets without his willing permission; that
included the results of the diagnostic scan.
However, Tom, at the very least would need to know about the abuse, even if only in general terms;
but Severus was not willing to bring that topic up with Harry until the teen had sufficiently calmed
and was no longer in a regressed state.
Severus needed both of the other men in the room to be aware of Harry’s fragile condition, for
different reasons.
Tom needed to know Harry’s difficulties were due to Dumbledore’s scheming. He would have to
know why Harry was seemingly changing sides. Though it was something Tom had been hoping
for; it would be foolish in the extreme for him to take such an apparent turnabout at face value.
Severus also knew that once Tom was aware of the horrors Harry had been subjected to, because of
the old man’s manipulations, he would be all the more likely to help in any way possible.
Lucius needed to be aware of the circumstances, both because he had caused this latest bout of
trauma; albeit unknowingly, and because he was essentially the political brains within Tom’s group.
Any steps taken; especially concerning Dumbledore would fall under Lucius’ area of expertise.
Severus had been quiet for the last few minutes, trying to decide the next course of action, while
simultaneously attempting to soothe the distraught teen he was holding.
Unfortunately, before he had come to any conclusions, Lucius felt the need to
further prove his idiocy.
“I fail to understand why we are pandering to the brat’s histrionics. Severus, perhaps you should
dump the pampered prince somewhere else so we can discuss whatever you came here for. You
shouldn’t have brought him with you, he’ll just report everything he hears to the old man.”
Lucius would have continued with his tirade, had Tom not cut him off.
“Lucius, while I value your knowledge of the political ins and outs of the wizarding world; your
continual insubordination, and failure to look before you leap, is outstripped only by your arrogance.
For once, shut up and find out what is going on around you, before speaking,; let alone taking any
action.”
The blond shut his mouth with an audible snap. Knowledgeable as he was in the world of politics, he
would never have gotten as far as he had without Tom’s backing him with his own knowledge and
connections. Tom could easily make Lucius’ life very difficult if he pulled that support.
Severus had stopped paying attention to either man, as his little Gryffindor’s shaking had begun to
increase once again at hearing the harsh words spoken. The potions master was sincerely concerned
that Harry could not take much more without shattering to pieces. Much as he hated to, Severus felt the best course of action at the moment, would be to give Harry a few sips of a sleeping potion. The teen needed sleep nearly as much as he needed his muscles to relax.

Severus had no intention of breaking Harry’s trust, but he did need to fill Tom and possibly Lucius in on a few things. If the blond was going to persist in his behavior; Severus would rather the upcoming confrontation take place while Harry remained oblivious to the tension.

Quietly he explained to the green-eyed wizard what he intended to do. He wasn’t sure that the small teen really took in any of his words, but the soft soothing tone at least had the strain in his little Gryffindor’s body easing somewhat.

Coaxing the distressed youth to swallow the small measure of potion, Severus arranged his charge, so he was cradled more comfortably in his arms.

Then he turned to the two others in the room. Both of whom had fallen silent after Tom’s reprimand. “I took a secrecy oath and even if I did not, I would not divulge personal information about Harry without his knowledge and consent. Having said that, There are a few things I can tell you, that will help explain the situation until Harry has calmed enough for me to speak to him about revealing more.” He then looked directly at Lucius. “I will not stand for any more of your foolishness. This is not your home. This meeting has little to nothing to do with you at this point. Tom Harry and I came to an agreement on the terms of this meeting; something you were not a part of. I will thank you to keep a civil tongue in your head.’ Turning to Tom Severus continued. “I will not presume to tell you what to do in your own home. I will ask of you that Lucius not be a part of any meeting that includes Harry, until such a time that the three of us; Meaning you, Harry and myself, have agreed to his inclusion. I would also ask, if that time comes, Lucius will have to have made considerable effort toward reparation of some sort for his words and actions against Harry. I also wish to reiterate, that I have made myself Harry’s protector; and as such will not leave him if he is distressed or in any way uncomfortable with being separated from me.”

Severus sat back and waited for Tom’s reaction. He really didn’t care what Lucius thought. The blond had many good qualities; not just within the political arena. Though the man had been sorted into Slytherin, his actions were more indicative of a typical Gryffindor. Recklessly charging in, without first assessing the situation.

Tom was silent for a few moments. He had certainly read the note Severus had sent via house-elf, but seeing the child; so different to how he had been described, as well as his reactions to Lucius’ words, his thoughts were going in a different direction.

Tom had long-ago made it a hobby to watch people, and read their reactions. The fear the teen had exhibited was not faked. It was very rare that Severus could be fooled; and was one of the reasons Tom trusted the potions master’s judgment. Every time they both came to the same conclusions about an individual, they had been proven correct 100%.

“I agree on all counts. Though while Harry is sleeping I would ask that you tell what you are able while both Lucius and myself are here. After that I will dismiss him, and we will discuss with Harry when and if Lucius needs to be a part of further meetings.”

Both Severus and Tom ignored the look of outrage that crossed Lucius’ features. “I agree. Depending on what is decided between you and Harry, I believe Lucius’ knowledge and experience could be an asset. However, as long as he continues not to listen and observe the situation before attempting to see how far he is able to put his foot down his own throat; I see him as more of a liability.”

Tom nodded his agreement with that statement. “While I concur with all you have said, I would also like to point out that if Lucius is given some information that would help him to understand the current circumstances, he may be able to be of use once he has had the time to digest everything.”

Harry shifted and whimpered softly in his sleep. Severus began running his fingers through the raven curls; using the time to calm himself and think. After a moment the teen in his lap settled, and Severus spoke.

“I know you are right, and Lucius does need to have at least something to go on. However please
understand, as I said in my letter; my first priority is Harry. His health, in all aspects, as well as his safety. Which includes him not just being safe, but feeling that as well.” He tucked the blanket more snugly around the shivering teen. He then looked at the two other men, and said, “Nothing is what we thought it was, where Harry is concerned. There are questions we do not have the answers to, as of yet; but what we do know is practically everything the wizarding world thinks they know about Harry is a lie.”

Tom contemplated that for a moment; all the while studying the tiny 15-year-old in the potions master’s arms.

“He was abused, wasn’t he?” Severus nodded in confirmation. He and Harry had conferred about what he could and could not reveal before Harry was ready. If Tom flat-out asked this, Severus wasn’t to lie or evade; but neither was he to give any details. Severus said as much to Tom, who understood; but said he would want more details as soon as Harry was comfortable.

“Is there anything else you can tell us?” Tom was watching the sleeping teen as he asked. “Dumbledore. Of course we are aware that he is not as he portrays himself, we have discovered there is quite a bit more to it. Including that we are fairly certain he is an illusionist.”

Tom sat back in surprise. “That is something new. Though if it proves to be true, it would explain many things that have previously not made much sense. I believe you have made certain that whatever information Harry has imparted whether it be of a personal nature or otherwise; could be verified. I trust your judgment and believe I know you well enough to say that you would make every effort to ascertain what was said was the truth.”

Tom said this in part, to bring to Lucius’ attention, that they were not operating under false information, or pretense. Severus understood this, and answered without hesitation. “We used a modified wizarding oath, of a truth spell variant. We both took the oath, so each could trust the other’s responses and thus be more likely to be forthcoming. Coupled with the secrecy oath, this also gave the insurance that what was revealed would not get back to anyone that might not be trustworthy.”

Again speaking for Lucius’ benefit, Tom asked, “What are yours and Harry’s intentions if we are unable to come to an agreement to work on the same side?”

“With what he knows so far of your goals and motivations, he has said unless he finds out something to the contrary; at the very least he will give you all the information he is able. This includes, but is not limited to: Information about Dumbledore. Names of members within the Order of the Phoenix. And any of the knowledge he has amassed about the problems with muggle/wizard relations. On that last one, he wants to make sure you know he is not calling your own knowledge into question, but rather that his personal experiences may give a different perspective. In addition, should the two of you be unable to come to an agreement to work together, Harry is willing to take an oath to the effect that he will not do anything to work against you, as long as you don’t come after him, or the few names he has who will also be siding with him; whichever path he chooses. I myself, will be staying at Harry’s side whatever his decision. Should you and he go your separate ways, I will also take an oath; same as Harry’s.”

Tom stood. “I agree with all we have discussed so far.” Turning to the silent blond man, he said, “I am aware you own a pensieve. I would strongly suggest that you utilize it to learn what has occurred today. Both what has been revealed, as well as your part in making a difficult situation nearly untenable.”

Looking down at the small wizard again stirring restlessly, he addressed Severus. “I think it best that Harry wake with only you in attendance. I will show you to the rooms you will be using for as long as you are here. Please let me know if you require anything. Also as soon as it is possible I wish to speak with Harry. In your presence of course. I will not speak of anything he is not ready for. However I do wish to allay any fears about his safety within my home. Due to the happenings earlier, I am concerned he will fear further attacks. I wish to let him know steps will be taken to prevent that.”
The potions master replied in the affirmative, and followed Tom to his and Harry’s rooms. He was hopeful that maybe; just maybe, things would work out without any more damage done to his little Gryffindor.

Chapter End Notes

Lucius is not irredeemable, he's just currently insisting on being a jerk. Hopefully he'll get over it soon. LOL
Many thanks to all who read my work, bookmark it, and/or leave kudos and comments. I appreciate the support more than you can know.
The fact that people enjoy my work and let me know keeps me pushing through headaches, depression and brain fog. A thousand thanks for putting up with my quirks.
Chapter 39

Chapter Notes

No, I didn't die. Though you'd never know it, going by my sporadic updates.
Hope you like the chapter. I did...once it was finally complete. LOL

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The rooms Tom had prepared for Severus and Harry were quite comfortable; spacious and airy. the suite was comprised of two bedrooms, a large bathroom, and a sitting room. The colors throughout the rooms were varying shades of blues and greens, with accents of cream and some pale gold.
Pleased to find a rocking chair, not dissimilar to the one in his quarters at Hogwarts; Severus settled himself and Harry in the chair. He had briefly considered laying harry in one of the bedrooms. However Harry’s very real fear of Severus tossing him out at some point, along with Lucius’ less than favorable reception at Harry’s arrival, topped off with this being a new environment; Severus felt it best to keep his little Gryffindor close. He also feared that the teen might wake still in a regressed state.

It was barely an hour after Severus had brought Harry into their new rooms when the small wizard was gripped by another nightmare.

Violent tremors racked the slender frame, as soft whimpers escaped his lips.

“I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'll be good. I'm sorry. Please don’t throw
Me away. Please, I’m sorry I was bad. Please don’t get rid of me. I’m sorry. I’m sorry.”

Severus heard every word despite the fact Harry was nearly choking on the sobs he was attempting to suppress.

Damn Lucius to the depths of the North Sea. Clearly the blonde’s words about dumping Harry had added to the fears Harry already harbored of Severus getting tired of him and abandoning him. With the teen’s past, Severus really couldn’t blame him for feeling so anxious about yet another person letting him down. A few days of Severus’s attempts to reassure Harry that Severus wouldn’t leave; could not hope to undo years of damage.

The potions master’s own behavior towards Harry in the last four years would almost certainly work against him as well.

Everyone Harry should have been able to turn to, to count on, to expect help or protection from; had at the very least turned a blind eye to what was happening, and at worst actively contributed to the abuse themselves.

Running his fingers through Harry’s silken curls, Severus worked to wake the teen as gently as possible.

“you’re safe Harry I promise. I am not going anywhere. I am right here. I will not leave; I am not getting rid of you. You have done nothing wrong. Please wake up for me. I’ve got you. You are safe. Please wake up.”

Curling into a little ball once more, Harry began to cry harder; even though he was still trying to stifle any sound.

Severus could tell his little Gryffindor was awake now, and still terrified.

“Sssshhh, Harry, You’re safe. I am right here. I am not going anywhere. You are safe, I promise.”

The tiny 15-year-old shifted until he could bury himself against Severus chest, and clutch tightly to the older man’s robes.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to be bad. I’ll be good I promise. I’m sorry.”

Tenderly cuddling the teen in his arms; Severus adjusted the blanket, tucking it more firmly around
the chilled little body.
“‘You have not been bad. You did nothing wrong. You have nothing to be sorry for.’”
Harry shook his head, his trembling only increasing.
Gently Severus tucked a finger under the small chin, lifting the tear-streaked face. Looking directly
into emerald eyes, Severus spoke softly, but firmly.
“Harry I know I have treated you abominably in the past, and I can never tell you just how sorry I
am for that; but I need to ask you a question, and I want you to think about it, so you can give me an
honest answer; not just what you think I want to hear. In all the time you have known me, even with
how I treated you; have I ever once lied to you?”
Harry was quiet for several minutes, never breaking eye contact. Finally he answered. “No sir. Never
that I can remember.”
“I know it is not easy, and that it will take time; but try and believe that I am telling the truth now as
well. You are not bad. You have done nothing wrong. You have nothing to apologize for. I am not
leaving you, throwing you out, or any way abandoning you. I have promised I will stay with you no
matter what. I will not go back on my word, and I have no desire to go back on it.”
Harry chewed on his bottom lip for a moment, finally deciding just to say what he was thinking, no
matter how much he feared the outcome. “But I am being a burden. I keep going to pieces, and I
can’t stop crying, and my back and hips just seem to be getting worse, and I keep acting like I’m five
instead of fifteen, and_”
Severus gently cut across him,
“None of that makes any difference. You are not a burden, and it does not matter how many
difficulties you have, or will have. I will not change my mind. You should have had people helping
you all these years. I should have been one of those people; to see that you needed help, and given it.
I would be honored if you would allow me to give that help now. My offer for a wizard’s oath or an
unbreakable vow still stands. I will gladly help in any and every way I am able.”
Harry reacted much as he had when Severus had suggested this before.
“No, No, I’m sorry, I’m just being stupid. You’re right; you’ve never lied to me before. I should stop
being such an idiot. I’m sorry. I should trust you.”
Severus was about to interrupt him, but Harry held up a staying hand.
Taking a deep breath, the diminutive teen let more of his insecurities show.
“Part of me knows you’re telling the truth and that I can trust you completely. But a another part of
me remembers all the times so many people said I could or should trust them, and they hurt me in one
way or another. I know that makes me pathetic. I know I should have learned by now that I should
do things on my own; that I don’t deserve to have someone I can depend on. I don’t want to have to
do everything on my own; even though I know everyone expects it of me. I am trying to not get hurt
again. I’m not trying to say I can’t trust you; I’m just scared.”
The last words were barely a whisper; but Severus heard, and it broke his heart just a little more.
“Harry you do deserve to have people you can depend on. You should never have had to deal with
things on your own. You should have never been put in the situations you were thrust into. It is
perfectly understandable for you to be scared. You have dealt with more in your short life than most
people several times your age. Unfortunately due to the failings of all the adults in your life, you’ve
had no support when you; more than anyone else should have.”
Severus fell silent, instinctively knowing that Harry could not take any more right now. He would
give his little Gryffindor time to work through everything, before he tried to address it again.
It was quiet for a time, as Severus continued to rock the still exhausted teen.
Harry nestled against his Professor, fingers still tightly clenched in the fabric of the older man’s
robes; thinking over all that had been said.
He did trust Severus; but at the same time he was waiting for the other shoe to drop. Every time he
thought he could trust someone, or that there was one who cared about him, for himself; it was
always snatched away. Trying to sort out his feelings about believing Severus versus all his past
experience, was confusing, and only served to make his head hurt more than it already did.
After a while Harry broke the silence.
“I stuffed it all up, didn’t I?”
“What do you mean?” Severus queried, never ceasing gently carding his fingers through Harry’s curls.
“With Tom. I completely went to pieces, like an idiot, and stuffed everything up.”
“No, harry, no, you didn’t stuff it up. Tom understands. Even if he doesn’t know all of what is going on he knows enough to be aware that none of what has happened in the past or what happened today is your fault.”
A shudder ran through the slight body in Severus’ arms. “How much does he know?” the small voice asked.
The potions master relayed his earlier conversation between himself and Tom. He also told Harry what Tom had said about and to Lucius.
“We, I mean, I guess I should talk to him this afternoon. I want to wait a bit to get my head on straight.”
“You had it right the first time, Harry. We will talk to him. It can be this afternoon if you are ready. If you need some more time, he will understand.”
“Unless I start acting like I’m five again or something, I want to try for today.”
Severus agreed if Harry was up to it, they would let Tom know.
“Either way, I want you to try and eat something. Even if you can only manage a little. I don’t like you having so many potions in your system without enough food to keep you from getting sick.”
Severus saw the look on the small teen’s face, and when he opened his mouth to speak, Severus gently cut him off. “No Harry, do not apologize. You have done nothing wrong. I know it is difficult for you to eat much. I’m not complaining about how little you eat, as long as you try, and eat what you can. I am also not complaining about the potions you need. I wish you didn’t need them, but only because I want you to be healthy and not require them; not because I think you shouldn’t have them.”
“Harry nodded, and thought for a moment. “Maybe soup and some toast. Would that be ok?”
Severus smiled in approval before calling a house-elf to give their order.
He hoped Harry would feel up to having their meeting with Tom later that day. Severus worried if the conversation were put off any longer, Harry would work himself into a panic attack, with fear of what might be said. Better if the meeting happen sooner, rather than later, and put his little Gryffindor’s mind at ease.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all who take the time to read my work.
Many thanks to those who bookmark and leave kudos.
A thousand thanks to all who comment.
The encouragement is much appreciated.
Chapter 40

Chapter Notes

Sorry, I didn't mean to take so long with this chapter. I'd actually had most of it written up and just needed to do a little fixing a few days ago; when my washer decided to pee all over my floor, and somehow, writing was driven from my brain. Hope you enjoy. At least the chapter isn't waterlogged; unlike my floor. LOL

See the end of the chapter for more notes

At Malfoy manor, Lucius paced in his study. As much as he tried to justify his actions within his own mind; he kept circling back to the fact that every time Severus and Tom agreed on an issue, or their assessment of someone’s character, they had been correct. Every time.

Deciding to attempt to look at the day’s events from their point of view, Lucius finally seated himself, and summoned a bottle of brandy and a glass.

As Lucius forcibly took a step back from the situation, he began to understand that the other two wizards had been accurate in their assessment of him. Severus had seen too much abuse; had experienced it for himself, to ever be fooled by a sob story. Let alone one from a child he had previously despised. Meticulous man that he was, Severus would surely have cast an in depth diagnostic scan, if not a full history.

Tom himself had been ill-treated by others, and as such would know just as well as Severus what indicators to look for.

He took Tom’s advice and watched the day’s interactions with the boy; using his personal pensive. There were several things he should have seen. The child was smaller, more fragile than he remembered. Severus would have made certain Potter was not using glamour when he came to Tom’s manor, so that meant the boy had been under glamour for the years prior.

Draco had enough temper fits when he was younger, that Lucius would have recognized an act if he saw it. Potter was truly terrified When Lucius began to draw his wand, after the teen had come through the floo.

Lucius Malfoy was not a soft man; but neither was he a heartless one. He realized with a painful squeeze in his heart that he had terrorized a child who seemed to exhibit all the signs of abuse.

Aside from what Tom and Severus had said that day, Tom made it a point that all those who worked with him understood his goals: the reasons behind them, and the signs that spoke of child abuse. Even in the short time Lucius had been in the teen’s presence, he had shown many of those tells.

**********

After Tom had left Severus and Harry, he made certain the house-elves knew to answer if either of his guests should call for one of them. He then went to his private study, and pulled out all of his journals that made any mention of Harry Potter, after he had started at Hogwarts.

As he had no direct interaction with the child, all of his notes were from verbal accounts given by his allies. There was very little, and considering the majority of that was from Severus’ who at the time hated the teen, his observations were unreliable at best.

Though Tom had yet to get all of the details concerning how the new dynamic between Harry and the potions master came to be, he knew however it came about; Severus was now seeing Harry, rather than the father.
After reading the scant information he had about the too-small teen ensconced in his best guest suite, Tom’s thoughts turned to his first impressions of the meeting that day with Harry and Severus. After assimilating the day’s events in his mind; he stared into the fire, not really seeing. His mind drifted back to his own childhood. Many people were responsible for his upbringing, or lack thereof; but Dumbledore was top of the list; at least on the magical side of things. The old man was aware of the conditions of the orphanage, as well as how muggles viewed anything they could not explain. Accidental magic certainly was something the staff at the orphanage could not explain. So they feared it. What they feared they grew to hate, and that hatred was turned toward the one who engendered the fear in the first place.

Dumbledore could have stopped it; in so many ways he could have changed the situation; but as was usual for Albus Dumbledore, If it did not directly benefit himself, he couldn’t be bothered. Tom felt quite certain that Rather than the mostly passive role Dumbledore had played in his own life, the old man had taken a much more active role in the abuse that Harry Potter had suffered. And suffered he had. The signs were abundantly clear to anyone who cared to look.

He didn’t expect or really even want Harry to fight against those he may have once called friends; but if the youth were willing to help, Tom felt certain the teen possessed a wealth of knowledge that would aid Tom’s endeavors. He also thought that if Harry fully understood what Tom’s goals were, he would want to help all he could.

It seemed obvious that the shockingly small wizard had not allowed his deplorable treatment at the hands of others to harden him. As such, he would almost certainly wish to help those in similar situations. To remove them from abusive homes, to put measures in place to help prevent the abuse to begin with.

Tom couldn’t be absolutely certain until he Severus and Harry had their meeting, but he felt reasonably confident that he had a new ally. One who with his magical power, unique knowledge of both the magicals, and non-magicals, along with the doors that would be open to him, would be a catalyst to turn the war in an entirely different direction.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks, thanks and ever thanks, to all who read and bookmark my work. Special thanks to all who leave kudos or take the time to leave comments.
See the end of the chapter for more notes

As the morning went on, and Harry seemed reasonably calm, if a little nervous; Severus decided they should forge ahead with their plan to speak with Tom that afternoon. Calling one of the house-elves, the potions master sent a message to their host, to ascertain if a meeting that afternoon would be convenient. He didn’t want to dictate the terms of the meeting, but he did stress the fact that Harry was rather anxious about Tom’s reactions, as well as the outcome of their negotiations. Tom sent back a reply, asking if a lunch meeting would be suitable; and while his response spoke of his understanding of Harry’s fears, they did not completely allay Severus worries. The potions master’s biggest concern was that Tom would make the mistake of seeing Harry as a commodity, or tool to be used against Dumbledore and those who aligned themselves with the old man. While Severus had no intentions of swaying Harry’s decisions; he also would not stand by and let his little Gryffindor be used or hurt by yet another adult. After checking with Harry to make certain that harry would be fine with moving their talk with Tom to lunchtime, Severus sent a message affirming the time.

**********

When their lunchtime appointment was imminent, Severus had reason to be thankful they had moved it from that afternoon; as Harry’s nerves were more and more apparent. The small wizard appeared to be in danger of a panic attack; something Severus fervently hoped could be avoided. They made their way to one of the smaller dining halls, with time to spare; as Harry was a bit unsteady on his feet. Severus hoped things would settle down soon, so he could see what could be done to alleviate the small teen’s pain, as well as repair as much damage as possible. With five minutes to the lunch hour remaining, Tom entered the room; looking composed, but covertly watching to gauge both Harry and Severus’ moods. The tiny 15-year-old was attempting to hide his discomfort with the chair he was sitting on. Other than that, he appeared mostly calm, if a bit anxious. Tom seated himself and called for an elf, asking him to serve their meal. He hoped that the relaxed atmosphere of an informal lunch would help put his guests minds at ease, and thus make their discussions more pleasant. “Have you found the rooms to be suitable?” Tom inquired generally, waiting to see who answered. Harry nodded, while Severus replied. “yes, they should meet our needs comfortably.” Tom opted for honesty. “I'm not sure how to begin our discussions.” He turned to Harry.
“Everything I believed I knew about you has proven to be false, so small talk seems to be out of the question. Would it make you feel more comfortable to start by asking me some questions?”

Harry chewed on his lip for a moment in thought. He knew Severus didn’t mind his asking questions, even if they were sometimes stupid ones, but he really wasn’t certain how Vold- er, Tom would be. The Dursleys punished him for asking questions. They would sometimes give permission to ask, then when he did, he would be punished anyway.

Uncertain if this were a trick; but hoping Severus would protect him, even in this situation; the small teen hesitantly nodded at his host.

Severus had been silently watching the interaction. He understood Harry's reluctance, and spoke up.

“Harry, Tom Means what he said. You are allowed to ask questions. If there is something he does not wish to answer he will say so. You will not be in trouble for asking.”

Tom was a bit surprised at what Severus' words indicated. It appeared that the abuse went deeper than Tom had assumed.

Deciding the best course of action for the moment was to affirm Severus assurances, “Yes Harry, Severus is right. While there may be some things I do not wish to discuss at this time, I will simply let you know, and we can talk about them when it is convenient for both of us.” He watched some of the tension leave Harry's body.

“Um, ok, I know Severus already told me, but I would like to hear from you what your goals are.”

A good safe starting point, Tom thought to himself; and began to explain.

**********

Harry thought over all they had talked about so far. Tom had confirmed what Severus had told him; explaining in more detail certain points.

“What plans do you have in place for any muggle-raised that need to be removed from their guardians?” the small teen inquired.

“Part of that depends on how many need to be removed. We have a program ready to implement that mimics the muggle foster system. All those who wish to take in any child will be thoroughly screened beforehand, and closely monitored after being approved. Should the influx of those needing to be removed from their guardians exceed what we expect we will be putting into place a magical orphanage, that will have the same screening and monitoring as the foster care.”

“How will you remove the children without causing problems in the muggle world, or breaking the statute of secrecy?” was the next concern Harry raised.

Tom smiled at the teen. “You ask very good questions. I am hoping that we can work things out, as I believe your input on this topic as well as others would be invaluable.”

Harry looked both embarrassed and incredulous at the praise.

Tom continued. “In answer to your question, we are still working the kinks out; but we will most likely use a secrecy charm so the muggles stay unaware of the magical world. I feel we need to use obliviators as little as possible. So while we can wipe any files or paperwork on the child we remove, it will be more difficult where others outside of the immediate family are concerned.”

Tom had noticed that while he and Severus were still finishing their meal, the little green-eyed wizard had eaten very little before pushing back his plate. Deciding to wait to address that issue; as he felt it pertained to the mistreatment, he continued with the topic at hand.

“Once proper procedures have been put into place that will detect accidental magic the first time it is used, it should considerably cut down on misunderstandings that ultimately lead to exposure in the muggle world. Even parents who truly love their children will usually believe there is something wrong with their child when they display magic. In an attempt to discover what is wrong with them, they unknowingly risk magic being exposed to the muggle world. While no system or plan is foolproof, we hope that by educating the wizards about muggles; properly so and not the outdated nonsense that is currently being taught in muggle studies at Hogwarts; and also making it clear why it is necessary for wizards not to stand out when interaction with the muggle world is needed, as well as keeping a close eye on any magical child being brought up by muggles, the rate of obliviations as
well as the amount of abuse will drop by a considerable margin.”
During their conversation, Severus had been keeping an eye on his little Gryffindor. He noticed the signs of Harry's increasing pain. The slight shaking, turning more pale, and the constant shifting in his seat; despite Severus discreetly casting cushioning charms.
When there was a lull in the talking, Severus stood. Tom watched silently as the potions master moved to Harry's chair, gently lifted the now noticeably shaking teen, and turned to address Tom.
“I think we should move to one of the sitting rooms for the rest of this discussion.”
“I'm sorry, I'm sorry.” Harry said softly, as he clutched at Severus robes.
“You have done nothing wrong. Therefore you have nothing to apologize for.” Severus soothed as he cradled his little Gryffindor against his chest.
For possibly the first time in his adult life, Tom had no idea what he should do in a situation. That this tiny 15-year-old had suffered abuse far worse than what he himself had endured was plainly evident. With what Severus had already revealed; along with his own speculations about Harry's treatment both in the muggle and wizarding world; it would seem the only person Harry really trusted, or for that matter had earned said trust, was the potions master who was even now attempting to calm him.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks as always to all who read, bookmark, leave kudos or take the time to leave comments.
It is much appreciated, and helps with the frustration when i'm having to switch WP programs mid-story.
FINALLY! The next chapter.
For those who have shown concern that I won't finish the story; please know that any story I post I fully intend to finish. Even though there are times when the wait between chapters is longer than it should be. As long as I have access to a computer, the internet, and the necessary software; I will bring my stories to completion.
I do apologize for the interminable wait. Some of the reasons are my own fault, and some are not.
Hope you like the chapter. Personally I think the upcoming chapters will be more interesting. LOL

Severus quickly made his way to the closest sitting room. Settling himself and the violently shaking Harry into a rocking chair near the fire; he summoned one of the nearby blankets to wrap around the teen, pleased to discover it was fleece, like the ones in his quarters in Hogwarts.
While the cashmere blankets, such as were in their rooms here, had a velvety softness to them, the fleece seemed to hold warming charms better, and thus helped in keeping his little Gryffindor warm.
“I'm sorry, I'm sorry.” Harry repeated over and over, seemingly unable to stop.
“You have done nothing wrong. You have nothing to be sorry for. It's alright, Harry. You're not in trouble. You've done nothing wrong.”
The head of ebony curls shook almost harshly. “I can't manage to get through one meeting, without falling to pieces.” Harry desperately fought the tears that were trying to make their presence known.
“I'm just getting worse. I was already useless, now I'm completely worthless.”
“No, Harry. That isn't true. You are neither useless, nor worthless. While your physical condition may be worsening, That does not negate the fact that you contributed to the conversation and offered very good ideas, that I'm quite certain had not been considered before.”
Tom hoped he wouldn't be making anything worse by putting his two knutts in. “He's telling the truth, Harry. You come at things from a fresh angle. That's not even mentioning the fact that you're more up to date on what's going on in the muggle world. While I grew up in it, and have people who take care of certain things within the non-magical world, There are many things that someone who doesn't live there won't realize, or even consider. That's not even considering the fact that you have lived in the muggle world more recently than I and know of their advances that I had no idea of.”
Harry's teeth chattered as he tried to reply. “It's nothing you c-can't have found out on your own. Whether by l-looking up the information yourself, or getting one of your p-people to do it. I certainly c-can't offer anything that you c-can't have gotten another way and probably with better details.”
For a moment Tom believed that Harry was looking for his ego to be stroked; far too used to Lucius and his ilk that liked being noticed for every little thing and be told how wonderful they were. But he stopped himself and studied the painfully slender teen in the lap of his closest confidant. He did not have details as of yet of all that Harry had been through; but taking what he did know along with his own experiences and observations of the teen, as well as what he suspected, He realized Harry honestly believed himself to be worthless, useless, and any other description that meant he was less than those around him. For Harry to believe this so firmly, it had to be something that had been repeated consistently, and with little to nothing positive to counteract it.
While Tom had been subjected to verbal abuse in the orphanage; it had been mostly sporadic and usually after a bout of accidental magic. At least from the adults. As for the children; while vicious words could hurt and sink deep into the psyche, they had rarely continued once they could not get a rise out of him. It would appear that Harry had not gotten off so lightly. That was not even mentioning the fact that such hurtful words had come from his own relatives; people who should have loved and supported him.

Tom hoped they could come to terms that would have Harry as one of his advisers. The teen did have a way of looking at things from a different angle than others who worked with Tom. Even if Harry did not work with him as he hoped, Tom knew the only way he would not help the boy would be if Harry declared himself on Dumbledore's side. Something Tom was almost positive would never happen.

One thing was for certain. Dumbledore had to be taken down. His political base, his positions, his support within the wizarding community; all had to be destroyed. It was more than apparent that the old man had done more to ruin their world than anyone else in the last several centuries. If someone so well known and often in the public eye as Harry was could be subjected to such severe, ongoing abuse without any kind of intervention to protect the child; the question raised itself in Tom's mind: 'how many others?'

Whether because Dumbledore claimed guardianship over harry and none wished to go against the old man, because it was easier to turn a blind eye, or because the old man with all his connections and power, had made it worth their while to throw their conscience out the window, mattered little. The fact remained that Dumbledore had far too much autonomy without any accountability; and that combination tore apart lives of individuals, while simultaneously demolishing the wizarding world as a whole.

Chapter End Notes

Sincere and effusive thanks to all who bookmark my story, or leave kudos and/or comments. They remind me of the reason why I push through all my issues and keep writing.
Chapter 43

Chapter Notes

I am blaming Mother Nature for a good portion of why it has been so long since I updated.
For the rest, I have no good excuses.
I'm very sorry for the lapse between the last chapter and this one.
A/N I need ideas for why Harry is especially terrified of thunderstorms. (Mentioned in chapter 20)
Rape is not workable for this fic, as among other things, Severus would have most likely seen it on the diagnostic scan and reacted.
Ideas and suggestions Please.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Once Harry had fallen into a fitful sleep, Severus carried him back to their suite of rooms. Gently he tucked his little Gryffindor into the soft bed that had been warmed in preparation for them turning in. Harry stirred when Severus lay him down. Whimpering almost inaudibly, he shifted toward the potions master.
Severus sat on the edge of the bed, tenderly carding his fingers through the silky soft curls, and quietly uttering reassurances to the small teen.
Once Harry had settled enough that Severus felt he could safely leave him for a while, the potions master cast a monitoring charm on his small charge, and went to his own room.
His little Gryffindor most certainly could use the extra rest; Severus hoped that it might be possible for Harry to sleep through the rest of the day and night as well.
As it was only late afternoon, Severus wasn't ready to go to bed himself. He sat in a comfortable chair by the window, and considered all that had happened. The conversations that day, as well as all that had come to light since his and Harry's last occlumancy lesson.
At this point, there were very few people who could be trusted with the knowledge of Harry's whereabouts; let alone that he was having peaceful talks with Tom. It was also a concern just how many might be under Dumbledore's influence. This was of great concern to Severus.
He had continued keeping up all studies and knowledge for healers. He did not have his certification, but were he to walk in even today to the healers guild and be granted the right to take the tests, he would pass without any difficulty. That being said, he would still wish to have a second opinion for Harry. Both his physical condition as well as his periodic bouts of regression.
Though he had half expected it, Severus was saddened to see that Harry only got a couple hours of sleep before the onset of a nightmare. Gently the older man roused the shaking teen. He held and soothed him until Harry slipped back into a light slumber. This scene was repeated three more times throughout the night. Each episode taking longer for Harry to calm down; partially due to the nightmares themselves; but also because the small wizard was distressed that he was constantly disturbing Severus' own sleep.

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

It was over breakfast, shared between Harry, Severus, and Tom that the youngest of them spoke more to himself than anyone else.
A bit out of sorts from his broken sleep of the night before; Harry, without meaning to spoke out loud. “He doesn't look like some creepy snake hybrid thing. Wonder if that's just one more thing to
prove Dumbledore as an illusionist.”
The other two stopped eating and stared at the teen. Severus spoke first. “Harry, what do you mean?”
Realizing that he had verbalized his thoughts, Harry's face blanched in fear of punishment. Both due to the fact that he had not stayed quiet and of what he had said.
Severus seeing the teen's reaction; moved carefully, so as not to startle Harry. Kneeling beside the trembling Gryffindor's chair, Severus gently said, “Harry you're not in trouble. You haven't done anything wrong. We just want to know what it is you said, and what you meant by it. I promise, no one is angry.”
Only somewhat reassured, Harry's words tripped over themselves. “Vol, er, Tom. He looks. I mean in the graveyard. What I thought happened at the graveyard.” As he attempted to explain, he became more and more upset. After a moment, Harry simply clamped his lips shut and sat there shaking uncontrollably.
Severus gathered up his little Gryffindor, carrying him back to the sitting room they had used the day before. He flicked a glance at Tom to come as well.
Reading his look correctly, Tom followed silently; not at all certain what had just happened.
Sitting in the rocker by the fire, Severus summoned the fleece blanket, wrapping it snugly around the violently shaking teen.
Yet again, Harry found himself fighting not to cry. Merlin, couldn't he do anything right? Severus was going to get sick of his being so pathetic all the time, and if not him, then certainly Tom. Who wanted to put up with a blubbering, stupid, worthless freak, who was becoming more of a bother and a burden with every passing minute?
Despite his mental berating, and the certainty that the two other men would chuck him out any moment, Harry's tiny hands desperately clung to Severus' robes.
Severus couldn't read Harry's thoughts, but with it having just been the two of them for the last few days, he had begun to understand how Harry's mind worked.
“Harry, no one is angry with you. You will not be tossed out. You're not a bother or a burden. None of this is your fault.”
The little 15-year-old only shook his head and burrowed closer against Severus; as though he thought he might not get another chance for such comfort.
Tom considered all he had observed and heard. He hoped he wouldn't be overstepping, but if one of Harry's fears was that he would be thrown out of Tom's manor, that at least was something he could address.
Moving slowly so he wouldn't frighten the child even more; Tom sat in a chair he had positioned right beside the rocker where Severus was trying to soothe Harry.
“Harry, what Severus said is true. No one is angry with you. You haven't done anything wrong. I'm not going to toss either you or Severus out. You are more than welcome to stay as long as you wish. When you desire to leave, it will be only after you have found a safe place to go and are ready to move there. You will also have my reassurance that you are welcome here if ever you need a place to stay or if you just wish to visit.”
“b-but that's too much trouble, and I can't do anything.” Harry's voice was so soft, both men had to strain to hear him.
“What do you mean you can't do anything?” Tom was sincerely confused. Harry had already contributed a good deal of information and insight, and that wasn't even mentioning all he had promised to help Tom with.
“I'm a bother and a burden, and I'm getting worse. I can't do the cooking and cleaning like I should. I have to earn my place.”
Severus' eyes closed in pain. Not only because of Harry's regression, but that the tiny teen had it so ingrained in his mind that he was of less value than anyone else. That his only purpose seemed to be that of a house-elf, and if he couldn't perform his duties properly then he would be dismissed, and disgraced, with no one to care, and nowhere to go. Just like most house-elves.
Tom sat staring in shock, not at all certain what he should do or say now.
Clearly, Harry's situation was far worse than his wildest imaginings. He needed answers. A lot of answers. But unless he was much mistaken, Tom would be doing all that was necessary to see that things were better for the little wizard who had somehow turned things upside down without even trying.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to all who read, and bookmark my work, as well as all who leave kudos and comments. They are both appreciated and helpful. Even when it isn't obvious. Many thanks to all my readers for their patience with me.
Chapter 44

Chapter Notes

Hopefully I didn't take too long with the chapter. I received some good ideas for why harry is afraid of thunderstorms. Still open to more suggestions.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

After Harry fell into an exhausted sleep, Severus placed a one way silencing charm around the small teen, so he and Tom could talk undisturbed. They discussed the best way to help harry, physically, mentally, emotionally, and in areas where Dumbledore and the ministry were concerned. They also made tentative plans for the rest of the day as well as the next. As this was the eve of Yule, they decided to do all they were able to make it good for harry, and deal with the rest starting boxing day.

**********

When Harry woke, still in Severus' lap, the sitting room they were in had been transformed. Tom and Severus were grateful for the house-elves and their willingness to do so much on such short notice. With Severus being unable to go out shopping, or gather anything else they would need, and there not being time for Tom to do so, the small creatures aid was invaluable. With the house-elves able to do so much and being more than happy to help, along with their new understanding of how Harry had been treated and saw himself, both men were gaining a different perspective where house-elves were concerned. There was a lovely tree in the corner, not pretentiously large, but not too small either. Decorated with fairy lights, crystal snowflakes, and twined with red, silver, and gold ribbons. It was elegant without being too elaborate. The mantle was graced with spruce boughs, small pine cones and sprigs of holly tucked in here and there. Holly and ivy framed the doors and windows, and a Yule log was set aside near the fireplace, ready for the next day; the aroma of wassail drifting from it. Harry looked around in wonder, his pale little face lighting up in pleasure. Severus and Tom watched the small teen's cautious delight, vowing to themselves that they would not only thank the elves profusely for their assistance, but also do all they could to put that look of wonder on Harry's face as often as possible; but without the lurking fear that it would be taken away. After letting the teen look his fill, the two men coaxed him back to the dining room. Harry hadn't finished his breakfast; which had been too little food in any case. So they had the elves prepare a brunch of varying dishes. Severus wanted Harry to have the chance to try things he had never been allowed before. The tiny 15-year-old seemed to fearful to ask for what he wanted. But going by what had happened at breakfast a few days before, Severus felt that if the table were laid out with several choices, harry wouldn't feel worry that he would be in trouble if he had what was already set out. There would be no reason to fear that he would be a bother or a burden to ask for something different. The elves had decorated the dining room as well. Holly wreaths in the windows. Small baskets made of yellow cedar and pine, filled with bayberry, sage, and frankincense. Candles were placed in the center of the table, Tall pillars of red, green, and white; ready for lighting.
Harry had enjoyed the variety that Severus had Sassy prepare for their breakfast in the potions master's quarters, but it was nothing compared to the spread laid out before them now. On the one hand, Harry wanted to try at least a little of everything. On the other hand, he had no desire to make himself sick; and was well aware that he could not eat as much as he wished without such an outcome.

Carefully he chose a few grapes, a croissant, and a soft boiled egg. Even at that, the two other men at the table noticed he couldn't quite finish what was on his plate.

Severus and Tom waited until they were certain Harry had finished eating, not wanting to rush him, or make him feel like he wasn't allowed to eat all he desired.

When the little wizard pushed back his plate and leaned more heavily against the chair he was in, the other two decided it was time to speak.

Tom began, “As this is the day before yule, I think we should enjoy today and tomorrow. Boxing Day will be soon enough to address other matters. We can decide then what needs doing.”

Seeing the look of anxiety that crossed Harry's face, Severus hastened to reassure him, “We, Harry. That means all of us. No one will be making decisions about you, that you don't fully agree with.

Everything will be discussed and accepted by all, before actually being carried out.”

The two men watched the youngest among them almost wilt in relief.

Tom then proposed, “Shall we go back to the sitting room, or is there another room you would prefer?”

Harry blinked in surprise when he realized the question had been asked of him.

“I like the sitting room.” he said softly. “It's comfortable, and has lots of light.”

Severus' hand clenched around his coffee cup, when he thought of the cupboard those despicable Dursleys had stuffed his little Gryffindor into.

“Yes.” He managed around the lump in his throat. “The sitting room is a good idea.”

As he helped the all too light teen from the dining room, he couldn't help but wish he could give Harry the potions he needed now. That was something that would have to wait a few days, however. As they needed to know more about how Harry's magic might have been affected by all he had been through. The dosages of even the most basic of healing potions, such as nutritive... would have to be regulated accordingly.

Calming draughts, and such, even a headache potion here and there, was not considered as invasive as deep healing potions. With all Harry had suffered it would be necessary to know in what ways and how badly his magic had been stricken. The majority of the spells they needed to ascertain that information was something neither Severus nor Tom were well versed in.

Unfortunately, Lucius was one they knew had such knowledge and practice.

Severus was concerned how they could get Harry to agree to let Lucius cast the necessary spells, as well as whether Lucius stance about Harry had changed yet.

Trying to put it to the back of his mind for the next couple of days, would take conscious effort on Severus' part; but he would do his best, so his little Gryffindor could have a Yule free of such worries. Severus had a feeling this might be the first time Harry would have truly been able to celebrate the holiday. He intended that nothing mar it.

Chapter End Notes

I don't know what Day Yule actually fell on in 1995, I mixed some of what I found about ancient Yule traditions, along with my own ideas of how they might have been carried out in this setting, and considering magic.

Many thanks to all who continue to read my work, bookmark it, as well as to all who leave kudos and comments.
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!